

Doorways

A.W. Metcalfe

University of New South Wales

Doorways

Social relations require us to hold the paradox that we are both separate from *and* connected to others, related to each other without being identified with each other. To escape the mechanical reduction of relations to things, we must live in and through an in-between space that is at once separating and connecting, that is *and* is-not us. This article argues that doors produce this space for social life and that doors can only do so because they literally imply the holy. It follows that space necessarily implies the sacred, even when apparently secular or Euclidean space.

Another way of making these points is to observe that we cannot discuss the numinous without invoking the structure of the door, that nothingness, interbeing and inspiration, the phenomena of holiness, come through the door. This observation recalls Jesus' urgent insistence "I am a door" (John 10:7), but this claim is routinely *interpreted*, as if it is *simply* or *only* metaphor. Faced with Jesus the door, many of his followers become anxious. Rather than be with him, they're eager to move from the lively openness of metaphor to the closed security of its proper interpretation, and in doing so they turn away from doors and from Jesus. When the text becomes a door leading onward to a proper meaning, Jesus too becomes only the way *to somewhere else*. Rather than know Jesus in creative relation, to be with him in the space and time of poiesis, many people long to be beyond him (see Game and Metcalfe, 1996).

My argument implies that doors are neither a symbol of, nor the way *to* holiness; when we enter into relation with them, they are themselves the way of the holy. Accordingly, when Thomas asked Jesus, "we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?", Jesus responded by bringing his disciple back from distant destinations to the present relational: "I am the way, the truth, and the life . . . If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also" (John, 14: 5-7). The door itself is the end, and the beginning. As Jesus elaborates, in the Gospel of Thomas, "where the beginning is, there the end will be. Blessed is he who will take his place in the beginning: he will know the end and not experience death . . . Blessed is he who came into being before he came into being" (quoted in Butcher, 1994: 128-9). The wonder is not where the door leads but in the very relation with it. In this, Jesus' doorway resembles Taoism's way. *Tao Te Ching* 6 describes the eternal and mysterious "first mother" having a doorway from which grows everything of heaven and earth. The

Taoist Sage "knows everything under heaven," according to another chapter, "[w]ithout leaving his door" (Waley, n.d.: 200).

The door's sacredness is recognised in the reverence that touches people approaching a threshold. The threshold has guardian spirits that call for our respect, whether or not they're acknowledged in shrines and statues at the lintel, whether or not they call for such a conspicuous religious gesture as a sign of the cross. Only retrospectively, however, do I become conscious of these threshold spirits; only after I've hesitated in my approach and noticed the shyness that has come over me, only after I realise I've checked the buttons on my clothes and the tidiness of my hair. A footstep from the door, and I swallow hard and tell my hands to stop sweating; I wipe my feet even if I know they're clean, and remove my hat. The door may be open as I approach, but nonetheless I cannot enter if I feel resistance in this gap. I might even look away from the opening, unworthy, and if I sneak a look, it will be with a sense of transgression that acknowledges the limit I'm overstepping. As I ring the doorbell, I put myself in the hands of larger forces with a small and voiceless prayer, "Well, this is it," "Let's hope it goes well," "It's too late to turn back now." This approach unfolds with the dreadful detail of slow-motion time, but after that there's a blank, a blur, a moment and space within the door, on the limen, that aren't mine to describe.

Unchosen and without the agency that distinguishes the human, my responses to doors could easily be disdained as being habit or "just ritual," types of action said to fall short of *real* action because they are inconsequential, meaningless, and inertial. The responses may seem inconsequential if we think religion is concerned with Big Issues, but God is in everything and nothing if (s)he is in anything. Moreover, rather than having no meaning, my door rituals have no *specifiable* meaning. They're not meaningless but mysterious; they let me *know* nothing. Finally, these responses are easily distinguished from dead or mechanical ritual which I experience as coercion or arbitrariness. I do not will my responses through a conscious sense of propriety, and I'm not responding to the door's reminder of a divinity elsewhere.

Before we met I may have been half-alive and the door an external object, but now the door and I open new possibilities for each other. We rediscover what it means to be *real*, for in the vital aliveness between and through us we feel the holiness of creation. We each bring it to the other reverentially, as a gift. So when the door calls on me, reminding me of connections that, a moment before, I hadn't known I knew, my obligations are carried out openly and freely with ever-renewed spontaneity because of the lively and righteous presence of *mutual* respect. When we're both participating in the divine between us, respect for one implies respect for the other, as it does when Gabriel and Mary bow to each other. There is grace in ritual and habit as spirited as this, happening "by itself," without anyone doing it (see Fingarette, 1972).

