

Rope, Stick and Pillar

Three {Self.Encounters}

Reflections by the Chorus on
a performance by
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What happens when our selfs take shape, take form in our surroundings?

When we find ourselves sitting among them. When we find them lying beside us? When we find our selfs walking beside ourselves?



Um just a couple of bits of housekeeping.

braces {hold things together}

brackets or parentheses (separate things out)

from *para tithenai* – something set or put aside.

What happens when we lift something up and out, suspend it, set it aside in our minds or in our movement?

What happens when we find the middle way between, say, knowing and {not knowing}, between grasping for and turning away? What happens when a woman, who has grabbed hold of a rope and realised she is actually holding a snake, neither throws the object away in revulsion nor clasps it to herself? Does she put the (rope.snake) in parentheses?

epochē is a Greek term meaning suspension of judgement: the act of refraining from reaching a conclusion about something, even about whether it exists or not.

Let's suspend judgement about (things in parentheses) and hold together {things that threaten to fall apart} in braces.

Ignore () Engage

Know (enquire) Don't Know

Include () Exclude

Know (not.know) Don't Know

Receive () Produce

Know (wonder) Don't Know

Perform () Witness

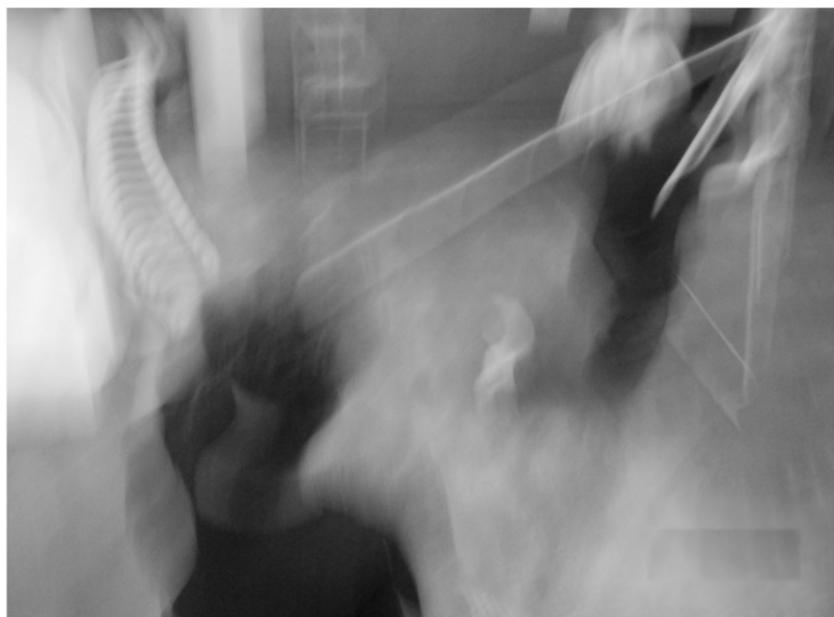
There could be a written output that gets given.



But filling, peopling, populating the empty {page stage} is a hopeless task. The {page stage} simply empties itself like a {sieve bath} leaving another hopeless task.

At one moment the {page stage} will be full. Then presses print and shutters whirr. But, before that, what of the impending page and the pregnant stage, pale and curved with possibility?

Filling the empty {page stage} constitutes my identity and hers and his and hers. All our identities coalesce around the production of something that fills the {place space} fills the {page stage}.



