

# Dying is easy, comedy is hard

I am left with the impression of white asparagus. Or of other plant shoots growing in a slow vegetable panic under plastic sheeting or concrete blocks, trying to find the light. Of something caught inside a closed system; or there electively, hiding from openness. I like how the French like their asparagus fat and white. They pile dirt up over the emerging spears to starve them of light and blanch them.

This material has an arctic whiteness that deafens the ears as snow muffles speech; its cells like places where symbols rest. Polystyrene is also up-to-its-ears involved in the present obsession with establishing more and more security, so adept is it at cushioning fragile times against blows in transit. This acute need for security is also a thought retardant given that new-idea thinking requires risk and feeds off chance.

I once had a dog that had never seen snow before. It snows every five years or so where I was living, and when it did, we went to have a look at it, she and I – we lived alone – in the dark of the early morning. She stood on the Victorian verandah – built to British plans, facing the south – and barked at the snow. Her bark was muted like we had been listening to very loud music but without any ringing. She tried to bark louder but it didn't help and she probably made her own ears ring in doing so.

This space is very white, but its relationship to light is ambiguous. It could be the white of the blanched in a light-starved space; but it could also be the white of the over-exposed in a light-saturated situation. But both bear a possible relationship to the condition of being observed, *over time*.

If this space is a dark passage, what is this darkness – the space of the literature, which is allegedly surrounded by darkness? This could be the opening scene of a novel, a magical one, where a duck can live happily, free, in the ice, without the need for warmth, nourishment, company. Like the pre-adolescent space before one realises a need for friends.

American artist Meg Cranston said at the time of this icy project – her show was next – that the experience of women working in the art world is of being perpetually

on the outside of something. Men, then, are they always stuck on the inside? Perhaps the over-exposed scenario described above represents the full disclosure and high definition the patriarchal set-up demands.

The resisting subject, however, demands curtains, formlessness and silence, which must put men in somewhat of a double-bind – stuck in an illuminated closed system (the self, masculinity, work, the institution, the gallery...) yet seeking darker, more female opacities. This compounded by the tendency people have to run headlong towards what they are most afraid of.

Here I am mindful of a diagram David Cooper, an anti-psychiatric psychiatrist, drew in his book *The Language of Madness*. It is a spiral that goes downward, getting smaller as it goes, representing the way language breaks down from 'the thinking subject', down a little further to 'words', and then much further down, beyond concepts, to 'the last word':

"On the 'perimeter' of the last spiral before the inexpressible are the scarcely articulated words of the language of madness and also the scarcely more articulated words of poetry. And then the plunge into nothing that has no more of a place than a place that can only begin to find a place in a transformed world. On the final perimeter idealist philosophy is finally silenced because it cannot bear what cannot be articulated – it can make nothing of a nothing that is nowhere 'else'."

The depressed subject (popular culture) may experience a falling out of words, but it is a fall to a quiet place beyond the reach of science, the institution, reason. What is protected is the meandering line of dribbling thought that bumps and bumbles in lines that look like tastebuds, the backs of bird's heads, duckbills, testes; from thought, to lower-grade thought, to not-knowing and wherever.

The doltish duck here could be easily dismissed as dim, stupid, and morally lacking for it, but it has been convincingly argued that evil is less a matter of stupidity than a by-product of the process of truth taken too far, eradicating the unnameable. As Alain Badiou has it, "Evil is the will to name, *at any price*".

Avian analogies see words pecking, and sense exploding as they flock. But this duck looks particularly digestive, as if it is, in farming terms, a turner, in that all it does

is turn perfectly good food into shit. It is of no use to someone who wants it to perform a service. On the ground, its flight is still a weak potential.

There is language at play here, but a primitive sort, one mired in a silent present between thoughts. Given the economy of words we are involved in, language perpetually removes us from the present, effecting losses and gains as we use it. In equal measure there is the disintegration of purpose as we struggle with dualism and other clunky abstractions, yet the mobilisation of desire lifting us upward when we seek to leave.

There is something comforting about cold air in that it cools the hands, feet, and face, contracting the capillaries, drawing the blood further in, lowering the blood pressure and promoting relaxation and sleep. Perhaps we should only use language in direct proportion to the amount we dream, thoughts then balanced by the undecidable.