RESEARCH ARTICLE

Ghosting Politics: Speechwriters, Speechmakers and the (Re)crafting of Identity

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Abstract

Despite public awareness of their role, speechwriters occupy an anxiously liminal position within the political process. As the ongoing dispute between former Australian prime minister Paul Keating and Don Watson over the Redfern Speech suggests, the authorship and ownership of speeches can be a fraught proposition, no matter the professional codes. Crafting and re-crafting identity places speechwriter and speechmaker in a relation of intense intimacy, one in which neither party may be comfortable and from which both may well emerge changed. Having written speeches for Jack Layton, former leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, I know just how complex, uncertain and productive that relation can be. This article conceives of identity as transindividual, formed in the intensity and flux of encounter, and weaves together the personal and the critical to examine politics' speechwriting ghost.

Keywords

affect theory; political communication; speechwriting; political leadership; writing

If you asked me to pin it down, I couldn't tell you exactly when I stopped hearing Jack Layton inside my head. He had a particular voice, an avuncular insistence on enunciating each word. Sentences asserted themselves in chunks, phrases laid down distinctly, one after the next, yet so deliberate that sometimes one idea blended into the next, punctuated by the thrust of his chin. His voice was firm, mid-toned, optimistic. Earnest, even. Jack loved the applause line, saw it coming and built for it. Mostly, he got it right, but there were times when he forced it too hard, wanted the crowd to respond too much. Sometimes he could sound insincere because he so rarely spoke without intensity, because he fell in love with certain formulations, because he could repeat slogans without seeming bored. Even his casual conversations had an air of conscious performance, of being in the public eye. Except in the rarest of moments, his was a public voice, not that of a friend or an intimate companion, but of someone determined to be heard. Yet for me it was intimate, in the way only a voice that has taken up residence inside your skull can be intimate.

We hadn't met when Jack knocked on the door of the empty office in which I'd been deposited. It was September 2008 and speculation was rife that Prime Minister Stephen Harper would send Canadians to the polls at any moment. Most of the staff of the New Democratic Party of Canada had already decamped to the campaign headquarters a few blocks away in downtown Ottawa, so there was no one to introduce us and no audience to the moment. 'You'll be helping us on the campaign, brother,' he said, or words to that effect. Even in that empty corridor of the office just below the Hill, he had a presence, a performance to him. He was warm, smiled, gripped my hand firmly and held my eyes. Our exchange was brief and stilted, but not unpleasant. Only after, turning the encounter over in my mind, did it strike me how odd it was that he'd said nothing about what exactly I would be doing: writing words that he would speak.

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Paul Keating was Prime Minister of Australia and leader of the Australian Labor Party from Christmas 1991 until his defeat by the Liberal Party's John Howard in March 1996. Don Watson was his speechwriter. For years, they worked in intense proximity and produced some of the finest political oratory in Australia's brief Parliamentary history. These days, they have a fractious relationship that occasionally boils over into public acrimony. Keating never forgave the 2002 publication of Watson's memoir, *Recollections of a Bleeding Heart*.[1] Its granularity, its insistence on getting to the heart of things, rubbed Keating raw. It wasn't simply that Watson had pulled back the curtain, but that he'd led his readers to the writing desk.

Watson began working for Keating in January 1992, with the newly minted prime minister languishing in the polls amid widespread expectation of defeat to Liberal leader John Hewson early the next year. As Treasurer through the Hawke government of the 1980s, Keating had been the chief architect of Australia's economic liberalisation and the accompanying upheaval and deep recession. Brilliant and arrogant, a cutting parliamentary performer and unflinching visionary, Keating was a known quantity to most of the electorate, already seemingly weighed and measured and found wanting. Rather than arriving at writing through politics, Watson had done the reverse. Already an established writer, he'd dabbled in speechwriting at the state level, in Victoria, when he met with Keating and agreed to join his office. Part of what drew him to Keating was the Prime Minister's command of language: when he 'was on a roll with it he could remind you of what language can be and what it can do'.[2] Yet while this shared passion for words and their power fuelled their partnership, it also made possible the fire that ended it. According to Joel Deane, who wrote for various Labor leaders, a speechwriter's job 'is to hunt down their beliefs, convictions and ideas, then write a story that makes that person

sound like an amplified version of his or herself'.[3] It is to find the voice of the speechmaker and give it back to him or her in concentrated, intensified form. The first rule of speechwriting is that the words aren't yours; you don't speak them, you don't own them, you don't live with their unspooling into the world.