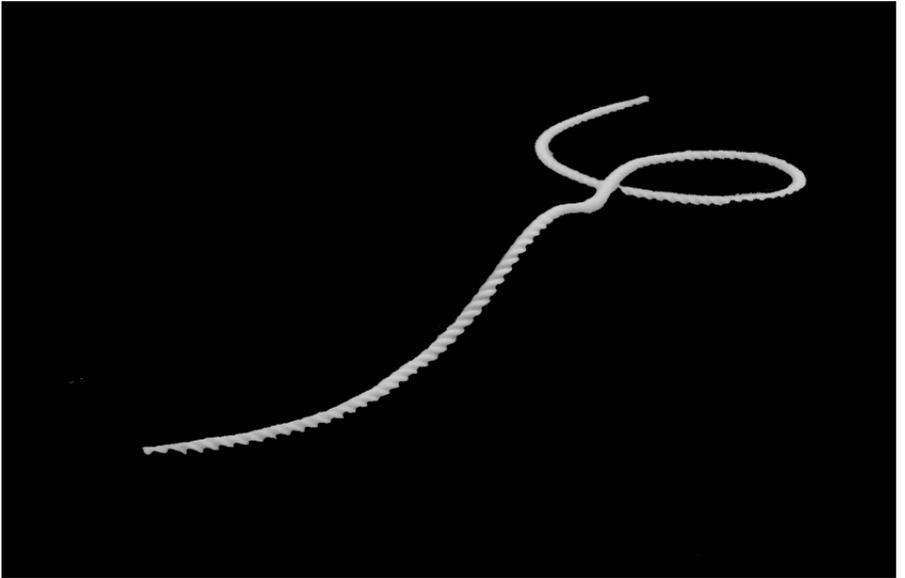
Oh, before we start, there's an important point about sentimentality. The sentimental is an appeal that intends to by-pass the rational, the logical, the mind – and address itself direct to the feelings. We maintain a healthy sense of disdain towards the sentimental and try hard to eschew it in performance. This is true almost by definition, because sentimental has come to mean anything that exceeds the viewer's or listener's or reader's sense of decorum, sense of how much emotion is 'permissible' or 'appropriate'. So the sentimental is always too much.

But the margin – the white apron around the edge of the {page stage} – is the space provided for that which needs to spill over. It is the space for the excess, for the excessive. Excess belongs in the margin. In finance, the margin is the cushion of excess – that which is set aside beyond what is strictly necessary.

Excess has been called 'the accursed share'. The argument goes like this: to justify our existence to our {selfs selves} we require excess in the form of feasts, orgies, spectacular shows that go beyond what we need to survive.

Tonight's performance is not strictly necessary. It is an indulgence, an excess. Perhaps you find it sentimental.

Incidentally, the Greek *choros* chorus (a band of dancers or singers) became in Attic tragedy a series of stories inserted between the dance performances. These stories gave expression to the moral and religious **sentiments** evoked by the performance.



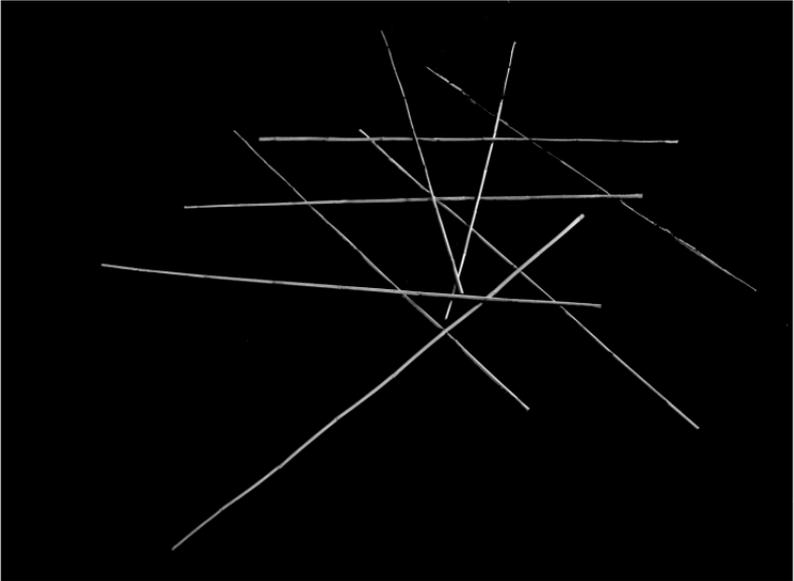
Of course there is tension. That's what keep us alive.
Or tells us we're alive. Or both.

It's what holds the surface on the water and stops it
spilling everywhere like the proceeds of an enema.

Of course there is tension. How else would you be here
and they be here? How else would the building still be
standing [just]? How else would we get it together to
copulate, give birth, defecate, laugh, cry or die.

Of course there is tension. That's how we hold together
our fragmented, chattering, centrifugal selves, like a
bunch of clattering sticks.

Of course there is a particular tension in a triangle,
tripod, trinity, threesome, triad, triskele, tri.anything.
It's the first angled geometry to create a {space stage
page} where people, things, ideas can be included or
excluded.



If we have successfully managed to whip up a convincing self [convincing to others and to ourselves], like a well beaten meringue – or is soufflé better? – and got it in the oven at the right temperature and baked it slow or fast and remembered to set the timer and whipped it out and it hasn't sunk, we may have several anxieties.

