GIVING BIRTH TO SELF

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Some Thought-Runs

Human beings are not born once and for all on the day their mothers give birth to them, but that life obliges them to give birth to themselves.

--Gabriel García Márquez

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Thought-Runs. One step forward, one step back, one to the left slightly askew. More statements about about problems than solutions. Always a mystery about the precise nature of the self, not only in ourselves and the other, but more to the point here, in the written text. In structure and intention, thought-runa have a family resemblance (Familienähnlichkeit) to Aristotle in the Metaphysics and Wittgenstein in The Philosophical Investigations. One, in effect, is on a quest to seek, to find, and identify, not just the phenomenal nature of the self, but also its foundational units, not totally unlike the builders visualizes the foundations of a house.

Additionally, to "piece out our imperfections with your thoughts" (Prologue, Henry V).

In the spirit of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, thought-runs can be seen narrow and shallow beach heads on a vast inoccupied island. As such they carry invitations to the reader to push further inward in order to perhaps occupy the whole island. We see this happening with Aristotle and Wittgenstein in the vast amount of commentary that continues, and will no doubt continue to accumulate, on the philosophers' works.
Naming the Self. In everyday language, which I presuppose throughout this essay, names have two characteristic functions, referential and vocative. In their referential use, names are frequently used simply to remind one of the existence or relevance of the thing being named. Or the purpose can be to distinguish between things, as in Adam's naming of the animals in *Genesis*. In this use the thing named can be anything, animate, inanimate, human or non-human.

In the vocative, or the "calling," use, however, the assumption of animacy is present, usually a person or a domestic animal. Familiar contexts for the vocative then are calling someone to dinner, calling one's pet, or simply calling one's companion to a particular feature of a painting. In this latter example, there is considerable overlapping with the referential use of names.

With the possibility of these two uses then I name the self in this essay with forms like "I," "me," "you," "myself," "one," or any nominal, "face," "body," "consciousness," "feeling," "nature," "soul" or any one of the five senses, "seeing, hearing," etc. that bring the presence, or possibility, of the self to mind. Animacy, memory and consciousness are always assumed as crucial features of what is named, even though it may be addressed with a neutral gender like "itself" or "themselves."

In beast fables and science fiction, for example, animals, machines and robots, by being conscious and wilful, can be said to have a self created by the self of the author. The created self is what I call "the second self."

For more see The Third Self (below).
Everyday Language. Every use of the term "everyday (or ordinary) language" presupposes, and refers to, the language spoken by the majority of speakers in any given context. Those who speak a non-everyday language are always in the minority and always in opposition to the majority. The adversarial nature of the relationship between the majority and the minority speakers can take many forms. See below, for example, forms discussed in the entries The Self in a Paradoxical State and The One Versus the Many Paradox.

Bodies. The Self of the Male Versus the Female. As mentioned in passing above a unique feature of language is to refer, and "talk," to itself. Here self, in its conscious state, enters the conversation by "talking" about the fleshly body in a linguistic context:

Inhabiting a male body is much like having a bank account as long as its healthy, you don't think much about it. Compared to the female body, it is a low maintenance proposition: a shower now and then, trim the fingernails every ten days….From the standpoint of reproduction, the male body is a delivery system, as the female is a mazy device for retention. Once the delivery is made, men feel a distinct failing off of interest….against the enduring female heroics of birth and nurture….The male body is like a delivery rocket that falls away into space, a disposable means.¹

X Chromosomes. Women have two X chromosomes, named Xa and Xi, men only one. The effects of this are enormous, only hinted at by Updike's account of female/male differences.
**Ignorance of Self?** Lately there has been a movement, mainly in academia, to teach, not knowledge, but ignorance. In the mid-1980s, a University of Arizona surgery professor, Marlys Witte, proposed teaching a class entitled "Introduction to Medical and Other Ignorances." She was, as one might expect, denied her request to teach such a course.

In recent years, however, scholars have made the case that focusing on uncertainty can foster latent curiosity, while emphasizing clarity can convey a warped understanding of knowledge. In 2006, Stuart Firestein, a Columbia University neuroscientist began teaching a course on scientific ignorance after realizing that many of his students now believed that nearly everything is known about the brain.

An analogy that expresses the relationship between knowledge and ignorance is that of Michael Smithson, a social scientist: "The larger the island of knowledge grows, the longer the shoreline—where knowledge meets ignorance—extends. The extending shoreline is where questions are born of answers and is terrain characterized by vague and conflicting information."ii

It is up to the reader to decide whether or not I extend the shoreline of ignorance of the self in this essay— and, hopefully, raise more questions about the self.

**Acting: Losing and Finding Multiple Selves.** In a review of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the reviewer focuses on actors playing multiple roles. In this, Bottom is central: "All the five actors seem to have been infected by Bottom's bottomless passion to take on any role that might offer, be they heroes, lions or ladies….Shakespeare's tale of love lost and found in an enchanted forest becomes a gleeful paean to the joys of losing and finding yourself through acting."iii
Losing Sense of the Self. "In Clarice Lispector master work, *The Passion Acccording to G. H.* (A paixdo segundo G. H., 1964), a woman finds a cockroach in a wardrobe, it revolts and transfixes her, sending her thoughts back through layers of time and matter to the beginning of the world, a process in which she loses all sense of self."iv

If we do a bit of reverse engineering on these lines, then the picture we get is of a self formed by a temporal process "through layerts of time and matter to the beginning of the world.." Unlike many accounts of death, where one loses awareness of the "world" and everything in it, (the main stuff of Horace's Odes), here thoughts of the "world" appear as the very foundations of self. Memory as awareness of past things, is presupposed and arranged in a definite order.

