Wordcount total: 6,104

Articles

Paul O'Kane

Six Thousand Masks for One Imposter

Six Thousand Masks for One Imposter

Paul O'Kane. https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8394-5354

CONTRIBUTOR DETAILS

Paul O'Kane is an artist and writer and lecturer in critical studies at Central Saint Martins College, University of the Arts London. He has published widely since 1997 and has recently given and published a series of articles (notably for *Third Text*'s referee and online journals) discussing and relating popularity, populism, carnival and masks. His long-running CSM seminar *Technologies of Romance* (and recent book of the same name, published in two parts by eeodo, London, 2017–18) encourages the historical re-interpretation and re-contextualization of 'new' technologies in accordance with an unbroken history of technologies and their influence on the development of art. In 2021, he is currently finalizing a book for publication with a major academic published on the theme of history in contemporary art and culture.

Abstract

Having recently given, and published in *Third Text* referee journal and Third Text Online, a series of articles on mask, class and carnival, I was recently invited to write a text to accompany an exhibition relating to masks.[1] Mask, Masque, Masc was a group exhibition hosted online between 14 and 31 May 2020. It was curated by Marc Hulson, Alessandra Falbo and Rolina E. Blok, and hosted by Five Years and Darling Pearls & Co at Platforms Project Net 2020. See:

http://www.fiveyears.org.uk/archive2/pages/277/Masc_Mask_Masque/277.html. (accessed 28/07/2021) This article is a transformed version of that text, edited and extended to suit this journal and the requirements and suggestions of the journal's reviewers. It starts out with two quotes from Walter Benjamin, which relate writing playfully to 'magic', and turns towards a conclusion with two quotes from F.W. Nietzsche, which dispute the priority of truth and claim that every word is a mask. The piece aims to encourage and support newcomers to writing, as well as non-native speakers and those from less privileged backgrounds; any and all of whom might nervously feel that their own writing is in some way illegitimate. I draw upon my experience as an arts lecturer and arts writer, as the article becomes an example of an autobiographical strain in my work that uses first-person narratives to explore ways in which writing, education (in general) and art education (in particular) might contribute to or help us negotiate class consciousness and cultural barriers. The article discusses ways in which new technologies invite and allow new voices to gain confidence in writing, and also alludes to 'masks', 'imposters' and 'imposter syndrome' (initially a feminist concern). It attempts to help and to advise aspiring writers by 'dis-spelling' myths of writing as transcendent, privileged and thereby socially divisive, and promotes the idea of writing as a material process (no less 'magical' for that) open to all. Interestingly, the title of this article alludes to its own word count, and thus the title had to be changed each time the article was edited and as it grew into the approximately 6,000-word essay it is now. As well as being, in this and other ways, self-reflexive and self-conscious, the writing becomes self-deconstructive towards its conclusion, tugging at a certain 'masc'-ulinity concerning the sources and motivations for the writing and of the author that

might otherwise remain masked to the author. This allows the piece to end by extending the implications of a purported *écriture feminine* to become an encouragement to more and different 'others' to find a way, and to find *their* way, to and through writing, meanwhile expanding on the many ways in which we might deploy a new-found freedom to write according to the model of words as masks, of writing as a masque and of the author as masked.

Keywords

writing

mask

imposter

play

art

masque

> every opinion is also a hiding place, every word also a mask.
>
> (Nietzsche, 1998: 173)

> a book has finally appeared in which all kinds of magic, including hundreds of tricks and some of the most incredible and astounding things you could ever imagine, are depicted and explained in clear detail. It's called *Das Wunderbuch der Zauberkunst* [The Wonder Book of Magic] and was written by Ottokar Fischer, who calls himself 'a formerly practicing artist and director of the Kratky-Bataschik Magic Theatre in Vienna'. One glance at the table of contents and your eyes are popping at the abundance of magic on offer. And don't worry that knowing what's behind the tricks could stop you from coming to magic shows. To the contrary, only when you know to watch very closely, and no longer let yourself get caught up in the magician's clever patter, always keeping an eye on what's coming next – only then will you appreciate the magician's unbelievable

