# Maladies of Our Souls: Identity and Voice in the Writing of Academic International Relations

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**Abstract**  *Drawing primarily, but not exclusively on the work of Julia Kristeva and Roland Barthes on language, writing, and 'the subject', I examine the issue of identity and writing in international relations. I argue that what has come to be labeled 'critical' or 'radical' constructivism rather insistently points in the direction of opening up spaces for discussing our own writing and exploring our own voices in what we write, though this has not been actively pursued. Sociologist Avery Gordon uses the phrase 'making common cause' to argue that our encounters with the social world 'must strive to go beyond the fundamental alienation of turning social relations into just things we know and toward our own reckoning with how we are in these stories, with how they change us'. It seems to me that this is not possible without giving attention to the issue of voice, specifically the voice we use when we write about international relations. To speak of voice is to raise many interesting and important questions, to ponder our use of language, our locations within our stories and the discourses we create, and perhaps most importantly to give recognition to the presence of desire in language and in the writing of international national relations.*

> We work in this building and we are hideous
> in the fluorescent light, you know our clothes
> woke up this morning and swallowed us like jewels
> and ride up and down the elevators, filled with us
> turning and returning like the spray of light that goes
> around dance-halls among the dancing fools.
> My office smells like a theory, but here one weeps
> to see the goodness of the world laid bare
> and rising with the government on its lips,
> the alphabet congealing in the air
> around our heads. But in my belly's flames
> someone is dancing, calling me by many names (Johnson 1995, 86)

Fifteen years ago I wandered onto this terrain of international relations (IR) longing for something bigger than myself, a world that stretched past the boundaries of my own small existence in a certain time and space. I came to this 'place' fascinated with the mystery of writing as well as with a suspicion that words are always woefully inadequate and not to be entirely trusted, but I loved them anyway. The word 'discipline' slipped by unnoticed, but it is a powerful thing, not to be ignored. Like a colonizing power who takes away the indigenous languages of the peoples who are colonized, forcing them to express their thoughts in words of the dominant power, 'the literature' can colonize our souls

forcing us to write in sanitized, anonymous voices, in the 'proud but calcified language of the academy'.[1] We may convey to readers illusions of truth with our authorial expertise, but often we are the hideous beings swallowed up by our scholarly clothes, the dancing fools under the fluorescent lights of our paradigms and theories that voraciously consume our thoughts, hammer the soul from our words, and drain our voices of any traces of humanity.

The issue of writing in academic IR has haunted me for several years as article after article in the journals of our discipline has become increasingly tedious to read even when the substantive issues are inherently interesting and important.[2] I have been tripped up in the middle of manuscripts as I struggled to write in the academic voice that seems mandatory if one is to gain scholarly legitimacy. I have been haunted by the questions: Where is the soul in our academic writing? Where is the humanity in our prose? Where are *we* as writers? I believe these are important questions because the absence of these things in our writing is thoroughly political. Writers of academic international relations may adopt an objective, neutral style of writing, but the very act of adopting such a style is normative and highly political. Writing is inextricably connected to the issue of identity, a concern that has proliferated rapidly in recent years in international relations such that it now virtually constitutes an entire subfield.[3] Still, the issue of our own identities as scholars and writers and how this comes through (or does not) in our writing has not, in my view, received the amount of attention it warrants. I am not saying that international relations scholars have totally ignored this issue. This is clearly not the case. International relations scholars such as Ashley, Bleiker, Luke, Shapiro, Walker, and numerous others have extensively addressed issues of language, discourse, agency, and identity.[4] I locate this article within the general concerns already expressed by many writers of critical IR who have made it possible for me now to attempt to speak

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[1] I borrow this phrase from Toni Morrison's Nobel Lecture, 7 December 1993, originally published in the *Georgia Review* and later in *The Writer's Presence* (1997). I use the term 'the literature' loosely to refer broadly to the body of scholarly writings that define international relations as an academic field of study. I realize the this is a somewhat slippery and ill-defined term and raises all sorts of difficult questions about what would be included in 'the literature' and what would be excluded. While recognizing the problematic nature of this term and not attempting to address the issues its use raises, I think my use of this term is justified because in fact we do often refer to 'the literature' and accept its power without ever really exploring the murky edges that divide 'the literature' from what it excludes.

[2] Mary Louise Pratt makes a similar point about ethnographic writing, asking, 'How, one asks constantly, could such interesting people doing such interesting things produce such dull books? What did they have to do to themselves?' See Pratt 1986, 33.

[3] The past ten to fifteen years have witnessed such a proliferation of literature in international relations on identity that it is impossible here to cite all of it. Two of the works that come to mind are Hopf (2002) and Weldes (1999). This theme runs through the work of David Campbell, Cynthia Weber, Richard Ashley, Rob Walker, and Audi Klotz, as well as my own work.