This further suggests that the substance of self can be seen from both the inside and the outside, as the place in which we dwell and the place we experience as the other. In this we might take as an analogy a house as both home and objective thing. In the self as home we find shelter. Being sheltered, the self's awareness of the past comes to dwell. If we move to a new house, often the details of former days travel with us. The self's memories of the outside never have the same reality as those of self as home.

The Self as Daydreamer. In this mode we integrate the inner and the outer, the self as home and the self as other. Without daydreaming the home, one would be a fragmented being. The home sustains us. In daydreams, the self is both body and soul. It takes the self back to its first world.

The Seasonal Self. When the self reflects on itself it often contextualizes itself as a certain season, spring, summer, autumn, winter.

Now it is autumn and the falling fruit
And the long journey towards oblivion.
The apples falling like great drops of dew
To bruise themselves an exit from themselves.
And it is time to go, to bid farewell
To one's own self, and find an exit
From the fallen self (D. H. Lawrence, "The Ship of Death"; emph mine).

The Maternal and Paternal Self? Are we then justified, continuing the home/house metaphor, to say that the self as home, in its warmth, security and comfort, is the material side of the self? The self as house a partial negation of these maternal qualities?

Intending the Self? In an article in the New Literary History Adriana Caverero says, "Interestingly enough, although the ancient Greeks lacked the concept of the self as we intend it today, they too had a common appetite for biographical narrations." No one, it seems fair to say, would disagree with Caverero that self is at the center, asserted and presupposed, of narration—commonly in the form of the first-person pronouns "I" and "we" and the reflexive pronouns, "yourself," "myself," "itself" and the like.

But how are we to interpret Caverero's "intend"? (Although I haven't read the Italian I assume that the word is a translation of intendiamo, first person plural of intendere). Is the reference of "intend" to the work of Franz Brentano, and others, on Intentionality and the Intentional object? Or is just another synonym for the everyday use of words like "purpose," "commit," "desire" and the like? If the former, are we then to take "intend" in a mental or physical relationship between the narrator and some object? If so, we would be required to say something about the differences between a first-person
and third-person point of view of self, and by self. If we take the word in the latter, everyday sense, are we suggesting that "to intend" implies an intentional experience of the self which, in turn, suggests a two-fold horizon of what is not actually meant in it, but towards which an actual meaning, can, of its nature, be directed. With this in mind, we would then want to go on and give an account of the "situation" of the self in any narrative. The horizon seen by the self necessarily implies a situation of the self. Horizon and situation, together with a intending self, form a unity.

Goals. Lest the reader now wonder where I am going with all this, let me quickly say that my intent with the term self, in the way of Aristotle and Wittgenstein, is twofold. One is to contextualize the term—certainly not in all contexts, an unknown, and perhaps unknowable, quantity of contexts, but the ones I consider salient because of their frequency. For the most part, the contexts are literary texts, especially classic poems. The second goal is to determine if the "application conditions" associated with the term "self" are fulfilled where the application conditions of self are the linguistic rules of the use, in ordinary language, associated with self.

In my view, all it takes for using self is that the rules of use for the term make it clearly acceptable to proceed from an undisputed claim that the self exists to another context in which the term is correctly applied. Thus, taking names like "I," "we," "you," or "myself" as names of the self, I can proceed in the manner of Sassoon in "To His Dead Body":

When roaring gloom surged inward and you cried,

Groping for friendly hands, and clutched and died,
Like racing smoke, swift from your falling head
Phantoms of thoughts and memory thinned and fled. vi

Notice in these lines the narrating self addresses a second self, "you," as the other. The other, as I say below in more detail (under other) is a crucial application condition of the use of self.

To state this another way, consider how the self becomes "public" or "private." In the context of application conditions, someone becomes public ("public self or woman") or private ("private self or man") only by entering either a public realm or private one for a certain time. Public, in this case, is the realm of appearance, being seen and heard by one's peers. In every profession, teaching, practicing law or medicine, one is constantly being seen and heard. Being private, as the etymology of the word suggests, is to be "deprived" of a public realm. In a military context, "private" denotes a lack of rank.

More abstractly, one might want to say to be Z (public) one first have to satisfy conditions X, Y…. Conversely, to be -Z (private), one has not" to satisfy X, Y…. Hannah Arendt, perhaps the foremost analyst of the public and private realms, distinguishes these two realms with, among others, the following antimonies. vii

Public:
*Peers
*Work
*Light

Private:
*Unequals
*Labor
Application Conditions. As I mentioned briefly, above, two conditions, context and application conditions, must be met by a writer in order for self to exist. Context, I believe, needs no special explanation here. In everyday talk, which Wittgeinstein says is good enough for philosophy (there is "no need for an ideal language"), is talk which situates something in space, time and causation. For example, "Just last week I sat in that chair over there on the events of my friend's birthday party, where I ate two pieces of cake."

Rules of Use. To proceed from the above, application conditions, one starts from indisputable facts, in the above case, that "I sat in that chair over there…where I ate two pieces of cake." The constraint here is that I follow the linguistic rules of English. So it would be correct to say that "the number of pieces of cake I ate were two" or "that chair I sat in was made in my hometown of Logan Utah," or any number of expressions that follow logically from the indisputable factual existence of "chair," "cake," "friend's birthday party" and soon.

