

Response to Yasuko Miyazaki's 'Children's Experience of "Beyond the Self" and "The Rustle of Language" in G. Bataille'

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Yasuko Miyazaki is concerned with how educators can approach experiences that are beyond the self, specifically play, when language presents limitations due to its nature of assuming things must be 'explained in terms of utility' (Miyazaki, 2008). To talk about play with language is to assume play is utilizable, however 'pure play' or 'major play', in Bataille's sense, is 'useless: a pure act' (*ibid.*). It is outside of language, and in describing and talking about play with language, it 'degrades' this pure act into a '*for something*' (*ibid.*).

While Miyazaki's paper focuses on the intricacies of the interaction between major play and language, there is also the question whether there is any way around this. A couple possibilities could be for there to be a language that is itself sovereign that allows for a description of a pure act, or an approach that maneuvers around language to approach these experiences of beyond the self without 'tainting' them or losing what they are about, such as indirectly or even through images.

It then needs to be considered whether language as sovereignty is possible and even comprehensible. If so, what would this be, what would it entail? If this is comprehensible, could it even still be called language or would it be something completely different (and what then is that)? Or is there no escape from this utility aspect of language and we must make do? If this is so, how would and could education approach this issue of play through language? If education wishes to attempt to incorporate ideas of major play, what 'new kind of language' would need to be put into practice in order to achieve this?

On the other hand, if another approach needs to be considered, what would this then entail? Can play, presented non-linguistically, be recreated and presented in a comprehensible way within education? I have heard from some who play music to claim there is no language in their understanding of music—language in the sense of words, grammar, etc., although some, such as Paul Standish, would claim that for the musicians, their understanding of the music would not be possible without the already background foundation of being within a linguistic framework. What is 'within' their understanding they cannot explicitly explicate, and can play and/or language learn and be inspired by this? Could music be a possible approach to deal with beyond the self experiences? To take the previous question a step further, are other beyond the self experiences a possible way of dealing with beyond the self experiences? Could music be an indirect route to presenting play? Yet how could one employ something unemployable to understand something that refuses to be understood with the use of language? It seems that we

are stuck within a linguistic net that refuses to be untangled.

One last question remains being to what purpose are educators attempting to approach this experience of play. If pure play is indeed sovereign and a 'for itself', what else then are educators looking for and for what reason? Could it be that in presenting an understanding of the uniqueness and purity of play, students can appreciate the different levels of life upon which they live and interact, thus possibly creating space for a less self-centered conceptualization of one's self within one's environment? I do not know myself although feel this issue has much potential to shed light on many interesting aspects of experiences.

To look at these issues in a different light, perhaps this struggle to deal with play within the constraint of language partly give it its 'status', its importance and also its richness. Does the difficulty in addressing the experiences of being beyond the self add to its 'value', if you will. Is this struggle to present it using language important to its very structure? As an experience in life, does its inexplicableness partly give it its uniqueness? Maybe the struggle is important not because of what light it sheds about the specific experiences themselves, but in what it sheds about what goes on around the experience.

These are some questions and concerns that Miyazaki may or may not look at and think about while pursuing her research. These issues of language's character, play and beyond-the-self also bring up interesting questions for something related: authenticity. By 'authenticity' I mean the being responsible and taking ownership for one's own life. And while how experiences of beyond the self affect authenticity would be interesting to investigate, how to present this in a way that does not diminish either concepts of beyond-the-self experiences or authenticity would also have to be thought out.

First, do the limitations of language that major play comes against manifest themselves when thinking about at authenticity? Does language's character of describing things in terms of utility cause problems when presenting authenticity? My conception of authenticity is, like major play, not seen as a means. It is something pursued for itself (or for my self!). Based on this, the use of language could become problematic. However, authenticity is dissimilar from major play in that while it is not a means, nor a handful of discrete pure 'acts' performed or experiences experienced, and straight comparisons to major play would be short lived. For in attempting to describe major play, one is indeed attempting to describe something short lived. It is a moment in time that language cannot get at. On the other hand, authenticity as I see it is not so much an 'end' (a goal that can eventually be [obviously or not obviously] obtained), but a way of being, similar to Aristotle's *eudaimonia*, and a way of being that spans over a lifetime. The exact manner a person can strive to be authentic changes not only with each person, but changes over time within a person's life. Authenticity is ever evolving and the language used to attempt to describe it can be molded and evolve along with it, for language is not stagnant but fluid and changes with the times over time. So while language tends puts things in terms of utility, perhaps the relationship between language and authenticity is looser where they 'use' each other to shape each other: they affect each other.