Who, then, is the author of the speech? Whose ideas, beliefs and language does the speech contain? And what of the story of its writing, of the cut and thrust of its drafting, of the craft that produced the event of its happening? There is a fraught ambiguity to all this.[4] 'Speechwriters write speeches but politicians own them,'[5] Watson writes in his memoir. Yet in an afterword to the tenth anniversary edition, he recalls not having 'a single image of Keating writing a speech. He delivered some *ad lib*, certainly, but the great majority were written for him.'[6] Yet words and the skill to wield them with precision and flair were at the heart of Keating's political identity. He 'lived in language, not as a pedant does, but in a visceral, intuitive way'.[7] This question of language and authorship is bound up with the significance of speechmaking, both for the politician and the nation. As James Curran argues, the speech of prime ministers sought to lead Australians 'to a new understanding of themselves and their place in the world' and 'give new meaning to the life of the nation'.[8] Is it any wonder this intersection of writing and ownership, of language and living, of nation and legacy and meaning, should so readily spark into conflagration?

Tensions between the two men are fiercest over the Redfern Speech, among the most influential prime ministerial orations in Australian history. Speaking with little fanfare to launch the Year for Indigenous Peoples on 10 December 1992, at Redfern Park in Sydney, a sitting prime minister for the first time took responsibility for the violent dispossession of Australia's Indigenous peoples and argued that it was up to non-Aboriginal Australia to take the first steps toward Reconciliation.[9] Keating did so in unflinching language:

> It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.[10]

In the grainy footage of that day in Redfern Park, voices from the restive crowd are audible as Keating begins to speak. Slowly, though, the noise drops away as the crowd focuses on the words themselves, on the historic gravity of the moment. Later, as the speech circulated and accumulated a totemic force, it transformed debate and coalesced an emergent desire for different relations between white and Indigenous Australians.

It was the Redfern Speech that made Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's 2008 apology to the Stolen Generations possible, and helped set the stage for debates over the nature of Australia's colonial history from the 1990s to the present day. Small wonder, then, that Watson writes about the speech as if it possessed its own agency. As if once it were written, it was the speech that spoke, that had an agenda to be enacted, and not merely the man who spoke it. Of Keating's role, Watson writes: 'He read it with his breakfast and went to Redfern Park with every word intact, and I think knowing better than I did what it would mean to say them.'[11] That ambiguity again: Watson granting Keating the authority of utterance and even ownership, but not quite of authorship. It was this kind of slippage that irked Keating, who wrote in a 2010 op-ed in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

> Watson cannot claim sentiments and guidance for speeches—that is, for their very authority—as his own … In the end, the vector force of the power and what to do with it could only come from me.[12]

Here was the rub, then: the locus of power and identity, and the notion that Watson might retrospectively usurp some part of it.

Literary scholar Tom Clark—himself a former speechwriter—points out that the question here was not really one of authorship and authority as such, but of word-smithing.[13] Who did the writing, who crafted the words themselves? It is a fine distinction, one that points to the heart of the mechanics of the speechwriting process, and to the hands and minds that did the work. Yet it too elides a more intractable question, one not of authorship but of selfhood. What stoked the intensity of the relationship between Watson and Keating? What kept the fire burning in the long years since? Something bundled up with identity, and visibility, and the sudden appearance of a ghost made flesh, a ghost from within the political machine? Isn't what matters here a problem of identity, of political performance, and of the strangeness of becoming in public through words mediated by the body of another? Was Keating simply confronted by the relationality of an identity he had felt to be singular and distinct?