Say, for example, that I have a house for rent. The indisputable fact that I own the house allows me to impose, for any would be renter, certain rules of use, and non-use, for the house. Such rules I would reveal to the renter in the form of a written rental contract that contain provisions like:

*Amount of deposit, monthly rental fee, responsibility for payment of utilities and the like.

*Prohibited activities such as smoking, curfew violations, parking in restricted areas, etc
*A stipulation against sub-renting the house.

The rules of use, as a written text, in all cases are in ordinary language derived from everyday life.

The application conditions and rules of use for self (or anything else) enter the picture at the level of existence and grow from there into questions about the nature of self, its uses, its causal efficacy and the like. Most of this I touch on in this essay. To know what the applications conditions for self are it is crucial to begin with knowing the context of self in any narrative. Where does it appear, at the beginning, middle end? What does it cause to happen within the narrative and in the mind of the reader? Is a self missing in the text? Reponding to such questions will, in many cases (some mentioned here), require something like reverse engineering. More specifically it requires an author's motivation for contualizing self in a specific way. Another way of saying this is to characterize it as a form of analysis (breaking apart) of a whole into its parts, of what existed before the self (in this case) becomes a whole within a context.

**At Stake: Context and Use.** C. S. Peirce, an American mathematician and philisopher, is known for his work on Thirdness and what we can derive from it. One of these derivation is his theory of three kinds of signs.

1. Icons: These are signs that are related to the things they stand for by virtue of some direct physical resemblance, for example, a hieroglyph as a picture of a house.

2. Indices. These are signs that relate to the things they stand for because they participate in, or are actually part of, the event or object for which they stand. For example, smoke indexes the existence of fire by virtue of the fact that the two are part of the same phenomenon.
3. Symbols. These are signs that are related to the things they stand for by an arbitrary bond agreed upon by those who use the symbol, for example, the word "computer."

The contexts and use of self corresponds to Peirce's definition of indices. The term "self" can only be interpreted in an actual context of use and its participation in the "same phenomenon":

The apparation of these faces in the crowd.

Petals on a wet black bough

(Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro").

The context here is, of course, a station on the Paris Underground. The use of the context is to create a unity between "faces" and "petals" by allowing them to participate in the same phenomenon.

**The Self as Tool? An Analogy.** If we say that language is a tool, as many do, then we can go on to say various things about self. First, of course, we can say, using a part/whole analysis, that "self," being a part of language, is a tool like language. We use it to "do," or represent, things in a particular context. Cornhuckers use a tool to strip the husk from corn in a cornfield at a certain time of year; the citizens of Paris use the Metro to get around at certain times of day and in varying conditions of crowding; prayers are said, typically, in churches, mosques and synagogues at designated times of day, the week and season.

If self is a tool then we might want to say, using the above use-contexts, that the self always has its time, place and proper function. But this claim can run up against the possible negation of time, place and proper function. If there is, for example, a proper function for self then there is always the representation of a possible improper function in
an impossible context—an impossible time and place. Here one is reminded what a tool like the one cornhuskers use cannot do, namely take itself as an object. It cannot, that is, unlike language and the self as language, talk about itself, a particular activity that has been described by the Zen expression, "The hand trying to grasp itself"—nor can cornhusker's tool perform its proper function in any context but a cornfield.

**Life Stage of the Self in Ordinary, Biological, Life: Conceived, Born, Grows and Dies?** The self, in Marquez' metaphor, is born twice, first as a biological process (from the mother) and secondly in a cultural way. The first birth, in a bodily form, is a happening. The self had no prior control over what it has became or awareness of what it will grow into. Here one is reminded of Blake lines on the wild unpredictability of the afterlife of birth:

Every night and every morn  
Some to misery are born.  
Every morn and every night  
Some are born to sweet delight.  
Some are born to endless night.  
("Auguries of Innocence").

No self asks to be born. It happens. No self, after birth, knows for sure what will happen in the time of its earthly afterlife. Notice that Marquez uses the verb "is obliged" to state this. The suggestion, obviously, is that one has no choice about giving birth to what might be called a "cultural self."

Are we then left with the question: why are we obliged to grow a second self? What conditions, if any, cause us to (at least) attempt to grow one? "Grow" in this context
suggests increase. But what kind of increase? One answer might be: fate forces one to increase the self but it does not state what nature the increase has to be. Your-self is the product of inexorable destiny. You have, consequently, no free will. You cannot plan how to grow a self. If so, then how does one increase self?

But is a writer required to give answers to these questions? Emily Dickinson, for example, gives no answer to related questions in "My Life Closed Twice Before the Close":

My life closed twice before the close.
It remains yet to see.
If immortality unveil.
A third event to me.
So huge, so hopeless, to conceive
As those that twice befell
Parting is all we know of heaven
And all we need of hell.

**The Third Self.** The author is born once and gives birth to two additional selves. There is the narrator, or voice, of the text and the others of the text. Take Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* for example. The first self is, of course, Sterne himself, the author of the narrative. The second self, Tristram (the "I" narrator) and the third others, Uncle Toby, Dr. Slop, Tristram mother and many others.

Another way of saying this is to say that a relationship between the author (the first self) and the other selves is one of contingency. The second and third self are contingent on the necessity of the author.
The relationship between these three selves is discussed in more detail below under the heading of **Intersubjectivity**.

