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Why I write (Writing, being, playing)  
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While I shall talk about my own process of writing, I shall shift between we, you and I. This is partly because it's how I feel when I write, partly as a statement of the many positions I inhabit as a writer and partly because of what I feel I share with other writers.



The process of writing can take many forms: it can be nightmarish, it can be ecstatic, it can be plain hard work or avoidance of. Whatever form it takes, for me it's closely linked to who I am, to my sense of being.

The most familiar nightmarish situation to any writer is when you can't write a word. Total paralysis takes you over and you feel condemned to nothingness. You don't write, you have no reason to live. It can be that extreme.

At other times, this very deadlock can compel you to transform non-being into being, urging you towards unknown territories. You take a deep breath and you plunge in. It is indeed there that ideas erupt, full of possibilities.

You're euphoric, you're alive again.

I can't but link this dynamic with the primal conflict identified by Freud, Kazantzakis (*Askitiki*) and de Beauvoir (*Second Sex*) independently: the constant battle within us between Eros and Thanatos, between pleasure and the drive for destruction, between synthesis and disintegration, between the desire to be passive and remain an object versus the need to transcend your given conditions.

In writing, when the drive that seeks pleasure/transcendence/synthesis transforms chaotic, tyrannical/obsessive thoughts into images, scenes, narrative, it feels like divine affirmation.

I write, therefore, I exist.



Furthermore, the artistic impulse may come not from a 'dynamic stasis' and its transmutation but from an external wound that makes you go into a state of siege: you experience a loss, a betrayal, a brutal injustice. You feel torn apart. This is so unbearable that the only way to make any sense of it is to write. Art through personal catharsis is indeed a route a number of playwrights have taken, as for example Eugene O'Neil (*Long Day into the Night*), Strindberg (*Father*) Sarah Kane (*4.48*

*psychosis*).

At times like this, in the first instance you seek refuge in your diary. Soon that is not enough. Because your need to communicate overcomes the need for expression. You have to

transform all this pain, all this material into something meaningful, something beautiful (even if it's just *your* kind of beauty).

Now, the style, turning this experience into an aesthetic form, is of paramount importance and the only thing that will satisfy you. What concerns you now is the how of the matter, its structure, its tone. The art of the thing. This is no less painful. The form and style of the work is not something superficial but rather something "arrived at by painful study, a distillation of thought and practice and essentially a moral decision" as Howard Barker has phrased it, (*A Style and its Origins*).

Content and form then, ideas and style, their constant interplay is what you are aiming for: the interplay between concepts and their forms; between lived experiences and the imagination; between images, language, rhythm.

The playful interaction with all of the above makes you feel fully present. It gives you a sense of pleasure, a sense of continuity between past, present and possible futures - even though they all become one while you are writing.

A very personal kind of play emerges from this process. My own most personal plays have been *Angelstate* and *Splinters*. The writing of *Angelstate* has been a long and painful process, that of *Splinters* one of pure delight.



With *Splinters* the sense of play is I believe obvious. Seven short plays about our relationship to Self and Significant Others, all written through free association. This method gives you a sense of absolute freedom, of endless possibilities. You pick a word, a phrase, an image, a sound and you free-associate. You improvise. You write non-stop, without thinking whether there is order, meaning or cohesion in what you write. The aim is to bypass logic and access the unconscious. And it is there I believe that the individual connects with the collective unconscious and the personal becomes political. Naturally the material emerging from free association needs to be shaped, edited, structured if it is to create something meaningful.

Still, what you write when using this method, while personal, it is also universal as the audience too feels it as personal to them.

It's not that you can't achieve this identification effect with more traditional methods of writing, where you carefully plan theme, character, scene breakdown etc. It's just that this process of writing achieves a more visceral, more subliminal, deeper effect, judging by the responses of the audiences in Greece.

One question I often ask myself, no matter what method I use, is: Why do I write?