If people talk of ritual in terms of imposed obligations, then they are only half right. Ritual comes alive when external and internal obligations coincide. Rather than engaging a Newtonian sense of inertia, and in meaningless habits that persist despite their lifelessness, ritual involves an eternal sense of the presence of the past. I experience the quickening of a social field that lives through me. The biologist Rupert Sheldrake describes this field-effect as "morphic resonance," the mimetic pressure of one member of any type on all others of the type. In apparently copying others, we're often alive to the deep and unutterable connections that constitute our kindnesses. The whales in pods that mysteriously beach themselves aren't copying each other as much as being together, and the child fleeing the dark is carried by the history of the species she carries. Matthew Fox draws out the theological implications of Sheldrake's term by speaking of "[t]he morphic field, the Community of Saints, the ancestors and the future, all that power that comes into a place when we are doing ritual well together" (Sheldrake and Fox, 1996: 146), and in these words I recognise the larger force that lives in my encounter with a door. In some unnameable way I know in my sweat glands the holiness of the door and the moral sway of countless others, then and now, there and here, who approach the door shyly, checking clothing, wiping feet, saying prayers.

The holiness of doors, then, is manifest in the reverence of our door rituals. But door rituals aren't just one type of ritual among many. Whether it's a blessing, baptism, communion or sacrifice, every ritual is greeting or farewell, an opening from the temporal and profane to the eternal and sacred, and perhaps vice versa. Every ritual is a passage in-between one world and another, one state of being and another. So every ritual is door ritual! Doors don't simply represent religious understandings, for religion presupposes our appreciation of their awful power.

Separation

In considering the holy work that doors perform, I'll begin with the most familiar understandings though they tell but one side of the story: a door, it is familiarly assumed, may be open *or* closed but cannot be open *and* closed. Considered thus, doors are switches with two positions, operating according to the binary logic of computers. The closed door is the marked position, the 1, while the open door is the zero, not strictly *different* from the closed, but only its negation.

People understand doors as they allow us to understand the world, and so it isn't possible to *explain* this bias in favour of closure. When I argue that there are no first things, I imply there is no first position for the door. But if people begin instead with the number one, they must also begin with the closed door, for it is this door that allows for a first thing in a world of things. The simply closed door generates and is

generated by the desire for pure oneness, which can only exist if a simply closed door protects it from contamination.

The orifices of the body, the lid on a box or bottle, the Pearly Gates of heaven and the passport gates of a country, the doors on a closed house or room or wardrobe: simply closed doors are said to separate decisively inside and outside things. The orderliness of life and the world emerges through tidying up, dividing different things and collecting like things, putting things in their proper places, cleaning mess, eliminating clutter and confusion, guarding boundaries, clarifying ambiguity (see Douglas, 1970, Kristeva, 1982). This tidy logic is implied when people talk of sorting themselves out, or getting away from it all, to rediscover the self that lies, still pure, within the innermost jewel box of their being. Without simply closed doors to protect its boundaries, the self could have neither integrity nor self-expression. It isn't surprising, then, that self-help and interior design literatures converge: "Sorting out furniture and belongings and keeping them ordered and accessible has become a spiritual quest for the contemporary home owner" (Copestick and Lloyd, 1998: 6). Despite the lessons of life, the photographs in design books evoke the powerful fantasy of being "cool, calm and under control," assuring readers that "[s]erenity is the only possible state of mind in a carefully considered living space where everyday junk has retreated behind sleek, regular cupboard doors" (Copestick and Lloyd, 1998: 29-9).

Why, in life, is this serenity so transitory? And why does the search for it make me anxious? Because pure oneness is chimerical; to say two things are separate is already to demonstrate their connection. And because I can never be clean enough to attain serenity, for the very act of tidying pollutes me by demonstrating the connection of purity and dirt. To maintain the fantasy of serene oneness, therefore, I must anxiously tidy up tidying up, hiding cleaning activities themselves behind closed doors, ensuring that cleaners and garbage collectors are wraiths who come and go by night. Striving for an appearance of order whose production can be taken for granted, that doesn't remind me of being implicated in the life around, I become a desperate criminal who cleans up evidence of my corruption and then has to eliminate evidence of my cleaning up. All this to cover my tracks, to deny the transitional processes still connecting order and disorder, to maintain the illusion of an absolute break in space between here and there, self and other, one moment and the next in linear time.

By allowing me to hide (temporarily) the in-between, simply closed doors present space as void or distance rather than matrix or ground, as the nothing that isn't there rather than the nothing that is. Protecting one thing from pollution by the other, this absolute break in space allows a first thing to stand alone. More specifically, the simply closed door produces the first fixed point in space and, functioning as Greenwich does to longitude this point allows space to be measured and marked out in abstract Euclidean grids.

Simply closed doors also allow me to believe (sometimes) in the beginning and ending of the journeys and stories that mark space personally. They give me insides and thresholds to farewell and outsides and foreign ports at which to arrive, they provide me paths to travel and centres to return to. Moreover, through marking out my life this way, they let me imagine purposes around which I can orientate my biography, separating where I've been from where I'm going. Simply closed doors are the beginning of ends, as evident in the etymology of "limit" and "threshold," which both refer to the limen of the door. They're fundamental to my sense of and desires for an ordered and integrated life.