**Ordinary Language (cont).** Throughout this essay I use the expressions "we (some) say....," "it is spoken..." and the like to express the link between how speakers use, or have used, ordinary language to express their, wants, bahavior and experience—in short, self or selves and the self of the **other**. The assumption is then that the self, in its various stages, has its birth with speakers saying something and listeners hearing something said. Every self then appears as the result of a speaker saying something but also, at times, leaving something unsaid. What results from all this can be classified as either a "global" or "local" narrative—the latter in the following specimen:

The narrator speaks about things as they occur to him randomly. As a narrative technique, it gave a nice twisted quality, which I liked quite a bit.

*(Denis Johnson author of *Jesus’ Sons*).*

**Ordinary Language (cont).** I should add that the self, viewed as a product of saying something—which could be an answer to the question "who are you?"—is a prominent rhetorical strategy in the way Aristotle presents starting points for discussion of specific topics. The general picture we get from this is that of a writer who was not only a close observer of human behavior but also an acute listener of the spoken word of his fellow citizens in specific contexts. Here is a short specimen:

The elements of the things that are by **are said** to be nature, some people **saying** that it is fire, some earth, some air, some water, some some other such thing, others some of these and still others all of them...other people...
say that nature is the primary combination of things (*Metaphysics* 1015a 3-9; emph mine).

It is possible, even likely, that Aristotle and his contemporaries read aloud. Silent reading, as we know it, did not come into being until late antiquity and develop up until the fifteen-century. So it is reasonable to assume that Aristotle was, while he was writing, sounding out the words as he wrote. This was the case, for example, in medieval monasteries where the scriptoriums were very loud with the noise of monks reading aloud while they wrote.

Everyone agrees that speaking is prior to writing, not only in time and account, but also in importance in intercommunication. Almost everyone, in thousands of different languages, speak the self aloud before they write the self. Many persons, insofar as they never write, accordingly, never write the self. Some don't write the self because they are illiterate, some because they don't like to write, others because they usurp writing with talking.

Even though saying the self and writing the self have much in common there is still an immense gap between them. Saying the self orally transfers far more information, far more faster, between speaker and listener than writing does between writer and reader. Given that language is a complex system that transforms ideas into sound between speaker and listener, and vice versa, it seems obvious that communication by sound has a much more comprehensive effect than writing. One can talk with someone else without seeing him or her and at some distance. Readers, by contrast, have to be present and see the written words
But sound has a drawback. It can only be retained for a brief period, just a few seconds at most. But its impermanence has been somewhat overcome in the last few millenia by writing. Here sound has been supplemented with the medium of sight. Thus I am able with writing to communicate with you now, although you may be far in both time and space from the range of my voice. Still, writing is handicapped in its inability to provide the quick interchanges that sound can between speaker and listener.

As I write this I am reading it but I am also conscious of saying the words silently to myself. That is, I am saying to myself my self as it shifts from one context, one sentence, to another.

**A Cautionary Note.** Let me say, at this point, that I am not entering here the fray as to the non-existence, ambiguity and mysteries of the self, namely, that given by no-self, personal identity, or personality theorists. My concern here is, and always has been, how to give an account, however minimal, to how writers, especially fiction writers, write self in various modalities and contexts.

**Narrative?** A narrative can be seen as an elongated representation of self, myself and the other, through the stages of the writer writing self as begotten, born, growth and death. That is, narrative begins with something said and ends in silence with things unsaid. Two famous examples are Aristotle's account of the selves of youth, adulthood and old age and Shakespeare's seven ages of man. See *Rhetoric*, Book II, chapters 12-13, *As You Like It*, 2:7.

**Intersubjectivity and the Other.** We give birth to the self by means of the other. Every use of "I," "You," "She/It/He" presupposes the existence of the other. The other can be either ourselves, in a dialogue with ourselves, or with some external other, the reader or
the listener. With this we generally assume that the other has some understanding of what we address to him or her. No claim is made that the other always understands what is addressed to him or her. We only assume that there is a possibility of them understanding us, even if it's not a perfect one.

Perhaps the best proof that speaking and writing rest on a prior assumption of intersubjectivity is to assume the contrary and attempt to conduct everyday affairs as if no one could ever understand what we say. Try ordering lunch in a restaurant while at the same time assuring yourself that the waiter cannot possibly understand your order. If we are honest, then we would have to confess that the subsequent appearance of our food under our noses is miraculous and accidental, or that the waiter somehow divines our meaning without understanding it. The emptiness of solipsism is that no one can truly be a solipsist and live in the world in accord with only h/h beliefs.

If we truly believe that no one could understand us, then why, aside from mere caprice, speak or write at all?

Accordingly, I myself and the present external reader are the other. And I invite h/h to question, correct, add to, or reject the claims I make here about the self. In my relationship with the present reader I then make an effort to follow Mill's advice:

He who knows only his own side of the case, knows little of that. He must be able to hear opposing arguments from persons who actually believes them: from persons who defend them in earnest, and do their very utmost for them (On Liberty).
**Examples of Self and the Other:** Holmes and Watson, Thelma and Louise, Prince Hall and Falstaff, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, Settembrini and Naphta, Vladimir and Estrogon, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

**Agent-Patient.** A self can be either an individual agent or an individual patient. By acting on the other, in either helpful or harmful way, self transforms the other into a patient. If the self acts on itself, in either a helpful or harmful way, it transforms itself into a patient. Given the shifting nature of the self, what is now the self as agent can, in different contexts, became a patient.