Will this {self.concoction} be pleasing to the other [or, initially, to the mother]?

Will it be attractive or repulsive?

Will it become the obscure object of others' desire or contempt?

Will it be noticed enough?

Will it be taken for granted?

Will it be taken seriously?

Will others see it as a concoction?

Will it be desired enough for others to wish to merge with it?

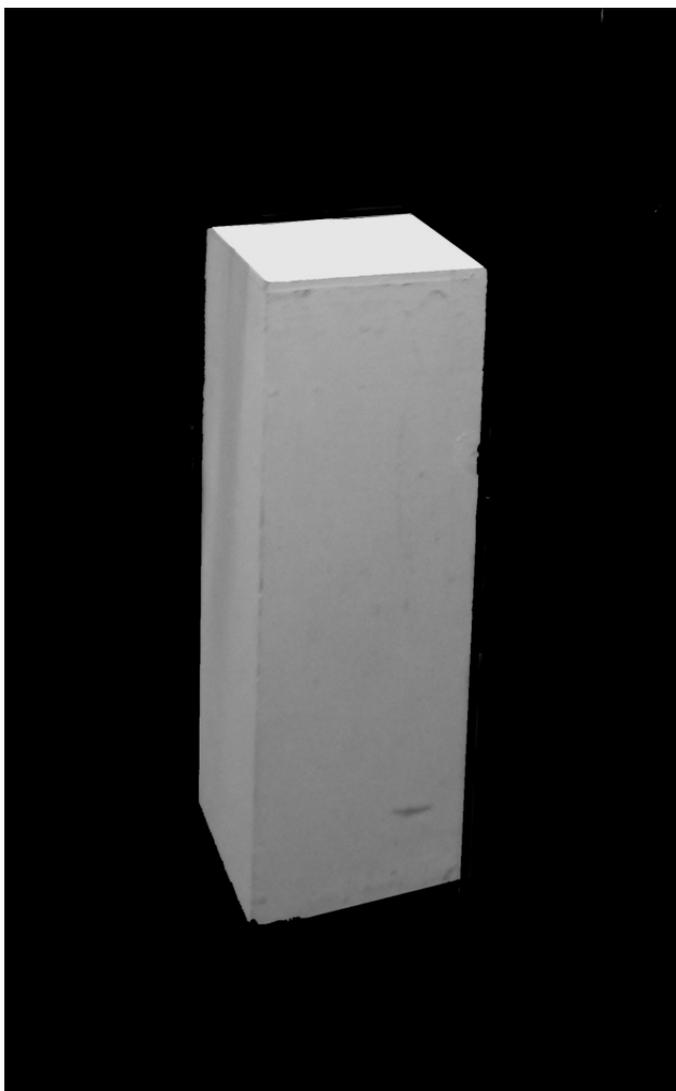
Will it be swallowed up?

Will it be left washed up, high and dry?

Will it shiver with the widowy anticipation of lonely desiccation and very, very slow decay?

Will it shiver with the shrew's shadowy horror of the buzzard's descent?

Are these anxieties allayed by paying steady attention to the immateriality of self?



If Bell, Book and Candle are the symbols of anathema and excommunication, then what are Pillar, Rope and Stick?

Perhaps they seem to be some unholy trinity of punishment and humiliation?

Perhaps they're caricatures so full of inherited meanings and associations that we can no longer see them as just pillar, rope and stick?

But if, as I maintain, they represent each performer's alter ego[s] and if, as I further maintain, each performer's self [or sense of self] dissolves in the course of their performance, then what will become of their alter ego?

Perhaps Pillar, Rope and Stick[s] can be the symbols of incommunication, of one's inevitable dialogue with one's self?

Anathema: from *anatithenai* – something set or put up.

You can wrap yourself in a rope, but not in a pillar or a stick

You can hide behind a pillar or a bundle of sticks, but not a rope

You can climb on a pillar, but not on a rope or a stick

You can point at a projected PowerPoint image with a stick, but not with a rope or a pillar

If you play scissors, paper, stone with them, it's complicated.

What did you notice?

I noticed:

Shadow

Exile

Alienation

Remembering

Association

Layers

Sounds

Their eyes, the whites of their eyes.



Rope for tethering, leading, restraining, coercing,
containing, constraining, tightening, tautening, coiling,
knotting, towing, whipping, lashing, corralling,
anchoring, sea-anchoring, hanging, swinging, lassoing.