> skill and recognize that it is his speed, the result of so much practice and determination, that is oftentimes behind the sorcery.
>
> (Benjamin 2017: 34)

> It is written in the chronicle that Faust left behind a library, which came into the possession of the Count of Staufen, on whose territory Faust died. Apparently people often came to the Count of Staufen to buy books from Faust's estate for a hefty price. Indeed, we know from a seventeenth-century necromancer that he paid 8,000 guilders for a so-called *Höllenzwang*. Now, what is a *Höllenzwang*? It is a collection of the incarnations and magic symbols used to supposedly summon the devil or other spirits, good and evil. I don't know how to describe them to you. These symbols are neither letters nor numbers; at best they resemble sometimes Arabic, sometimes Hebrew, and sometimes convoluted mathematical figures. They make absolutely no sense except as a way for a master sorcerer to explain to his students why their incantations failed: they simply didn't draw the figures precisely. This must have been the case, because they are so convoluted that they can only really be traced. And the words in a *Höllenzwang*, a gobbledygook of Latin, Hebrew, and German, sound very bombastic and also make no sense.
>
> (Benjamin 2017: 121)

It may be relatively easy to begin, but few writers come to the end of a piece of writing (as I hopefully will, before too long, and perhaps abruptly) with much understanding of how to conclude, nor with much knowledge of how they came to write what they have written. What writers are more certain of however is that some time ago, they picked up a pen laden with ink or started thumbing the virtual keys of their device and began to make and move words around within an otherwise blank space until those words began to resemble something worthy of the name 'writing'.

Wordcount total: 6,104

For some time now I have thought that writing resembles a coven (O'Kane 2009a: 53–59), a scene where dark, mysterious figures convene 'in cahoots' to cast a spell over the mind and if possible the soul of a reader (you perhaps). And my modest ambition here is, initially at least, to simply bring some runes together, stir them up and let them lie, compose and recompose them until they might deserve, attract and maintain your attention. If I am successful then we might justifiably say that I have cast a spell over you, and together we will make magic by transmitting thought, almost telepathically, from my here and now to the here and now you occupy as you read.

If writing might be considered a form of magic then perhaps its greatest trick or feat of transformation is the way in which it convinces us of its privileged, even transcendent status when in fact, like many other forms of magic (see our Benjamin quotes above), writing is not as unworldly as it might appear but is rather the outcome of a material process. Like other forms of magic, writing might be entertaining and even spectacular, yet it also contends with the undeniable fact of its prevalence and pervasiveness in our everyday lives, a ubiquity that might compromise its value in our eyes. However, writing can only say something about the world by being of that same world, the same world as that about which and of which it speaks. And so, despite some commonly held prejudices and misconceptions, writing may have little or no transcendent power, no perspective or purchase over or beyond that to which it refers, while any magic it might achieve will invariably be the result of a process that, as writers and as readers, we can both learn and learn to believe in.

Anyone who has ever meticulously and repeatedly proofread the manuscript of a book being prepared for publication will know that we like our writing and our writing