If separate spaces are produced by simply closed doors, so are separate individuals. According to the most familiar understandings of child development, exemplified by the psychologist Jean Piaget, doors are crucial to the processes by which infants gradually separate from parents, hollowing out an inside that distinguishes them from others who are imagined as independent and external beings. Piaget describes childhood as a developmental stage based on inadequate understandings of the world's separation from the self: the child is "a being knowing nothing of the distinction between mind and body . . . Compared with us, [the child] would experience much less the sensation of the thinking self within him, the feeling of a being independent of the external world" (1973: 49). According to this model, people close the door on childhood when they finally learn the simple Euclidean meaning of closed doors, "realising" the distinctions between mind and body, inside and outside, subjective and objective, and self and other.

The discovery of the secret is a special milestone in this Piagetian sense of development for it signals the recognition of an inner world distinct from the outer world. We play with this idea as children through the beginning of our lifelong fascination with boxes, doors, cupboards, houses and buried treasure chests. These games teach us about volume and capacity, but more urgently they help generate our capacity for our fantasies of independence and self-containment. My three year old son was playing with these possibilities when before going to sleep, he lovingly tucked under his pillow a picture he'd drawn of himself. Similarly, as a ten year old, Jung secretly carved a little manikin, wrapped it and hid it for a year in a box in the forbidden attic. He didn't understand his actions, but knew that his security and life depended on the secret: whatever situation arose, he gained strength by thinking of the manikin secure in its hiding place. His autobiography ascribes the episode a major role in his individuation and character-formation, as "the climax and conclusion of [his] childhood" (1973: 22).

According to psychologists, children who fail to secure the lessons of the closed door are prone to personality disorders (see Meares, 1992). One such disorder is psychic impenetrability, an inability to share "inner" feelings for fear that there will be no

difference left, that relations necessarily involve the suffocation of invasion and merger. Another is psychic incontinence, an inability to keep anything inside, to recognise and accept the differences and distinctions on which relations rely. These problems underscore the importance of separation as a guiding principle of our lives, but contrary to the conventional academic and popular wisdom of our time, they don't justify the assumption that separation is the first principle of life. Separation is too often separated from its connection with connection, and the world of separate things is too often taken as the only true world. Just as these things rely on nothing, the proud individual leans on others whom they take for granted, and the inside of a door comes hand in hand with its outside. Connection is not the enemy but the guardian angel of separation. Indeed, the closed door can make a world precisely because it is never a *simply* closed door.

Separation and Connection

[T]here are two 'beings' in a door . . . a door awakens in us a two-way dream . . . it is doubly symbolical. (Bachelard, 1969: 224)

[T]he door represents . . . how separating and connecting are only two sides of precisely the same act . . . By virtue of the fact that the door forms . . . a linkage between [spaces] . . . it transcends the separation between inner and outer. (Simmel, 1994: 7)

Just as the act of cleaning separates *and* connects dirt and purity, God in the *Genesis* story is the connection between the things he separates to begin the world, the light and dark, the land and sea, and so on. God doesn't simply stand apart, pure, but also lies between, neither pure nor impure. And so it is with doors.

Approaching a door with a Push sign on it, I have an embarrassing way of carefully reading the sign and then pulling the doorhandle, having, presumably, unconsciously imagined the sign from the other side. We cannot look simply at *one* side of a door, for to do so we must have already imagined the *other* side. Because one side literally implies another, doors demonstrate the complexity we must accept in order to appreciate the mutual implication of interbeing (plex, ply: fold, layer, pleat, plait, bend, inclination). Whereas binary logic insists on doors being open *or* closed, Bachelard, describing our lives as "half-open being" (1969: 222), insists that the door is open *and* closed. Rather than the overcoming of initial distance, social relations rely on the Janus-faced door that literally holds the paradox of separation and connection.

Let's test this claim by reconsidering the nature of secrets. Closer inspection shows that secrets rely not on the simple separation of an inside but on the inside's mutually dependent relation with an outside. I remember the naked delight on the face of a four

year old boy when three nine year olds announced they'd play hide and seek with him. "You can hide first. We'll count to ten thousand and then come and look for you." Going first! Ten thousand! The little boy could hardly believe his luck. He rushed here and there before settling on a place behind a tree where he hid and hid and hid as his vitality and confidence wilted. Unless sought, there is no secret and no self! Had Jung been unable to imagine anyone interested in his secret, it would have died as surely as if it had been discovered.

The corollary of this is that relations die if deprived of the secrets and mysteries that hold open the erotic space of mystery. If, for example, I pry in someone else's drawers, I'll find only the husks of the tantalising secrets that make up the person. Accordingly, I serve my indiscreet fascination with my friends by maintaining the discretion that protects the relation on whose energy we rely. My friends and I trust each other to understand that a closed treasure chest holds more than an open one. The former lives imaginatively, while the latter sinks into the dispiriting objective externality that Piaget ascribes to reality. Rather than revealing the sharp demarcation of inside and outside necessary for a *distinct* self, secrets indicate the simultaneity of separation and connection and exemplify the relational life in-between self and other, and subject and object (see Phillips, 1993: 79ff).