The key to understanding the agent/patient relationship is then to understand the nature of the action between them. Here we understand action as spoken, or written words, body language, and prior and possible future relationships between the self and the other.

**The Self in Time: Diachronic and Synchronic Representations.** A common way of representing self, especially in fiction and poetry, lies in picturing the self "as it was and had been" (diachronic) and as "it is now" (synchronic). Below are two examples. Notice particularly the shifting of the tenses of the verb from the simple past (the default tense of most narratives) to the simple present and then to the compound tense. The first is an excerpt from a novel, *Stoner*, by John Williams, and the second by A. E. Housman:

*Mrs Bostwick *spoke* less frequently and less directly of *herself*, but Stoner quickly *had* an understanding of her. She *was* a Southern lady of a certain type. Of an old and discreetly impoverished family, she *had grown* up with the presumption that the circumstances of need under
which the family existed were inappropriate to its quality. She had been taught to look forward to some betterment of that condition, but the betterment had never been very precisely specified….Her voice was thin and high, and it held a note of hopelessness that gave a special value to every word she said (emph mine).

* The time you won your town the race
We chaired you through the marketplace
Man and boy stood cheering by
As home we brought you shoulder high.

*Today* the road all runner come
Shoulder high we bring you home
And set you at your threshold down
Townsman of a stiller town
("To an Athlete Dying Young").

**Inscape and Instress?** What links the "then" of the diachronic and the "now" of the synchronic, as the two above examples show, is what might be called the "conservation" of the essence, but not the properties, of the self. Inwardly and outwardly the self loses properties associated with youth and acquires those concomitant with age:

When you get old,
the light from the sun, moon, and stars will grow dark;
the rain clouds will never seem to go away.

At that time your arms will shake
and your legs will become weak.
Your teeth will fall out so you cannot chew,
and your eyes will not see clearly.
Your ears will be deaf to the noise in the streets,
and you will barely hear the millstone grinding grain.
You’ll wake up when a bird starts singing,
but you will barely hear singing. \textit{(Ecclesiastes 12; New Century Bible)}.

So what, if any, is the essence of self? It is, it seems, something beyond a comprehensive definition. But it seems to have, as I said earlier, many names, "the idea" of the self, the "thing in itself (\textit{Ding an sich}), the "inscape" and "instress" of Gerard Manly Hopkins.

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; \textit{myself} it speaks and spells,
Crying \textit{What I dó is me: for that I came}.
\textit{("As Kingfishers Catch Fire")}

Hopkins's "selves" in the above, is, as far as I know, the only use of self in English Literature, as as a possible verb. The \textit{OED} does not credit it as such. But I doubt that anyone would want to argue with the way it expresses application conditions of the term "self" in Hopkins' poem.

\textbf{Sensing the Self.} It is a common, and an obvious fact, that we experience the world through our five senses, sight, hearing, smell, touch and taste. Of these, seeing is the most useful—or as Aristotle has it, "loved" because of its central role in identifying, and consequently knowing, the differences between things:
All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, sight makes us know and brings to light many differences between things (Metaphysics 980a22-28; emph mine).

Taste and smell, since they involve physical contact with certain sense organs can be reduced to the sense of touch, the "deepest sense" according to Classen.xii

In presenting the self, sight usually combines with other sense modalities, like hearing or touching. The constraint here is that the self "knows" that the modalities form a unity of effect:

    The geraniums I left last night
    On the windowsill,
    To the best of my knowledge
    Now, are out there still,
    And will be there as long as I
    Think they will.
    And will be there as long as I
    Think that I
    Can throw the window open on
    The sky,
A touch of geranium pink in the
tail of my eye:

As long as I think I see, past
Leaves green-growing,
Barges moving down a river,
Water flowing.
Fulfillment in the thought of
Thought outgoing,
Fulfillment in the sight of sight
Repeating,

Of sound in the sound of small
Birds southward flying,
In life life-giving, and in death
Undying. (William Jay Smith "The World Below the Window.")

**Causal Efficacy?** In order to be a self, assuming the existence of the other, should one condition of application be causal efficacy? Do things happen because of the existence of a self? Or, in Hopkins' terminology, what other things do selves generate, mental or physical?

Each mortal thing does one thing and the same:
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves — goes itself; myself it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I dó is me: for that I came.*
("As Kingfishers Catch Fire")
Let us assume that what an author can create is a self, not completely based on everyday experience, but can move, be conscious, perhaps be seen and can speak and be the cause of other selves that move, be conscious, seen and can speak. Two examples here might be witches, phantoms and ghosts. With the latter we have the example of the ghost of Hamlet's father. The ghost performs in three acts in Act I, Scene i; in the continuum of Act I, Scenes iv and v; and Act III, Scene iv. The ghost arrives at 1.00 a.m. in at least two of the scenes, and in the other scene all that is known is that it is night.

Or call to mind Walter de la Mare's ghostly figures that populate his *The Listeners*, addressed, for example, by names like "phantoms," "no one," "no head," or "strangeness."

**The Self as Individual.** The individual always appears in different contexts that give substance and growth to the self. In an etymological reading, the individual is irreducible to any prior state, entity or event. In a political sense, the individual is a person with free will, as in the right to vote and protest, and make personal choices. For Kierkegaard, arriving at a position of religious faith, and so a state of individuality, entails a "teleological suspension of the ethical." The self must first totally embrace the ethical. In order to raise oneself beyond the merely aesthetic life, which is a life of drifting in imagination, possibility and sensation, one needs to make a commitment. That is, the self needs to choose to transcend ethical, which entails a commitment to communication with God and decision procedures of acceptance and avoidance. 