likes to be legible and correct, as if it were or would be a window so clean that it does not divert attention from what can and should be seen and understood through it. We might today (and despite much social and technological change) still express admiration for and even grant authority to well-executed handwriting, made and presented according to long-established standards of neatness, clarity and design. Indeed, along with certain forms of speech pronunciation; articulation; social skills; cultural and other forms of capital; dental history and so on, ‘good’ handwriting might still be an indicator of social class. For someone like myself who has admittedly ‘socially climbed’ and whose secondary education was negligible, I feel that my lumpen handwriting (along with a quick look around inside my mouth) is a ‘giveaway’ exposing my class and cultural roots. All those whose starting point is then like my own, relatively marginal and inauspicious, but who nevertheless feel sure that we have ‘something to say’, to write, and a certain as yet unheard ‘voice’ capable of attracting attention and which deserves to be heard, may consequently experience an uncomfortable, often vertiginous trajectory in travelling ‘up’ from one class and culture to another. All who take this journey might justifiably doubt that our ideas (however valuable we believe them to be) will be taken seriously if presented in broken English; in a strong colloquial vernacular; in the form of monstrous handwriting; or indeed if uttered through misshapen and discoloured teeth. However, for some of us, word-processor technology, followed soon after by the happy marriage of Apple computer + Microsoft Word software, appeared in time to rescue us, and even allowed some of us to write our way out of relatively wretched cycles of alienated labour and unemployment into more ‘respectable’ jobs, relationships and careers of a more fulfilling and professional kind; occupations that we are able to sustain

and bear, grow with, learn from and of which we can be proud. Thus there lies half-hidden, half-revealed here what we might call a ‘politics of writing’ informing and influencing class mobility yet given insufficient attention in proportion to its potential import with regard to current considerations of equality, difference and dynamic social progress.

Unlike the noisy, mechanical, yet simultaneously fussy and sensitive typewriter on which many mid-nineteenth to late twentieth-century communicators (particularly women) became adept at creating meticulous ‘fair copy’ (Kittler 1999), the Apple computer + Microsoft Word combo is relatively quiet and forgiving. Its luminous virtual pages, ‘save’ function, autocorrect, spellcheck, copy-and-paste and other tools all encourage a gradual, multi-layered approach to writing shorn of much of the fear, shame and sense of imminent reproach that would haunt similar *sorties* into handwriting or typewriting. A sense of moral moratorium is awarded to users of a computer, whose errors, corrections and deletions no longer result in *actual* (only virtual) loss, mess or waste. Thus we might (quoting illustrious jazz musician Miles Davis) even celebrate the notion that today, for us, ‘there are no mistakes’.[2]

Teaching myself to write to a publishable standard, scribing away as an anxious and alienated hermit in my mid to late 30s (a period that I have repeatedly reflected upon in writing) I confess that I used trial, error, intuition, a little Proust (for inspiration) and lots of time (seven years) processing drafts, making numerous printouts, correcting and augmenting by hand before processing further drafts and further printouts, while always aiming for something meticulous, creative and *convincing* – and perhaps in this way, I was already acting like a forger. During this process, I also began to notice that new

thoughts, seemingly not my own but perhaps those of the writing itself seemed to emerge as if by magic from the words and the lines, from the page and the screen. It often struck me then that it was rather the process and not the assumed author that ultimately found and led the way towards the writing's point, purpose, composition and any conclusions it might draw. As with many other creative processes (at that time I had made some modest achievements with photography, drawing, collage, printmaking and pop music), I learned that I could only 'master' writing by paradoxically relinquishing some of my presumed or desired control over it. The 'author' that I aspired to be, was, not simply myself but also the process of writing *it*self. And so, whenever I proudly typed my name at the top of a completed text, I suspected that I should also be acknowledging the technology, and even the designers of the technology that had allowed or helped me to write it.

It was not with any previous experience of writing or typewriting but with my limited (and relatively ignominious) experience of painting that I sometimes found myself comparing my own process of writing. I mention this here and now because, as a result I have always felt that writing for me is in some way the production of an image; perhaps an image of a certain received idea of 'good writing'. But of course, this is surely what a computer's writing software is programmed to do, i.e. to allow a would-be writer to create a virtual image of a piece of writing. In fact Microsoft Word is not very much like real and actual (or perhaps we should say 'previous technologies of') writing; the programme merely provides a form of *skeuomorph* that we are willing to buy-into and go-along with until we notice that this experience may have at least as much, and possibly more in common with some other, quite different process – e.g. painting. We should also note here that the age of the digital, being also the age of the virtual, has