Sometimes I believe it has to do with a fragmented sense of self that seeks something cohesive, something complete: a structure, a whole, a meaning.

You may be female, male or transgender; queer, bi or straight; Greek, English or Nigerian; working, middle or upper class; your politics may be suspect or offbeat. You may speak the language of the majority or that of an undervalued minority. And then there is your personality that may clash with all of the above.

So many identities inside you.

You're in a constant state of flux.

You need an anchor.

What do you do? You write!



At other times, you could be writing motivated by a neglected/childish Ego craving approval, recognition, even a certain immortality. Because yes, playing god has its own seductive madness. You create characters and if the mood takes you, you destroy them afterwards. You punish them, you demolish them, you see them crawling on the floor and feel a certain sadistic pleasure. Or you make them suffer injustice and you suffer with them, feeling a masochistic satisfaction. Or you elevate them to

desired heights and you rise with them. Up there where no-one can touch you, up there with the Angels. Naturally.

You create worlds and you lead them in any direction you decide. Imagine! They would never exist without you. It's a beautiful thing shaping the world according to your desires. Incomparable pleasure.

There are also very mundane reasons for writing: sheer boredom/filling time/avoiding something. Nothing good comes out of this kind of writing though. The motivation is transparent in the result.

Another strong motivation for writing is the undeniable high you get when you're 'in the flow' as Dorothea Brande articulated it (*Becoming a Writer*). I once wrote that when I write I feel the same way as when I fall in love. I am totally given to what I'm doing, I lose sense of time and space and feel an absolute high. The person I was having a relationship with at the time, felt jealous!

It seemed amusing to me then, irrational. I now realize that there was a logical basis for that jealousy. Writing can be an unbeatable rival to a person in love. Both situations, falling in love and writing, produce addictive endorphins, both can take you to mythical heights and both can throw you to abysmal darkness.

Their power is immense.

Writing however is much closer to who you are or want to be, to how you view the world, to your place in the world. This, together with the solitude that writing demands, can cancel out the Desired/Loved Other. The person that is 'You' disappears. By contrast, when you fall in love, it's the 'I' that dissolves and the concept of *We* becomes paramount. In other words, You, Me, We (in love and in writing) are in constant conflict with each other or to put it more positively in a continuous interplay.

A wider question that begs to be raised here is what socio-cultural factors influence the creative process? And of course its reception.



Quite simply, when you experience reality as an outsider i.e. belonging to a non-dominant group, you see the world differently. You view it through at least a double or triple vision i.e. the dominant one we all share by necessity and whatever other ones you belong to: be that nationality, gender, sexuality, race, class. Your socio-cultural position not only shapes the conditions of the art you produce, your choice of themes and styles, it also creates in you an urgency to change an unsatisfying reality of misconceptions and exclusions. Invariably, you develop a political awareness

that possibly places you outside the charmed circle.

Related to this issue, a number of other ones emerge: How important to your writing are your identities? Can you write outside them? Is this possible? What kind of cultural space and freedom do you claim or are allowed to claim? What confines/censorship are you subjected to?

How entitled do you feel to use language as the cultural weapon that it is? And if you do, which language do you use, the dominant or your subcultural ones? The language of your mother tongue or that of the host country? Do you use codes of communication of your own subcultures at the risk of being misunderstood by a wider audience or those of the majority at the risk of diluting your uniqueness?

What kind of aesthetic does your socio-cultural position and stylistic choices create?

Is it female or male, feminist, feminine or womanist, white or black, bourgeois or working class, straight or queer aesthetic? Or none of the above? What then? Or is it simply individual? What exactly is that? We are shaped by competing discourses, narratives and sociocultural positions and it is at the intersection point of all those I believe that the possibility of freedom exists, the possibility of developing your own unique voice as a writer. My own work is invariably marked by an existential, queer, gender-aware, cross-border undercurrent, sometimes thematically and aesthetically, other times simply as a way of looking at the world. In terms of language, it has been noted that there are distinct differences in style in my plays and stories, depending on what language I write in or what culture I write about. When I write in English or about English realities my aesthetic tends to be more distanced, stylized. Whereas when I write in Greek or about Greek realities, the style moves closer to realism or meta-realism.