Rope for the slavemaster and the wavemaster.

Death.noose, whip.lash, hold.fast, life.line.



Stick[s] for beating, caning, poking, prodding,
cajoling, walking, fencing, supporting, staking,
sustaining, swishing, wielding, threatening, pointing,
showing, naming, shaming, barring, blocking.

Sticks in bundles for the fascist.

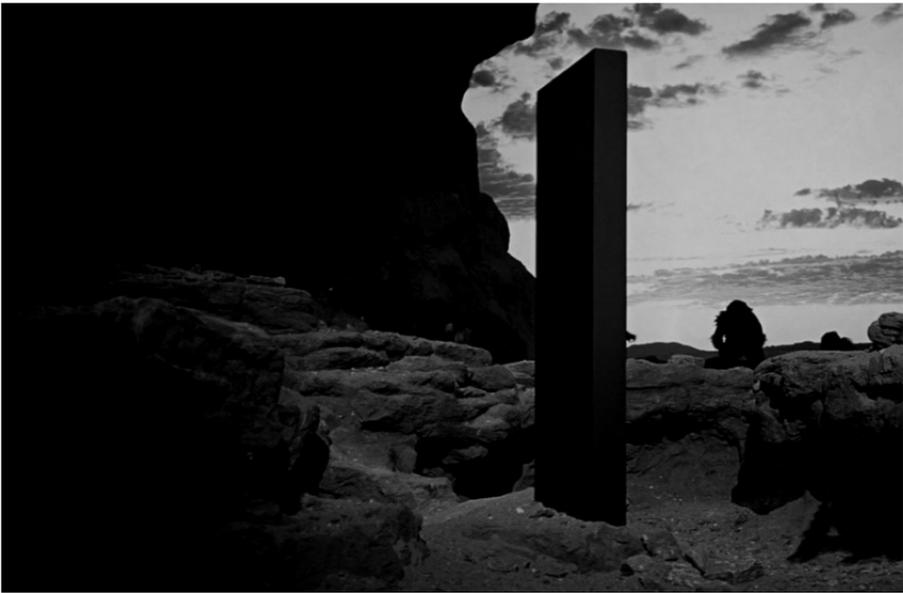
Clatter.snap, brittle.clack, tick.tack, stickle.back.



Pillar for plinth and posturing, for posing, displaying,
revealing, elevating, uplifting, raising, dais-ing,
speaking, haranguing, hectoring, badgering,
supporting, sustaining, upholding and imposing, for
pillaring and pillorying, for shaming and disgracing, for
setting up that which is later to be brought down.

Plinth for the statue of the patriarch.

Cockle.rock, tipple.stone, wobble.block, jiffle.trunk.



Does our dialogue with our self[s] inevitably lead to some kind of power struggle, this setting up and putting down, this hierarchy of selfs, this pecking out of a pecking order? And, if so, what can soften it?



What is softening for pillar, stick and rope?

Only rope is already {hemp.soft} until the onset of salt and sea render it; render it {hard.wet}, an unforgiving combination that, unexpectedly, burns like fire.

Stick has been soft. Softish. Stick has been green and young and juicy to push up, surge up through the forest {under.foot}, but sharp enough to grow straight through flesh --- a puncture. Stick has been soft until the onset of even one winter renders it; renders it {hard.dry}, a brittle combination that, unexpectedly, stings like a bee.

Pillar is tough and strong and softened only by decay, like the densest man. Pillar is brute strength carved, curved, shaped into column or boxed into plinth – selfs, for the display of.



Solitude can result from an act of consciously disengaging from other humans. It is not a loneliness that afflicts us.

What if the practice of choosing solitude leads to the empty {place space} populating itself with other selves? Serpents and eagles. Devils and demons. Bamboo groves and mossy plinths. What if those selves are noticeably more real and tangible than we are ourselves?

What if those selves sustain themselves without any tension or winding up or holding on our part?

What if we have to tighten up the sense of self if we are to experience solitude without entirely dissolving?

If we do dissolve into our surroundings, what do we dissolve into? What medium do we dissolve into? Emptiness? A wateriness awash with pillary, ropey, stick selves? A great self?



What if you find your animus-self is a rope? What happens?

I find {surgence resurgence} and {emergence submergence} in your {rope movement}.