Additionally, there is another aspect of language which Miyazaki points out: it shows the boundaries and limits of my self that are possible; limits not in the negative sense, but in the sense that Paul Standish writes, as Miyazaki quotes him, 'the sense of the outward reaches of a situation' (Standish, 1992, pp. 38 – 39). Language can reveal the outer boundaries the

experiences of beyond the self. What is interesting is the idea of this outer boundary of experiences and the revealing of such boundaries. Whatever way my horizons are exposed, through language or otherwise, this light shining on the outreaches of my possibilities, allowing for the space for the disclosure of the mysteries and uncertainty within life and the world is important in the pursuit of authenticity. The possibilities for finding myself beyond myself are endless. They are mysterious and uncertain because the possibilities are just that: possibilities. For instance, in regards to the experiences beyond the self, those moments usually come unexpectedly. One becomes lost within, to follow the example above, the beauty of music. There is no distinct moment when one can say ‘that was the moment when I became lost within Chopin’s Ballade no. 1 in G minor’. They are mysterious in that I do not necessarily know when I will find myself within them. This mysteriousness is not reserved only for beyond the self experiences. The world is so vast that while one can have some understanding and awareness of one’s possibilities at that moment, one can never behold one’s surroundings in its completeness, and thus the world has the capacity to throw at us the unexpected. One could plan out one’s life by sussing out and analyzing the possibilities presented, and the next thing one realizes one is pursuing life on a completely different path from what one had planned. A woman, who wishes to obtain life experiences that are off the beaten track, chooses to take a year off after graduation from University to teach English as a Second Language in Korea as she always had an interest in Korean culture. She has the intention of coming back the year after to pursue her Master’s, or possibly obtain a job in her field of Criminology, however 5 years down the line she finds herself in Burma helping children out at an orphanage. She does not ‘find herself’ in the sense that suddenly she awakes from deep slumber and does not realize where she is. She ‘finds herself’ in the sense that in that reflective moment one sometimes finds oneself in, she realizes how much time did indeed pass and where life took her instead of where she thought it would go. Yet not as some passive passenger along for the ride, but in how the world can present such amazing opportunities and how each of her choices and actions (conscious or unconscious) upon those opportunities changes her possibilities, her desires, her life, her path and her self in such a monumental way. She lives her Burma life true to herself, but this is not to say her ideas on where she thought her life was to be beforehand were not authentic because she did not actualize those plans. Rather, those plans were for that time in her life what she thought was good for her, but as she lives on and as life goes on, what she sees herself doing changes as what she encounters opens up new horizons.

Thus, I come unprepared as my horizon is so large and far-reaching and there is such an element of unexpectedness. What is great about the unexpectedness of life is that while scary, it can also be freeing, if one allows it to be. If one does not try to hold onto life too tightly in the sense that one must have constant control—‘follow the plan’ no matter what!—embracing the unexpected and being open to and within one’s experiences can open up new ways of feeling, thinking and being. In the example of the woman who ends up in Burma, if she was too ‘strict’ about how her life was to pan out, she may not have been open and aware of the possibilities that lead her to Burma. This is not to say that for her to be authentic she *has* to take up the Burma opportunity and that choosing otherwise would be inauthentic. An alternate path may have been that she does decide to go back after a year to do what she claimed she was going to do. This is merely saying that if she had too much of an iron fist on her life, she may not have

been open to and thus aware of the possibilities in the first place to be able to decide. I am not implying that one can be aware of absolutely all possibilities within one's life. However, being open to unexpectedness allows for discovering oneself in ways one would never imagine.

What is equally as interesting (as the line of thinking in the previous arguments) is how and where authenticity is placed and thought about within these beyond the self experiences. In these moments when I lose myself, or get lost within my experience, such as while I am in major play, would and could I be considered authentic within those experiences? Or is this a false problem, set up because I want too much to hold onto the idea of always having, always being some (possibly essential) concept of my self all the time, or that it is not that I am not my self within these experiences, but that these experiences evoke or give a glimpse of that which is beyond, possibly transcendental? Or perhaps, as just said above, this glimpse of beyond the self can be helpful in understanding my authentic-ness and what it means for me to be my self within my life. On the other hand, is then using these experiences of beyond the self, experiences that could be described as pure, taking away from its purity in that it is 'utilized' by authenticity? Is that 'not the point', if a point were to be attached to these experiences?

Part of the tension seems to lie between self-awareness within an experience and experience of losing oneself. Some of what beyond the self experiences offers have been explicated in the presentation above. I will now turn to self awareness. Self awareness is one way which assists me to pursue my life authentically. It is important to note that I do not see self awareness as the only way or the ultimate (or penultimate) way of enabling one in being authentic—it is not a hierarchy of ways to be authentic but rather a cluster: just one way out of many. While experiences of being beyond these self involve *losing* one's self to say the moment, self awareness generally is thought as the *focusing* on one's self within that moment. In relation to authenticity, this can be useful in assisting one to figure out how to respond or deal with the situation that is authentic, or true to oneself. Self awareness can disclose one's self within one's situation or the situation to one's self. For instance, a popular theme in many films and novels, such as *The Razor's Edge*, *The Moon and Sixpence*, (both by W. Somerset Maugham), *The Matrix*, *Wanted* and *Fight Club*, is one where a (seemingly) ordinary person (in the examples given, usually a man) working a menial and banal job, very much a part of the rat race, becomes aware that this kind of existence is meaningless for them and not what they want out of their life at all. They have somehow fallen into some routine they care nothing about, and seek to escape it and to find a life that holds more significance to them. Being self aware can reveal one's emotions or thoughts concerning the situation one, and whether one wants to be in it or not.