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When I began writing his speeches, the Honourable Jack Layton had been leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP) for five years. He'd made his name in Toronto city politics and progressive activism: he was a conviction politician with a deep faith in the possibility of a fairer, more just Canada. He'd written books on homelessness and progressive policy.[14] As leader of the party, his mission had been to modernise its policies, operations and messaging without losing touch with its roots.[15] Avowedly socially democratic and the party of organised labour in Canada, the NDP has its origins in the agrarian socialist movements that arose in the prairies after World War II. With deep roots in both urban and rural communities, it has championed environmental protection and action on climate change and advocated for progressive policies on crime, poverty, inequality and Indigenous issues. While the party has often held government in provinces across the country, it had never come close to doing so at the federal level. Despite this, the NDP has had a remarkable impact on Canadian life and governance, having driven the introduction of Medicare and other significant social programs by working with the centrist Liberals and, more rarely, various incarnations of conservatism. Under Jack, support had grown steadily but not swiftly; people liked him, but were wary of the party's leftist economics and of Jack's own activist persona. At the 2008 election—the campaign for which I wrote—the party won 18 per cent of the vote and 37 seats, but could not escape the narrow frame of protest, conscience and idealism through which the electorate viewed it and Jack.[16] Then, at the 2011 election, seemingly out of nowhere and more than a year after I left, Jack and the NDP surged to become the Official Opposition for the first time in Canada's history. What became known as the Orange Wave changed the course of the party and, perhaps, of social democracy in Canada. Jack's persistence, his enduring fidelity to his values and to the Canadian people had won through. When cancer took him later that year, the way he'd come to touch the lives of countless Canadians was clear in the outpouring of grief across the country.[17] Jack's fierce optimism was affecting: people had come to believe in him, that he could be trusted to keep his promises. That what you heard was what you would get.

No politician likes to think their words are not their own, to find them rough-edged and unfamiliar in the passage through body, tongue, lips. No leader likes the notion that a writer

might be necessary for speech, that there might be a more affecting, moving self emergent only in words crafted by another.[18] Jack was no exception. If speech is felt to be the foundation of communication—a feeling too deeply embedded to be overturned by Derrida's deconstruction of its primacy over the text—then how can the political leader truly speak if their words come from elsewhere? How can the speechwriter not infringe somehow on the speechmaker? Sometimes Jack spoke the words I wrote, sometimes he didn't. To write his speeches was to write contingently; words that I never possessed, which took definitive form only when uttered by another.

Speechwriters are the open secret of politics. It is common knowledge that another hand has picked up the pen in the context of the political campaign, or the policy announcement, or the formal statement. Our existence is not a matter of luxury or pretence, so much as necessity. As Kathleen Hall Jamieson notes: 'The dilemma for public figures who wish to speak their own thoughts in their own words is that they feel compelled to give more speeches than they can conceive and capture in language.'[19] There are those rare speechwriters who become famous in their own right, especially in America, but most of us only emerge publicly in the words another speaks. How those words are crafted, the dynamics of a speech's to and fro, the origin of specific words and turns of phrase, remains largely veiled. Yet for all the ghostliness of the speechwriter, the emergence and institutionalisation of political communications professionals is inescapable: press secretaries, communications directors, media monitors, strategists, spokespeople, spin doctors and, of course, speechwriters, have proliferated across the political world.[20] This professionalisation has not always been good for political language, even if it is a necessary response to the increasing complexity of the media landscape and accompanying centrality of promoting policies and arguments to publics. Daily talking points, reluctantly mouthed by politicians under the twin demands of message discipline and a system that rewards 'performance' and punishes the 'gaffe', deliberately dampen individuality and flatten meaning into finely spun bromides.[21] This centrality to contemporary politics has led communications staffers to be blamed for making politics less authentic and contributing to the increasing apathy with which the general public treats politics.[22] Yet despite this, the speechwriter possesses a certain romance—or so it seemed to me when I took on the job. Graham Freudenberg, crafting words for Gough Whitlam, Ted Sorensen for Jack Kennedy, Peggy Noonan for Ronald Reagan and, of course, Don Watson for Paul Keating. That there might be something morally dubious, something illegitimate or deceptive about the very existence of the figure of the speechwriter, I had not yet understood.[23]