[4] See Bleiker 2000; Luke 1999. These issues are present throughout the many works of Richard Ashley, Michael Shapiro, and R.B.J. Walker, who have been pioneers in broadening and problematizing the academic field of international relations. Richard Ashley has clearly pushed the boundaries of writing in international relations in ways that at least implicitly challenge our own identities and styles of writing.

in and of a different voice. I offer it as a contribution to their own thoughts on identity, writing, and scholarship.

My focus is on *voice* and I have chosen to explore this issue by drawing heavily on Julia Kristeva. I do this for two reasons. (1) Kristeva has written extensively and explicitly on the poetic element of writing which I believe is inextricably connected to our ability to access our 'other' voices. (2) Her work reminds us forcefully that writing contains a physical, muscular element connected to our bodies, thus highlighting the link between a writer, his/her words, and the illusive thing called desire that lurks within all of us. She does this in a way that I believe suggests the importance of personal commitment on the part of the writer without necessarily suggesting that the writer is an autonomous, atomistic, or pre-given subject. There are, to be sure, other important thinkers whose reflections on language and identity are relevant to my concerns; many of whom I am aware and undoubtedly many of whom I have never heard. My purpose is not to uncritically celebrate Kristeva's work as itself a sovereign voice of authority for critical IR. Nor is it to ignore other thinkers.[5] Let me simply say that I find her ideas on the semiotic and poetic language particularly relevant for a consideration of voice, specifically our own voices as writers. Because I am problemetizing academic writing and many of the rituals that it entails, I have chosen not to engage in the usual practices of referring back to every scholar who has said anything related to the subject at hand or comparing and contrasting my ideas to all that have come before, establishing links and continuities as well as discontinuities. Derrida (1985, 4) puts it nicely when he states, 'These are but some of the imperatives of classical pedagogy with which, to be sure, one can never break once and for all. Yet, if you were to submit to them rigorously, they would very soon reduce you to silence, tautology, and tiresome repetition.'

Another imperative that one can never break with entirely is the use of labels and though I am not completely comfortable about it I use them nevertheless for I am uncertain about how to proceed without them. What has come to be labeled 'critical' or 'radical' constructivism rather insistently points in the direction of opening up spaces for discussing our own writing and exploring our own voices in what we write, though, as noted above, I do not believe this has been sufficiently pursued.[6] Often, even critically oriented scholars write in anonymous voices of expertise and authority. I include myself here. The imperatives of 'the discipline' and the academy more broadly to write in a certain voice are

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[5] Many years ago C. Wright Mills called attention to the 'peculiar language' used by social scientists and raised the question of whether such language was necessary. See Mills 1959. Adorno was also concerned in *Negative Dialectics* with the relationship between language and identity. Roland Bleiker offers an excellent elaboration of Adorno's ideas in chapter 8 of *Popular Dissent, Human Agency and Global Politics* (2000). Of course, there are many other relevant thinkers who could be included, both academic scholars and creative writers. I make no claims that I am here reviewing all of the relevant literature.

[6] As with any label that subsumes a vast and varied literature, my use of the term 'critical constructivism' is problematic. Perhaps 'critical international relations' would be a better term. I stick with 'critical' or 'radical' constructivism so as to make clear I am referring to the large and varied body of work that has over the years been subjected to so much intentional misrepresentation on the part of those who self-identify as 'conventional constructivists'. I do not include the latter as part of 'critical international relations'.

very powerful and sometimes difficult to escape. This issue would not hold the importance that is does for me, had I not personally experienced the 'discipline of the discipline', the slow often unnoticeable slipping away of my own voice into an abyss of academic jargon. It is my own personal struggle to retrieve a lost voice that motivates this article. I include myself in the criticisms I make of academic writing.

## 'Other Voices' or What's Wrong with Academic Writing?

> the desire to understand has a built in brutality that erases what you seek to comprehend. (Hoag 1993, 247)

> All of my life I've had trouble with this order, knowing it was a way to make sense out of things and yet sensing it was a way to squeeze the life out of things. (Bowden 2002, 121)

