

Dear Gordon, Dear B

A text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination

Roland Barthes (1967), *The Death of the Author*

The starting point for this exhibition is a letter. Since this letter was found, we are presented not only with an author (*B*) but an already existing reader (*Gordon*). As new readers we experience them as if overhearing a conversation, where our two subjects remain anonymous.

As an object a letter is rather curious. Situating itself distinctly between two subjects, it is as if a letter acts as an intermediary between two parties, bringing them closer together yet causing them to remain distinctly separate. In order to express what we feel the letter transforms our thoughts into words. It is as if the letter is an attempt to distil and transform inner experience into an object that can be passed on to another.

It is through the uniqueness of a speaker's voices that what is said allows us to access who is really speaking. But who is speaking in this letter? In order to liberate the voice from language we articulate, and so we breathe life into the text. However, knowing neither Gordon, nor B, the voice that emerges is our own. It is as if the letter is an attempt to contain and possess voice, yet even when writing letters to someone familiar our voice is implied yet only ever present in the imagination of the reader. Our voice therefore exists only as an echo with an imaginative origin.

For those familiar with the author of a letter, the voice that emerges is neither determinedly 'heard' or 'read'. What is experienced is an inner voice, a result of the memory and recollection of the person in question. What is experienced therefore is located somewhere between listening and reading. This voice is not real, it functions in the irreal space of auditory imagination; it can be recalled yet remains elusive. This irreal voice merges with our own, causing a conflict between who is speaking and who is listening. If we begin to utter this text we give breath to writing, liberating it from the page, yet as this voice continues to merge with our own it remains incomplete, tethered between the corporeal and the imaginary. It is as if this imagined voice exists as an uncanny hallucination, familiar yet continuously out of reach.

Who do we hear, then, when the letter is not intended for us? We are presented merely with subjects, whose identities remain obscure. We are granted access to the text, yet a voice remains out of reach. It is as if the subjects appear to us, darkly, behind thick and frosted glass. The shadows of bodies are perceptible, yet their voices are muffled and lost to us as we remain ever on the margins. For us, our two protagonists remain acutely silent and their identities only partially exposed. For us, they exist only within the letter, enclosing it at each end of the page. With only the text available to us we realise the distance between our two protagonists and ourselves.

The discovery of this letter, found abandoned and separated from either subject, is akin to catching the tail end of a whisper. We can recognise what it is and its attempts to express feelings that exist beyond language, yet like hearing a whisper we cannot access everything that the letter hopes to contain. The words contained in the letter blur and fuzz in front of our eyes, obscuring their intentions from us. Separated both from its author and its intended, the letter takes on a new significance. The words within it are no longer secured by their original

intentions; they remain tethered to the letter but float around it, unfixed and without context. It is only through this new relationship that the complexities of the letter finally reveal themselves to us. The fundamental intention of any letter is always to be read. However, with each new reader the letter changes. Although the letter's material qualities remain the same, its content and meaning appear fluid, endlessly flexible. The beauty of this project is that we are not only shown the complex relationship we all have with language, but how our attempts to communicate and express inner thinking will always be interpreted beyond the words themselves and beyond ourselves.

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