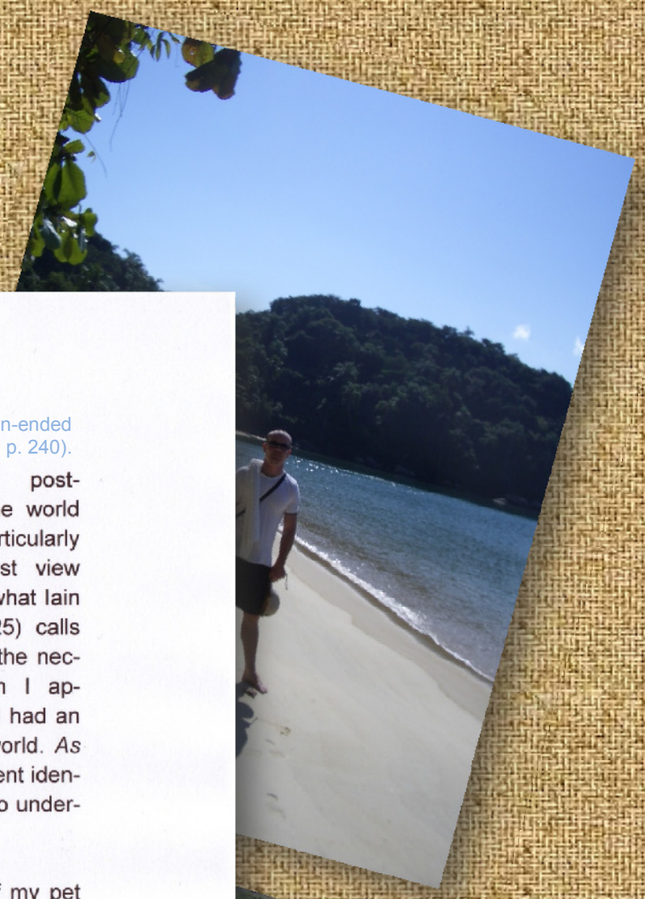
Re-describing …



'A book neither begins nor ends: at most it pretends to' (Derrida, *Living On*, 1979, p. 97).

"Where does the mouth end and the bum begin? Or is the mouth simply the beginning of the bum? Or is the bum simply the end of the mouth?"

'At the beginning of a creative task we face the dramatically open-ended question, *what am I capable of?*' (Brophy, *Creativity*, 1998, p. 240).

No text starts with the first word. Texts start elsewhere—they inherit, they borrow, they are infiltrated. By extension, no text finishes with the last word, however final. Intertextuality, palimpsest, bricolage, messiness, pastiche, collage, and so on, are not so much authorial choices as textual inevitabilities. So where to *begin* the un-beginable and *end* the un-endable is a difficult question.

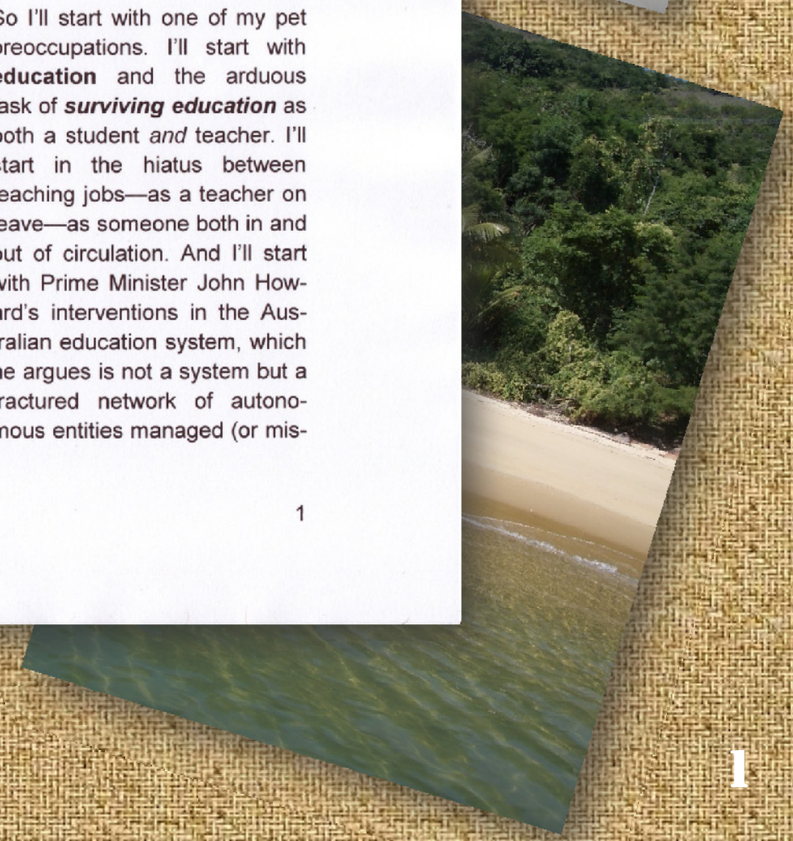
There is no suitable place to start this text or this project. It has no beginning and it has no end. **Meditations** typically concentrate on specific *objects* or *subjects* of contemplation. They home in on—rather than pull away from—whatever they wish to know, learn, uncover, or understand. *Not so this text. Not so this mind.* It can't focus. It can't concentrate. It can't even decide what its object might be. Why should a meditation (if that's what this is) focus on something? Why not focus on everything? On the endless stream of preoccupations that pass through the mind?

At the moment it's on Sarah (15.7.07). The word Sarah. The person Sarah. And the woman Sarah. But the *word* Sarah and the *person* Sarah are not the same thing. Sarah is not a name—a word—even if I know her as such. Sarah is something *other than* her name. She is un-nameable and unknowable. The *word* Sarah and the *person* Sarah are distinct things. The word Sarah *stands-in for* and *alludes to* (signifies) the non-Sarah (the signified). Sarah isn't a word. Sarah isn't an object. Sarah is beyond these things and yet I need these things to make any sense of her at all. It's a terrible conundrum. *I don't know how to know Sarah.* And Sarah doesn't want me to know her either, not really. Any attempt to know Sarah will be an imagining of Sarah, a surrogate Sarah, a projection of Sarah. I can't, in fact, know Sarah, no matter how thorough and far-reaching my meditation. So I won't try. I won't pretend to know the unknowable. I will instead construct an *until-further-notice* understanding of the world and my relationship to it (as Zygmunt Bauman might say). I will invent the world as I go along: including Sarah and my love of Sarah (whatever that means). Hardly romantic, I know, but inevitable, yes. And so I may as well start *anywhere* as somewhere. But where?

I'll start everywhere. I'll start with my *imagined* Australian context and my *imagined* historical moment: the moment—the *zeitgeist*: the *time spirit*—when **postmodernism** clashes with **neo-liberalism**. When a particularly 'French' post-structuralist view of the world clashes with a particularly 'American' late-capitalist view of the world. I'll adopt what Iain Chambers (1995, p. 25) calls the *subjunctive mode*: the necessary ruse by which I approach the world *as if* I had an understanding of the world. *As if* I had a full and coherent identity. I'll simply *pretend* to understand Chaos.

So I'll start with one of my pet preoccupations. I'll start with **education** and the arduous task of ***surviving education*** as both a student *and* teacher. I'll start in the hiatus between teaching jobs—as a teacher on leave—as someone both in and out of circulation. And I'll start with Prime Minister John Howard's interventions in the Australian education system, which he argues is not a system but a fractured network of autonomous entities managed (or mis-

'When a text quotes and requotes, with or without quotation marks, when it is written on the brink, you start, or indeed have already started, to lose your footing. You lose sight of any line of demarcation between a text and what is outside it' (Derrida, Living On: Border Lines, *Deconstruction & Criticism*, 1979, pp. 81-82).