In graduate school and throughout our careers we learn to adopt a certain style of writing, a certain way of being on the page, a certain *voice*. This is not necessarily a conscious decision. Often, we pick it up by osmosis. It's just the way to write for the journals and university presses. We, in turn, pass this along to our own students. This acquisition process is far from innocent. Graduate students learn fairly quickly that a dry, soulless voice is pretty much a require-ment for an 'A' in many of their introductory graduate seminars.[7] We read so much of a particular style of writing that it becomes absorbed into the fabric of our beings. We begin to define the world and humanity in terms such as rational actions and absolute versus relative gains. Other motivations and impulses are ignored or marginalized; left to the poets, the novelists, the essayists. Creativity becomes reduced to conjuring up yet another variant to add to an already exhausting list of hyphenated realisms and liberalisms that border on the absurd, e.g. neo, neo-classical, post-classical, defensive, offensive, state-centered realism. Each of these narratives is a creative story presenting itself as truth, but ultimately grounded only in the imaginations of individual and collective writers and readers. Our ideas, curiosities, intellectual wanderings, and ethical concerns are twisted and contorted to fit our professional voices and all the while the soul of our writing becomes eviscerated, our passions sucked into a sanitized vortex that squeezes the life out of the things we write about. A certain writing voice is imposed on scholars and students from the amorphous and rather ill-defined, but powerful dictates of 'the profession' and for this reason it is extraordinarily political with political consequences. It is also an inherently violent imposition.

The issue of 'other voices' was raised a few years ago when the *Review of International Studies* published several papers engaged in a dialogue prompted by Andrew Linklater's 'The Transformation of Political Community'.[8] The central issue addressed by the participants in this conversation was the need to transform academic international relations into a more inclusive intercultural dialogue that would 'provide a foundation for a new cosmopolitan community

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[7] I thank Timothy Ruback for pointing this out to me.
[8] See Hill (1999), Elshtain (1999), Walker (1999), and Geras (1999), all of whom participated in the Forum on 'The Transformation of Political Community', *Review of International Studies*, Volume 25 (1999). Also see Buhler 2002.

of humankind'. Several participants suggested the need to voice the concerns of real people, to include voices from below, and asked what such an inclusion could mean. I mention this dialogue because, in opening up for discussion the question of 'other' voices in the sense of the many human beings who are excluded from our discipline, this conversation implicitly raised the question of who 'we' are and what 'we' are all about as 'we' engage in 'our' scholarship. 'Other voices', I would suggest, can refer to something within ourselves, an element of our humanity that gets lost long before manuscripts are disseminated in the various venues within which scholarly ideas circulate. Other voices can refer to our own other voices buried beneath the ones we don as academic writers, which ensure the safety of our journals, the sterility of the stories we tell, voices that erase the blood that might otherwise drip from our narratives, voices that efface the heartbeat hidden in the interstices of our big box words and our ever proliferating isms. The voice that echoes from our journals is all too often cold, detached, devoid of soul and human identity. As academic writers we have no personality on the page, no connection to the world of human beings. Our writing alienates us from everyone except ourselves.

The voices we use to tell our stories are intimately connected to the issue of 'real people' who are absent but whose presence haunts our writings, our theories, our scholarly identities. Our identities are defined, in large part, by the absence of these 'other voices'. Over thirty years ago, in the context of the Vietnam War, Anthony Lake[9] argued that the 'bloodless' abstractions and 'disembodied and dehumanised terms' that constitute the language used in both the classroom and in foreign policy bureaucracies enable policies that disregard real people and result in immoral consequences (Lake and Morris 1971). Intentionally or not, Lake was arguing for recognition of the productive nature of language and the often horrific consequences of speaking/writing in the anonymous voice that dominates the social sciences. Roy Preiswerk made a similar argument suggesting that 'social scientists become alienated from their own societies, or from the societies they study, largely because of dominant thinking about what are supposed to be serious academic standards and research methods' (Preiswerk 1977, 128).

The contributors to *Writing Culture—The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* explicitly addressed the issue of scholars as writers and their voices on the page by calling attention to 'one of the principal things ethnographers do—that is write' (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 10). In his introduction, Clifford called attention to the untenable assumption that the poetic and political are separable, showing how many writers in the field of anthropology have blurred the boundary between art and science. If the dividing lines between the poetic and the political, between art and science are more ambiguous than is generally thought, then issues relevant to art, literature, and creativity may have some relevance for the writing of international relations. International relations scholars whose work is informed by post-structuralism have at least implicitly raised this issue. Michael Shapiro uses the term 'insurrectional textuality' to refer to a 'writing practice that is resistant to familiar modes of representation, one that is

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[9] Anthony Lake, President Bill Clinton's first-term National Security Advisor was a member of the National Security Council under Richard Nixon. During the Vietnam War he resigned to protest Nixon's decision to send troops to Cambodia.

self-reflective enough to show how meaning and writing practices are radically entangled', thus calling our attention to the significance of voice. Focusing on poetry, Roland Bleiker has shown how styles of writing are linked to politics. Elizabeth Dauphinee has bravely written in a beautifully poetic voice of her experiences in Bosnia and the limitations and constraints of academic writing.[10]

In this article I offer for consideration the idea that voice, i.e. the sounds, rhythm, texture, energy of our words, is important because it positions us as writers in our own stories. Voice is who we *are* on the page and who we are in relation to what and whom we write about. Voice gives us, as writers, a presence in our own writing. Our voices can thus position us as part of the humanity we write about or as separate and cooly detached. Rendering our own voices, our own humanity absent from our writing affects the stories we tell and the worlds that are either brought to life and made real or are made virtually non-existent on the page. Voice then, becomes an important consideration when attempting to understand issues of inclusion and exclusion, identity and difference, and social/discursive constructions of the world and its inhabitants. It is in this sense that our own 'other voices' are inextricably connected to the issue of broadening 'our' community to include the 'other voices' of human beings who have not been granted access to our scholarly venues.