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Much of the work of political leaders is affective: Barack Obama's embodiment of hope and change, or Donald Trump's enactment of grievance and disruption. In the passage on recognition in the Redfern Speech, Keating's move is much more than merely rhetorical; his language produces an intensity that is outside the words themselves because it opens onto the possibility of reimagined relations between Indigenous and white Australia in the belief that doing so might reshape a nation. Keating naming a 'we' who committed violence was not simply a linguistic manoeuvre; it set in motion affective flows, attunements and empowerments.

Jack understood the affectivity of politics and the politics in affectivity. Optimism that in the early years seemed naive to many Canadians was, by the time of the 2011 campaign and the surge of support in Quebec, felt to be sincere and honest. As his friend, communications advisor and campaign manager Brad Lavigne writes: 'Some people saw Jack as a bit schlocky,

but that was who he was: optimistic, loving and affectionate.'[24] In orchestrating events for television, Lavigne and the NDP team sought to capture Jack's interpersonal affectivity:

> Jack was warm and personable, so we always had him surrounded by people. Throngs of enthusiastic partisans also gave our campaign a sense of momentum. If the people at home could see themselves in the people with Jack, perhaps that's where they belonged as well.[25]

Thus the staging of political affinity was not solely rhetorical, but also visual. Crucial, though, was Jack's sheer affective capacity, his ability to be present and warm to so many strangers. It was perhaps no coincidence that he came to touch the lives of more people than ever before in the last year of his own, when cancer left him no time to give anything less than everything. In the days after his death, 'Regular Canadians had taken to the street by the thousands to mark Jack's passing … assembling at impromptu memorials across the country… People left cans of Orange Crush, and picked up chalk and wrote messages about Jack on the sidewalk.'[26] On his deathbed, Jack had written a letter to Canadians. He closed that letter with these words: 'My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we'll change the world.'[27] This recognition of the affectivity of politics, of the necessity of moving others, captures the resonance with which Jack pursued political change. It was how he had forged something of substance between himself and Canadians, even those who did not align with his particular brand of progressive politics.

In Spinoza's well-known formulation, affect refers to the power to affect and be affected.[28] To affect and be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it, moving and moved by that which one encounters. Affect is bodily in the sense that it is allied to both sensation (its sensed arrival in the body) and emotion (its recognised, organised and owned presence), but it is also intra-body: it is concerned with the potential of a body that is acting and acted upon.[29] Because it is so bound up with potential, affect is already working before cognitive reckoning kicks in and need not carry prior meaning.[30] This is not, however, to suggest that affect cannot work in specific ways or do specific things: affect might spark joy or disgust, it might involve turning away from particular objects or tending toward particular persons.[31] Understood in this way, 'affect is proto-political,' argues Brian Massumi. 'It concerns the first stirrings of the political, flush with the felt intensities of life.'[32] This does not mean that affect is somehow prior to all politics, but rather that to be affected by anything always opens onto political potential. Or to flip the script, all politics begins with affect—with an intensity that can enact a change in state, a movement across a threshold.

In a certain sense, then, affect is the very stuff of the political: it is what forges relations between parties and populations, between politicians and voters, in interpersonal moments and across mediated encounters. For Massumi, Ronald Reagan's capacity to connect was not emotive or empathic, not a process of identification but of affective alignment.[33] So too in Anna Gibbs's account of the right-wing Australian populist Pauline Hanson, who became 'a vector for the media's affective amplification, intensifying rage (and outrage), magnifying fear, and, not coincidentally, inciting hatred'.[34] Such affective modulations signal how affect is instrumentalised within the practice of political communication, across the continuum from the macro of strategic framing to the micro of interpersonal engagements. Affect can prime audiences to accept the exercise of power: stoking fear and anxiety in the politics of national security can aim to legitimate mass surveillance, torture, or the indefinite detention of refugees. This amplification and diminution of fear can occur through focused techniques such as colour-coded terror alert system, but also through political rhetoric and its performative