somewhat undermined the status and authority that writing might have for previous generations – in the modern period at least. ‘Hard copies’ that have traditionally held our society together, in the form of legal documents, religious texts, national constitutions or classic works of literature are all surely challenged and intimidated today by the arrival of a form of writing constituted from the same digital base as so much else that we interact with today; thus a strange new continuity occurs in which our writing is made of the same ‘stuff’ as our online shopping, selfies, streamed movies, etc. And this perhaps inevitably brings us to doubt or question the speciality, status, substance and authority of relatively etiolated digital, virtual, twenty-first-century writing.

Today, aided by new technology’s welcome help in masking my own horrible handwriting and inept handling of typewriters, I have now written a Doctoral dissertation and published over 150 professional texts (articles, essays, reviews, catalogue essays and assorted art writings). I have also written, made and distributed (with the help of my talented collaborators)[3] a handful of illustrated artist’s self-published books. I like to think that this archive of writings may have succeeded in saying or starting to say something at least of whatever it is or was that I have long felt I had to say, and which motivated me, in my 30s, to take the trouble to put my wayward life on hold while for seven years I taught myself to write and then approached editors and publishers with some eventual success. In addition to the particular content of any particular piece I may have written and published, I hope that what I have written might also say is that to write, and to empower ourselves through writing we should not be afraid to first create an image of ourselves as a writer.[4] Furthermore, we should be unafraid and unashamed to create our writing as an image of writing, an image by means of which our ideas and

voices (even if not our entire self) might ‘pass’, enter, travel, cross cultural thresholds and class boundaries, be heard and taken seriously in appropriate contexts by appropriate audiences, and ultimately not just help ourselves but contribute more widely to understandings of difference.

I hope that my accumulated published writing might also ‘say’ that we should be happy, free and willing to do all of the above even if it might occasionally feel ‘fake’; might make us feel like an imposter, or like someone who is wearing a kind of cultural mask. In fact, despite this fear, I believe we should relish and enjoy this whole process, and do so guiltlessly, thinking of it all as a form of creative and constructive play, or masque. It was from feminist discourse that the diagnosis of ‘imposter syndrome’ emerged as many women, although recognized, celebrated and labelled as ‘high achievers’ (including figures of such cultural magnitude as Michelle Obama and Maya Angelou) came to speak of the insidious sense of an irrational fear of being ‘found out’ for what they (supposedly) ‘really were’, i.e. found out as and for ‘really’ being some other, less- or non-achieving version of themselves. In this way, these women were, and perhaps remain, haunted by a kind of *alter*-id, a self-subverting, ego-undermining aspect of a persona long borne on the hard-won way to objectively verified and acknowledged achievement.

Today’s art colleges, to which I now devote the majority of my professional time, energy and creativity, are currently (and not, I think, for the first time) working to bring more, new, different, other and othered, less empowered, less ‘entitled’ and less privileged voices within the relatively charmed circles of professional life and more fulfilling careers, positions and roles, thereby cultivating greater participation at higher

levels of what aims to be or become an increasingly fair, equal and progressive society. These ‘new voices’, with their previously un- or under-represented ideas and perspectives might consequently be heard more clearly, contribute new perspectives more effectively, be taken more fully into account, be considered more equally and also considered ‘differently’ (i.e. for the positive and progressive value of difference itself). It is likely, however, as I know from my own class-crossing or social-climbing experience, that such a welcome and long-overdue cultural development is also likely to multiply incidents and examples of our aforementioned ‘imposter syndrome’, unless, that is, some responsible mechanism can be conjured with which to counter it. One possible cure for this debilitating condition might be to critique, problematize and if possible supplant certain influential conceptual and cultural models, including: the real, the authentic, the right, the genuine, the honest, true, sincere and good, perhaps replacing them with newly affirmed models of the mask, masque, image, play, fake and lie. In search of support for this apparently disruptive trajectory, we might revisit the writings of the French philosopher and cultural commentator Jean Baudrillard who hyperbolically and rhetorically critiqued postmodernity as a realm of simulations; or perhaps cite nineteenth-century radial thinker (Baudrillard 1983) and Romantic anti-philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who dared to write an article titled ‘On truth & lie in a non-moral sense’, in which he declares:

> truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.