Another example of the door's complexity is its implication of verticality in every horizontal movement. I talk of opening *up* and closing *down* because each door I go through redefines the prevailing classificatory order, leading me to higher and lower orders, ranging from a cosmic order among the stars to a microorder among the things inside the box inside the drawer inside my bedroom. Moreover, every descent of this classificatory ladder is also an ascent, and vice versa. Looking *down* at things of apparently negligible significance, I tidy *up*, ascending to find a higher classificatory order. There's an intimation of cosmic order in play as I tidy my desk drawer: the lid on the box of paper clips allows it to imply, to hold, the world. In the conceptual space that separates rubber bands and paper clips, I feel the hum of the world that connects them, to which they and I belong, in which they and I participate.

The drawings of young children depict this cosmic hum in the smile of the moon or in the chorus of flowers blooming around the figures of the hugging parent and child. Although Piaget characterizes this sense of chorus as a lack, of differentiation, I'd affirm its lifelong significance. The Greek word for chorus is etymologically akin to a word for course or way, and this connection reminds us that it is our sense of chorus that allows us to live with enchantment, carrying and carried by life. The speaker who reacts to the atmosphere in the lecture theatre; the sailor who listens to the wind and reads the clouds; the novelist whose characters create their own lives; the reader who enters and breaths the text: adult thinkers constantly draw on immersion in and

relation to the world. They as much as children know the tender smile of the summer night, the joyful and sorrowful hymn of the world (see Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 355).

If adults believe their stories of pure separation, it only shows how alienated they are from their ways of knowing and being, for existence would be unremitting horror if the distinction of inside and outside always prevailed. When people reduce the complexity of doors to the simplicity of the closed door, they strive to turn doors into walls that simply banish the outside. But paradox isn't so easily evaded, for an impermeable wall no longer closes off an outside. Indeed, as we'll later see, experience "within" a doorless and windowless wall requires the language of limitlessness!

A door is only closed if it can open. This is why people point to doors when identifying their homes; there is no containment or wholeness without some hole in the house's perimeter. The outside has to enter before it can be apart. Without doors, the world has no horizon to end it, connect it, embrace it. The hole, the holy and the whole go together.

Nothing in between

*We pierce doors and windows to make a house;
And it is on these spaces where there is nothing that the usefulness of the house
depends.*

*Therefore just as we take advantage of what is, we should recognise the
usefulness of what is not. (Waley, n.d.: 155)*

The basic function of a door is to imply two fascias, inside and outside, layering the sides so that they are together and apart. A door could even be defined as the mystery that separates and connects the sides or aspects of life. This mystery is the in-between, which is neither inside nor outside, which is ever present and tangible but which, presenting no face or side, is never directly seen. The sideless and faceless mystery can be as thin as thin can be; it can be less substantial than the stuff between the sides of a film of lover's silk, or no more than the air held in the frame of an open door. Any attempt to dissect the door and locate what is between the sides would be as futile as attempts to dissect the body in search for the soul. Nevertheless, this miracle of in-betweenness is enough to hold insides and outsides apart, to forestall the merger of complete contamination while still holding insides and outsides together. Without this miracle, relations would be impossible, collapsing into the paired horrors of merger and Godforsaken abandonment, both of which are losses of substantial in-between.

Every door then is a tunnel, and even if tunnel-vision blinds us to the nothing in-between, we all know the magic of doors through experience. Abracadabra, Open Sesame. Doors melt us, transform us, surprise us: "is he who opens a door and he who closes it the same being?" (Bachelard, 1969: 224). During the blurred instant in which I am in the middle of a door, I am ritually transported from one world, one state and one self to another world, state and self; I enter a tomb and leave a womb, but cannot report on the miracle. How wondrous is the transformation between the inside and outside of a prison door, how voluptuous the first passage between the living room and bedroom of a new lover!

Think of a waiter moving between the restaurant kitchen and dining room:

It was amusing to look around the filthy little scullery and think that only a double door was between us and the diningroom. There sat the customers in all their splendour--spotless tablecloths, bowls of flowers, mirrors and gilt cornices and painted cherubim; and here, just a few feet away, we in our disgusting filth . . . As [a waiter] passes the door a sudden change comes over him. The set of his shoulders alters; all the dirt and hurry and irritation have dropped off in an instant. He glides over the carpet, with a solemn priest-like air . . . And you could not help thinking, as you saw him bow and smile, with that benign smile of the trained waiter, that the customer was put to shame by having such an aristocrat to serve him. (Orwell, 1940: 67-8)

How does this transubstantiation occur? From where does this grace come? How does the waiter get from here to there? What happened in between? Who, and where, and when was he in-between?