embodiment of fear.[35] Affecting the crowd has always been essential to political leadership, but today the galvanising of bodies is increasingly mediated. Affective politics takes root in affective publics, defined by Zizi Papacharissi as the 'networked public formations that are mobilised and connected or disconnected through expressions of sentiment.'[36] Yet no matter the means of mediation, what is at issue in the drive to political affiliation or action is affect.

Political leaders are the locus for this affective potential. They embody its possibility, for better or worse, with more or less intensity. The doing of politics is thus about working the transindividual rather than representing specific points of view or interests. Transindividual, a term borrowed from the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, describes affective relations that reside not in one body or another, in this subject or that, but between subjects.[37] This transindividuality is not a static thing, but rather what arises in processes of encounter. Politics operates on a spectrum between micro and macro; it occurs in minor gestures of community as well as national institutions.[38] In short, the field of politics is not at all reducible to the communicative rationality of Habermas's public sphere and political theories of its ilk, but is instead inextricable from the messy domain of relational potential from which action might emerge. Party politics often fails to recognise this overtly, that coalescing a public requires countless micro affections. Leaders, however, tend to know this instinctively, which is another way of saying that they know it bodily—in affect. As Watson writes of the Australian public and its prime ministers: 'We expect him [sic] to know what we, in all our myriad manifestations as citizens, are feeling—even when our feelings are at odds with what an equal number of our fellow citizens are feeling, or are inflamed beyond reason.'[39] Exhibiting this co-feeling, and working with it, modulating it, is made possible in the transindividual looping of affect, in its resonance between political performance and the body politic.

As the paradigmatic performance of politics, speechmaking is thus not only the performance of language, but also the production of affect and through it the forging of (potentially) enduring relations. Nowhere is this more evident than in the speech before a crowd, in which affect 'binds the crowd to a leader, uniting the mass of individual bodies into a force with its own purpose and direction'.[40] More than any other political event, the speech calls attention to its own politicality and to its desire to move an audience; Watson aptly calls it 'an embrace'.[41] Yet any embrace entails coming into contact with the body of another: an exposure. No political act is more intensely embodied for the leader—and yet into this moment slinks the speechwriter, an affective spectre of lingering illegitimacy. To speak politically is to engage in a determined, intensive form of identity formation, a becoming-through-speaking of the political self, realised transindividually. That is, realised in relation. Jack rarely let his performance slip. Jack Layton, Leader, was always entangled with whatever other Jacks there might have been—identity not as a set of masks but rather the coming into prominence of particular affective formations. Within the event of the speech, traced from conception to delivery, I became entangled too. When I heard Jack's voice as I wrote, when the rhythms of my fingers on keys were the flow of his words, I felt myself fray. To quote Massumi: 'Although affect fundamentally concerns relations in encounter, it is at the same time positively productive of the individualities in relation.'[42] Here I slide close to hubris, to the brink of claiming too much: namely, that I must have slipped into Jack. But I have no desire, nor any right, to speak on behalf of Jack. I don't know and can't know how he felt about the words I wrote, whether they were intimately alien or faltering mimicry. I don't know if I had folded into Jack, only that some part of him was folded into that part of me that wrote. Our exchange could not have been reciprocal: what I wrote wasn't me, but him—or almost, close as I could make it, as affected as could be. Our affective attunements were always at

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differentials, approaching the speech and its crafting from varied contexts, with differing powers and interests.