He goes on:

> We still do not know where the urge for truth comes from; for as yet we have heard only of the obligation imposed by society that it should exist: to be truthful means using the

> customary metaphors – in moral terms: the obligation to lie according to a fixed convention, to lie herd-like in a style obligatory for all.
>
> (Nietzsche 2000: 56)

Nietzsche also gave one of his books the enduringly provocative title: *Beyond Good & Evil*, and there wrote the following:

> The hermit does not believe that any philosopher […] ever possessed his true and final opinions in books; don't we write books precisely in order to hide what we keep hidden? Indeed, he will doubt whether a philosopher is even *capable* of 'final and true' opinions, whether at the back of his every cave a deeper cave is lying, is bound to lie – a wider, stranger, richer world over every surface, an abyss behind his every ground, beneath his every 'grounding'.

He continues:

> Every philosophy is a foreground philosophy – this is a hermit's judgement: 'There is something arbitrary about the fact that *he* stopped just here, looked back, looked around, that he did not dig deeper *just here*, but set down his spade – and there is something suspicious about it'. Every philosophy also *reveals* a philosophy; every opinion is also a hiding place, every word also a mask.
>
> (Nietzsche 1998: 173, underlining added)

Given the profound (or perhaps we should say 'anti-foundational') and imaginative insights to be found within the quotes above it is perhaps not surprising that Nietzsche is a key influence upon those luminary post-structuralist thinkers who, in turn, influenced my thinking during (and, indeed after) my postgraduate education as a late-to-the-table and very hungry mature student. Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault, as well as figures like Georges Bataille and Jean Baudrillard might all be described as Nietzscheans.[5] Meanwhile, their contemporary, Luce Irigaray, in her book *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche* (Irigaray 1991) was moved to make a carefully crafted and

convoluted embrace (a sophisticated act of ‘masking’ according to our purposes here) of Nietzsche. Irigaray thus seeks to immerse Nietzsche’s undeniably influential, Romanticist and sublime thought within an even more oceanic and extensive feminine expanse or formidable formlessness. Irigaray thereby acknowledged Nietzsche’s undeniable influence on the progressive thought of her generation while simultaneously disallowing him from patriarchally dominating feminist post-structuralism’s own adventures and possibilities.[6]

The post-structuralist pantheon assembled above thus took cues from Nietzsche’s imaginative radicalism and today, under the influence of all of these Nietzscheans, we might assert that writing (our current writing, and the writing to which we aspire) might be both deeper and shallower than we had previously assumed; more duplicitous and less true; more ambiguous and more indeterminate than we may have expected or hoped it to be. And yet this might equally lead us to the acknowledgement that some of writing’s greatest achievements[7] endure precisely because they revel in and exude (word)play, paradox and a certain self-reflexive (intra-)intrigue. Furthermore, we may begin to see that to write, for us, is not, or is no-longer necessarily to establish, instate or maintain the values of the right, good, correct and true[8] but is rather to extend and to continue an equally noble legacy of effectively challenging and destabilizing that which any extant writing (including the writing that we are currently writing) purports or presumes to be for and about, while correspondingly bringing into question the identity, meaning, value, purpose and process of writing itself – which Nietzsche has suggested (above) might just be a play (or masque) of words perceived as masks. Hopefully, this proposition promises

to provide us with a space of freedom, an invitation to transgression and to liberty, as well as stepping stone to empowerment.