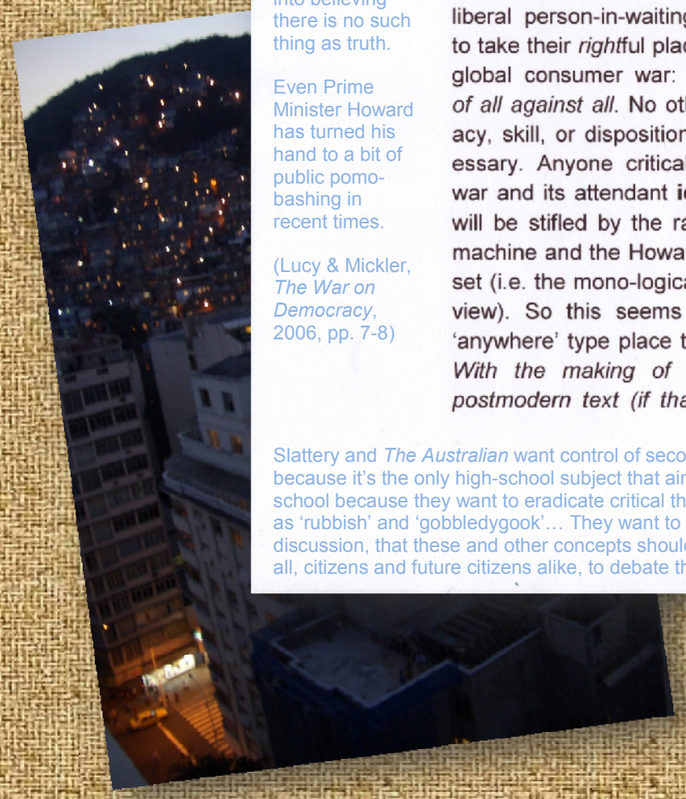


the ~~exegesis~~

I

Re-describing …

Scallywag Learning Tours: *Rio de Janeiro*



the 'book'

The measure of the shift lies precisely in the credibility that is given to the conservative accusation that Western liberals are responsible for global terrorism. This is unconscionable enough already, but it becomes even more repugnant when you realise that what it really means is that dedicated, hard-working Australian academics and high-school teachers, who are decent, law-abiding citizens and honest taxpayers, stand accused of justifying, if not inciting, violent acts of terror against fellow Australians and other citizens of the world. (Lucy & Mickler, *The War on Democracy*, 2006, p. 43)

John Howard: 'We will decide who comes to this country and the circumstances in which they come.'

For Luke Slattery … the teaching of secondary-school English in Australia is administered not by hard-working, underpaid, law-abiding English teachers, but by what he calls 'postmodern' radicals who are trying to indoctrinate the nation's children into believing there is no such thing as truth.

Even Prime Minister Howard has turned his hand to a bit of public pomo-bashing in recent times.

(Lucy & Mickler, *The War on Democracy*, 2006, pp. 7-8)

managed) by leftwing lunatics. No doubt I am one of these lunatics – as this text and this prose should make abundantly clear. More specifically, I'll start with the Prime Minister's attacks on 'postmodernism' and the teachers who teach it. I'll start with the 'gobbledegook' he accuses of undermining the twentieth century Australian educational 'doxa' (as Roland Barthes might say): *the three Rs*. According to Howard, these three skills are all the neo-liberal person-in-waiting needs to take their *right*ful place in the global consumer war: *the war of all against all*. No other literacy, skill, or disposition is necessary. Anyone critical of this war and its attendant **ideology** will be stifled by the rationalist machine and the Howard mind-set (i.e. the mono-logical world-view). So this seems like an 'anywhere' type place to begin: *With the making of a 'truly' postmodern text (if that's possible) in an otherwise anti-postmodernist climate*. I will therefore start by ***raging against the neo-liberal machine***. By *hyper-textualising*. By writing in such a way as to *confuse*, *defuse*, and *refuse* the mono-logical worldview.

And why not?

So let's begin with the absurdity of imposing a 1950s sentimentality—a *nostalgia*—on a twenty-first century market-obsessed, neo-liberal, post-modern world. Let's begin with the Absurdist King himself: with John Howard as Prime Minister and Arch-Racist of Australia (current 2007) and his crusade to purge left-wing thinking from bureaucratic life while naturalising fear and exclusivity as core Australian values in a post-September 11, neo-conservative, fear-producing world. Let's begin with the *culture wars*.

I will also start by introducing some of the main 'characters' of this text, including: (1) the text itself; (2) me and my multiple selves; (3) learning, knowing, and researching; (4) pedagogy and education; (5) art, aestheticism, and the non-verbal; (6) the reader and viewer; (7) vagabondage and tourism; (8) the historical moment (*zeitgeist*); (9) postmodern theories and practices; (10) neo-liberalism (Harvey, 2007); (11) representation and simulation in a *book-cum-computer* age; and (12) ***The Postmodern Pedagondage*** as a potential site for this multifarious exploration.

As such, this text is a multi-directional, multi-layered, paratextual, heteroglossic, post-structural, pluralistic, heterogeneous, postmodern, *fabulation*: a bricolage of texts exploring postmodern *possibilities* in an otherwise *back-to-basics* neo-liberal age. The age of numbers—of *numerology*—where numbers are the only 'sanctioned' measure of consumer ~~wellbeing~~. Where 'wellbeing' vanishes from political discourse because consumer confidence *is* wellbeing. Where happiness *is* money: *is* jobs, *is* credit, *is* shopping. Forget everything else, if you have a job, a mortgage, a credit card, a car, a television, and something to screw, your needs are met. And if these things don't quite tickle your fancy *then move to another planet*. You are a *flawed consumer* and a burden to the system (Bauman, 1997, p. 14). So 'get bent' as Bart Simpson would say and 'get off' the supermarket floor (previously known as The Blue Planet) and 'jump off' the billboard (previously known as Planet Earth). In other words, get DEAD or *get over it*.

The Howard government can win in parliament, but on its own it can't win the war on democracy in the public sphere. For conservatism to achieve more than just parliamentary power it needs professional help. Every war has its apologists, and chief among these at present are the weekly conservative media commentators … So far, they're winning. (Lucy & Mickler, *The War on Democracy*, 2006, p. 5)

Slattery and *The Australian* want control of secondary English, as do Federal Education Minister Julie Bishop and her predecessor, Brendan Nelson, because it's the only high-school subject that aims expressly to develop students' critical thinking. They want to 'de-politicise' the teaching of English in high school because they want to eradicate critical thought from society, which is no doubt why even the Prime Minister has taken to referring to postmodernism as 'rubbish' and 'gobbledygook'… They want to oppress, in a word, the democratic force of the idea that truth, knowledge and culture should be open to discussion, that these and other concepts should not be locked away inside a cupboard in John Howard's office but left out in full public view, rather, for us all, citizens and future citizens alike, to debate their meanings. (Lucy & Mickler, *The War on Democracy*, 2006, p. 28)

Text from friend:

One often meets one's destiny on the road one takes to avoid it.

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
8-Aug-2007
10:52:25

Re-describing …

The End of the Book / And the Beginning of Writing: All appearances to the contrary, this death of the book undoubtedly announces … nothing but a death of speech (of a *so-called* full speech) and a new mutation in the history of writing, in history as writing (p. 8). [And] From the moment that there is meaning there are nothing but signs. We *think only in signs* (p. 50). (Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, 1976 / 1967)

Because if you eat Big Macs and drink Coca-cola and drive a SUV you will live to a hundred. *That's a fact.*

Context-making

And so let's begin by building a context: a context for this text (this introductory text) and the texts to follow (the contrabands). Let's begin by gathering together the texts I have made in recent times to 'see what I've seen,' to know what I know (to quote Lucy quoting Charlie from *The Last Magician* [Turner Hospital, 1995]). Let's use these fragments to introduce a type of **postmodern meditation** – a scatterbrained contemplation that cannot sustain its focus even when it tries. Let's impose an order (of sorts) on an otherwise order*less* universe. Let's try to make sense of the senseless. Let's try to get our bearings—for an instant—before utterly losing our bearings in a hyper-textual, *para-eclectic(al)*, polyphonic, *textmire* (to coin a term or two). Let's let our metaphorical hair down and go strategically mad: *fan-at-i-cal* (fə'nætəkəl).

In the next few pages you will see several scanned documents. I could have entered these texts as Word documents (as prose) rather than scanned images, but I didn't. I wanted them to reflect something of the distance between then and now, between *this* Word document and the JPEGs they have become. They are not *of* this text – they are from elsewhere – they are pasted in – grafted into place – collaged, if you like – by electronic and tactile means – they are the mysterious gift of the 'Other,' of arrival, dislocation, and *différance* (as Jacques Derrida might say). These texts —as *art(e)facts*, as *textaments* —include:

1. A Flinders University symposium flyer,
2. The paper I presented at this symposium,
3. A SAETA[1] competition flyer,
4. My entry in this competition,
5. My reflections on the AATE[2] National Conference as published in the SAETA Newsletter (Miller, 2007),
6. A report card,
7. A site map (of sorts) showing how this text might be 'read' and 'negotiated,' and
8. A travel brochure offering a pre-paid packaged tour.