The inclusion of our own 'other voices' is, to be sure, inherently disruptive to the academic discipline of international relations, radically transgressing existing boundaries that divide different genres of writing. Of course, transgressions already abound in international relations, though mixing genres of writing is arguably a more radical and perhaps more controversial move than crossing disciplinary boundaries. Careers and scholarly identities have been built upon certain styles of writing, even if the work is interdisciplinary and critical in content. Blurring genres would significantly broaden the range of what can be said, how it can be said, and to whom it can be said. In 1989 Richard Ashley noted that modern criticism, in order to be taken seriously, 'must always be spoken as a truth emanating from a sovereign voice, an unquestioned voice'. Critical practices that 'promise only historical openness, that would make possible the transgression of limits without saying where the transgression might lead', have no place in the modern regime (Ashley 1989, 266–67). Clifford suggests that it has often gone unappreciated that what is at stake in the proliferation of theorizing about the limits of representation is an ongoing critique of the West's most confident, characteristic discourses. I believe an integral aspect of these discourses is a certain kind of writing voice construed to convey 'factual reality' and expertise but which is itself a product of both 'restrictive and expressive' social codes and conventions that define the academic discipline of international relations.[11]

Writing in a different voice about international relations promises only openness and is intimately connected to broadening 'our community' to include our 'other' voices that might facilitate connections with the voices of those generally excluded from academic international relations. It offers the opportunity to make connections, arguably ethical connections that might otherwise not be made. Sociologist Avery Gordon uses the phrase 'making common cause'

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[10] See Shapiro 1989, 13; Bleiker 2000; Dauphinee 2003.

[11] I borrow the phrase 'restrictive and expressive' from Clifford and Marcus (1986, 10).

to argue that our encounters with the social world 'must strive to go beyond the fundamental alienation of turning social relations into just things we know and toward our own reckoning with how we are in these stories, with how they change us' (Gordon 1997, 21). It seems to me that this is not possible without giving attention to the issue of voice, specifically the voice we use when we write about international relations. To speak of voice is to raise many interesting and important questions, to ponder our use of language, our locations within our stories and the discourses we create, and perhaps most importantly to give recognition to the *presence of desire in language and in the writing of international national relations*. This article can be read as a provocation to the reader to critically consider a key element of what we do as scholars, i.e. write, to think of ourselves as writers and storytellers and all this might imply.

### Identity, Desire, and Zero Degree Writing

> Crossing the frontiers to the other world without transition, at the stroke of a signifier. (Cixous 1993, 81)

How do we lose our humanity when we write for 'the discipline'? How do we cross into that world devoid of flesh and blood and beating hearts, that world where we must speak in the sovereign, unquestioned voice Ashley writes about? Roland Barthes offers a partial answer, or at least an important idea to consider, in 'What Is Writing?' when he makes the distinction between language and style (Barthes 1967). For Barthes, *language* is the comforting area of an ordered space, of prescriptions and habits that function to facilitate communication. Rules of grammar, semantic norms, laws of syntax and phonetics would fall under Barthes's definition of language. In contrast to language, *style* is biological and biographical, rooted in the depths of the 'author's personal and secret myth-ology'. Barthes reminds us that writing is inherently physical. Image, delivery, and vocabulary spring from the writer, from his/her body, and past. Style is outside the pact that binds the writer to society (1967, xiii). It is the writer's 'thing, his glory and his prison, it is his solitude' (1967, 9–11). While language is a horizon much like structure, implying boundaries and limits to the possible, style is vertical, penetrating into the mysterious depths of the writer. Barthes locates *writing* in the interstices of these two. The writer must navigate between language and style. Writing is the choice of tone, of human attitude, and of ethos. It is a rhythm of delivery and atmosphere where the identity of the writer is established. While operating to a large extent within the confines of language, writing is rooted in something beyond language, containing a 'circumstance foreign to language', and straining 'to free itself from the contamination of social meaning' (Barthes 1967, 17; Eagleton 1983, 140–41).