If we assume that the skilled waiter wills these changes each time he passes through the door, we reduce the roles on one or both sides of the door to bad faith, arbitrariness and phoniness. This cynical interpretation, however, only makes the problem of agency regress, for where is the self that changes the self? What's more, this view denies the grace and gracefulness that we know through experience. Whereas the waiter wilfully playing waiter is too stiff and self-conscious to enter the spirit of different rooms, the attentive waiter has an easy and appropriate courtesy, born of a receptive aliveness to the particular relations encountered in each room. The courteous waiter's transformations, then, are conversions that overwhelm his self because of his respect for and trust in the benevolent power of the door. Because he is open to the nothingness in the middle of the door, open in the opened door, the door achieves through him what he could not. These changes of states, indeed, are typically associated with falls, with the loss of self and the loss of pride, like Saul's fall on the

road to Damascus. Gracefully, gratefully, humbly resonating with our kind, we fall through doors.

Breaking Through

Many people, however, are terrified when doors call on them to open as they open, to pass through with nothing but faith. *What happens*, they panic, *if I become stuck in-between without a purposive self to extricate me?* Suspicious of movement that occurs without their volition, they insist on control and on clear boundaries between self and other. It isn't surprising that doors are a presenting problem for many people whose suffering is described as "obsessive-compulsive disorder." Just as obsessive washers can never be sure enough that they've purified their hands, door jammers cannot pass through doors easily because they insist on doing it themselves. Faithless, terrified of slips that may occur when the self isn't there to guarantee "rightness," they cannot move with grace, cannot die to be reborn in a different state, like the restaurant waiter. They get stuck:

At almost any hour, Paul could be found in a doorway, slightly swaying back and forth, with his eyes fixed at the upper corner of the door frame. "What are you doing?" a ward attendant would ask. "I'm stuck," Paul whispered back, without moving. "I have to do it over again to get it right; I have to do it a certain, a special way." "Have to do what?" the attendant would ask. "Get through the door right," Paul would answer. (Rapoport, 1991: 73)

Paul's terror is common but most of us manage it with the more brutal methods of Jim Morrison of *The Doors*: in our hungry and fearful desire to get somewhere else and to be someone, if only someone else, we try to *break on through to the other side*, hoping that in our rush, itself a nonreceptive form of selflessness, we flash past the in-between and are saved from the possibility of being lost between here and there, and self and other. To avoid our fear of falling, we plunge.

At university, students leave their essays till the last minute so that they can write them in a rush that hides the messy transitional phase of *writing* an essay. Likewise, students and staff rush through classroom doors in their eagerness to escape the door's threat to self. The danger is so urgent that architects have fitted windows in the doors of lecture theatres and tutorial rooms to make it easier to see through the door to the other side. After sneakily scanning this other side, students push open and plunge through the door, heading with speed and tunnel vision toward their accustomed seats in the room. Allowing students to know in advance who they are and where they are going, these familiar seats normally make the treacherous passage invisible. But sometimes someone has usurped the student's seat! Then, unless they have

contingency plans, students find themselves in limbo, stuck like Paul in the doorway, dreadfully aware of the other students watching them from the defended safety of their own seats and selves. Although desperate to move, the stranded students cannot decide where to go because they've lost their decision-making self in the passage.

If we consider this fear of doors, we notice something strange. People afraid of doors are, at base, afraid of being without doors. They fear the darkness of the door's tunnel because they can't see the door that will get them out of it; the in-between threatens to be a space where, paradoxically, there are no doors at all, and therefore no distinction or control or self. Terrified that the liminal is itself limitless, they want simply closed doors that can protect them from open-and-closed doors. They want doors they can take for granted, doors that don't talk back and don't demand acknowledgment, doors to which they themselves can be closed, doors without implications.

Obsessive-compulsive conditions arise when ritual becomes untrustworthy, and the same faithlessness torments the door-phobic. Without trust in the benevolence of doors, we can become so terrified of being with the world that we seek to exclude and control it. But the attempt necessarily fails, for while we trust only what *we* do, we alone cannot do what we want done. Like obsessive-compulsive hand-washers, who want a clean break but find themselves stranded in endless cleaning up because each washing is a new source of contagion, those of us afraid of doors find that to close otherness out, to establish control, we must use doors that themselves ask us to open to otherness. Faced again with the fear we sought to shut out, yet still unable to trust in powers beyond us, we lurch about frantically, nonreceptively, unable to see the exit that would appear if we turned to it, terrified of being caught in the middle. Although not itself under control, this lunging is brought about by the desire for control.