These texts will tell a story of sorts, a contextual story, of where I've been and where I'm headed. Like all stories, it is just *one* of many possible stories and one of many possible trajectories. It may not even be true given that it omits more than it reveals, but it will suffice for our context-making purposes. So let's make a story. Let's make a beginning. Let's maintain the ruse that I can make sense of the wor(l)d and everything in it (which I can't).

Background-making

The background is this. In 2005 I enrolled as a graduate in a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) at Flinders University having completed a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in English at the same university six years earlier. This was a challenge given my *bruising* encounters with schooling as a student (to borrow a phrase from Pat Thomson [2002, p. 68]) and my lingering suspicion that teaching was an 'off limits' and 'inaccessible' profession for the likes of me: *scallywags*. In 2006 I completed my Bachelor of Education (Honours) and sub-

[1] South Australian English Teachers Association
[2] The Australian Association for the Teaching of English

Postmodernism is a broad term that refers to both a historical period and a 'style' in Western culture, based on the merging of artistic and industrial forms of production. Postmodern works of art or literature are often characterised by a mixing of texts and genres, and a resistance to singular, fixed meanings or interpretations.

(Moon, *Literary Terms*, 2004, p. 108)

Bricolage: "The process resembles what the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss calls *bricolage*, which is the construction of something out of whatever materials are available. 'Every hypertext reader-author is inevitably a *bricoleur*', writes Landlow (1992): each reader-author constructs an individual text out of fragments. Such bricolage provides a new kind of unity that is entirely suited to hypertextuality" (Snyder, *Hypertext*, 1998, p. 72).

Copies of copies and signs of signs: *simulacra*.

Poststructuralism is a theoretical position which investigates the connections between systems of meaning/action and relations of power. It investigates how knowledges and 'truths' are constructed, and how these serve particular interests.

(Moon, *Literary Terms*, 2004, p. 111)

God save me from me

Re-describing …

Text from friend:

Do you think theres any truth to the rumour that everything is really O.K?

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
5-May-2007
14:39:53

(Dm) We don't need—no ed–u–ca—tion, We don't need—no thought con-trol— No dark sar-cas-m in the class—room. Tea–cher, leave—them kids a–lone— (G). Hey, teacher! Leave them kids a-lone!— (Dm) (Am) (G) (F) All in all you're just an–oth-er (C) brick in the wall (Dm). (F) (C) (Dm)

Words & Music by Roger Waters (1980)

The 'Exegesis'

Writer James Friel spoke in Adelaide in 2007 about the 'exegesis' and the PhD. At some level, Friel suggested, the exegesis *can't make sense*: it is senseless since researching the imagination is very different from researching books. Friel advocated that writers use the exegesis to write about what interests them in their writing: as 'a record of your maverick mind.' Don't systematise it, don't apologise for it, only introduce it, and don't sacrifice your creative writing to it! The exegesis, for Friel, is the writer's 'scrapbook' and not an essay. It is an 'aid' to writing and not a thesis. Its first loyalty is to the writer rather than the reader.

Settle for Nothing (1992)

If we don't take action now

We settle for nothing later

Settle for nothing now

And we settle for nothing later

Township Rebellion (1992)

Why stand on a silent platform?

Fight the war, fuck the norm (x4)

RAGE

mitted a thesis titled: *Mystory: Raging Against the Mass Schooling Machine* (2006a), an autoethnographic piece (a *performance*) made up of personal reflections, images, discursive commentaries, and theoretical analyses (i.e. a bricolage of texts that borrowed its 'rage' from Rage Against the Machine, the band). I was interested in both the 'form' and 'content' of the project—that is, the non-verbal *and* verbal elements—despite the *absence* of assessment criteria acknowledging the importance of aesthetics in text production (something I consider ridiculous in this day and age). *English in Australia* published one of the chapters – with images – the same year (Miller, 2006b). Subsequent reflections and images on 'social justice' in contemporary schooling (independent of my Honours Thesis) were published as a monograph for teachers by ACSA two years later (Miller, 2008): not bad for a Pink Floyd-loving, school-hating rebel of the 1980s (see *appendix* for this experimental text which was made in the holidays between my Honours and PhD years).

The principle aim of my Honours research was to construct a 'teaching identity' that would allow me to survive and function as a 'pragmatic radical' (Boomer, 1988, 1989) and 'activist professional' (Groundwater-Smith, Brennan, McFadden, & Mitchell, 2001) in a *Fordist* factory-model educational landscape, while also constructing a pragmatic–radical 'student identity' in an otherwise *Fordist* factory-model university system, thus pushing the boundaries of research, writing, image-making, and text-production beyond those usually afforded to students. These preoccupations remain today – to the point where my texts appear messier and nastier than ever. In fact, I no longer plan my texts in the conventional sense: I let them (dis)organise themselves and *rage* against the hegemonic 'essay-making' machine, in a form of textual glossolalia and logorrhoea. They unfold, develop, and drift *and* tour as they evolve.

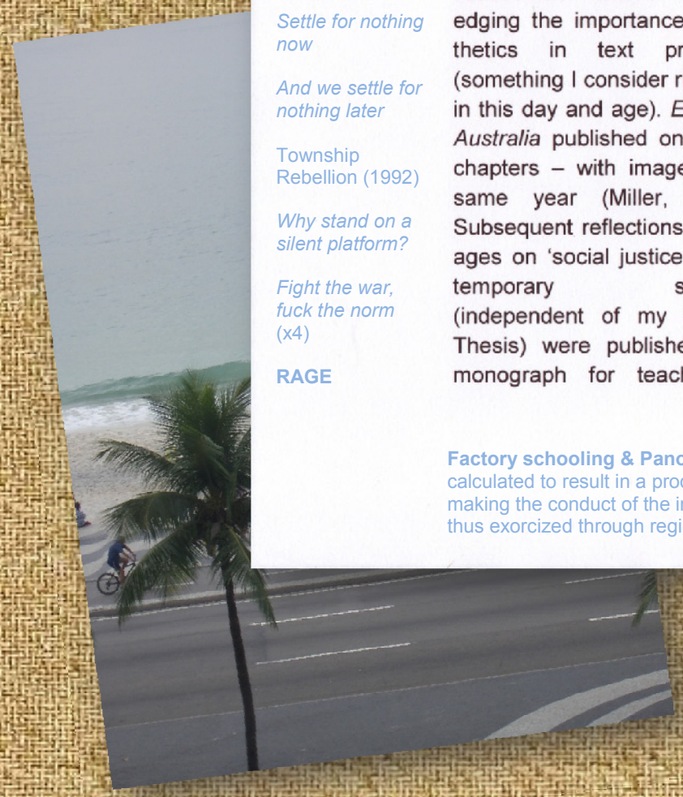
In 2007 I enrolled in a PhD in Creative Writing at Flinders University to continue my textual and pedagogical explorations (my **textaments**—another neologism): to go deeper, wider, and faster[3] into the mind-blowing possibilities of post-modern theories and practices in a neo-liberal age.