Barthes's understanding of writing opens up a space for speaking of *voice*. The tone, human attitude, and ethos he refers to *is* voice and there is no writing without these things. There is always voice in writing even if the voice is one of absence as in what Barthes labels 'zero degree writing'.[12] It is important to note here that voice is not necessarily solely a characteristic of an individual author, but rather of the work itself, the text. To bring up the issue of voice as a

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[12] Zero degree writing is discussed further below.

characteristic of an individual author, of course, presupposes the individual author/subject, which is not my intention here. Barthes introduces the possibility of thinking of the subject on the basis of literary practices, i.e. writing, rather than on the basis of psychology. Kristeva picks up on this with her notion of the 'writing subject' (Kristeva 1980a, 98). Within the texture of writing, the subject is caught between instinctual drives and social practices within language. What emerges is a subject that is not one of cognition or of language in a Saussurian sense but a subject of a text, both shattered and coherent, that comes into being within the context of writing practices. In contrast to the concept of an 'author', the 'writing subject' does not emphasize the conscious intent of a writer who has authority over the meaning of his or her work. At the same time, however, it is not meant to deny all intentionality or refuse recognition of a role for the sentient human being who puts pen to paper. Rather it is to suggest that consciousness and intentionality do not dominate the process and that the writing subject is a 'complex, heterogeneous force' that includes consciousness, unconsciousness, and non-consciousness (Kristeva 1984). Writing is the product of a divided, pluralized subject, a place both of 'naming' in accordance with phonetic, semantic, and syntactic laws *and* a shattering of this naming. It is practiced by a subject of understanding and meaning, but inherent in this practice is a shattering and pluralization of meaning attributable to what Barthes calls 'style', the 'sublanguage elaborated where flesh and external reality come together' (Kristeva 1980a, 111–12; Barthes 1967, 11–12).

The voice of the writing subject, the 'I' if we dare use this personal pronoun in academic writing, then is the product of all the complex forces that go into producing a text that does not exclude an element of intentionality and choice on the part of the writer who has chosen to become a writer and to do so in a particular manner. Thus, while not denying individual creativity and responsibility on the part of writers, Kristeva suggests that there is more going on in the writing process, which includes unconscious drives and desires. She articulates this in her distinction between the symbolic and the semiotic, the two elements or modalities of writing, from which the writing subject comes into being, though always as a 'subject in process'. The symbolic, as the element of language associated with the structure or grammar governing the ways symbols operate, i.e. how they refer to things in the world, parallels Barthes's definition of language itself.[13]

In contrast, the semiotic is highlighted by poetic language that both operates within the realm of the symbolic communication of meaning, which is dependent on syntax, grammar, and logic, and also opens onto a terrain of what

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[13] The 'symbolic', as used by Kristeva, should not be confused with the 'Symbolic' as used in Lacanian theory, where it refers to the entire realm of signification, including culture in general. On this, see Oliver 1997, xiv–xv. It is also important to note that Kristeva uses the term 'symbolic' in a way similar to how others have used the term 'semiotic'. For example, William Sewell defines culture as the semiotic dimension of human social practice. By 'semiotic' he means a structuring principle by which practices are rendered meaningful. See Sewell 1999. Sewell's use of the term 'symbolic' is consistent with Geertz and many others who draw upon a Saussurian understanding of language in which the meaning of a sign or symbol is a function of its place in a network of oppositions to or distinction from other signs in the system. See Geertz 1973. Kristeva's use of the term 'semiotic' differs from these writers, instead referring to desires and drives in excess of conscious thought, in excess of the symbolic.

Kristeva calls 'heterogeneity'. Poetic language contains a *heterogeneousness* of meaning and signification which is exhibited in rhythms and intonations operating 'through, despite, and in excess of' the signifying function of language (Kristeva 1980b, 133).[14] Semiotic rhythm within language underlies the written and is irreducible to intelligible verbal translation. The function of poetic language is to introduce, through the symbolic, that which works on, moves through, and threatens it (Kristeva 1984, 81).

The symbolic element gives signification meaning in the strict denotative sense of the term, while the semiotic element, notwithstanding its disruptive nature, is what makes symbols matter, i.e. what gives them meaning for our lives. The interdependence between these two elements implies an important relationship between language, life, and the body where drives originate (Oliver 1997, p. xv). Numerous writers, both academic and non-academic, have written of the 'physicality' of language and as well as of the poetic. In his discussion of Vico's ideas on how language and intelligence works, Said refers to 'language trying to recapture the bodily directness of poetic thought' (Said 2000, 86–89). Poet Bob Hicok says, 'I have to believe writing is simply in me. I've come to believe the desire is biological, that there is no reason other than this is what I was going to do' (Deutsch 2004, 41–45). For author Carole Maso, 'the emotional state is approximated through the physicality of language' (Maso 2000, 17). Derrida refers to an 'invisible interior of poetic freedom', writing that 'To grasp the operation of creative imagination at the greatest possible proximity to it, one must turn oneself toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom. One must be separated from oneself in order to be reunited with the blind origin of the work in its darkness' (Derrida 1978, 8). The thrust of Derrida's suggestion here resonates with Kristeva's notion of the semiotic.[15] Derrida dreams of a writing that could directly access the body, 'a pen that would be syringe, a suction point rather than the very hard weapon with which one must inscribe, incise, choose, calculate, take ink before filtering the inscribable, playing the key board on the screen, whereas here, once the right vein has been found, no more toil, no more responsibility, no risk of taste, nor of violence, the blood delivers itself all along, the inside gives itself up'.[16]

