

Positive and Negative Creativity

The piece in which I [revisited an old text](#) (Meaningless) talked about a form of heaviness, a solid presence which I often feel weighing down from somewhere just antecedent to my thoughts, a presence which, when it has coagulated a certain amount of units of pure subjectivity around itself, forms a dense intuitive singularity of a ripeness which is impossible to ignore, a pungent and pendulous fatness which imposes itself on every waking thought like the distinct and material urge to empty one's bowels, except insisting on its release through the hands via the intellect rather than the anus via the intestine. This urge to release what has been metabolised in the mysterious organ that is the brain is the result of the bodily digestion of external reality, the by-product of the process by which the brain consumes that which is external to itself and assimilates it as part of its being, a necessarily continuous nourishment that keeps the mind full of a fresh sense of reality as it loses the present to the vagaries of memory in an uninterrupted stream, forming a mental analogue to the materially essential and unceasing replenishment of our cells by consuming physical matter from the world around us.

The processes themselves are metabolic and vital, one for physical health and the other mental, and while both continually replenish their respective realms they conversely create superfluous material which must be excreted as it does not constitute a functioning part of the body, superfluous material which makes its presence felt in the gut, and the mind. The build-up of this by-product of existence and engagement with the surrounding world might have become intolerable for me, might have been a great source of pain if I had not been fortunate enough in life to have had my hands and thoughts introduced to - and trained in- the transubstantiation of mental figure to physical matter, a skill which has allowed me to not only rid myself of these accumulations, which I imagine would otherwise have clogged up my primary apprehension of things outside of myself, but to even begin refashioning small segments of the world around me in consonance with the intuitive and internal process of mental metabolism, in other words the release of this superfluous material now brings me not just the relief of excretion, but also the pleasure of creation.

I have become somehow intimate with the exigencies of the natural functioning of both the stomach and the mind, and have become relatively adept at procuring both food and stimuli that will make me at once feel reasonably healthy and adequately engaged and productive, rendering these biological systems generally predictable, predominantly stable, verging on the habitual. Unfortunately, permeating every stage of the metabolism of both my mind and body, there is an unstable element, a tenacious and inscrutable presence which destabilises the placid equanimity that would be so pleasantly balanced without it. I hadn't thought about it much recently, preferring to stare into the wine-glass rather than into its entirely specular face, but a brief conversation on the terrace at the AA, and my attempt to be truthful rather than phatic, led me to think a little about its impact on my production, and by association my life.

Asked how (or why, I cannot remember which) I was so continuously 'creative', I replied phatically that it was because 'I enjoy it', vaguely justifying the ease and emptiness of the response to myself via the narrow connection of its positive verb to the slow, quiet and broad pleasure to be extracted from the metabolic, biological creativity I enjoy so much; and while usually such vague justifications are satisfactory this one was clearly insufficient in that the question had been asked about the quantity of my creativity, its incessancy rather than about any quality, and the slow form of production with its occasionally heavy moments of fecundity which I was referring the 'I enjoy it' to is not one that produces anything in great quantities at all, it is something entirely else that fills in the gaps between those moments of weight and substantiality, something totally different in kind that forces a certain pace to hands that would otherwise perhaps be helping others or working to make money.

It is that other thing which needed to be referred to, and I could not reconcile it to 'I enjoy it' because -and this struck me rather heavily at that moment- there was no pleasure

contained within my recollection of it whatsoever, it was entirely devoid of delight, or of enjoyment. Rather than emerging painlessly from within me, than being products of a harmony between body and intent, the majority of works I produce are artistic palliatives; not independent sources of joy or pride, but manifestations of a repeated and desperate desire to be rid of an implacable, vicious and mercurial substance which corrupts and agitates every part of my nature that it touches.

When I am trying to rest and relax it inserts itself into the gap between the silence and my enjoyment of it, disrupting any germinal relationship between the two by taking the form of an immaterial and shapeless anxiety, an anxiousness which drives me into the arms of books and drink in search of other forms of silence; when I am trying to enjoy an entirely innocent and enjoyable meal it sinks into the delightful union of nature and pleasure that is the transcendental heart of dining, and corrupts it, distorting the balance between hunger and enjoyment so that hunger grows so frantically unstable, so hysterically nervous, that the best that can be hoped for from meals becomes not delight, but relief from a monstrously enlarged hunger; and when I am trying to work, trying to do anything that is not within the orbit of a creative activity, the greater the time spent away from making things, the more items of artifice that I feel I should have made in the preceding interval, the smaller the value that seems appended to me, the further my internal self-estimation falls towards the crushing point of worthlessness, and it is the feeling of proximity to that point of nothingness which agitates a yawning terror and drives me wildly back into production, clawing feverishly drawing by drawing, design by design back from the brink of nothingness.

Works produced under these circumstances are definitely not positives, not items of pleasure with value in themselves, they are instead negatives, momentary reliefs from the terror of worthlessness whose value lie in the absence of an unpleasant feeling, the lack of a troubling agitation. They are artistic analgesics, and form a potent medicine in the cabinet of calmatives that habit has developed to give me respite from that one same devilish toxicity, that selfsame noxiousness that is always there in the smooth integers of my personality, ready to crack them into unrelated and selfish fractions; that unitary disruptor which is the ticking heart of that terrible anxiety I always find in silence, that monstrous starvation I have to face in meals and the awful descent into worthlessness I cannot avoid if I am not producing.

It would not be true to say that everything I do is tainted in this way, since there is always the genius of that silent metabolic process which continues to consume reality, reaffirm existence and excrete singular beauty; it is a genius which resides in a place that lies behind and before the areas where anxiety and agitation inject themselves, a position which allows those positive, natural and pre-neurotic creative acts to develop and occur simultaneously with those negative ones whose aim is palliative. And the two have even fed each other's ability for self-realisation, in that the relentless drive to assuage the ego's perpetually diminishing self-worth through production has always had the positive consequence of forcing the hands to learn new techniques, hone old ones, and broach new mediums, skills which in turn have helped in the creative excretion of the residual build-up of mental metabolis, helped in the formation of natural, positive, complete, and joyful objects of creation.

And so if asked the question again of how or why I am so constantly creative, while I cannot in good faith reply that it is because 'I enjoy it', I equally would not be able to say that it is only because 'I want to avoid torment', my reduced and lazy reply would simply have to be 'because it pre-occupies me entirely'.