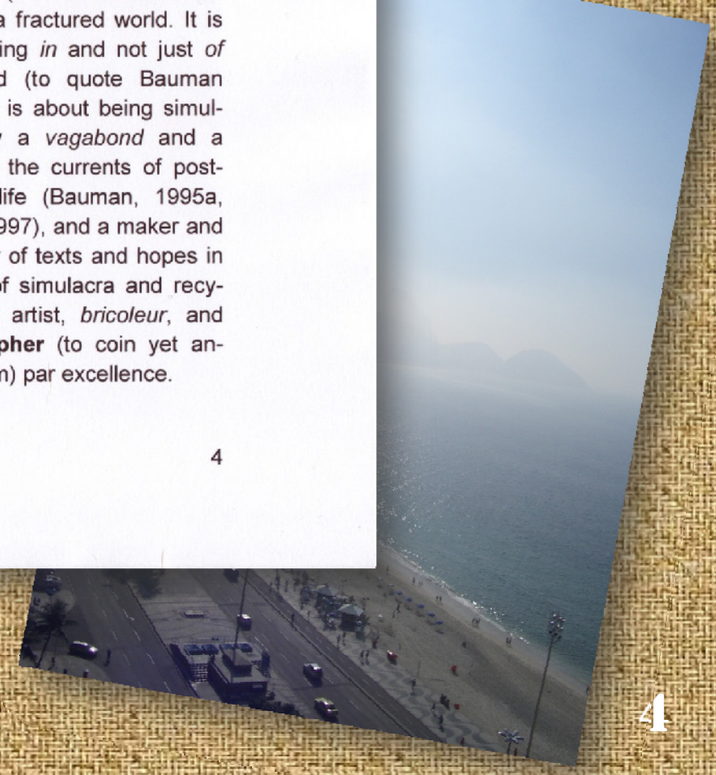
This brings us up to the present: the historical *moment*, the impossible *now*, where I intend, once again, to launch into uncharted and unknown spaces (the inter-text) for the sake of my messy preoccupation with living and learning in an impersonal, de-humanising, number-centric world. This is not just about teaching and learning: it is about being a 'person' and an 'artist' (if these identities still hold) in a fractured world. It is about being *in* and not just *of* the world (to quote Bauman again). It is about being simultaneously a *vagabond* and a *tourist* in the currents of post-modern life (Bauman, 1995a, 1995b, 1997), and a maker and destroyer of texts and hopes in an age of simulacra and recycling: an artist, *bricoleur*, and **textographer** (to coin yet another term) par excellence.

[3] *Depth*, *breadth*, and *speed* are learning strategies typically advocated for 'gifted students.' In this case I mean to make them available to a problem student and textual anarchist—*me*, as a one-time disaffected, disillusioned, and disabled student.

Simulacra & Simulation: "It is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real… Never again will the real have the chance to produce itself…" (Baudrillard, *Simulacra & Simulation*, 2006/1981, p. 2).

Factory schooling & Panopticon (factories of order): '…like all factories, they were sites of purposeful activity calculated to result in a product conceived in advance, in their case in restoring certainty, eliminating randomness, making the conduct of the inmates regular and predictable – certain – once more. … The spectre of uncertainty is thus exorcized through regimentation' (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, pp. 107-108).





inherited 'knowledge'

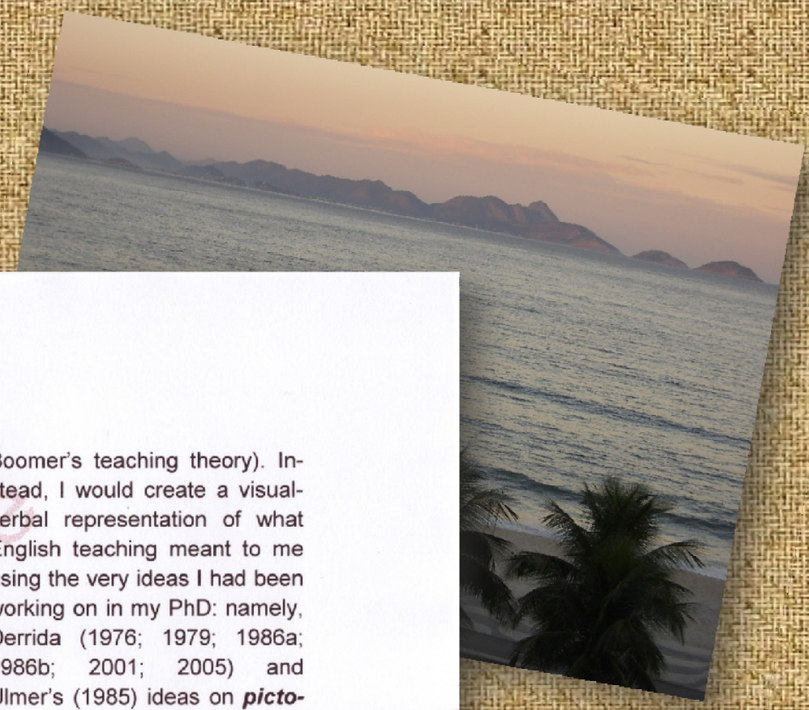
Re-describing …

Text from friend:

Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. Martin Heidegger.

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
15-Oct-2007
10:49:35



And why not?

Symposium-presentation

In early 2007 I was asked to present a paper on 'Pragmatic Radicalism' at a symposium on 'social justice' at Flinders University: I was stunned (**Refer 1**: *Symposium Flyer*). What could a suburban maniac like *me* say about social justice in schooling to a largely academic audience?

Plenty, I discovered. I read two papers: the first was an autobiographical piece outlining my bruising encounters with school and society as a teenager (Miller, 2006b); the second was a collage of excerpts from my Honours thesis re-assembled into a stand-alone paper on 'pragmatic radicalism' (2007, February 15). Images and quotations projected onto a large screen helped extend these texts beyond the page and beyond my voice. It was, in effect, a multimodal textual performance akin to Jacques Lacan's 'tripartite' lectures and Gregory Ulmer's (1985) 'applied grammatology.' I was *hyper-textualising*. I was making paper-based texts that were attempting to escape the page, to escape the monitor, to escape the book (like Derrida's texts). It wasn't cyber-textuality I was seeking, but hyper-textuality.

Although most of the material for these texts appeared in my Honours thesis, the symposium text was very much a 'new' text, for a new context, for a new audience, using re-structured and re-fashioned material. It was my first PhD text, so to speak, and it set the tone for my textual experiments to follow. Included here is the mono-modal, book-chapter version and not the multi-modal, PowerPoint version (**Refer 2**: *Symposium Paper*).

Postcard-making

Not long after the symposium I saw a notice in *English in Australia* for the National AATE Conference in Canberra. Knowing that first-year PhD candidates were largely ineligible for conference funding, I put the conference out of mind. Soon after I received my quarterly AATE newsletter and journal in the post. One of the flyers outlined a SAETA competition offering airfares, registration, and accommodation for two South Australian teachers to attend the National Conference (**Refer 3**: *Competition Flyer*).

My first thought was to RESIST the 500-word competition limit and respond in fewer than 50 words by using visual elements to summarise my teaching philosophy. This, I hoped, would set my entry apart and work *against the grain* of the competition (in the spirit of Garth Boomer's teaching theory). Instead, I would create a visual-verbal representation of what English teaching meant to me using the very ideas I had been working on in my PhD: namely, Derrida (1976; 1979; 1986a; 1986b; 2001; 2005) and Ulmer's (1985) ideas on ***picto-ideo-phonographic*** writing. That is, a multi-tiered text (**Refer 4**: *Competition Entry*).

Some weeks later I received a call from SAETA saying I had won the 'beginning teacher' category and would be flying to Canberra the following month.

Conferencing

One of my obligations to SAETA while in Canberra was to write an opinion piece, of sorts, outlining my reflections on the conference for the SAETA Newsletter. Diligently, I took notes at every session and spoke at length with academics

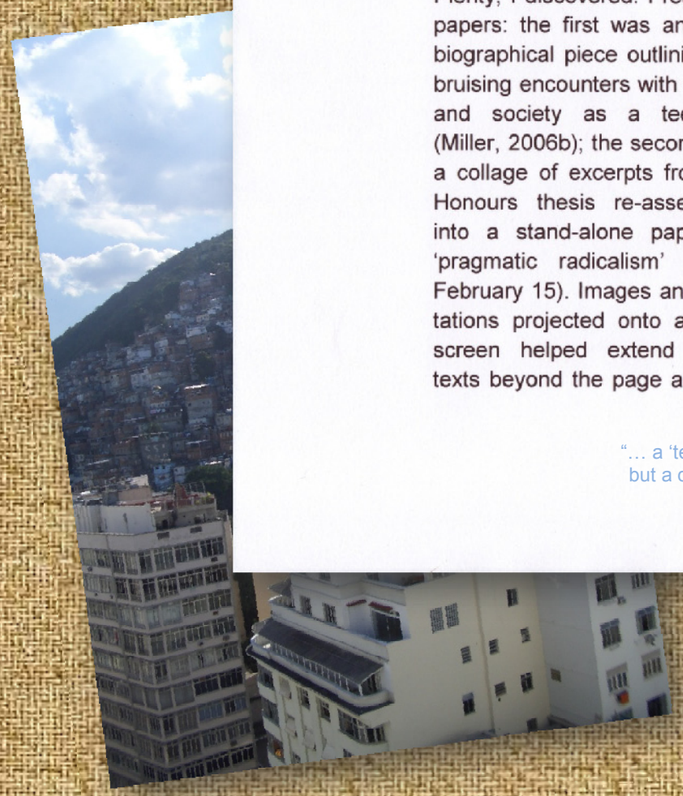
God save me from me

"… a 'text' … is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces" (Derrida, Living On: Border Lines, *Deconstruction & Criticism*, 1979, p. 84).