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For Elspeth Probyn, writing is not simply about linguistic relation or textual referentiality. 'Writing is interested;' she writes, 'it is deeply embedded in contexts, politics, and bodies.'[43] Speechwriting takes this one step further. It is not only embedded in but actively seeks to rework its contexts, politics and bodies. Its task is to produce change, to make the speechmaker more than they might otherwise have been. This purposive ambition twins with speechwriting's constitutive relationality to raise the stakes of its practice. Its stakes reach such heights in part because politics is performed in public and it has consequences that matter materially in people's lives. But it also matters at a constitutive level for the speechwriter. As Probyn writes: 'To care intensely about what you are writing places the body within the ambit of the shameful: sheer disappointment in the self amplifies to a painful level.'[44] Shame arises when the writing falls short of its subject, when it fails to be equal to the intensity of interest that prompted it. This is just one way in which 'writing takes its toll on the body that writes and the bodies that read or listen'.[45] Oratory adds the body of the speechmaker to this formulation and in doing so brings it to the fore: no body is more intensely invested in the delivery of the speech.

When writing *for* another, when *writing the other's public self*, this potential for a toll to be exacted is amplified. It is amplified in part by the knowledge that you, the speechwriter, are yourself shameful, a necessity that nonetheless speaks to a potential inauthenticity of the speechmaker. Our existence is common knowledge, yet despite the figure of the celebrity speechwriter, the pretence remains that we are not there—or, rather, that we are mere distillers and editors, conduits for the character of the leader. Glorified stenographers. This is as it should be, yet the speechwriter is all too corporeally present to the speechmaker. No matter how close the two are, how deeply trusting of one another, the relation between the two is always tinged with anxiety. Thus Keating, a man of staggering achievement, battles publicly with his speechwriter more than a decade later. Or the Kennedy family, after Dallas, seeks to diminish Theodor Sorensen with the intent of mythologising the dead president, of darkening any reflections that might tarnish the glory of his life. Or Kevin Rudd bristles at the very need for the speechwriter, consigning James Button to the outer reaches of his staff.[46] No speechmaker–speechwriter relations are the same, of course, and here is the truth of mine: in the best speeches I wrote, any sense of my having written them was absent. They were smooth surfaces, warmly lit, unmarked by anxiety. Jack, freed of his propensity to belabour the point, to lapse into phrases too well-worn, yet given back words that might have come from within.

Or so I like to believe.

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'Use a story,' Jack said, 'one of the ones from the summer tour.'

He'd been travelling Canada, talking to workers laid-off in the wake of the GFC, returning moved. Stories bring a speech to life. They transform abstract challenges and solutions into lived experience. Jack was obsessed with stories of the people he encountered, with the moments of their lives that had resonated with him and the policies of the NDP.

'What story?' I wanted to ask, but the words stuck.

How-to manuals on speechwriting are readily available for purchase on Amazon, but only a handful focus on politics. Most have as their audiences ambitious middle managers, nervous CEOs, athletes embarking on the speaking circuit, studious maids of honour tagged with

speaking at the wedding. Their advice isn't bad: tell jokes, keep statistics to a minimum, use metaphors to relate complex ideas, deploy the rhetorical rule of threes. Often, they reference story—the importance of the personal, the lived and real. Much of this is common sense or derived and simplified from more august texts, from the classics of rhetoric or the memoirs of great orators. *On Speaking Well* by Peggy Noonan, one of Reagan's speechwriters, is one of the few such books that has its roots in the practice of politics. 'The most moving thing in a speech is always the logic,' she writes, rather than sentimental or ornamental language.[47] Lifting a speech into the high rhetorical mode is all too easy; making it vibrant with the stuff of life, writing it in such a way that it captures the voice and the experience of the speechmaker is far harder. Academic textbooks on political communication offer few clues. They note the importance of message framing, of careful word choice, of prominent sound bites, and attempt to outline the features of various genres of the speech.[48] More challenging than all that, however, is the necessity of entering into the being of another, of making them appear in words. 'Finding that voice can be hard,' Noonan writes.[49] It requires listening, reading, and watching. Perhaps most of all, it requires time in the presence of the other.

