

Voicing Smoke: A Conversation

“We talk only because of a persistent desire to understand what is it that we are saying”

-Arkadii Dragomoshchenko-

“Yeah, eventually the smoke turns inside-out, doubles itself,” he says, intruding and explaining, “You know you really get going, people all over (strangers too), start hearing you, reading your voice and such, and you yourself, you start to lose track keeping up you know, with your own voice, you’re hearing things all twisty and stylistically, like what you wrote that they responded to (strangers too, man) and thinking – trying to keep thinking that way – hypothetical points-of-view, as if you were many other people (strangers, too) beside the husband, dad, son, brother, laborer you are (also) and it curls and wisps about on you, you know, you’re sort of this-that and other things but you’re writing, god dammit you’re writing, writing something, anything, trying to empty out by keeping making more, they say you can’t know enough about words, like diseases or philosophies, or god and psyches, dreams and children, hell even stars or bacteria; the musics, what-not, we all pick interminable vocations to try to keep ourselves alive, you know, and, far as I can tell, all of ‘em are capable of getting you bewildered and lost, twisted off course, dead-alive as it were, you know, mystical rabbit holes, reinventions, discoveries...”

“My own words take me by surprise and teach me what I think”

-Maurice Merleau-Ponty-

“Chasing or catching, you might wanna ask, are you painting the lines or are the lines limiting options, you know? I mean selection seems infinite as experience, as ideas or blades of grass, but once you pick one it changes the field and then what you gonna do - just keep on tearing things up willy-nilly, or you gonna watch for patterns, make shapes, crop circles and what-not, fetching opposites or similar, throw in some weeds or flowers, blow up the bulbs with your mouth, you know? I mean once you get started touring around in a dictionary or whatever, even a simple beginner’s one, it’s all over, man, catch the drift? If it occurs to you there’s a better way to say it, there’s got to be a word for that, there’s stuff that oughta be all mashed together or dissected for various purposes and all the other things everything might be used to sound like or mean, you know? Take your kids favorite words – *penis* or *oxytocin*, *beasty* or *outta-sight*, you know – where phrases start standing in for single words or concepts, some emotion-idea, like when your wife tries to spell floccinaucinihilipilification and then you’re all supercalifragilisticexpialidocious Latin or Russian or characters and symbols, it’s a winding road man, outta-sight! Whammo! Beasty. You gotta be careful what you wish for when it comes to these things man!....”

“The general rule that each word when used in a new context is a new word”

-J.R. Firth-

“So say you pull back, right, you shut it up like you doing now, man, go all Buddhist or scholarly-like, studying researching languages form function communication and so forth, you were using words in so many ways hearing so many things you were constantly misunderstood or in trouble with the missus or what-not, you know? You call a stop, seek therapy, work as a bagger or cabbie or something, anything to quiet the noise in your brain, ‘cause you were

reading, keeping your mouth shut and reading, just soaking it up, taking it in, informations and theories and styles, especially the stuff about death or silence, unsolvable human mysteries, conundrums sort of things, and what's that leave you with? Where's that got you brother, huh? It's still called logorrhea – heard of it? Diarrhea of words, man, just a constant spraying thrum of language and whispers, shouts and moans you're seeing everywhere, hearing on signs and packages, instructions and internet – everywhere - you can't escape these words in your head even when you're shitting or making love, you know, man? So even learning about silence is full of words and they're like hives in your mind man like weather fronts clouds filling you up gathering across plains in your brain, logocentric egocentric ethnocentric all like some F5 tornado bro, a frickin' ocean of words, a storm – and whatcha gonna do then man?"

"Language presents the picture of a ceaseless flow of becoming"

-V.N. Volosinov-

"I can tell by looking bro! You're listening to me and you're lost in a void, a buzz man – it's all catatonic overwhelm and I hear you! You better believe it, you've got your head all wired up with signs and symbols, all these voices saying this or that, typing imprints on your mealy flesh, flashing brands deep in callosum and what-not and sometimes – kablam! all the sounds and suggestions line up and it looks good feels good sounds good like you've got it all figured out and everybody's talking to everyone else filling out some humongous picture of the universe and our place in it, or at least yours, or the story it is that you're writing about it, or the sentence you start to form, and you feel the flow the peace the genesis of things, the coincidence of "let there be light" you know? And you probably sing out you know, put music on the page like a nightingale, throttle that bitch or what-not, yeah man? am I right? Feels good, people like it again (even strangers) and you think you've got something growing, working on mastery of expression or what-not – taunt me to throw out some topic or sound and you'll go all apeshit on it - go Picasso or James Joyce all over it making it yours, mine, the whole world will see, and language suddenly wonderfully seems like an incredible cosmic chorus you wanna swim all in and flip-flop around like you're sweating in your bed with your baby or satisfied smoking spent, and then you know what? Know what? Yeah, I see it in them eyes, I see you know what..."