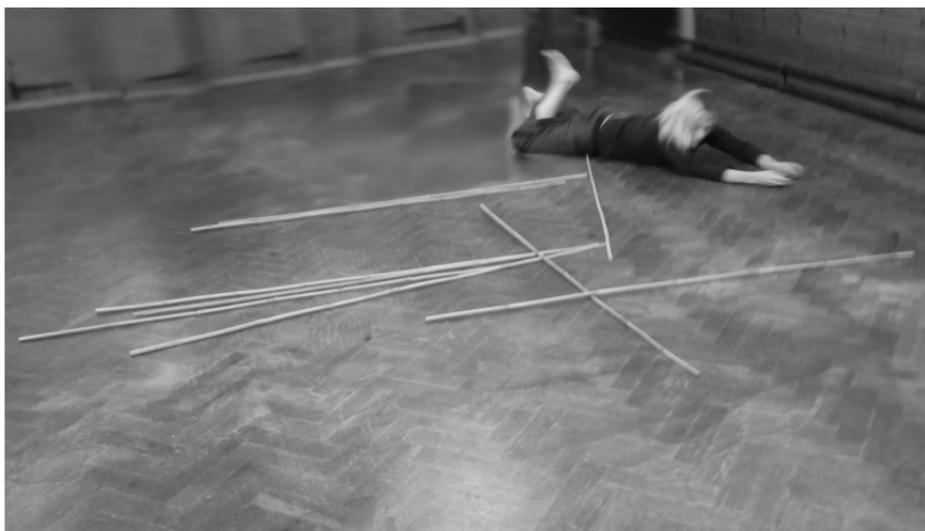
I find your ropeself is riding you (as a ship does a wave) and being ridden (as a wave is by a ship). I find it is your master and your servant. I find it whips up in power and coils itself away in love. I find it affirms and burns. I find your ropeself is your lover and your beloved, your dance and your despair. I cannot always tell whether your ropeself is toying with you or you with her.

I find your ropeself is always wanting to be your ally and always wanting to become a noose; always wanting to tie a knot and always wanting to slip free; always wanting to hold a sail taut in the wind and always wanting to recoil.

I find your ropeself contains your awareness of yourself.

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Rope leads the elephant into the I/eye of awareness.  
Rope holds the vessel in the I/eye of the storm.  
Rope holds the bull by the I/eye of the cauterised nose.



What if you trip one day on a loose paving stone or an irregular {verb kerb} and find that you have fallen apart into nine selfs, nine crackle shards? What then?

I lose count, lose track of your stickselfs. They are legion, they are colony, they are pandemonium. They are always transforming themselves, into musical instruments and congregation, flock and diaspora, pack of cards and stack of staves, clattering daddy-longlegs remorseless on the window pane, handful of spaghetti, clutch of torture stalks – always crying out for the wet.wet.wet.wet that will not moisten them.

One for your little girl, all awonder at the {whirled world}

One for medusa, debauched into ugliness

One for the bamboo grove where the light still dapples  
and insects seek refuge from the day and heat settles  
in dense pools

One for madness where the howl won't sound

One for grief

One for tenderness that trickles down your face

One for the conjuror, magician and priestess

One for the exquisite stepping of a path

One for extinction.



What if, out for a walk on a moor or other flat expanse where the mind's eye can roam unresisted, you stumble apelike upon a flint plinth, a single stone, a monolith, a pillar or pilaster, a column without a capital, a stylus or stylos such as the one St Simeon Stylites spent thirty-six years upon?

What if you take it on instead of giving it a wide berth?

What if intrudes, demands to be seized, wrestled, moved, manoeuvred, insists on being climbed, entered, explored, made useful? What if it beckons and rejects? What if it asks to be left in the lurch?

What if, sitting beside it at one moment, you discover that you are beside your self?

What if a man finds that he is beside himself? What's a man to do with himself? How can he get comfortable with himself?

Surely no amount of personal development work will dissolve this improbable, flinty, boxy, plinthly other?



We're never alone, so solitude is always a performance.

We're all, always, existentially alone, so the idea of solitude is meaningless as it supposes another state of {not.solitude}.

P.S. As a matter of fact, the performers' entire lives have culminated in these three {self encounters}. That's quite something. Though it will no longer be true tomorrow.

So I think these must have been autobiographical pieces. The pillar, the sticks, the rope on the stage represent all the lives that all the performers' selves have lived thus far.

Q. What object would you choose to represent all your  
selves and their autobiographies?

A.

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