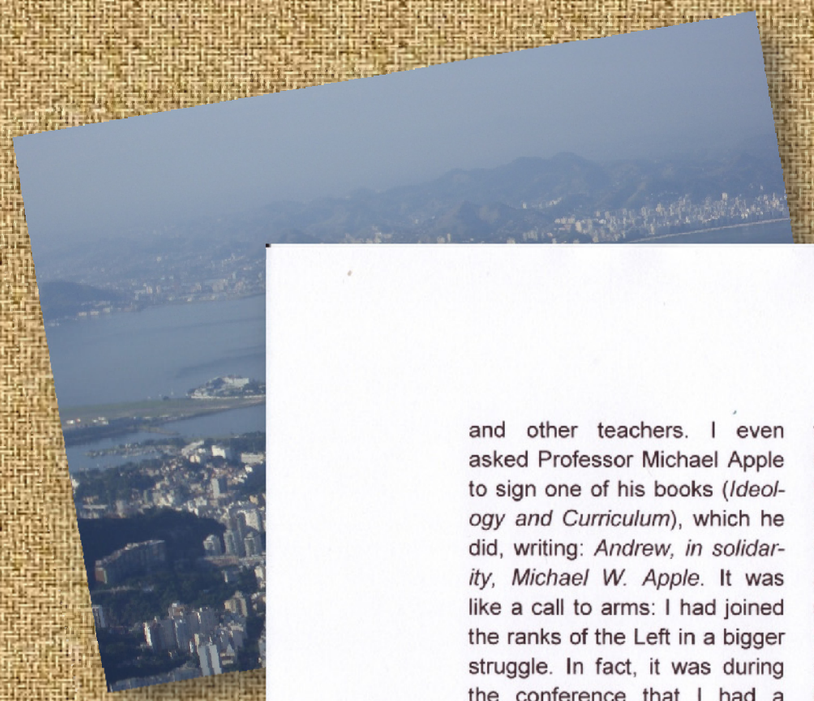
Aesthetic writing is important because, as we have seen, the aesthetic allows us to discover aspects of reality and experience that can be discovered no other way. Because of its re-creative representational aspects, drawing together the emotional and the intellectual, the reflective and the experiential, it allows us to apprehend things that purely rational, intellectual writing cannot. We can write ourselves into understanding.

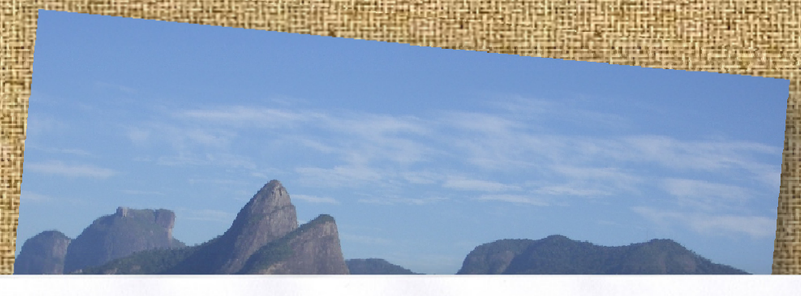
We can also write ourselves into being. We develop ourselves, vary who we are by engaging in writing.

(Misson & Morgan, *Critical Literacy & the Aesthetic*, 2006, p. 128)



learning & teaching,





and other teachers. I even asked Professor Michael Apple to sign one of his books (*Ideology and Curriculum*), which he did, writing: *Andrew, in solidarity, Michael W. Apple.* It was like a call to arms: I had joined the ranks of the Left in a bigger struggle. In fact, it was during the conference that I had a feeling—a dislocating, shape-shifting, metamorphic kind of feeling—that I was suddenly a bona fide teacher. *An English teacher at that.* I was gripped with both pride and panic. How did this happen? How did I become one of my mortal teenage enemies? How did I change sides? But then it occurred to me: there must be gaps enough in the world for the likes of me to squeeze through to occupy 'respectable' places in society and even command 'professional' personas and 'socially-critical' voices. There were hidden worlds behind wardrobe doors – just like in the Narnia series I read as a kid (when my mind awoke). As Peter McInerney suggests in *Making Hope Practical* (2004), 'hegemony is never complete,' and it is in these gaps and fissures that some of us make 'strategic gains,' as Boomer (1988, 1989) would say. I was, it seems, an English teacher – AND PROUD OF IT (**Refer 5**: *SAETA Newsletter Article*).

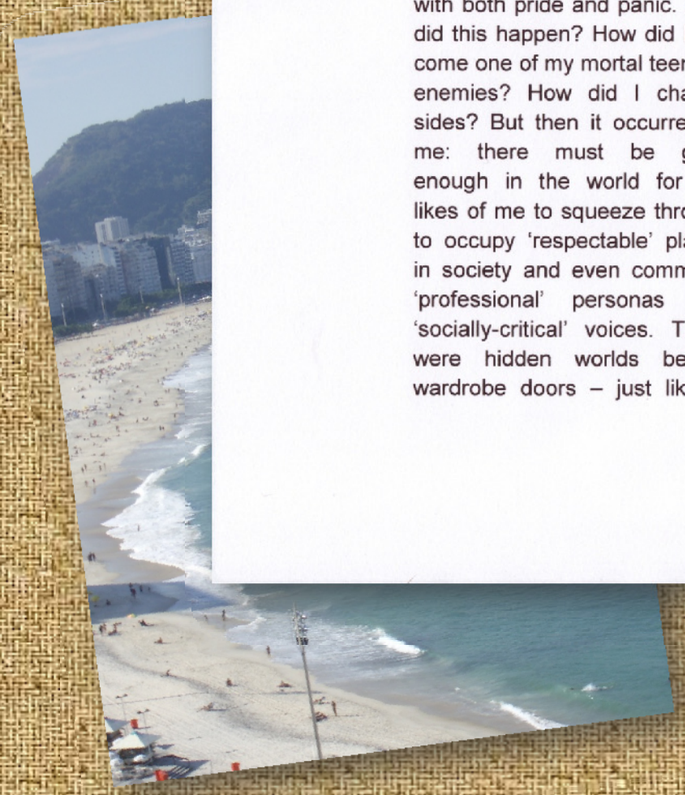
And why not?

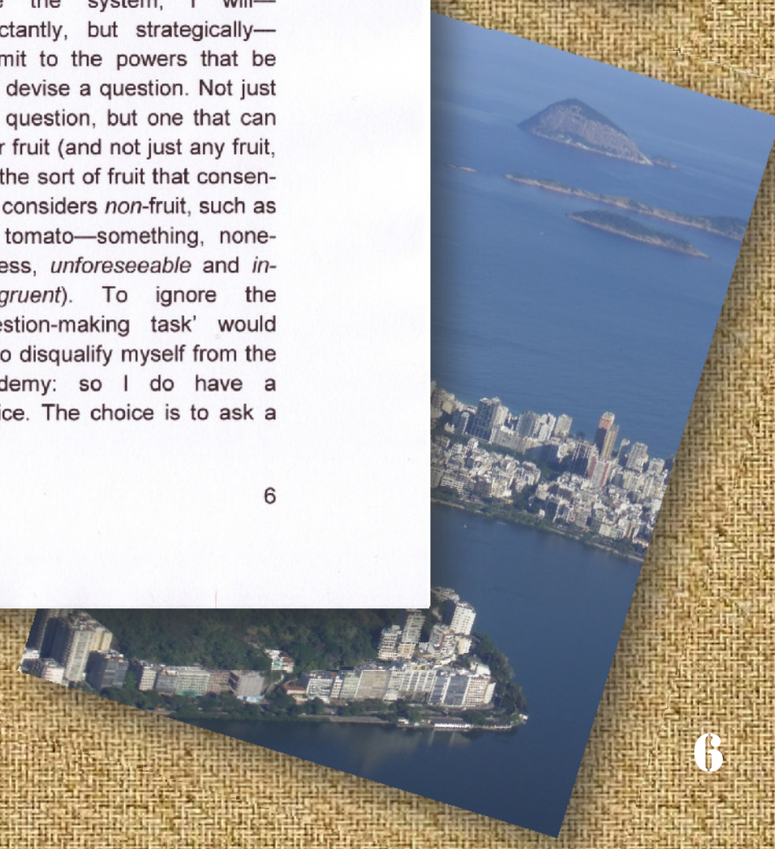
My former student weaknesses (**Refer 6**: *Report Card*) were now my guiding strengths: *mischief-making* was my call to arms, my pragmatic *and* radical means to grind against the grain of habit and disturb the common sense: to 'question with tact' as Boomer would say (i.e. using a politics of tact). Yes, to stand up tall and ask the most obvious and perplexing questions: *Why? Why anything?* Because I really wanted to know—then, and now—what makes good people tick for nasty ends? To surrender their decency for hegemony and corruption? In a world that makes corruption normal and indecency rational? Why did we abandon our collective dreams for individualist nightmares (Bauman, 1997)? How did this happen to my species?

