

Chorality

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'Slippage between singular and plural in pronouns of the first person is not uncommon in ancient poetry; the traditional explanation is that much of this poetry was choral in origin, that is, performed by a chorus of voices who collectively impersonate the voice that speaks in the poem.'¹

Writing choral is to see and follow the movement of thought around the organizing theme as it emerges and digresses. The choral (event as abstraction) is performed as 'a movement or passage through language, a spreading memory, drawing to itself an associated tangle of meanings'.²

Thoughts in motion become articulations – movement-becomes-thought and vice versa as an elastic almost, an incipient potential, a coming to language that is a moving-with-movement.³

This movement need not be thought.

'The point is to whisper at us weirdly from the trees, to make us hesitate.'⁴

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Everybody

–

sings to-
gether.

Everybody
does
not
sing to-
gether.⁵

¹Carson 2002: 365.

²Ulmer 1994: 227.

³Manning 2009: 6.

⁴Morton 2015: 349-51.

⁵Holder & Waterman 2015: performance script.

And the 'performances of the paratext have their own unruly potential'.⁶

Pointing to what lies outside, behind or beyond the text, to that whispered from behind the hand – the Ancient Greek chorus was both medium and commentator.⁷ Onstage throughout, the choral presence imposed an openness on the space so that even the most secret exchange was conducted in clear public view,⁸ in a public fictional space.

The Japanese *noh* chorus (*jiuta*) creates and makes use of the distance between actor and role to become multi-vocal – 'a shifting unidentifiable collective, able to speak for and about the character'.⁹

The recitation is transparent, so the lines belong to no one.

This 'strange and powerful plural-singular choric voice is also heard in prayer, children's games, pledges and protest, celebration and in the collective utterances of crowds'.¹⁰

'Chorality is the means whereby we allow ourselves the collective hallucination of collectivity.'¹¹ And 'every individual vocality has a connection to a phantasmal chorality'.¹²

In *How to Live Together*,¹³ Roland Barthes focuses on the concept of 'idiorrhymy', a form of living together in which each person respects the individual rhythms of the other. Barthes points to the self-regulating form of monastic practice of a small group of monks on Mount Athos, Greece in the tenth century who lived with few voluntary links to the collective life of the monastery and appear to have reconciled the extremes of solitude and sociability.¹⁴ It should be pointed out that the Holy Mountain was a peninsula reserved for Orthodox monks, where no female, not even a cat, was welcome.

For Giorgio Agamben, living together is the product of rhythm. Agamben situates life in the affirmative conditions of thought and of communicability. Life constituted as action rather than as a quality that is defined by external prohibition or expectation.¹⁵ Rhythm as a guide to practice.

The movement goes both ways.

This movement is a configurative poetics that engages different modes of attention. Attention to inklings, hesitations, curiosities, attractions that allow for beginnings which in turn stimulate thinking about possible structures and ways to proceed.

⁶Drucker 2013: 11.

⁷Bierl 2009.

⁸Slavey 2013.

⁹Smethurst 2013: 92.

¹⁰Connor 2016: 3.

¹¹Connor, 'Choralities', *Twentieth Century Music*: 20.

¹²Connor, 'Choralities', *Twentieth Century Music*: 21.

¹³Barthes 2013.

¹⁴Barthes *How to Live Together*.

¹⁵Agamben 2013.

34 A to Z of Creative Writing Methods



A movement within a space, and a movement that creates a space and new spatialities,¹⁶ the choral effects subtle disruptions of orthodoxies.¹⁷ Think of the voices inside your head – a space of inner rhythm and monologue parsing the world of experience – and the ‘delirious multiplicity’ of the ‘I’.¹⁸

The choral has a poetic function; it moves, dances, offers the privilege of distance onto language and works to recast awareness.

‘What I’m interested in [...] is observing the movement that takes place in me.’¹⁹

These ‘inner movements [...] hidden under the commonplace [...] slip through us [...] in the form of undefinable, very rapid sensations. They hide behind our gestures, beneath the words we speak, the feelings we manifest, are aware of experiencing and able to define.’²⁰

An insistent poetics motions across different orders of experience.

‘In place of a seamless continuity of argument/evidence, there is a *movement of thought* that again and again is interrupted and begins anew in order to approach the object over and over from different angles.’²¹

This ‘practice of thinking through one’s singularity, not in fear of it, is both aesthetic and ethical in nature and takes on a social dimension’.²²

‘The little matter of the “we”’.²³

‘One is never synchronous. One is never simultaneous with the object [...] about which one is thinking or writing. And the appeal of such activities lies not in eventually becoming synchronous but in increasing the paradoxes to attain a feeling for slowness and fastness [...] It is precisely through visible discrepancies that the voice gains its poetic independence.’²⁴

The above text including footnotes and asides is formed in a choral mode of collated quotation of text from the author’s doctoral thesis, ‘The Movement of the Aside’ (2019).²⁵

¹⁶Connor, ‘Choralities’: performance script.

¹⁷Ulmer 1994: 149.

¹⁸Carlin 2018: 6.

¹⁹Carlin, ‘Essaying as Method’: 4.

²⁰Sarraute 2018: vi.

²¹Frey 1996: 140.

²²Stefans 2001.

²³Carlin, ‘Essaying as Method’: 4.

²⁴Tawada 2009: 184–95, 193–4.

²⁵Copley 2018.



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