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[14] The semiotic is inseparable from a theory informed by the Freudian unconscious wherein the subject is split and the transcendental ego decentered. Ultimately Kristeva grounds her theory of language and the subject in a modified [Lacanian perspective, according to which the subject emerges from a process of repression resulting from the fact that the Symbolic, which is synonymous with paternal law, represses primary libidinal drives. The subject thus becomes the bearer of this repressive law. By means of the semiotic, which Kristeva ties to the maternal body as its source, she introduces a perpetual disruption to this repressive law.

[15] I am not trying to lump Kristeva and Derrida together here and suggest they are basically saying the same thing in different ways. Derrida goes on to suggest that his blind origin is a *pure absence*, an 'essential nothing on whose basis everything can appear and be produced within language'. Kristeva gives this absence a presence in the concept of the maternal body, to which others have raised important objections. For example see Butler 1990; 1993. My own inclination is to be suspicious of claims to a grounding in the maternal body. I do not believe this issue of origins can be resolved though, nor do I think it is necessary to do so in order to appreciate the insight that Kristeva's semiotic offers about the nature of language and the writing subject.

[16] Quoted in Oliver 1997, xx. From 'Circumfession', in *Jacques Derrida*, translated by Geoffrey Bennington (University of Chicago Press, 1993).

The product of writing, i.e. the text, is a complex weave of the semiotic and the symbolic, and the nature of this weaving determines the resulting kind of text. The *phenotext* arises from societal, cultural, and grammatical constraints. The *genotext* is spun by drives, woven within the semiotic disposition and is exemplified in poetry (Kristeva 1984, 5). The distinction between the phenotext and the genotext should not be understood as hard and fast, since they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In that writing navigates between the symbolic and the semiotic, no one text is purely one or the other, though in any one text one will tend to dominate. It is within the texture of a text that a writer's voice emerges and the writing subject is constituted by the dialectic interplay between these two modalities.

Barthes uses the term 'zero degree writing' to refer to a colorless, stylistically 'neutral' form of writing that produces a phenotext. Such a style of writing strives to appear innocent but ultimately calls attention to itself as not so much a neutral style but rather a *style of neutrality* showing that style dominates all writing. As writing consists of the negotiation between language and style, it is impossible for writing to be genuinely neutral. The notion of 'zero degree writing' creates an intellectual space within which to analyze academic writing as a style desirous of the absence of style. Desires and drives are not absent from this 'neutral' style of writing, though. On the contrary this kind of writing is indicative of a desire to suppress desire, which is itself a desire, or, as Deleuze and Guattari might put it, desire for one's own repression.[17] Most academic writing possesses the characteristics of zero degree writing and produces a particular kind of 'writing subject'. As Clifford notes, since the 17th century Western science has excluded certain modes of expression from what is deemed legitimate writing. This exclusion was (is) based on a series of oppositions including rhetoric versus transparent signification, fiction versus fact, and subjectivity versus objectivity. The first terms in this series were assigned to the category of literature, where the emotions, passions, desires of writers were considered legitimate (Clifford and Marcus 1986, 5–6). The instability and plurality of meaning inherent in literary writing were scientifically condemned as an obstacle to the neutral, objective stance deemed necessary for getting closer to the truth. Barthes's understanding of zero degree writing tells us that the 'neutral' scientific mode of expression is merely a kind of style. Said reminds us that all writing styles have to be demystified of their complicity with the power that allows them to *be there* (Said 2000, xxxi).