With reference to Nietzsche above, our own thoughts here both hide and reveal much that could be pursued further and deeper: e.g. dialogues between writing, spells and runes, writing and magic, writing and skill or technology, writing, speech and social class but the most inspiring potential arises from Nietzsche's claim that words are masks and the implication that all writers, authors, thinkers and philosophers are correspondingly masked. And this makes of our own text here and now a form of 'masque' (or masquerade) – which sounds both inviting and accessible, in the way that a carnival invites all, whereas a private party is restrictive and exclusive. Once we take this notion of writing as a 'masque' to heart, we might suppose or hope that our relationship with it might change, and yet long-established habits and influences (including the way in which each of us were initiated into writing) mean that we might need to actively and repeatedly apply ourselves to making and maintaining that change. For example, we can encourage ourselves to think of our writing in a newly masked, and therefore more mischievous manner, and avoid slipping back into a received sense of writing as something more 'God-given', transcendent, esoteric or masterful (all of which tends to create a subaltern, servile and hierarchical identity within a would-be writer) than it really is. Once masked we might feel more empowered and readier to risk, dare and try, and when every word is a mask we can more readily set free the domain of a text that becomes a masque into which we invite various readings and readers.

As we have seen above, for me, the act of writing has for some time necessarily involved the wearing and making of masks, while writing itself (if writing can be said to

have or be a ‘self’) can be seen as a masque. We might even picture or imagine our page or screen as a scene or *milieu* hosting a coven or masque within which words (now considered as masks) meet and play, act and interact, mingle flirtatiously, conspiratorially, surreptitiously, duplicitously and infectiously. Having become aware of and accepting of words as masks, we might begin to write with renewed purpose and power; the power to make and unmake, to mask and unmask at will, while wielding one’s own mask more artfully and subtly, always acknowledging the world as a play of uncertainties, a floating world of virtual existences, slippery ‘truths and lies’ that have (in the Nietzschean manner) lost both moral presumptions and pejorative implications. Now we can build upon our innate (every child does it) capacity for acting, mimicry and deception; our instinctive talent for showing and hiding, dancing, laughing, winking, nudging and nodding, always with the aim of enticing, immersing, inculcating and if possible intoxicating a reader. Once rescued from our own all-too-familiar, all-too-singular and all-too-real face (in which we might have disproportionately invested our identity); and once the words we use are set free even of their own faces (thus wearing masks as well as being masks – masks that wear masks), we might feel more confident to invent and transform, play and experiment in the empowering manner that allowed, enabled and entitled those more privileged and established writers we admire to conjure-up images, times, characters, personae, narratives and events. If we look closely, we might even see that words mask one another; even when one word simply precedes another and thus hides, reveals and informs the next; or when words comingle in any form of proximity, variously shouldering-out and shining light upon one another in the bustling space of writing’s masque.

If we can confidently assert and agree to perceive and use words as masks and our writings as masques, we might further discuss, before closing, a heretofore barely acknowledged gender issue subtly pervading the text above, i.e. might our words and writing also be in some way 'masc' (an abbreviation of 'masculine' used in current discourse around gender)? Do words and writing unavoidably draw upon or buy into some implicit patriarchal rule of language; perhaps that 'phallogocentrism' conceived and coined as a critique by Jacques Derrida and furthered by Hélène Cixous and others in search of an alternative *écriture feminine*? (The suggestion makes me begin – as I come to an end – to chastise myself for brandishing writing –and autobiographically brandishing 'my' writing – as a phallic tool or trophy by means of which I may have sought to empower myself and to thus lay territorial claim to certain cultural gains, while cavalierly 'masc-spreading' and 'masc-splaining' as I go – and as I went). Or can our Nietzschean re-reading of words as masks and writing as masque perhaps allow or encourage us to escape any such gendered and dualistic framework using the mask as a mercurial model with which to hide, supplant or obfuscate any gendered bounds that might restrain or repress our adventures in writing? The many female authors who have published, and do publish, strategically, under the mask of male names come to mind here, along with Fernand Pessoa who used dozens of pseudonyms, most of which were male but several of which were ambiguous, androgynous or genderless (sometimes using non-committal initials as did 'J. K. Rowling'). Meanwhile, the idea of *écriture feminine*, a feminine, female or woman's writing; a writing *of womens' own* as it were[9] is, like the idea of 'Women's Time' discussed by Julia Kristeva (Moi 1997: 187–213), profound, provocative and progressive and seems to lead beyond gender in the direction of other