Certain speechwriter–politician relations are intensely intimate, bound up with shared history or shared beginnings. Keating hired Watson in the first days of his prime ministership and would soon introduce him as his alter-ego; Ted Sorensen spent eleven years with Kennedy, the two men crisscrossing America together; Jon Favreau met Senator Barack Obama over breakfast during his first weeks in Washington and only left his employ after Obama was re-elected as president in 2012. In his memoir of working for Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, James Button explores the fragility of their relationship, its awkwardness, and his own failure to connect with Rudd on a human level:

> **I was too proud. Don't push, I thought. The work must speak for itself (…)But I should have pushed. Maybe I should have been hungrier, too, worked harder to imagine myself into his head.**[50]

In Button's account, there is an awareness of the stalling of affective binding, of how distant what Massumi and Manning call 'co-composition' was from the creative process he sought to spark with Rudd.[51] Button writes, too, of the challenges of writing from afar, of not being present to hear what was delivered or to be present for the conversation that shaped the Prime Minister's thinking in the moment.[52] Spatial separation is not simply a question of logistics or access, but of attunement to one another.

Whether due to logistics or the natural tendency of the speechwriter to ghostliness, I rarely travelled with Jack. I wrote from Ottawa while he hit the road, and his voice would come down the telephone. Sudbury, Brockville, Kelowna, Regina, Moncton. Towns on the map, abstract spaces to write into, a divide of experience between his speaking and my writing. More often, then, I saw Jack speak the words I wrote on a screen, or heard about them second hand, or read them in media clippings emailed to my inbox. 'Use a story,' he'd said, but to admit that I didn't know the stories he'd heard would reveal our distance, that I couldn't write back to him what he knew, who he'd encountered. Despite the geography between us, I had to believe I could write within the flow of Jack's becoming, his affectivity capacity to shape bodies, spaces, potentials. To write, in short, I had to retune my affective relations to the world.

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Democratic politics demands a cohesive identity from its political figures and, as a result, it rests on the ontological illusion that such a thing is possible. Everything must fit, or else the gaps and inconsistencies, the very uncertainties of knowing that constitute our relations to

self and other, threaten to fracture the whole (unless, perhaps, that whole is Donald Trump, fractured and chaotic, deliberating refusing the consistency and cohesion conventionally demanded of political actors). As politics is increasingly mediatised, the projection of political identity into the world calls for more and more smoothness. Such smoothness might well reach a point of self-caricature in the over-rehearsed telegenics of Marco Rubio, failed contender for the 2016 Republican candidacy, yet his flaw might well have been that he never mastered the trick of performing smoothness without seeming to. Changing one's mind, or shifting one's stance, or exposing a distinct private self—these are cracks to be made invisible or sealed over. Nothing is worse than to be labelled a flip-flopper, since this charge speaks to an inconstancy at odds with possessing a definitive identity. Papering over such perceived flaws is part of the speechwriter's job, but that very artifice calls attention to our close relation to the performance of self that politics demands. Change requires a narrative, a passage in which the public participates. President Obama's slow conversion to support for same-sex marriage successfully flowed with the tide of public, while Prime Minister Julia Gillard's too-quick switch to legislating a carbon tax marked a betrayal. Telling such stories of change is, at least in part, the work of the speechwriter, this interloper, this trespasser upon the territory of the self.

Maintaining a stable identity is always the work of fiction. This is because, as Erin Manning puts it: 'Identity is less a form than the pinnacle of a relational field tuning to a certain constellation.'[53] Thus identity coalesces not solely in the performance of a politician but in enactment, reception, context, history, deviation and mediation. Identities are not self-contained, but always co-composed—they manifest in the patterns of relation that are the communicative stuff of sociality. This fluidity of identity is unremarkable, readily recognisable in the shifts, whether minor or major, that one enacts in differing contexts: our identities are different at work, at home, in the social basketball league that plays on Wednesday nights. These identities are not, of course, discrete, unrelated roles but rather differently manifested relations to the fields through which we move. Variations on a theme, the intensification of certain pulsings and the diminution of others. Yet as intimately known as all this is, it is also complex. Identity is contingent, composed of frictions and harmonies of between-ness. Identity arises in affective relation, not in any given subject. What occurs between one body and another in their encounter is always part of their individual becomings. As I have argued, speechwriting necessarily embraces this transindividuality in its technics of practice. It has no choice. It is always a co-composition—the question is only of how powerfully rooted in relation that co-composition is.