**The Self in a Duel With Death; Or When Every Second of Every Day is Ash Wednesday.** By thinking about death, one's own, and that of the other, the writer
immerses the self in the expectation of inevitable death. This process is a three-level (or staged) one. At the first level one becomes aware that that h/s is going to die. The self can say to itself, at this level, that "I am going to die." But the self cannot say, with any certainty, when, where and how death will come. With such uncertainty the self cannot interpret the meaning of the arrival of death. Death is not reducible to any source, cause or explanation.

At levels two and three the self attempts to give a context for h/h death. Since every context embodies location, duration and causation, the self has the option of giving a pictorial representation of death or composing a written narrative of h/h self or the other. Among the pictorial representation are the Danse Macabre, a hooded figure with a scythe, a skeleton or a death's head. In the narrative mode, one finds death in works like Donne's Holy Sonnets, Ecclesiastes, Morality Plays, modern novels like Hemingway's A Farewell The Arms and movies like Bergman's "The Seventh Seal." In all of these representations, the relationship between self and death appears as a duel. This is perhaps best shown, in its most explicit way, in Donne's Holy Sonnets, especially #167, "Death be not Proud."

DEATH be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not so,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
From rest and sleepe, which but thy pictures bee,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
And soonerest our best men with thee doe goe,
Rest of their bones, and soules deliverie.
Thou art slave to Fate, Chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poyson, warre, and sicknesse dwell,
And poppie, or charmes can make us sleepe as well,
And better then thy stroake; why swell'st thou then;
One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; death, thou shalt die.

The context of dueling is, of course, a contest of two. The application conditions in
everyday life for dueling include, the need for "satisfaction," admittance to a society like
the Burschnschaft of German students, or the desire to display one's skills. In narratives
of death, however, the contexts differ wildly and the application conditions are the self's
awareness of inevitable death, the self's reaction to such awareness, and (usually)
involuntary withdrawal from the context. Here some examples are the Medieval Morality
Play, "Everyman," the movie, "The Seventh Seal," and Randall Jarrell's "Death of The
Ballturret Gunner":

From my mother's sleep I fell into the State,
And I hunched in its belly till my wet fur froze.
Six miles from earth, loosed from its dream of life,
I woke to black flak and the nightmare fighters.
When I died they washed me out of the turret with a hose.

The Everyday Self as Life. Having Versus Deploying. Things that are alive have a
distinctive capacity to develop or maintain themselves by engaging in various processes
including chemosynthesis, photosynthesis, cellular respiration, cell generation, and
maintenance of homeostasis. Let us call these vital processes. It is one thing to have the
capacity to deploy these processes and another to actually deploy them, just as there is a
difference between having the ability to run and actually running. For something to have
the property ‘alive’ seems to be a matter of its having the capacity to sustain itself using
processes that are saliently similar to these.

The Everyday Self as Dead. By contrast to the above, the property ‘dead’ seems
applicable to something that has lost this above mentioned capacity. We can call this the
loss of life account of death. The event by which the capacity to employ vital processes is
lost is one thing and the condition of having lost it is another. ‘Death’ can refer to
either.xiv

Life Stage of the Self: Begotten, Born, Grows and Dies (cont). The eighteenth-century
novel, Tristram Shandy, begins with the self, the "I-protagonist" being begotten:

I wish either my father or my mother, or indeed both of them, as
they were in duty both equally bound to it, had minded what they were
about when they begot me. had they duly consider'd how much depended
upon it…

Another great narrative of the eighteenth-century, Gulliver's Travels, begins with the
protagonist looking back on his birth, growth and life expectations:

My Father had a small Estate in Nottinghamshire, I was the Third of five
Sons. He sent me to Emanual College in Cambridge, at Fourteen Years
old, where I resided three Years, and applied my self close to my Studies.

The Self and Obituary. Throughout this essays I have spoken about applications
conditions that must exist before an author can contextualize self. One does not just put a
self in context without first knowing what conditions determine whether or not a self can have a specific context and then to follow rules of use given by a particular language, in this case English. Contexts of self and rules of use associated with the contextualized self appear often as all life stages of self, birth, growth, death. Two narratives may be cited, Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and John Williams *Stoner*. Swift and Williams both begin with the birth of the protagonist, proceed to different life contexts —Gulliver as a sailor, a stranger in different lands, Stoner as as the child of a farmer, an academic, a married man. For Gulliver the last stage is life in a stable with two "stone (castrated) horses," for Stoner death while reading:

> He let his fingers riffle through the pages and felt a tingling, as if those pages were alive….He was minutely aware of it, and he waited until it contained him, until the old excitement that was like terror fixed him where he lay….The fingers losened, and the book they had held moved slowly and then swiftly across the still body and fell into the silence of the room.

With this in mind, please consider the context, some application conditions and rules of use, associated with an obituary, in this example that of Oliver Sacks.\textsuperscript{xv}

**Contexts:** Birth in London, July 9, 1933, the youngest of four sons of Samuel Sacks and the former Muriel Elsie Landau. Career as a doctor at the Beth Abraham Hospital in the Bronx, the Albert Einstein college of Medicine and the New York University School of Medicine. Death from cancer at 82 in New York.

