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Writing Hunches and The Horrible Gift of Bells

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Hunch (v). “Raise or bend into a hump,” 1650s; earlier “to push, thrust” (c. 1500), of unknown origin.

Hunch (n). Figurative sense of “a hint, a tip” (a “push” toward a solution or answer), first recorded 1849, led to that of “premonition, presentiment” (1904). (hunch, n.d.)

But again, and again, why have these On-Line Etymological digs so easily on hand on one’s desktop? After all, beware “etymological intoxication” (Gadamer, 1960/1989, p. 409). Although speaking directly of Plato, this is most probably also an affectionate dig by Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) about his teacher, Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). Why, then, flirt with intoxications? Because they can unexpectedly wrench up coils of suppressed ideas and images, presumed and silenced thoughts and suggestions, out of my most intimate innards. They can suddenly place before me my own unnoticed ancestries being unwittingly dragged behind me, now looming up and around in the trees, in the smoke, in the passings, lamenting. This is what interpretive work does. On purpose. (Jardine, in press)

I am being treated for tinnitus. Its proximal cause was muscle strain, last October, turning over a large compost heap and still-strangely co-incident with the yearly flu-shot. Good news is that, so far, this condition comes and goes. It is fascia related. It yields to acupuncture. I’ll have days without a peep, then days that are all day. Overall, I can’t suss much of a pattern-cause of its appearance and disappearance. When I lie down. When I slump in a not-so-easy chair.

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But then, this strange news. A more long-standing cause of my current buzz feed is writing, more specifically, my posture when writing combined with how very much of this practice I do, day-to-day. My ear ringing is almost inevitably set off if I do what I usually do when writing -- hunch over it, literally and figuratively.

I have started to notice that my *posture when writing* has also long-since been something of a *posture of writing itself*. Something of the intensity of ideas and their allures is linked to the body-posture that comes from such allure -- anticipation, investigation, nervous/joyous energy, intrigue, burrowing, sussing, peering and squinting and then bursts of arrival, discover, resolution, and then the oh-so-careful editorial parses and compositional decisions, and so on.

I can hardly get a hold of this yet, but I can get near it if I start with a different example.

Part of coming to tend to my tinnitus has been about being of a certain age and, simply put, not standing up straight. My shoulders had become hunched forward and up...very common, I hear. I was informed that my posture is better than many fifteen-year-olds who hunch day and night over their “devices” in sometimes grievous urgency to “keep in touch” (whilst, of course, “device” is defined as a “method whereby something is divided” -- an idea that, by itself, can make my ears ring if I’m not careful).

A weird subtlety, then. When I would begin to finally start taking notice of this slouch of mine and stand up straight, I *felt* arrogant and I felt that I *looked* it as well. I did get assured that it didn't look so. It still *feels* it. A weirdly unaccustomed thing, this, deeply buried and forgotten in the very flesh and breath of the day. I’m sitting here writing right now and this hunch has become so very hard to notice because, habitually, it has become the posture *with which* I notice, not *that which* I notice. This certainly helps re-invigorate and make more complex an old, too-easily-tossed-off medical platitude about “developing healthy habits.”

Now it isn't just the whiff of (apparently not apparent) arrogance that is part of this vaguely familiar upright posture. I also feel something like “younger” unhunched. This is probably a combination of muscle-memory of a time before the hunching seriously began and all the relentless writing that has been my mainstay posture for many years. The imputation of bowing, of cowering, of submission, of following, is a slight secret about writing. I must admit, though, that sometimes the act of writing has a broad and open stride, like when I just now thought of this and this line came in with a young and loping ease.

My ears are ringing. I have to stop for a bit.

So now, when I write and must, at the same time, remember to stand or sit well and carefully and alertly, I have run into the fact that being this alert and unhunched means that the bodily locale in which and out of which I used to spontaneously write must be avoided. I find myself, again and again, when, especially, seeking out a line, a reference, something exact and meticulous, hunched again over a hunch of an idea, without noticing it (v.) while noticing it (n.), if you see what I mean.

So, to be specific, there is something utterly wonderful about standing up straight and back and feeling the beautiful aching arching of muscles finding their way back into aging place, along with the morning squirming standing at the standing desk, urging the arrival of enlivening postures that shake off the ringing of the night for what sometimes feels like the pretentious, arrogant impostures of writing. For now, this ringing is a weird, ambiguous gift. To hold the urgency and shape of the composition of words in a spinal/fascial discomposure is a stunning thing to have finally noticed, and to, again and again, have fall from notice so easily. Habit can be embarrassing and frustrating, especially, in the long run, for something so relatively trivial given the suffering to come.

That one of the results of writing, for me, is tintinnabulation --a word apparently invented after the Latin by Edgar Allan Poe, I'm just now discovering [don't hunch!] -- is especially fascinating given that much of my writing is, somehow or other, "auditory" -- not exactly precisely the sounds of words, but rather the sway, cadence, and movement of them. Sometimes, when hunched over writing, I'll sense, in the distance of oncoming letters, the exact cadence and trip that the next part of a sentence needs before I sense the exact word-sense of it, as if the ringing echoes and the habitats it trips over and longs to reveal, precede the words themselves and open a way ahead. So to speak.

And *tintinnabuli* (from the Latin *tintinnabulum*, "bells") is also the word that Arvo Pärt uses to describe his style of composition. I am especially enamored of his composition *Fratres* (see, e.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNVoZVFpW58>) which has several versions with various instrumentation.

So, to speak: at times, this ringing is horrible and frustrating and exhausting, then I'll hear again of those who have it constantly. And I'll also, sometimes, catch the fact that frustration and exhaustion is a way of leaning into it, a hunch where cause becomes effect becomes cause. The [for now] coming and going of my own condition makes it strangely worse and better, I suppose. The [for now] coming and going provides a gap -- an "opening"/portal/opportunity/moment -- where can upspring a spine tingle in reminder of younger airs, sprightlier steps and the arrogance of writing. A bit of a gift. Even discovering back in the winter that meditating on falling snow somehow perfectly aligned a visual splay with the multilayered ring-a-lings and let me resignedly settle into its then-inevitable occurrence. But watch out:

Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further. One insight leads to another; one invention suggests another variation; more and more seems to press through the hole, and more and more we find ourselves drawn out into a chaos of possibilities. (Hillman, 2013, p. 94)

Don't forget. Hermes is a trickster spent up along the spine, rusing and blocking energy lines as much as opening them, misleading as much as leading, needling and in need of needling, too. Edits. I forgot again. Ringing. Stop writing. Now.

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