PhD Questioning

Academic convention demands that PhD candidates have *a question*. Not just a question, but an answer. This assumes, of course, that there are suitable (and un-suitable) *questions* and adequate (and inadequate) *answers*, and that the 'institutionally-accredited' question is capable of producing answers that *add to* the stock of human knowledge and *plug* the gaps of human ignorance. This strategy / formula seems to hark back to the order-making ambitions of modernity (as Bauman might say) rather than the postmodern insight that all knowledge and all assertions are provisional—*until-further-notice.*

I had no intention of putting forward a question when I began my PhD. However, as a 'pragmatic radical' teacher / student who means to remain within the system in order to chip away at the walls that secure the system, I will—reluctantly, but strategically—submit to the powers that be and devise a question. Not just any question, but one that can bear fruit (and not just any fruit, but the sort of fruit that consensus considers *non*-fruit, such as the tomato—something, nonetheless, *unforeseeable* and *incongruent*). To ignore the 'question-making task' would be to disqualify myself from the academy: so I do have a choice. The choice is to ask a





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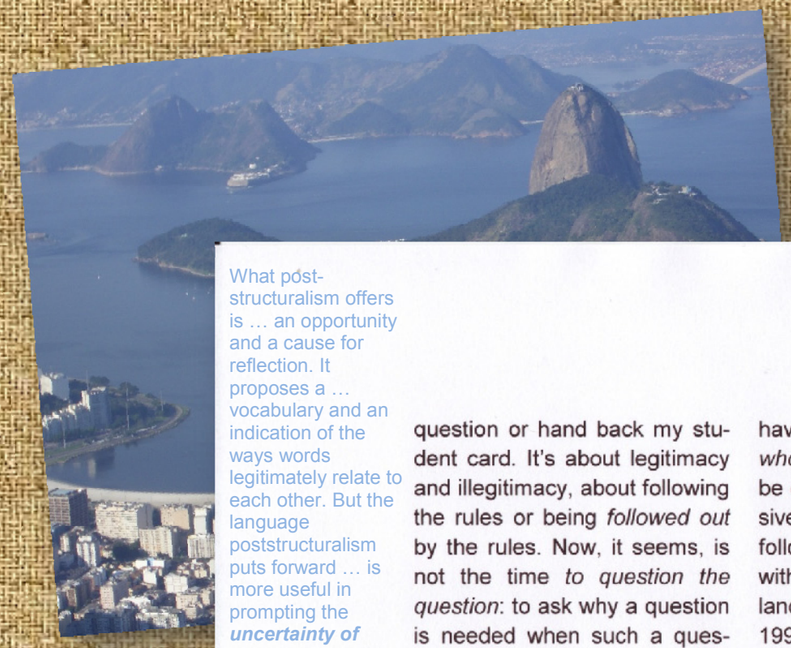
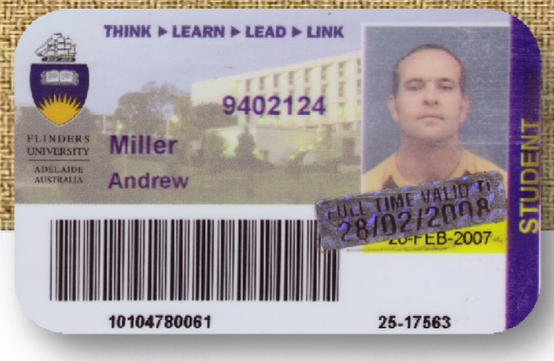
reality & 'truth,'





Make no mistake about it: the student card is not innocent. It is my Passport and Entry Visa into the educational market-place & professional credentials. I am not 'free' to pursue my research as I see fit. The university has considerable power over the scope & direction of 'my' project. So reader beware.

Text from friend:

To be on a quest is nothing more or less than to become an asker of questions.
SAM KEEN

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
7-May-2007
12:36:30

What post-structuralism offers is … an opportunity and a cause for reflection. It proposes a … vocabulary and an indication of the ways words legitimately relate to each other. But the language poststructuralism puts forward … is more useful in prompting the ***uncertainty of questions than in delivering the finality of answers***.

The project is that the questions might replace the bewildering alternatives of the intellectual market place with a more sharply focused undecidability that specifies the options while leaving them open to debate. In that respect, in its emphasis on the degree to which we make our own story, … post-structuralism is at once sceptical towards inherited authority and affirmative about future possibilities.

(Belsey, *Poststructuralism*, 2002, p. 107, my emphasis)

question or hand back my student card. It's about legitimacy and illegitimacy, about following the rules or being *followed out* by the rules. Now, it seems, is not the time *to question the question*: to ask why a question is needed when such a question guarantees certain answers and de-limits possible solutions; when the question *is* part of the hegemonic problem. As soon as I ask a question I am a prisoner *to* the question. For three or four years this question will plague my every waking thought and every subconscious dream: it will appear in my mind's eye when friends are talking about sick children and trips to Fiji; it will stalk me, limit me, and narrow the world into an order-possible—answer-centric—project. It will limit what can and cannot be found and discovered. It will limit what can and cannot filter into my head and heart as knowledge and emotion. It will have massive implications on *who* and *what* I can and cannot be or become. It will have massive implications on my life to follow. Like a pebble moved with a toe, it will have an avalanche effect (Turner Hospital, 1997, p. 104). Ask the question and a cascade of answers will follow. *If you build it they will come*. And my job for many years will be to un-bury myself from the debris piled up over my head – and build monuments to knowledge.

I had wanted to avoid this type of annihilation: this kind of rationalist insanity; this kind of single-minded, claustrophobic, market-dependent, modernist project. I had wanted to keep my options open, as Bauman might say, and to avoid committing myself to a single issue or cause, a single answer or solution, a single identity or expertise, a single anything. I had wanted to explore a world of possibilities not answers, a world of infinity not certainty, a world going towards the Abyss not away from it. I had wanted to run face-first *into* the Void rather than map a neat chapter-by-chapter retreat *from* the Void.

My reluctance to nominate and stick to a question stems from my commitment to 'possibility' not conclusion. It / the task ('asking a question' / 'making a straightjacket') is almost the very opposite of what this project is all about. None the less, with caution, and fear, my question is something like:

What is it to explore postmodern textual and conceptual possibilities in an otherwise back-to-basics neo-liberal age?

Or

What is it to explore postmodern possibilities in a neo-liberal age (as a person, teacher, researcher, student, artist, and dilettante)?

Or

What might a paper-based textuality look like in a cybertextual age: a textuality that borrows from the future to inform the past?

And so on.

Another way of putting this might be as a statement of *intent* rather than a question. For instance, a statement of intent might look like a poem:

The Postmodern Pedagondage:
—touring and drifting in a post-modern age—
—disturbing the mono-logic(al)—
—texts of resistance against the neo-liberal machine—
—and surviving the global 'super' market—

Or some *other* such expression that doesn't look like a question. Something more mischievous, subversive, and habit-shattering. More toxic and chaotic. More *gonzo*.

'There is a wish to make writing ungraspable, of course' (Derrida, *Glas*, 1974/1986, p. 64).

