Author's note on the hermeneutic text

In 1996, I took part in a course at the University of Toronto's Faculty of Education (OISE) that explored the use of hermeneutic texts as a means of *recreating* rather than simply *describing* an experience for an audience. Working with an early essay-length version of this text, I wondered whether it might be possible to establish the same co-operative relationship with the voice within my unconscious using a computer that I had established through photography.

After incorporating a dozen arbitrarily placed hard returns (line breaks) into the document∗, the text was reduced to a sequence of words and phrases whose sequence had been thoroughly – but not consciously – reconfigured. The resulting text retained a surprising degree of consistency, not only with my style of language (as recognised by the other participants in the course), but even more astonishingly, with both the tone and meaning of the original essay.

I do not pretend to understand what force(s) lie behind or animate this phenomenon (in which a text can be effectively stripped of order and sequence, yet still retain both sense and style), but the coherence and intelligibility of the resulting text has only served to reinforce my conviction that, by giving up our conscious, rational control over the means of expression, we can put a pen in the hand of the Life Force within us and create the conditions necessary for a dialogue with the *deus ex machina*.

Through its often (but not always) subtle interventions in my efforts to explore and describe the world around and within me, I have regularly found unexpected gifts of guidance and affection from my unconscious companion – if only I am willing to look.

∗ Using the REPLACE function of WordPerfect 5.1, I gave the command to replace 'e·' with 'e[HRt]' which inserted a hard return immediately after all words ending in 'e'. This broke the original text into several hundred short lines, each of which began with the word immediately following those ending in 'e'. I then gave the command to SORT these lines alphabetically and then deleted all the new hard returns, turning the entire text into a single paragraph. I then repeated the process with 's·' (words ending with s), '·t' (words beginning with t), ',·' (words following a comma), ')·' (words following the close of parentheses) and so on through a dozen arbitrarily chosen criteria. Except for the deletion of dozens of now-orphaned prepositions and punctuation marks, the insertion of a small number of new hard returns and the spit-and-cuff-polishing of a few verb tenses, I have not otherwise altered the content of the resulting text.

Hermeneutic text

A picture at which I had pointed
my camera
'the something' between the face of some image I had seen
and some part of me

Always phrases and desires
but in my failure, somewhere secrets
communicating: losing their thoughts
looking carefully at the Idea
and certain opinions I have chosen

Self-portraits describe my thoughts
and emotional choices catch my detail
they express and describe this Passion Play

Fact and fiction, favourite filters, difficult impressions
expose and acknowledge – for I have photographs

Forever fragments
form and native outlines
the goings-on behind beliefs
and hiding from somewhere

A thorough search of my Self
hint at or explain their surface
Have you ever owned a camera?
Parlez-vous Photographie?

I have a box of photographs
and in them I recognise the stories
the tales told in shadow

If language illuminate the me
I – from the unconscious
reveals the contents and implies the elusive
the one that failed

Impressions, pause and move
In the conscious decisions, contents
In conversation with my photographs
In action my photographs reveal
the real moment of confrontation

In the viewfinder (I hope) my Itself
In most cases, in time and chance
In a dark room, in occasionally prompted places
In my attention, I discover them
my way of looking

And include some thing
Insights there: more than any other
throw them out and risk instead
the closed doors

Even with friends, intuitive response, dreaming mind
my interpretation of the irrational something
Once I was
like anyone who has merits mind

Like scenes from a fleeting learned world around me
Me and my own Moral Code

No mere accidents
my aesthetics of conscious begun from some Medium
Intuitive visual events occasionally yield up language
and glimpse unconscious elements

my decision: my photograph drifted unexpectedly
Here, photograph this
Photography can not

Places, poets, private me
rational mind, conscious mind
re-examine what I believe

Record and describe
Record resonance, a spontaneous relationship
Reveal anyone

Sifting secrets
describe scenes and metaphors I sense before me
Some pale reflection of what had caught my attention
and show where I keep the secrets

These are my ghosts – sometimes arising, scenes and subjects
In the meaning of me the fault lay
in the language of the picture
in the medium of 'before put into words'
and the shadow cast across the gesture

Indeed, the picture depended on
the whole truth and often more
this real subject of my landscape, a description, a truth
my photographs: a record of my fears

Uniquely valuable clues
to understand the reasons for
Visual metaphors
up from the developer