**Application Conditions:** The following are undisputed claims about Sacks as a doctor and writer: "Keen powers of observation and devotion to detail, deep reservoirs of
sympathy, and an intuitive understanding of the fathomless mysteries of the human brain and the intricate connections between the body and the mind" (A1).

Rules of Use. These are the linguistic rules of use associated with the term "Oliver Sacks" that correctly proceed from the application conditions. Or, to put it another way, it involves the use the if/then linguistic structure in order to make the foundations of the contexts explicit.

Everyday Language. On everyone's lips.

Writing Self as a Paradoxical State. "Paradox," is an aggregate of two terms of everyday language of ancient Greeks, para and doxa. Each, on its own, as I discuss later, appears on many different contexts. But combined, our understanding of the uses of "paradox" becomes more complicated. Three views seem possible. We can say that as a couple para and doxa, not unlike Holmes and Watson or Abbott and Costello, do what each cannot do alone. Or we might want to say that together para and doxa relate more directly, and imageable, to everyday problems, events and concerns, than each can do alone.

Or, finally, and this is the stance if take up here, we can say that para and doxa, in an adversalial relationship, create a mystery at the heart of things.—and, by implication, the inability of language to fully express the meaning of everyday facts, happenings and daily cares.

At first sight, one might think that paradox and irony express the same meaning. And this, on the whole, is how dictionary makers take them. But, if we follow the etymology of both doxa and para, how Greek speakers, that is, seemed to take them, than a substantial difference appears. In short, irony, with the root word eiron, or "saying,"
suggests an individual speaker *saying something ironic* as judged by h/h listeners.

Paradox, by contrast, suggests a *state said by a group*.

Of all the theories about the name and nature of paradox (in the thousands, no doubt) the one that stands the best chance of contextualizing, and un-contextualizing, self is the one rising from the struggle to replace an everyday opinion with a non-everyday one. This claim, I propose to demonstrate, starts with the etymology of the word "paradox," a term that combine *para* (beside, beyond, different from) with *doxa* (opinion). So, using the terminology of this essay, we can say that we recognize something paradoxical whenever we "hear" an everyday opinion, *doxa*, expressed in everyday language, partnered by whatever is "beside" (*para*) it—in some way attached to it in either harmony with *doxa* or a struggle with it.

So the basic structure of a paradox rises from a "war" between an opinion-narrative and a counter beside-narrative. The integrity of a paradox depends on there not being any winner in the war.

In the original Greek "paradox," *to paradoxon* has many synonyms, *to topon, e eironeia, to dogma* and others. Only *to paradoxon* survives as the salient form today in the major Indo-European languages like English, Italian, Spanish and so on.

As these examples show, *to paradoxon* always appears in everyday classical Greek, with the definite article. This suggests that the term refers more to a state than a process or event. Such a state comes into being by combining *para* with *doxon* to form a phrase that can be roughly translated as "beside" or "in addition to" (*para*) an "opinion," *e gnome*, itself a substantive and a word with many synonymns.\(^{xvi}\)
With this, I believe I have warrant to say that a paradox names a state of being, not an act, process or event. So, how "big" is this state of being? I will stick out my neck and claim that it is the irreducible ground of every narrative of self conceived as a possibility for the self.

Written on the frontispiece of Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* is a saying of Epictetus: "It is not things (*pragmata*) that bother people (*anthropos*) but the opinions (*dogmata*) about things." By "people" Sterne presumably means not only the characters of his novel but also himself and also the reader of the novel.

Opinion-holding is such a universal trait of humans it is almost impossible to conceive of a person without opinions. A narrative that explores the loss of opinions in the character Olga, is Chekhov "The Darling." Thoughout the story talk is given as the source of opinions and the lack of talk, as happens to Olga, as the source of the lack of opinions.

A paradoxical state develops from what Peirce calls a process from "Firstness," to "Secondness" and onto the final state of "Thirdness." Firstness is the thing with no past, "nothing behind it," individual and solitary. Secondness is a reaction to Firstness. Thirdness, finally, is an interpretation of Secondness. In more grammatical language, the term "paradox" is a Second making reference to a First. A narrative of the paradoxical state of self is a Third.. Or, in everyday language we can say that something exists, somebody notices that something exists and then someone else says something about what exists which may be him or herself or something external to h/h.

In the terms of what was said above, a thing exists, someone notices it without having an opinion about it and then someone forms an opinion about it. H/h's opinion
then generates a "war" (as spoken above) between a counter-narrative (\textit{para}) and a narrative of the said (\textit{doxa}).

A common example of self in a paradoxical state is an opinion-narrative (\textit{doxa}) about life that harbors within its bosom a counter-narrative (\textit{para}) of death. The narratives are typically in the first-person. An example from the eighteenth-century is the narrator of Swift's "The Bickerstaff Papers." The "I" entraps himself in a paradoxical state with his use of the terms "alive" and "dead." His subject is one Partridge, an "Almanac Maker." The "I," himself an almanac maker, by name of Bickerstaff, predicts that Partridge will die "infallibly upon the 29th of March next, about eleven at night, of a raging fever. Therefore, I advise him to consider of it and settle his affairs in time."

To this, Partridge reacts with a declaration that he is still alive after the time set by Bickerstaff and he points to the evidence of the publication of his almanac. Bickerstaff then replies with "Proofs" of Partridge death on the date given in his prediction of "the 29th of March next." One of his "Proofs" is to Partridge himself to declare himself dead: "I appeal to Mr. Partridge himself, whether it be probable I could have been so indiscreet to begin my Predictions with the \textit{only} falsehood that ever was pretended to be in them."