I have noticed however that now that I have been back to Greece for almost five years, these styles have begun fusing into each other. I believe *Splinters* is an example of that. Perhaps this is evidence that language doesn't only manifest itself in our everyday speech but also in our way of thinking and our aesthetic. The English language certainly offers itself for economy, precision and rhythm. Greek language releases, in me at least, deep emotionality, a sense of freedom and political sharpness. Clearly, I need both. And both now occupy an interactive space in my writing.

Through both I keep obsessively seeking solutions to burning questions such as: why do people torture each other? Why do people deceive/control/manipulate each other? Is love enough? Is intimacy possible? Is sexual desire stronger than a sense of self? Why do we submit to tyranny? Why do we stay trapped even when we can get out? Is freedom an illusion? Is justice a utopia?

These unanswered questions have preoccupied me again and again. They are very much on the borderline between the personal and the political. I do not really separate the two. For me, no political situation has any meaning unless it is somehow reflected in my inner world.

For example in my plays *Angelstate*, *Reasons to Hide*, *Kiss the Shadow* (which I wrote in English) and *Wild Beats* (the first play I wrote in Greek) I explore, on some level, confinement, control, repression on the one hand and resistance, love, freedom on the other = two rival triptychs that mirror each other.

These themes/situations would not create in me the constant creative tension that they do if they didn't correspond to internal states of being. I believe my inner world has been shaped by these from as early as childhood and when I experience them in the outside world, I feel compelled to write.



Ultimately, writing does have an inherent political dimension whether we admit it or not. The question whether art and political discourse are mutually exclusive concepts, as some insist, is I believe a rhetorical one.

As writers we do want our ideas to become part of the collective conscience, as James Baldwin has put it, and thus bring about in whatever way possible, some kind of inner/mental shift in someone's perception of the things we write about.

This is a strong motivation for writing, for me at least.

To maintain that you are 'above political thought' as an artist is, for me, either refusing to see reality or self-deception. After all, as Orwell has said, the assertion that art should have nothing to do with political ideas is in itself a purely political position.

Besides, there are border-patrols in every cultural and artistic field. Gate keepers fiercely guarding the insiders from the outsiders. Politically-motivated but not naming it so. Indirectly censoring the opposition but not calling it censorship.

If you want to unofficially censor someone who is threatening your privileged position, in a certain socio-cultural sphere or hierarchy of status, use the following, unfailing methods: First, deny the existence of your opponent by any means necessary. Failing that, distort their work or assimilate it beyond recognition. If it still won't go away or resists homogeneity, devalue it as non-whatever it is you are defending, and diminish it to extinction. These methods have been used historically against female writers, as Joanna Russ has identified (*How to Suppress Women's Writing*). They may however be used at will against any threatening Other. Power battles notwithstanding, it is, I believe, a misconception and rather naïve to negate as

non-art socially and politically aware writing, as for example has been done against Pinter's latest work.

I shall mention just a few writers here, clearly politicized in both their life and their work who have produced unmistakable art: Ibsen, Pinter, Caryl Chuchill, Loula Anagnostaki, Sarah Kane, Deborah Tucker-Green, Susan Lori-Parks, Coetzee, Sartre, Simon de Beauvoir, Camus.

I would also here like to add Helen Cixous' thoughts on the matter: She says: "Writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space where subversive thought can emerge, the very condition of the transformation of social and cultural structures." (*Utopias*)

So finally, why do I write? I write in order to exist, to express myself, to immerse myself in new imaginary worlds, to play, to feel pleasure, to explore, to communicate, to be part of the world, to make a difference no matter how small, to discover, to imagine the unimaginable and to communicate all this with you! Thank you.