## The Art of Innocence and the Other of Language

> But the innocence of this art must not be confused with naivety or ignorance:
> rather it is situated beyond knowledge, in a knowledge of non-knowledge,
> obtained at the price of a long labour of the soul, of reflection on language and
> on the very body of the sentence. (Salesne 1988, 121)

There is an element of art in pushing the insights of 'critical' or 'radical' constructivism in a direction beyond, but already begun by, the many who have spoken of the limitations and inadequacies of our words, the surplus and slipperiness of meanings, the overwhelming power of discourse. There is an art

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[17] This theme is explored throughout Deleuze and Guattari (1983).

in the experience of shunning imperatives to write in the zero degree and instead seeking the blind origin of pure absence from which springs the act of writing. There is also an innocence to such an endeavor, though we know language and words are never innocent. The innocence is in the opening of ourselves and our identities to the full range of what language is without recourse to claims of expertise and authority. Critical constructivism began this push and indeed this is arguably what has struck fear into the hearts of those who have appropriated the very word 'constructivism', tamed it, eviscerated it, and made it amenable to the possibility of scientific rigor, the building of cumulative knowledge, and secure settlement into clearly bounded and often intellectually stifling 'research program'.[18]

The ideas that have driven critical constructivism linked the discipline of international relations to the realms of philosophy, metaphysics, culture, literature, and everything else that is implicated in our constructions of ourselves and whose connections an artificial severing had functioned to mystify. Identity is at the very fragmented heart (so fragmented that to say it has a heart is somewhat misleading) of this challenge to conventional ways of thinking in international relations. This is evident in the early writings from George's questioning the commitments of scientific rationalism that have shaped our images of reality and the self to Ashley and Walker's stressing the significance of situations where the identity of the subject is put in doubt (George 1989, 269–79; Ashley and Walker 1990, 259–68). Many, many others (too many to mention here) have pursued these themes of identity, self, and other, in various ways that have arguably changed the face of the discipline of international relations over the past fifteen years and sent it spilling over the arbitrary boundaries that had insulated it from the tough questions that previously could not be posed.[19]

However, what has received quite a bit less attention, at least in any explicit way, is the issue of 'our' own identities as scholars and writers, how these identities emerge within our own writing practices, and what the consequences of this might be. I stress the term 'explicit' because, as noted earlier, the issue of our identity is at least implicitly a fundamental aspect of critical constructivism. Critical constructivism offers the potential to follow lines of flight, à la Deleuze and Guattari, in a nomadic fashion that would enable our own presence as writers to be felt, though not as authoritative, autonomous, and stable identities.[20] Critical constructivism's understanding of language and identity as well as

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[18] I am referring here, of course, to the proliferation of dismissals, distortions, and derisions by which 'conventional' constructivism has gained currency and attempted to reduce 'radical' or 'critical' constructivism to some errant, delinquent variant of an overall approach of which conventional constructivism offers the true promise in terms of legitimate scholarship. Examples would include Ruggie (1998) and Jepperson and colleagues (1996).

[19] Scholars here would include all the usual suspects: Richard Ashley, Rob Walker, Michael Shapiro, David Campbell, Cindy Weber, William Connolly, James DerDerian.

[20] See Deleuze and Guattari 1987. Deleuze and Guattari use the phrase 'line of flight' numerous times throughout this book. Specifically regarding writing: 'Write to the nth power' (24); 'Make rhizomes, not roots, never plant'; 'A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*.—The tree imposes the very "to be", but the rhizome is the conjunction, "and … and … and". This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb "to be".'

the central place they occupy, if pursued in the direction I am suggesting, ultimately leads to a questioning of our own identities within the stories we tell (and we should never forget that this is what we do, tell stories).[21] I am arguing in favor of pushing the insights of critical constructivism in a self-consciously new direction towards a discussion of *voice* in academic writing, though not just a *discussion* but the actual incorporation of other voices in our writing. Critical constructivism, by introducing into academic international relations an important awareness of and sensitivity to the complex nature of discourse and text and all that goes into producing them, presents the possibility of exploring the nature of voice in writing and its relationship to our own identities as well as the possibility of writing differently, crossing into other genres, welcoming the trace of our other voices.

Kristeva's notion of the writing subject, a subject whose identity is constructed within the writing process offers an important enabling concept for examining our own identities as writers of academic international relations. Both critical and conventional constructivists have drawn attention to the self/other relationship and its significance in constructing identities, although they have done this in radically different ways. What has received less explicit attention even among critical constructivists is the significance of the 'other of language' for the identity of the self. Kristeva offers a way into this 'other of language', through her notion of the semiotic, though this way in is always only partial, fleeting, and contingent. The 'other of language' is not uniquely Kristeva's idea, but rather is an important element of post-structural thought more generally. While there has been much misunderstanding, especially among its critics, that post-structuralism recognizes no 'reality' beyond language, Derrida himself has openly refuted this claim, saying, 'It is totally false to suggest that deconstruction is a suspension of reference. Deconstruction is always deeply concerned with the "other" of language. I never cease to be surprised by critics who see my work as a declaration that there is nothing beyond language' (Derrida 1984, 123). Words can never do more than give us traces of the things they always only inadequately represent. The 'other of language', the 'beyond', the 'something more' is the very possibility of writing, but is at the same time outside of its grasp. Kristeva's notion of the semiotic seeks to grasp this other, however tentatively. In *New Maladies of the Soul*, she locates the other of language in the psychic realm or the soul, which represents the bond between the speaking subject and the other and 'constitutes us as speaking entities' (Kristeva 1997, 204).[22] The psychic realm, for Kristeva, is the link between the other of language and its always ultimately unrealized potential for verbal or written expression. If the subject is constituted through writing, then the other of language is a constitutive element in the construction of our identities as human beings and as writers. Writing contains an inherent desire to access this other of language. Barthes's notion of style is an attempt to get at this, as is Kristeva's semiotic and Derrida's blind origin. It is in this sense that we are always divided subjects, our