In sum, the paradoxical state of the "I" self of "The Bickerstaff Papers" comes from predicating the contrary states of life and death to the same subject \textit{at the same time}. This, the reader will notice, corresponds to a violation of Aristotle's Law of Non-Contradiction: “It is impossible for the same thing to belong and not to belong at the same time to the same thing and in the same respect” (\textit{The Metaphysics}, IV 3 1005b19–20).
By implication, we might want to say that a paradoxical state of the self in everyday life is an impossibility—that it is only possible in a linguistic representation. Everyday language makes an everyday impossibility possible as food for thought.

Placing an awareness of self as finitude and as the afterlife of infinitude in the same time and place also exemplifies a paradoxical state. For example, the voice in Housman's "To An Athlete Dying Young":

Now you will not swell the rout
Of lads that wore their honours out
Runners whom renown outran
And the name died before the man.
(ll. 17-21).

Here there is a struggle between awareness and unawareness. To go on living, and wear his "honours out," would be to be aware of a bad situation. Dying young, and entering a state of unawareness, of not wearing his "honours out," is a good thing.

One Sentence Paradox. "I chiefly grieve because I cannot grieve." This is a statement by Waldo Emerson on the death of his five year old son Waldo. Notice the use of the negative "cannot" in the statement. If we take "chiefly grieve" as the doxa (opinion) and "I cannot grieve" as the para ("beside" or "around thing") than it is the negative "cannot" that keeps them separated, a necessary feature of every paradox in sustaining the individual integrity of para and doxa.

The One Versus the Many Paradox. In this kind of paradox the narrator of the text pits the opinion (para) of one individual against the opinion (doxa) of many. Swift's "An Argument To Prove that the Abolishing of Christianity in England May, as things now
stand, be attended with some Inconveniences; and perhaps not produce those many good Effects proposed thereby" is an example. Here the narrator stands as the one with an "opinion" contrary to the "opinion of the majority" who want to abolish Christianity in England. The opinion of the one, true to the core meaning of the Greek doxa, is advanced with hedges and uncertainties, "some," "may," "perhaps" and with phrases like "I do not yet see the absolute necessity of extirpating the Christian religion from among us."

Doxa, for the Greeks, as it is for the narrator, in a stance somewhere between ignorance and truth. Plato, we reall, makes much of this stance in Meno. This, in addition, is the eightfold context for "opinion" in Swift's text.

Lest the reader not take the narrator's opinion as a paradox, in a "paradoxical age," he says:

This (argument) may appear too great a paradox even for our wise and paradoxical age to endure, therefore I shall handle it with all tenderness, and with the utmost deference to that great and profound majority which is of another sentiment. xvii

The Expecting Self and the Unmet Expectation. A salient feature of everyday life is to expect one thing and for a different thing to happen, or not happen. The relationship between the presence of an expectation and its absence can take many forms, behavioral and verbal. I may expect to get a raise in income this year but don't. Perhaps it goes to someone else. You may break a promise to meet someone for lunch. Or my friend Jack may expect rain and leave home with an umbrella to find it a sunny day.

One might want to say here that every expectation contains the potential of unfulfillment with the unfilfillment being the cause of the unexpected. The outcome
comes into being as a three stage one, the expectation, the reaction to it, and the reaction as a cause for the unexpected. Sartre uses this scenario to illustrate the nature of "Nothingness" in Being and Nothingness, Shirley Jackson the incongruities of expectations in her 1948 short story, "The Lottery" and Jonathan Swift in certain episodes in Gulliver's Travels, such as an undersized Gulliver attempting to play an outsized spinet for the much larger Queen of Brobdingnag (2:3).

One might even want to go further and say that expectation and unfulfillment of such suggests that paradox involves a war between word and thought without any "referee" or winner or loser.

The Paradox of Is and Ought. The eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume famously said that one should not derive an "ought" from an "is":

In every system of morality which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning and establishes the being of a God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when when, of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, is and is not, I meet with no proposition that is not connected to an ought or an ought not. xviii

I have suggested above the benefits of seeing a paradox as the everyday Greek speaker saw and said it. Expressed as propositions, we can suppose that the Greek speaker thought, and might have spoken of, a paradox in both a Humean, and non-Humean way:

*There is an opinion.

*There is something in a paradox besides (beyond, in addition to) an
opinion.

*The added-on something *ought to be there.

In Hume's analysis this syllogism is flawed. The gap between *is* and *ought* is not bridgeable—if that is, we want ourselves to be logical. With this in mind he would, no doubt, want to replace the final *ought* proposition with an *is* one, namely "The added-on something *is* there." Such replacement would entail an additional proposition that the added-on something does not *have to be there.*

Is Paradox Just Another Name For Parable? If so, we seem to be left with the question, raised by Kafka, of the usefulness of paradoxes. Since parables may seem at times to say something incoherent about the ordinary, we might ask what use do paradoxes have in coping with our "daily cares"? xix

In this orchard I have gathered only the low hanging fruit. I intend to visit other orchards soon.

NOTES


5 New Literary History, 2015, 46: 1–1


4 http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/death/


6 In English, as other modern language, for example, Spanish and French, *para* never appears, unlike the Greek, as a single term. It is always in combination with something else. The OED list some 17 different combinations such as "paranormal," "paralysis," "parallax," "paradigm," "parasthesia," "parenthesis," "paragraph" and others.


19 Frogcircus.org/kafkaParables