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Speaking with a Boneless Tongue


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A complete version of David Jardine's "Speaking with a boneless tongue" is available in PDF



format

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book is akin to a family gathering or collection that turns around several interrelated themes?pedagogy, generativity, interpretation, ecology, feminism, narrative/story and questions of the language appropriate to such themes. It is written in a peculiar fashion. The reason for this is that this nest of themes poses a challenge to the nature of writing itself.

Ecology, for example, presents us with an image of our lives and the life of the Earth as involving a vast, vibrant, generative, ambiguous, multivocal, interweaving network of living interconnections. We are living *in* this web of interrelations and these interrelations are always already at work *before* the task of writing *about* those relations has begun. In this sense, therefore, if we take the example of ecology seriously, it is not enough simply to write *about* these interrelations. This sense of vastness and vibrancy and generativity and ambiguity and multivocality and interwovenness must somehow inform the character of the writing itself.

Ecology tells us that there is no center or foundation to this web of living interconnections, just small, lateral, interlacing relations of this to this to this, splayed in moving patterns of kinship and kind (wonderful terms for pedagogy to consider). If this is taken up as a challenge to the nature of writing, the question becomes one of how to write in such a way that the writing gives up the notion of having a center or a foundation. In an earlier version of this book, I wrote in a typical academic-narrative form, but I found that this form of writing was actually writing against what the book was about. This form of writing presupposed the very thing that the book then went on to critique as ecologically and pedagogically dangerous?univocality, closure, representationalism, essentialism, foundationalism.

The present version of this book is written in small, interlacing "bits" or "chunks" which relate laterally and generatively to all the other bits. Very often, the "flow" of the text is interrupted by the eruption of something new. Some new connection, another thread, another similar voice that resembles what went on before without exactly replicating it, will appear as an "aside"

[like this one, which is actually pushed over to the side of the page and which is often accompanied by an aside to the aside]

in the text. Because of these textual interruptions, the reader's options multiply: the reader can "read on" in the main, left-margin-justified text, or can drop down into and out of the aside, or down into a footnote to the main text or, in fact, into the footnotes to the asides.

But this means that the experience of trying to read this book is inevitably one of constantly "losing the thread" and finding it again, looping back and forth. We have all been trained to believe that this "losing and finding" way of reading (and writing) indicates either a mistake in the text or a mistake in ourselves. We are not accustomed to such "comings and goings," and the first response to this book may well be one of deep frustration. However, it is precisely something akin to such interlacing, lateral "comings and goings" that ecology suggests is essential to our Earthly lives. It is precisely because we have forgotten how to live well with such "comings and goings" that describes our current ecological troubles.

In reading this book, therefore, it is necessary to allow yourself the luxury and the risk of getting lost in this huge forest of text?and then suddenly noticing something vaguely familiar, or glimpsing something moving out of the corner of your eye, or following a rocky side trail of traces and footprints that stop at the sheer edge of a cliff. Without such luxury and such risk, this book will not fit together.

It will be difficult at times to decide which is the main trail and which is the aside, for all of the threads do wind together in an interweaving web of interdependencies. It will depend, in part, on where you want to go and on where you have been. But it won't depend only on this.

Sometimes the trails will lead to places that are connected to where you want to go or where you have been, but that are more difficult or more complicated and convoluted and dangerous than any of us might wish to admit?the text may draw you, as it has (often painfully) drawn me, into implications of meaning that point to culpabilities beyond our wanting and willing. Sometimes, in writing this book, I have stumbled on things I wish I had never seen?toxic products of my living that I did not intend, but that implicate my living nevertheless. However, just as often the text stumbles out into the wide open air and has given me breathing room and made my life and my culpabilities more meaningful, more connected, more understandable and thus more bearable than they might have been borne as a private burden.