"Oh this infinity-speaking full of mortality and to no purpose! the naming and naming of the most transient"

-Paul Celan-

"You hit the wall, man, it all sounds like Babel to you, you know, we ain't got the words for it, is what you start thinking reading, an infinity of words we got and you reread your own and everyone else's and you're like 'shit! that ain't quite right!' you know? It wasn't, was just that uber-profound smidgen off of what you meant to express, what you wanted to hear, to discover, there's a gap, you learn. You're singing high there and it empties out underneath you like you can't get up over a ledge, you know, that 'if I could just see around that bend, over that hill, into that cave' sorta thing – ain't no way, man, that's where you've got to – you're saying all sorta everything babbling on and on about nothing man! Nothing underneath! Nothing we don't already know brother! We may not a-heard of it your way, but it sho ain't nothin' new you spouting about in that jet-packed vacuum-sealed cranium of yours – just buzz brother, buzz! Aristotle, Shakespeare, Hamlet whoever – Homer – all them guys, and girls too – ol' Gertrude

Stein bitch and V.A. Woolf like you know, they all said the same shit you're saying – different, better – don't know and it don't matter – it ain't new man – no nuclear physics happening here, no Kepler, Galileo, Kantcrap, Hegelshit, Hesienberg – you know – the whole relativity and flux school did away with discovering dinosaurs and spirit, yeah? You just know you don't know and it all keeps changing on you – Kafka, Nietzsche, Derr-i-da – them guys – surprised you didn't I? Knowing all these words – names and names of the transient – you'll see – you're gonna be like 'what the hell is there to say, man?' 'what the hell is there to say?' ..."

*"there is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express...
together with the obligation to express"*

-Samuel Beckett-

"Nothin'! Right man? Not a thing! That's what you're wishin' there thinkin' 'I wish this guy was saying nuthin nuthin nuthin' instead of all this Beckettian Babel-babble saying everything saying nothing, I see you man, I see you wants to get away, to stop up my mouth, I got you, I got you, man, I be lettin' you go already, but I wanna hear that I'm right, ain't I? – I'm right. I'll go on down the street muttering away an endless stream that just fucking flows off to the damn sea of words, signs signs names names blubber blubber blubber, sentences unwinding themselves fast as I can make 'em and you're there thinkin' 'thank god I am a quiet man, thank god or hell or haiku or whoever that I'm careful, I take care with my god-damned precious breath, my smoky lungs, my meticulous brain' – I hear the gears spinnin' in there brother, I hear you cataloguing categorizing glomming shit from my mumbles wishing you were far away buried in Paradiso or sailing off with Ulysses or some shit – I got you figured out brother – so take this little rant as notes from the underground friend, your musing angel popped up with a burning sword to cleave and join you, set you free from fire, send you on your merry happy worrisome way, language all bundled up and spinning in ya brain – I gotcha, right? You know it man, I got you!"

"Language is what gets us where we want to go and prevents us from getting there"

-Samuel Beckett-

"that language is a system of relationships whose center is everywhere and nowhere"

-Eugenio Montale-

"Oh, hold on man, yeah, eventually the smoke, the smoke it turns all inside-out on you, you know, it gets going all tangled twisting transient and ever-disappearing, wrapping this way and that around and through, making you smell, man, you know? Your clothes, your hair, your skin, your brain – you see it there? That's your mind man, that's our minds on language – chock full of stories and theories and words, *whoosh!* – like that, man – lapping and over lapping and whisking away. I'm telling you – look at that smoke you mother – that's a beautiful fucking sight, bro, a beautiful fucking sight, that's what I'm telling you. Damn."

"because if you once say something, it will lead you to say more than you had meant to"

-Robert Creeley-

*“Then babble, babble, words, like the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three,
so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark”*

-Samuel Beckett-