potential, latent, marginalized, oppressed and repressed writings; other writings with other things to say and that might justifiably want and need to be said in and as a writing 'of their own'.

Nietzschean post-structuralist philosopher Gilles Deleuze, working with Felix Guattari, promotes the idea of 'becoming woman' as a progressive trajectory for our thoughts but their schema cannot 'countenance' or accommodate 'becoming man' if only because 'man' is the *status quo*, institution, establishment, given or starting point from which progressive becoming must differ and depart; we cannot progress to, or become that which already is (Deleuze and Guattari 2004). Similarly, the implicit mask in 'masc-ulinity' (though admittedly perhaps little more than an irresistibly playful homophone) does not lead us much further than a stony-faced patriarchal physiognomy, while the notion of *écriture feminine* referred to above (if we can be allowed to make the comparison) appears to be capable of inspiring all who feel the need to write and be heard, to find and/or create a writing of *their* own and of *our* own, albeit and if necessary using masks, masque, mimicry, lies and fakery (in a non-moral or non-pejorative sense) on the way to turning over, turning back-to-front and inside-out, turning away from (rather than merely aspiring to) any established, 'majoritarian', maybe 'masc' (phallogocentric or patriarchal) model of good, correct, true or 'right' writing.[10]

And so, perhaps those two italicized words – *écriture feminine* – could or should have been my last; could, if perhaps I had written more carefully and cleverly, might have been two final or *finale* 'masks' with which I might have neatly ended, thus making way sooner for those aforementioned 'more, new, different, other and othered, less empowered, less "entitled" and less privileged', those other others, i.e. other than myself,

who, like me nevertheless, have felt and may now feel that they, and we, have all, after all, ‘something to say’, and that they and we are free to find a way, *our* way, in which to say that which we have (possess) to say and that which have to (must) say.

I also see now that I should perhaps have changed my name before or during this writing; before ending or before publishing this text (perhaps there is still time?); and yet, unlike Fernand Pessoa or Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot) I seem to lack both the courage and the pressing need to do so. I confess that my hypocritical timidity in this regard is based on what might be perceived as merely vague, perhaps petty ‘personal’ or ‘professional’ grounds. However, despite such missed opportunities, of the kind that almost inevitably make themselves known only in the moment of bringing a text to a conclusion and which tend then to linger until attended-to in some subsequent and consequent text, it seems to me that I have, nevertheless, by means of as many masks as there are words above, managed with some degree of success (and relief) to pass for and perhaps even appear all-but identical to those real or imagined authorities and masters, elders and betters with whom I have long longed to join and mingle and yet from whom I have, at heart, long longed to set myself free, or freer at least to enter and leave the realm of writing unchallenged by guardians, real or imagined, who, despite all I have written (and all I have written on writing) still seem to me to police its threshold. And thus it seems there may be yet still more for me to write.

Acknowledgements

This article is dedicated to the fond memory of Dr Kate Love, sadly and sorely missed friend, colleague, enthusiastic proponent and champion of art writing’s transformative

potential, and hearty supporter of experiment, risk, innovation and progress in creative and academic writing.

With thanks to Alessandra Falbo, Rolina E. Blok and Marc Hulson for initially commissioning me to write an earlier and shorter version of this article.

References

Benjamin, W. (2017), *Radio Benjamin*. London: Verso.

Baudrillard, J. (1983), *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext(e).