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[21] Cynthia Weber (2001) forcefully and creatively reminds us of this in her important and innovative text.

[22] Although Kristeva uses the term 'speaking subject' in this instance, I believe the same ideas apply to the 'writing subject'. Based on the overall gist of her theory about the writing, subject this interpretation is justified.

identities fragile, split, and inherently unstable. This other of language makes itself known in various ways in language, though like a ghost in ways that are not always immediately graspable, slipping away from us as we seek to get a handle on them, pin them down, box them in, and hold them up in front of us for rigorous, scientific scrutiny. Deconstruction is, if it is anything, the attempt to restore the slipperiness, the excess, the impossibility of final meaning to language and thereby open up space for the other of language and of ourselves. I believe that accessing and writing in our own other voices brings us closer to this illusive goal. There is a required element of innocence in this attempt through the writer's *voice* to give presence, however fleeting and ultimately impossible, to the other of language.

Let me close with the following question and reflection. What if self-conscious efforts, in the name of truth and the progression of knowledge, are made to suppress the desires and drives that constitute the semiotic? What if our writing practices become dominated by an imperative to write in the zero degree? What if 'your expression is standardized, your discourse becomes normalized?' (Kristeva 1997, 207). This spells malaise. It heralds the death of our souls, though it does not mean that desire is not at work. For, as noted earlier, zero-degree writing is not neutral, but a style emanating from the body of the writer, an extraordinarily powerful style that is often *almost* successful in mystifying the fact that it *is* a style that harnesses desires and intensities in the quest for theoretical progress. The identity of the writing subject as scholar becomes a faceless, formless authority positioned at a removed distance from the human element at stake in what is being written about. Potential human connections among the writer, the reader, and the subject matter are severed. The 'other' of language, of ourselves, is obliterated beneath the white, white collars of objective social science. We are 'worldly' not in the sense of being part of the world we write about, but as part of a scholastic hermeticism where 'the issues of greatest importance will be what one critic says about another'.[23]

There is an ethical dimension to this that Kristeva calls to our attention when she suggests that we are alive only if we have a psychic life, however distressing, deadly, or exhilarating this may be. We are capable of action only if we have soul. An arid, academic, zero degree discourse does not allow for soul. The ethics of a social discourse gauged by how much poetry it allows is distinct from a juridical notion of ethics grounded in law. 'Finally, our notion of the ethical as coextensive with textual practice separates us from the "scientific morality" that would like to found a normative, albeit apparently libertarian, ethics based on knowledge … The ethical cannot be stated, instead it is practiced to the point of loss, and the text is one of the most accomplished examples of such practice' (Kristeva 1984, 234). This is perhaps the 'so what?' of this article, the reason why it ultimately matters why we write as we do in academic international relations and why it would be important for our discourses to allow more poetry, more of our 'other' selves, more of our own presence as writers on the pages where we inscribe our words. By saying this I am not suggesting that our own presence is synonymous with individual, autonomous egos. When 'I' write, I am the complex writing subject in process, moving through the always inadequate structures of language, negotiating the social codes and restrictions, entering the

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[23] These two senses of 'worldliness' are discussed by Said (2001, 3–38).

long dark tunnel of desire, pulsating with the mysterious energies that move through me, through us, through the other. Only by permitting the full, complex range of what writing *is* to present itself can relationships with others exist. An important part of this entails a continual interrogation of our own identities. Academic writing does not permit this, does not create a relationship with others. Any body of thought, perspective, approach, or critical attitude that uses the rhetoric of social construction and takes this notion seriously must include oneself in the equation or admit to a deceit.[24] I would argue that this calls for a different mode of writing wherein the writer's voice 'pervades and situates the analysis and objective, distancing rhetoric is renounced'.[25] Perhaps such a mode of writing would elicit a caring for the human beings that are invisible in our academic writings and in this sense would constitute an important ethical move.

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[24] Taussig (1992, 10) makes this important point.
[25] See Clifford and Marcus 1986, 12.

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