Without Doors

The very word obedience means an intensive listening. The opposite of that obedience is absurdity, which means being deaf to life's challenges and meaning. (Steindl-Rast, 1998: 52)

Night, the essence of night, does not let us sleep. In the night no refuge is to be found in sleep. And if you fail sleep, exhaustion finally sickens you, and this sickness prevents sleeping; it is expressed by insomnia . . . In the night one cannot sleep (Blanchot, 1989: 267)

If God is a door that produces the world, and allows us to inhabit and belong in space, doorlessness is the apparently Godforsaken condition of being unheld. It involves the endlessness and pointlessness that makes the stories of Parzival and the Flying

Dutchman so terrifying. In the German story of Parzival, the young hero finds himself at Wild Mountain where the Holy Grail is kept. Intent on making a good impression and becoming a proper knight, Parzival achieves neither goal, failing his calling as a Christian knight when he fails to ask the tormented Fisher King the cause of his agony. Subsequently unable to forgive himself, yet also angrily quitting the service of the God who allows such suffering, Parzival tries to find his way back to Wild Mountain, to make amends. He wanders the abandoned waste lands for years, but no path is to be found: "The sun rose, the sun set, but there was no counting of the days. The world seemed a cold and endless wilderness. A man might ride forever and never come out into the sunlight or into sight of a great castle that refused to show its face" (Paterson, 1998: 96).

Like the Flying Dutchman, who vowed to sail forever rather than submit to the sea's power, and whom the Devil kept to his word, Parzival exists in a self-imposed exile, a hell without arrivals and departures, without beginnings or endings, without the passionate urgency of mortality, without home or away or the belonging of lively relation. Parzival and the Dutchman are not in-between anything, and are therefore limitless, unable to hold any meaning, neither empty nor full, neither held nor holding. They subsist in a ghostly undead and unalive condition, unable to be still but also unable to go anywhere. Ghosts are not free spirits just because they can walk through doors and walls and crypts; their misery is that they can't *not* walk through every obstacle. Accordingly, they're not like the in-between spirits discussed so far in this book. Because they lack limits, you cannot truly meet a ghost, but only become one. If you listen at night you can hear their inarticulate placeless endless background wailing, but not from a safe position, and not unless your voice too returns as a wail.

This lifeless undeath can swamp people at any time. It often happens, for example, in the middle of redrafting a piece of writing, when the words won't hold and, no centre or end or source of agency being imaginable, the middleness drops from experience. But the most common form of this condition might be insomnia: "To sleep badly is precisely to be unable to find one's position. The bad sleeper tosses and turns in search of that genuine place which he knows is unique. He knows that only in that spot will the world give up its errant immensity" (Blanchot, 1989: 265). Involving a self ineffectually seeking a grip in a careless and distant "real world," the pathology of insomnia indicates how "life" would be if we fulfilled Piaget's model of adulthood, if interbeing and prepositional connection became unimaginable and if closed doors lost their limit because they lost their implied outside. Strangely, this independent life becomes existence without distinction from which no self can separate.

When suffering insomnia I cannot find comfort or purchase or a door to close off the experience. *oh no now I'm in trouble not this again try on the side no good roll over don't panic stay calm stay calm breathe at least there's no cramp tonight try your*

*hand under the pillow it's so quiet there must be a sound somewhere it might be better on my back and when I get to sleep the children will wake me to take them to the toilet **breathe** you forgot to breathe I wish the clock wasn't so loud oh no what **is** the time? this is a disaster I've got classes tomorrow no don't think about the time it'll only make it worse how can she sleep? she's stealing the sheet it's so hot kick the sheet off maybe I need a drink I should get up that's what I should do but I'm too tired and I really need to sleep maybe the pillow will be cooler if I turn it over I can't get up I'm too tired I need to sleep now* The more I will myself to sleep, the less I can find it, and while I know this and know I should break the cycle, I lack the sense of "I" to get up. My muscles won't move to my will.

I can't sleep and can't wake. My mind churns monotonously, images and phrases coming and going with relentless menace. These aren't my ideas, just ideas I'm condemned to think forever. I cannot stop them repeating self-importantly, like the cheaply-made advertisements on stale rotation on midnight television. It isn't that I have insomnia, it's that everything is insomniac. Insomnia menaces me with an endless existence without witnesses, relations or vitality, and I cannot escape because, without doors, I'm moved by neither self nor grace. Incapable of leaving insomnia, I can only be inexplicably delivered from it, when some thing reveals a door that breaks the spell.

For all the fear it evokes, however, insomnia is impassive. It waits, never preying or attacking. But knowing that it waits, the restless sleeper tries to flee, tries to close off from it, to save the self from dissolving in it. And this attempt to turn away from insomnia delivers the would-be sleeper to it. Insomnia is self-inflicted, a malady of pride, of a self too faithless and fearful to fall. Its doorlessness is produced by the self's very attempt to stay in control behind doors that simply close off dangers.

