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Queering Enlightenment

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> 'To claim ***this is what I am*** is to suggest a provisional totalization of the 'I'. But if the I can so determine itself, than that which it excludes in order to make that determination remains constitutive of that determination itself. In other words, such a statement presupposes that **the 'I' exceeds its own determination**, and even produces that very excess in and by the act which seeks to exhaust the semantic field of 'I' '
> Judith Butler
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> 'The idea of a separate... 'I' concept is an object. I become an object, inevitably, whenever I think of myself... You have no objective existence (as you), nor any subjective existence (as you) because existence as subject would make subject an object which it could never be.'
> Wei Wu Wei

I do not consider myself a Buddhist. I do not consider myself a mystic or a spiritual teacher. I have studied western interpretations of Zen, and am beginning a study of poststructuralism and Queer Theory. It is with these studies in mind that I respond to the request of those who consider me to be (or accuse me of being) 'enlightened'. They ask 'What was your experience of attaining enlightenment?'

The question is problematic. I do not consider myself to be 'enlightened', yet I have a desire to answer the query as I ***have*** known Satori. The popularized concept of 'attaining enlightenment' is, to anyone studied in Zen, a contradiction. To say 'attain enlightenment' is much like saying 'swallow your throat.' Enlightenment is what everything always already is; it has even been said by Shunryu Suzuki Roshi to be 'nothing special.'

I will attempt to write while conscious of the paradox of writing as one who is enlightened.

> 'He who knows does not speak. He who speaks does not know.' - Lao Tsu

And so, acknowledging that I do not know; I speak.

'What was your experience of attaining enlightenment?'

Satori, for me, was not really an experience. Nor did I receive any insight which I could be said to have ***attained***. Thus, the simplest and most honest answer is; nothing. Though there was certainly a happening, no thing happened. I will return to grammar later. First, an account of this Satori.

A few months ago I was planting a field with greens. During the hours that I was at this task, I listened to

an audio book. Planting required a minimum of effort and the book absorbed the dialogue of my mind. The book ended. In the moment of silence, it began to rain. I continued to plant. Yet, the next moment I knew Satori. I was not ***experiencing*** enlightenment. It was past as soon as I knew it. I was again filled with thoughts trying to reconnect to that moment of silence when it began to rain.

I can recall distinctly the feeling, but to say that ***I*** (***subject***) felt ***it*** (***object***) is not an accurate model of the event. Satori did not have an objective character; as I said, the feeling was no ***thing***. It was not signifiable with accuracy. Nor was I conscious of it until afterward, so I cannot represent it as a subjective experience. I will attempt to analogize.

It was as if I had made an appointment to meet at a cafe. After waiting for too long for the other party, I checked on them only to find that the person I had agreed to meet was myself. Surely, an impossible state of affairs in reality. Having found that I had already arrived and in fact needn't have waited, the only course of action would be to be glad that my waiting was over, feel a little foolish, and order something to eat.

I felt this sort of bewildering foolishness, and continued planting; trying to consider what conditions had led to this feeling. Having been at a repetitive task, my body was automatically planting. I was not conscious of my work; and I was listening to the audiobook.

About listening, Julian Jaynes says;

> 'Sound is a very special modality. We cannot handle it, we cannot push it away. Sound is the least controllable of all sense modalities... [When listening,] in a certain sense we must become the other person, or rather, let them become a part of us. **We suspend our own identities**, after which we come back to accept or reject what they have said... volition [in early man] came as a voice that was in the nature of a neurological command, in which **command and action were not separated**. To hear was to obey.'

So, I had substituted the reader for my inner dialogue and when he finished speaking, I was left blank. Before I could resume my self-identified normal cognition and begin to process, it began to rain. But what is this 'it' that 'rains'?

> 'There is no being behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed.'
> Friedrich Nietzsche

> 'Illusions of being and substance are fostered by a belief that the grammatical formulation of subject and predicate reflects the prior ontological reality or substance and attribute.'
> Judith Butler

So, despite the grammatical difficulty, rain occurred. Just as I had been, I continued to plant. Yet, I was not consciously planting. The repetitive work I had been doing continued itself. I did not think of it. Just as there was no 'it' raining, there was no 'I' planting. There was, objectively, an Owen performing the action, but I was not the subject.

> 'Only objects can be born and die, only objects can be perceived. Only objects can be thought of and conceived. Only objects can appear to exists and all that exists is appearance only. **About what is indicated by the word 'subjectivity' nothing can be cognized, not because it is some 'thing' that is not cognizable, but because by**

> And yet, inevitably, it must necessarily be all that is and all that we are. What, then, is 'it'? No sort of 'what'. Just sheer phenomenal absence, whose absence is us.' - Wei Wu Wei

In the next moment, thoughts arrived. It was apparent though that the identity that 'thinks' them is constructed or inferred from the thinking. It is the companion I was waiting for.

> 'All psychological categories (the ego, the individual,the person) derive from the illusion of substantial identity... it was grammar (the structure of subject and predicate) that inspired Descartes' certainty that 'I' is the subject of 'think' whereas **it is rather the thoughts that come to me.**'
> Michael Haar

> 'They must dephenomenalize themselves. Disidentify their subjectivity from its projected phenomenal selfhood which is dominated by a concept of 'I'. This adjustment has been given many names but it is nevertheless not an ... experience-- for, except as appearance, there is no object to which such can occur; it is a metanoesis whereby **figmentary attachment or identification is found not to exist or ever have existed since it is a figment**. This displacement of subjectivity is from apparent object to ultimate subject in which it inheres from phenomenon to noumenon.' -Wei Wu Wei

'What was your experience of attaining enlightenment?'

I noticed a mistake of grammar. Though 'I planted' and 'I continued thinking', my volition felt much more pretentious. It seemed to me that 'I' thought with as much volition as 'it' rained. Thinking happened. I blamed Owen. Yet it seemed too that this attribution was not volitional; 'I' did not attribute my thoughts to me. They were attributed. Attribution, thought, planting, rain, simply went on. I assumed my identity but that happened on its own too. Ultimately nothing 'I' do can be attributed to me.

Somehow, Satori, rather than being a 'higher state of consciousness' was not conscious at all. Nor was it the feeling or the realization, or the flood of thoughts. These things happened after. It was not a ***thing*** that ***happened*** in the moment my subjectivity was destabilized. The Satori was nothing in particular. It endeared me rather more to farming than to mysticism.

'What was your experience of enlightenment?'

Nothing.

> 'There is no mystery whatsoever; only inability to perceive the obvious.'
> Wei Wu Wei

buddhism consciousness queer spirituality theory

I define my sex, gender & body. You define yours.

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