Experiences of being beyond the self seem to play against self awareness in that this self awareness gets repressed. If anything, too much self awareness can be detrimental to the experience. My being lost in performing or even listening to Chopin's Ballade no. 1 in G minor. I am lost in my emotions and I am lost in the music, and if by chance something occurs, I hit the wrong note or the phone rings, it jars me out of my reverie and suddenly I am aware, I am aware of that I sitting at the piano and I am playing. (I can also be aware of that which is around me, the loud ringing of the phone, the ticking of the clock, etc. however as I am specifically looking at self awareness, my examples will mirror that focus.) The moment is lost and I cannot continue on with the piece. I must either start again or stop completely.

While self awareness may not play a direct role within the actual beyond the self experience, this does not mean there is a necessary incompatibility between the two. As seen above, while self awareness can play quite an integral role within one's life, I do not mean to claim that one must be self aware at all times. Furthermore, one cannot be lost within moments all the time either. However, having the two beside each other, interacting with each other can make for a much more richer conception of experiencing and living. One can also learn from the other, having a symbiotic relationship. I do not think that these pure experiences of beyond the self is something that are necessarily meant to be there to 'assist' me to 'be authentic' as they are there in themselves only—they are pure—yet I do not think that incorporating the experiences of beyond the self with the understanding of who I am diminishes these pure experiences. After all, after the experience I still must come back to myself (else I go crazy or die), and within that coming back, I can embrace that wondrous moment as something special and touching. It is not a matter of 'using' either of these experiences in some way that I use a fork. These experiences are my experiences, they are my own and they make up a part of who I am. I learn from them and grow from them, and looking at these experiences in this way I do not think compromises their purity. For that is what both authenticity, beyond the self experiences and life in general is about: living and *embracing life*, experiencing experiences, and constantly growing and becoming who I am and who I want to be within the situation that I am placed. These experiences that point to the beyond are still pure in that it is a moment that I am caught in and am absorbed in, a moment that can potentially make me forget about myself and allow me to see beyond, but upon return can also bring a fuller understanding of what it is to be me.

It has not gone unnoticed that the educational implications to these ideas have not yet been addressed. It is important for education to attempt to deal with both concepts of self-awareness and experiences of beyond the self. Encouraging students to be self aware invites students to articulate their understanding of their education and the role it plays within their lives, as well as what role they wish for it to play within their lives. Creating a space for students to think about what they are doing and the relevance (or irrelevance) it has and how they want it to play within their lives allows students to take responsibility and ownership for their decisions.

Additionally, creating a space that encourages students to lose oneself allows them to experience that there is more to their life than what they are made to endure on an every day basis, that life is more than putting everything to use for their current lives or as preparation for their future lives; that sometimes life is not prepared and that there is a whole horizon of possibilities to be experienced for the sake of itself. Again, as is Miyazaki's problem of how to approach the concept of major play, the issue here is how to create these spaces, without reducing the experience to merely a '*something for*'. The experience is pure and denies usability. Creating a space to allow for the possibility for experiences of beyond the self to happen is one thing, but attempting to say force this upon students specifically to experience losing oneself undercuts the very experience. A teacher who sets aside a specific time in the day for those experiences where one loses oneself defeats the purpose he puts himself out to do. 'Now class, it is time to lose yourself in your activity' presents itself to be a ridiculous statement.

There needs to be freedom within the environment that allows for the reception of these experiences of being lost when they do come upon us, as opposed for educators to constantly needle students to 'pay attention to what's going on' (for instance within the lesson). It could

be that within a lesson, a student is taken aback by an ideal or concept and loses himself in it, allowing the complexity or gravity of the concept to take over his mind. Educators need to allow for this to take place so that the student can build a much deeper and richer relationship with his or her education.

Too much significance placed on just one of these ways of experiencing (self awareness versus losing oneself) will skew the many facets that life has and can take on. Focusing purely on students to be aware of themselves may become a breeding ground for egoism and self-centeredness. On the other hand, only promoting 'getting lost' within an activity not only ruins the experience by potentially making it a *for something*, but can *unground* an individual to the point of madness. Approaching both with equal sensitivity could make for a very enriching education experience.

REFERENCE

- Miyazaki, Y. (2008) Children's Experience of 'Beyond the Self' and 'The Rustle of Language' in G. Bataille (unpublished).