Jack's voice in my head, tempo of my fingers on the keys marked by the pacing of his speech, the discretely expelled words. Like writing a fictive character yet within an intensive field of bodily relation, of socio-political context. I doubt Jack felt this anywhere near as intensely: his exposure was public facing. To have the capacity to affect is to possess power—not power *over*, but power *to*. Power to move, to persuade, to bring into affective attunement with one's self. To affect others intensely is to be receptive to being affected: this is the co-compositional corollary to Spinoza's affected and affecting body. To affect opens onto being affected: 'It represents the vulnerability of the individual to larger societal forces.'[54] This is the price of political leadership. Not simply the distanced notion of damage to reputation, or a loss of privacy, but rather a radical exposure to the collective and individual affects of a wider public. In the US election of 2016, Donald Trump grasped this transindividuality of political identity far more than Hillary Clinton. His obsession with the theatricality of his rallies, with the sheer size and number of them, signalled a deep appreciation of the necessity of bodily presence in the practice of politics. Trump rarely speaks with the polished phrases that mark

the presence of the speechwriter. So infrequently did he employ a script—and so readily deviated from it when he did—that his political performances during the campaign seemed largely *sui generis*, lacking in the polished veneer of the professional contemporary politician. Indeed, this very lack of polish exposed the constructedness of his opponent, and in doing so gave an unexpected authenticity to a man with a long and public history as a charlatan.

For the leader whose words are at times written by another, exposure entails a rather different affective dynamic. While the leader opens outwards, seeks both an affective force of their own and to become the vessel for the hopes and desires of others, they must watch their back: what might the words of the speechwriter do, how might the illusion that is their identity be compromised. To quote Massumi, 'bodies in encounter are both completely absorbed in the felt transition, but they are differently absorbed, coming at it asymmetrically, from different angles, living a different complexion of affecting-being affected, transitioning through the encounter to different outcomes, perhaps structured into different roles'.[55] Speechwriting and speechmaking operate on the pretence that a distinct and cohesive being might emerge from a body that is always more than one. That a stable identity might be crafted from relational, transindividual becomings, generated within a field of differentially attuned affects. To write speeches is thus to resist the very dynamic in the midst of which they are composed, and to reinscribe a mythology of identity that the presence of the scribe renders for what it is.

When I wrote for Jack, this differential attunement produced a kind of sustained low-level anxiety: I wanted to fall further and further in sync with his world, yet felt that synchronicity to always remain just beyond reach. When Watson wrote his memoir, what wounded Keating was not that he had offered an account, but that the speechwriter had refused his ghostliness. Even years later, after Keating's sentiments were widely known and their relationship stressed to breaking, Watson writes:

> I cannot alter the fact that one dark night I wrote it. That was not to put words in his mouth, but to put them on a page: for him to use as he saw fit, as he would another form of advice. In a political office a speech is advice formally composed. An offering.[56]

This notion of the speech as an offering has a poetic quality, yet it does not quite capture the intense dynamics of the practice of politics, the way time compresses and demands proliferate. Nor is a speech quite so simple a thing as another piece of advice, another memorandum to inform a decision or analyse an event, policy or problem. The mediation of the page can only do so much to lessen the sheer fact of words to be spoken by another, someone for whom so much rides on identity. Keating had no desire to make public the to-and-fro of its uncalled for contingency. I suspect that Jack would have felt unmoored by similar revelations, although his temperament was different and our work less intense, less prolonged, less enduring. But the dynamic of speechwriting and speechmaking is precisely about resonance: relations between writer and leader can never be extricated from their contingency, their continual (re)crafting of words that seek to shape from the affective field of politics some identity that might, even briefly, escape its own fluidity.

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Notes

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