The way to separate from insomnia is to let go of the attempt to deny it, even if this appalls our instincts of self-preservation. Victims who toss and turn, looking for an escape, are turning in the wrong direction and prolonging the suffering. They should turn *toward* the waiting insomnia, incline to it, attend to it, just as car drivers must steer *into* skids, must leave the skid by first coming to terms with it. Because if a single relation is formed in the midst of insomnia, a door has miraculously appeared, an in-betweenness has been formed to hold us, and the ghostly spell is broken. This door will found and bless the world, turning the ghosts into spirits who can be met, with whom we can have a relation. Its complexity will hold and heal the space laid waste by the fantasy of pure distance.

Because there can be no doors without implied doorlessness, it is a possibility that always accompanies us. Nevertheless, doorlessness loses its horrible ability to possess us when we realise that it remains connected to doors. Rather than an independent

condition, door-lessness is a prepositional possibility formed at the moment the door originally made the world. There can be no doorlessness without implied doors. Once the insomniac *relates* to doorlessness, then they stumble on the door still implied in and leading out of the condition; they find the God still implied, as an absence, in Godforsakenness. They learn that it isn't possible to be abandoned by God, though we often turn our backs on God in the self-imposed exile of sulking. They learn, too, that while we cannot save ourselves, the miracle of grace is always at hand when we ask for it.

Within the Inner Sanctum

For we are where we are not. (Jouve, cited in Bachelard, 1969: 211)

When we reach our innermost heart, we reach a realm where we are not only intimately at home with ourselves, but intimately united with others, all others. The heart is not a lonely place. It is the realm where solitude and togetherness coincide. (Steindl-Rast, 1984: 29)

While the insomniac struggles for control, desperate for doors but terrified of their implications, trusting children fall gratefully from selfhood into the arms of sleep. Unlike Parzival, these children have a strong sense of belonging at home, reinforced by frequent spiritual experiences of truth and authenticity. But if there is no distinct and closed-off self contained within us, what is manifest during these spiritual experiences? What do we find in our intimate spaces, our hearts and homes and bedrooms, that is hidden from the outside? What is our secret?

When asked where they felt most at home in their childhoods, students in my tutorials nominate beds, treehouses, cupboards under stairs. One student explained that in the safety of her cupboard, with the door closed, she was never just herself, but could be anywhere and anyone she liked: a princess, an Indian, an astronaut. She was most at home in the non-place and non-time that allowed her to play with whatever mysterious reserves were at hand, without needing to reach a conclusion or give an account. In this inner of the inner of the inner there's a vital nothingness that's also the fullness of mystery.

"[T]he inner space of an old wardrobe is deep," says Bachelard (1969: 78), but only when its door is closed. This door safely holds the emptiness, making it full, allowing the wardrobe and child to hold each other, each enfolded in the other like parent and child, producing through their relation a benign environment that is inside *and* outside the child and the wardrobe. The safety of the wardrobe implies a safe world beyond it; the very solidity of the inner sanctum's boundaries allows them to dissolve like the wardrobe walls in *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe*, which unaccountably

disappeared to give entry to the magical country of Narnia (Lewis, 1950), and like the walls of the locked bedroom to which Max was sent in *Where the Wild Things Are*, which changed into the world all around and opened onto an ocean across which Max sailed for almost over a year to reach the place where the wild things are. (Sendak, 1975).

Safe at home, in reverie, we play games and roles like "astronaut." More than this, though, we play the world, as someone playing a piano brings it to life by testing its infinite resources, as someone plays the world through ritual performance, as someone playing with the hinges of a door explores the implications of inside and outside. In play, in a condition of inspiration and bliss, we're in the world and the world is in us. Our home is the place of dreaming, in which our faculties are scattered here *and* there. The being at home is at home *and* away, dispersed *and* contained, all over the place *and* grounded. We don't express ourselves as much as recognise ourselves in the doublings of imagination.

An example is offered by my five year old son's "reading position," which is his favourite place in the world, his home at home. This position involves being snuggled in a parent's lap, enfolded within the open book, held in the room, protected in the house. But in the core of this Babushka doll there's nothing. The intense stability of reading position is a form of travel, and my son has disappeared. Look at his fingers, on the page, *in* the page. There's a glazed and rapturous look in his eyes as he follows the thread of the story like a tightrope walker. Reading transports him to other lands and times, to the no-where and no-time of once upon a time. When you open the book you enter a door, but to read the book well you must leave it.

On the one hand, my son actively plays the roles, feels the pain, is the hero of our stories, perhaps darting to the toy box to grab the necessary props. On the other hand, reading is an experience of intoxication and passivity, of allowing one's self to be swept away. Likewise, as anyone familiar with this reading position knows, it's not easy to say who is reading to whom, or who is reading through whose eyes, or who is breathing for whom. Parent and child are absorbed into each other and into the book, but on the serious playful condition that they won't be required to identify the boundaries. Reading position is a deliciously monstrous form, even though it is also my son's most centred and concentrated form. "When I read I am one thousand men, and I am never more myself than when I do" (C.S. Lewis, cited in Tredinnick, 1997: 48).