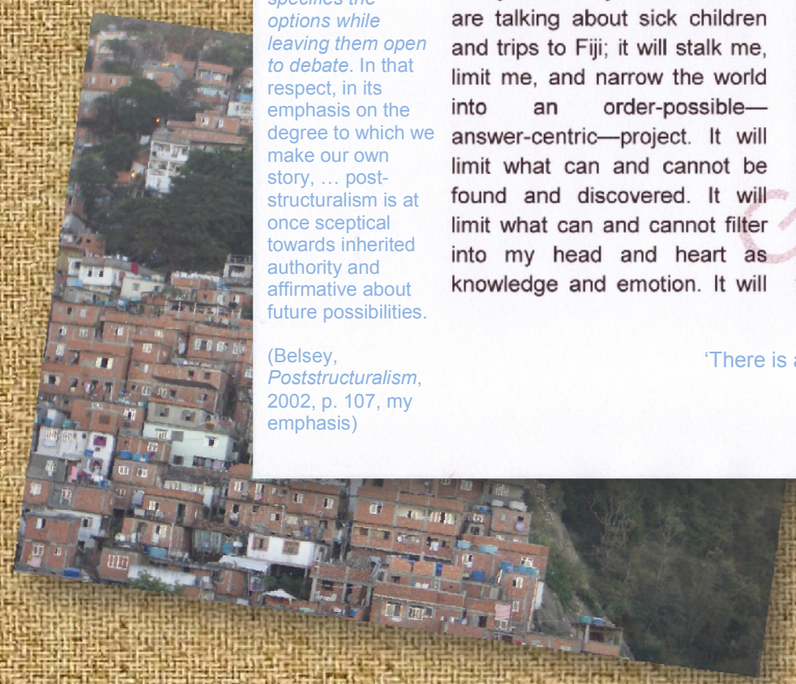
7

God save me from me

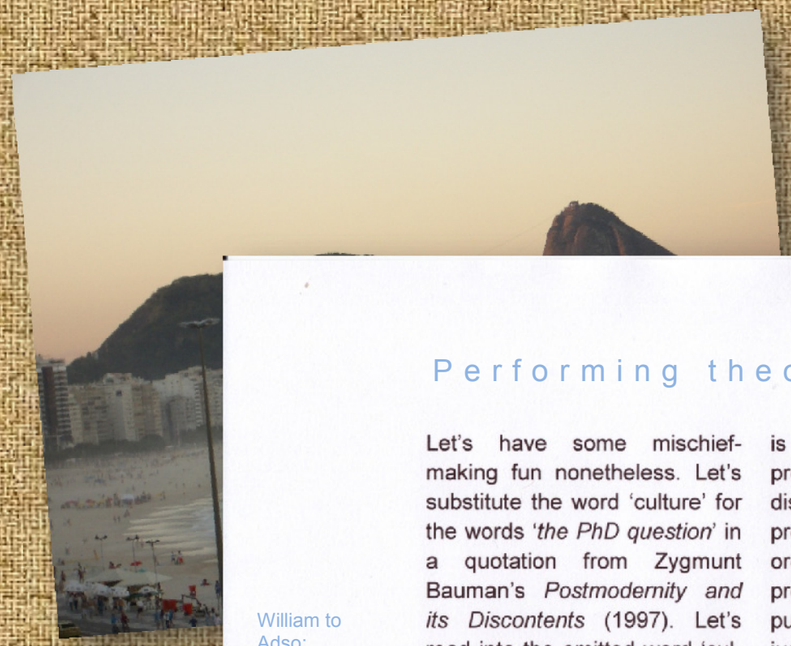
The PhD Question/Project

My question / project has caused much debate at the university. Most people think it is reasonable enough, even exciting, while others suggest it is illegitimate. I have been told in no uncertain terms (by some) that I need to have very specific questions and very specific answers: in other words, that, yes, I can do a postmodern project but only so long as I do it from within a classical modernist framework; in other words, no, you can't really do a postmodern project even within creative writing. Although consistent with poststructural and 'arts-based' theories and practices, the knowledge I am creating is considered non-academic and meritless by a small but powerful minority.

Poststructuralism is better suited to raising questions than providing answers.



researching & text-making,



Neoliberalism

In so far as Neoliberalism values market exchange as 'an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs', it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that the social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market (p. 3).

Neoliberalism has … become hegemonic as a mode of discourse (p. 3).

(Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2007/2005)

Text from friend:

Everything is arranged so that it be this way, this is what is called culture. Jacques Derrida.

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
17-May-2007
12:10:43

Performing theory

Let's have some mischief-making fun nonetheless. Let's substitute the word 'culture' for the words '*the PhD question*' in a quotation from Zygmunt Bauman's *Postmodernity and its Discontents* (1997). Let's read into the omitted word 'culture' the very essence of the PhD project: *making-order* and *making-knowledge* (or thwarting disorder and thwarting ignorance). Let's now read the quotation:

> This is how we are inclined to think of ~~culture~~ [the PhD question] to this very day: as of an anti-randomness device, an effort to introduce and maintain an order; as of an ongoing war against randomness and that chaos which randomness brings about. In the eternal struggle between order and chaos, the place of ~~culture~~ [the PhD question] is unambiguously in order's camp (p. 131).

And now let's pretend that this is the *natural* thing to do. Let's pretend that it's *insane* to seek disorder rather than order. Let's pretend that I intend to make order rather than disorder. Let's pretend that my motivations are pure. Let's pretend that I didn't just lie through my teeth – that I do have the very best intentions at heart – that I am the most *obedient* and *white* of human sheep. Let's pretend that everything *is-as-it-is* and *is-as-it-seems*. Let's not hide behind the fact that everything is a ruse: *the question*, *the answer*, *the meaning*, *the word*, the lot. And let's proceed from (t)here. And let's assume that the shrew is a man. And let's assume that you have already begun to question the integrity of the writer. And let's assume that you are *right*: that he is indeed a peculiar type of idiot and buffoon, a kind of relentless warship cannoning through the high seas of self-righteous bewilderment. And, yes, let's assume that he doesn't really know what he's doing or what he's saying, and that he has little confidence in his own knowledge claims (or counter-claims) or his ability to think straight. Let's assume it all—*and move on*.

Touring & Drifting to Oblivion

According to Bauman (1997, pp. 83-94), we live in a world populated by 'tourists' and 'vagabonds': the winners and losers / heroes and villains / of postmodern life. In this world / war, the *tourist* and the *vagabond* represent the opposing fortunes and life-trajectories available to contemporary consumers (regardless of whether they travel or settle). Some of us will move from the relatively empowered position of the tourist to the utterly destitute position of the vagabond depending on how we play the game (but few of us will move the other way). Tourists are experience-gatherers: travellers seeking ever more exotic people, places, and things to stave off boredom and stagnation; they consume and discard as they flit along—unlike the vagabond who moves out of necessity not desire. They—the vagabonds—are the *failures* of postmodernity, the *flawed consumers* and *garbage* of neo-liberal life. Pushed from behind by the powers that be and pulled from the front by the hope of tomorrow, vagabonds lurch toward death, destruction, and detention centres. They are the booby prize of neo-liberal life: the walking *effigies* and *alter egos* of the tourist class: the feared 'other' of the marketplace: the pathetic and grotesque billboard that says: *Don't be like me. I am a disgrace to rationality. A blight on the common sense. I played the market and lost. BECAUSE I AM A LOSER.*

God save me from me

William to Adso: "Perhaps the mission of those who love mankind is to make people laugh at the truth, *to make truth laugh*, because the only truth lies in learning to free ourselves from insane passion for the truth" (Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1980/1998, p. 491).

'Modernity was born under the sign of such order – order seen as a task, as a matter of rational design, close monitoring and above all pernickety management. Modernity was bent on making the world manageable, and on its daily management; the zeal to manage was whipped up by the not altogether groundless conviction that when left to themselves things will go bust or run amok' (Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, 2002, p. 28).