Cixous, H. (1993), *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Cixous, H. and Clément, C. (1996), *The Newly Born Woman*, London: Tauris.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1986), *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (2004), *A Thousand Plateaus, Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis, MN, and London: Continuum.

Irigaray, L. (1991), *Marine Lover of Friedrich Nietzsche*, New York: Columbia University Press.

Kittler, F. A. (1999), *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Moi, T. (ed.) (1997), *The Kristeva Reader*, Oxford: Blackwell.

Nietzsche, F. W. (2000), 'On truth & lie in a non-moral sense', in The Continental Aesthetics Reader (edited by C. Cazeaux), London: Routledge pp. 53 - 62.

Nietzsche, F. W. (1998), *Beyond Good & Evil*, Oxford: Oxford World's Classics.

O'Kane, P. (2009a), 'A hesitation of things', Ph.D. thesis, London: University of London.

Wordcount total: 6,104

O'Kane, P. (2009b), MA Fine Art Degree Show 09, Catalogue, Central Saint Martins College of Art & Design, School of Art, University of the Arts London, 107-109 Charing Cross Road, London WC2H ODU, London, Summer 2009 (Catalogue essay The Art of Righting).

O'Kane, P. (2018), *Technologies of Romance – Part II*, London: eeodo.

Woolf, V. (1995), *A Room of One's Own*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

SUGGESTED CITATION

O'Kane, Paul (2021), 'Six Thousand Masks for One Imposter', *Journal of Writing in Creative Practice*, 14:2, pp. 00–00, https://doi.org/10.1386/jwcp_000XX_XX.

Notes

1.

2. Apocryphal.

3. I make my artist's books as and with 'eeodo', a not for profit artists' publisher, run by myself and my partner the artist Bada Song. With each book, we have collaborated with various designers, typographers and illustrators.

4. Perhaps, as many do and traditionally have done, donning the mask of a *nom de plume* in order to do so. Many writers (not least the exiled Machiavelli) might also insist on wearing certain clothes in which to write; might write at a very particular time and place each day; might use particular pens, desks and surround themselves with certain objects (e.g. see Sigmund Freud's desk at the house museum where he lived in Hampstead, London) as and when they write etc. I referred to this in the 'Writing' chapter of my 2009 University of London Ph.D. titled 'A hesitation of things' (see

O'Kane 2009a), citing, among other references, a *Guardian* newspaper series that illustrated 'Writers' Rooms'.

5. 'Nietzscheans' was the title for one year's edition of Professor Howard Caygill's long-running 'Contemporary thought' seminar at Goldsmiths College (history), University of London, which I attended between 2003 and 2009.

6. Noting that Nietzsche's occasional highly misogynist-seeming statements may be disputed by those who sometimes see his contributions to progressive thought in general as too valuable for his entire reputation to be discredited by apparent 'lapses' that apologists might prefer to read as purposefully provocative, perhaps heavily ironic gambles and risks taken when commenting, from within a male-dominated canon, on and to the emerging (late nineteenth century) phenomenon of modern women's new, emerging, changing and different voices and values.

7. Thinking here (in a way that is surely too 'masc'-uline) of William Shakespeare; of the most aphoristic statements of Maurice Blanchot, or of the curt and cutting utterances of Samuel Beckett, but also of *all* those mentioned above and below, whether 'masc', 'fem' or 'trans'-this particular binary; indeed thinking of all who write or who have ever written seriously enough for their writing to become unavoidably playful.

8. Here with purposeful, but subtle implications of platonic thought.

9. Invoking Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Woolf 1995), the title of an appeal by her for women writers to find the necessary private space and necessary resources with which to cultivate their work and persona as writers.

Wordcount total: 6,104

10. Noting that I published an article on this theme as part of the 2009 Central Saint Martins, UAL, MA Fine Art show catalogue, under the title *The Art of Righting* [*sic*] (see O'Kane 2009b).