As *Where the Wild Things Are* illustrates, the monstrous forms involved in children's reading are often the subject matter of the books. The stories themselves could be the monsters that carry away and apparently consume the identity of the child. These monsters are desperately desired at the same time they are feared; they are feared but

are also as safe (and yet as dangerous) as the encompassing parent reading the story. The strange monster that threatens to consume the child is in fact utterly familiar, not only because the child knows it's coming and recognises in it other giants and witches, not only because it's uncannily like the child's parents and stories, but because it's also uncannily like the child itself, with its desires to eat the world and the stories and parents it loves and hates. Because outsides and insides imply each other, the surprise of wild things waiting outside your door is always expected.

Monsters are there with a message just for you, they are your muse, your fate, your way, the stranger you are to yourself (see Serres, 1995: 115ff). In this annunciatory encounter, are you inside or outside or in the middle of the door? Are you coming or going? Who is monster to whom? This reversibility is the door's particular blessing. The story told in a safe environment is an in-between space that allows us to relate to monsters without necessarily or finally being devoured by them. Perhaps more important, it allows them to be meaningful, to be *our* monsters. This is not to invoke the familiar psychoanalytic reduction that the monsters *are* truly us, our secret, that the apparently outward journey of Sendak's Max was *really* an inner one. It is to insist that the inner and outer imply one another, and that the monsters and us, and the world between belong together. With the nothingness of the door between us, we are neither distant nor identical, but in relation, holding each other.

This point is beautifully illustrated by a blank page in the picture book *Goodnight Moon*, by Margaret Wise Brown and Clement Hurd (1947). This book features an infant in a closed bedroom, itemising the (transitional) objects in its environment as it says goodnight to each in turn, presumably seeking to assure itself of the world's continuing existence and presence during the chasm of sleep. "Goodnight room/ Goodnight moon," and so on, through clocks and socks, kittens and mittens, and brushes and bowls. Towards the end of the book, a hauntingly "blank" page unexpectedly appears, with the strange text "Goodnight nobody." The book ends "Goodnight stars/ Goodnight air"--the pictures on these pages are interchangeable--"Goodnight noises everywhere." The old lady who was sitting with the infant at the beginning of the book has left by the final page which is dominated by the moon visible through the window.

Whereas the loveless insomniac feels the moon has turned its back, the infant in this story can feel the presence in the nothingness, the body or spirit in the nobody. This air of tenderness holds and comforts her in the face of the unthinkable anxiety of abandonment or suffocation. Because of the door, with its mystery of implied sides, this air can fill the bedroom and also escape from there to produce a cosmos that holds the room as the room holds the infant, making the cosmos a loving bedroom, the moon a loving parent. The moon and infant are not one, any more than the mother and child are. But they hold each other, regard each other, and belong to each other. It

is *her* moon, she is *its* friend and she looks at it with the love that she knows it feels looking at her.

This belonging and reversibility and interbeing is the "nobody"--the love, the matrix, the nothingness-- that holds us in a concerned cosmos. We live in this cosmos through substantial illusions: sometimes we see air and sometimes stars, sometimes foreground and sometimes background, sometimes emptiness and sometimes fullness. *Nobody* and *nothing* are the infinitely tender horizon that hold and bring to life every *thing*; they are angels or the Holy Spirit, they are God. And because they allow me to know where I belong, St. Augustine can say that God is closer to me than I am to myself. Following the logic of *Tao Te Ching* 6, we might also say this of the mother. As the child's first door, located inside *and* outside the child, between him and the world, and between pieces of him, the mother allows the child into the world and the world into the child, producing both world and child through producing a sense of both connection and separation (see Winnicott, 1991).

The doors of our innermost recesses, therefore, do not necessarily shut out the world, or turn us inward. Because of the door's undecided nature, we turn in *and* out. The maternal home is world-making rather than reality-denying because at home, held, we can safely allow ourselves to relate to possibilities we elsewhere refuse to recognise. We welcome the monster and the moon and learn from them how we belong to a larger and more benevolent world than our self recognises. Accordingly, Bachelard (1969: 6-7) claims that the chief benefit of the house is the shelter it gives to day-dreaming:

[T]he house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind . . . Without it, man would be a dispersed being . . . It is the human being's first world. Before he is "cast into the world," as claimed by certain hasty metaphysics, man is laid in the cradle of the house. And always, in our daydreams, the house is a large cradle.

The sense of integration that comes from holding differs from the clear and distinct self of primal oneness. If the cradle of the house is the integrated person's bedrock, people are strangely held together with sinews of nothingness, with threads of reverie, play, sleep, and dream. The forces that integrate and accommodate us are precisely the experiences that *we* don't have, that we don't *have*, that aren't located; these are the bindings of religion. The "real world," beyond the house and cradle is accommodated within our home; the living concerned cosmos is created and found through bedtime reverie. When its implications are given play, the door shifts attention from the distinctly located self to the endless possibilities, the nothingness, the mysterious darkness of the self's preposition.

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