I can't help but recall the poem by Rick Fields that so eloquently expresses the lovely agonies of this sort of interpretive writing and ecological insight, where the bad news somehow turns out to be the good news:

My heart is broken,
open. [\(1\)](#)

Of course, whenever we lose the thread and find it again, things are never exactly the same as they were before. We inevitably "pick up the thread" from a place slightly different from where we left it. And we pick up the thread with a hand and a heart that are themselves slightly different. We bear a memory or trace with us of the places we have passed through, the experiences we have undergone. Reading marks us in a deep sense, if we allow it and if the text leaves room for our wanderings. Again, ecology challenges the nature of writing (and reading) itself.

There is thus something very important about the spaces between various pieces of text?the "jumps" or "gaps" are, in a sense, longing to be filled and there is no single, prescribed, "proper" way to fill them. They are gaps in which something just might unexpectedly happen. The gaps are invitations for the particular reader to speak, to write, to generate meaning out of the empty, unfilled space. The gaps are like the fecund margins between forest and field or between ocean and beach and, as deep ecology suggests, "life erupts at the boundaries." Not all of these gaps will work for everyone. And no one will fill any one gap exactly the same way as anyone else. And certain gaps will haunt or frustrate or resist or provoke. All of this places a particular burden on the particular reader of this text, but it also makes each particular reader an irreplaceable thread of the whole. Parts of this book are exhausting, too steep a climb, or too frightening a headlong crashcascade, too fast for sure-footing. Some passages or trails that are tightly closed early on in the text may only open later, once you have read the whole book. Some themes or concepts are introduced too early or too quickly, only to be filled out later. This, too, is not an error. This is what ranging a rich and varied ecosystem is like: we never have it all at once as a possession that we can fully master. We always find ourselves in it as an ongoing, emergent nest of ways we must somehow pass through in order to understand.

This ongoing process is something that happens for me as well?the "author" of the text whom you might presume should know best what the whole thing is about. This is another presumption that ecology is putting into question?the presumption that there is someone left over, over and above the ecological web of interrelatedness, someone who might save us the trip or rescue us ahead of time from the traps and pitfalls, someone who has every thing under control. As feminism has shown us, in this sort of family gathering that is our real, fleshy, Earthly life, there is no such patriarch (over-arching pattern / pater / father) who will speak or read or interpret this text(ure) on my behalf or on your behalf. Ecology tells us that this way of living (and writing, and reading) can only be taken up by each one of us, starting from the life we actually live and not from some grand fantasy of "the Whole Earth." Each of

us must face our own, living cuplabilities in the face of foreboding ecological rumblings in the distance. And, once questions begin to revolve around the lives we actually live and the real, Earthly conditions under which life can go on, children have already arrived and pedagogy begins to dovetail with ecology in a strong and vital and fleshy way.

This book is a cold plunge, and, in places, the water is deep and forbidding.

It picks away at our desire for an easy, clear and simple text.

But again, ecology is reminding us that there is nothing easy, clear and simple about the Earth's textures and the ways we are culpable for and implicated in this "text."

I hope that the reader can read what follows knowing that this introduction is not a list of apologies for uncorrected mistakes but that it is somehow indicative of an urgent necessity to speak and write differently than so much of our inheritance has allowed. It aspires to the ways of the voice and the hand and the heart that embody the generativity and wildness and interdependence and ambiguous kind-ness that is also its topic.

Portions of this book have appeared in a radically different form in various journals. I would like to acknowledge and thank the editors of those journals for their kind permission to re-work the following essays for this text:

Jardine, David W. (1988) Piaget's clay and Descartes' wax. *Educational Theory*. 38(3), 287?298.

Jardine, David W. (1990) On the humility of mathematical language. *Educational Theory*. 40(2), 181?192.

Jardine, David W. (1990) Awakening from Descartes' nightmare: On the love of ambiguity in phenomenological approaches to education. *Studies in Philosophy and Education*. 10(1), 211?232.

Jardine, David W. (1990) "To dwell with a boundless heart": On the integrated curriculum and the recovery of the Earth. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*. 5(2), 107?119.

(1) Cited in the Introduction to Catherine Ingram (1990). *In the Footsteps of Ghandi: Conversations with Spiritual social activists*. Parallax Press ,p.xiv