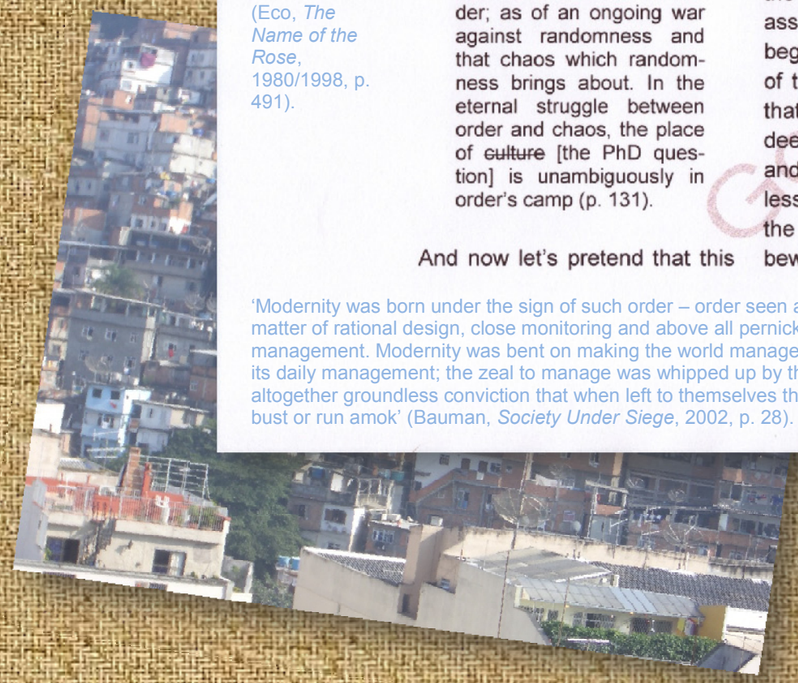
'We live in a 'software' rather than 'hardware', 'liquid' rather than 'solid' phase' (Bauman, 2002, p. 27).

8

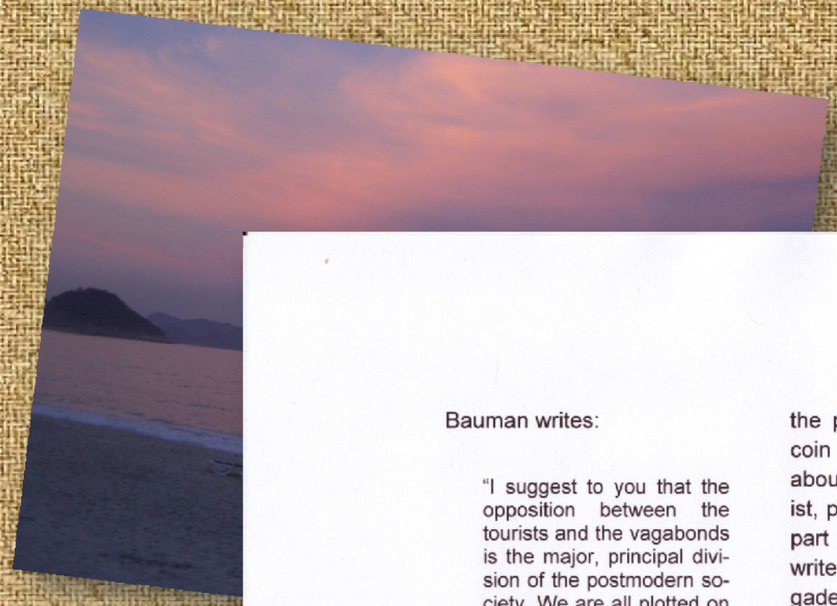
But it is the profoundly anti-democratic nature of Neoliberalism backed by the authoritarianism of the neoconservatives that should surely be the main focus of political struggle. The democratic deficit in nominally 'democratic' countries such as the US is now enormous (p. 205).

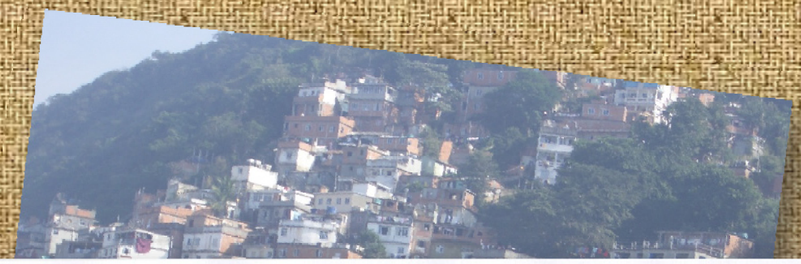
The world is in a position to reject that imperialist gesture and refract back into the heartland of neoliberal and neoconservative capitalism a completely different set of values: those of an open democracy dedicated to the achievement of social equality coupled with economic, political, and cultural justice (p. 206).

(Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2007/2005)



artworks & essays,





Bauman writes:

> "I suggest to you that the opposition between the tourists and the vagabonds is the major, principal division of the postmodern society. We are all plotted on a continuum stretched between the poles of the 'perfect tourist' and the 'vagabond beyond remedy' – and our respective places between the poles are plotted according to the degree of freedom we possess in choosing our life itineraries. Freedom of choice, I put to you, is in postmodern society by far the most seminal among the stratifying factors. The more freedom of choice one has, the higher is one's rank in the postmodern social hierarchy. Postmodern social differences are made of the width and narrowness of the range of realistic options (p. 93).

And it is within this marketplace—this *brute*scape—that the postmodern ***pedagond*** (to coin another term) moves about in hybridity: as part tourist, part vagabond, part learner, part teacher, part artist, part writer, part prisoner, part renegade, part author, part actor, part radical, part pragmatist—*but never quite any of them*. A shape-shifter, a chameleon, a *monster*. A creature neither here nor there in the consumer rat-race. A creature that still believes in 'social justice' in a world that can no longer pronounce *social justice*. A creature so fantastically idealistic and so optimistic about the human spirit that it cuts an absurd figure against the flashing neon lights of the brothel and casino. A creature so utterly out of date and out of place that it trembles with permanent discomfort. So driven by other currencies as to be an anomaly—an anachronism—in the contemporary flea market. A creature still peddling such exotic oddities as love and hope as to repel all but the most perverted and nostalgic. A creature so deranged as to sell its wares for FREE. A creature so out-of-order as to be a *dis*order, a *dis*ease, a *dis*traction, and a *dis*grace to the logic of the market. A creature so nihilistic as to believe in itself—its *Self*—in an age hell-bent on *selling* the self and buying masks. A creature so ridiculous as to command respect. A freak of culture. A pariah. The *other*.

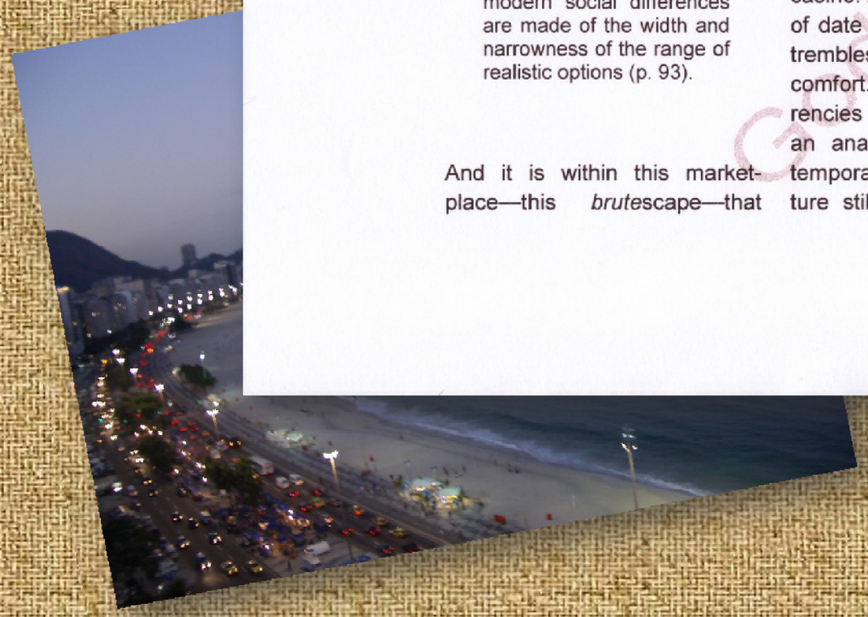
Whatever it is, *it's just not right*. It stands there, naked and sunburnt, windswept and flyblown, bound and market-ravaged, *smiling*. Yes, smiling. Like a mad thing, eyes-glazed-over, staring at the world beyond—the *other* world, the potential world, a loving world beyond the pollution. It sees beyond the hatred of the stock market. It sees flowers, trees, hills, and clear streams. So far, in fact, that it radiates in the afterglow of an ancient and future sun. That far.

It is from within this vision and this uncertainty that this project emerges. In one sense it appears to be a 'meditation' on living and learning in a neo-liberal age; but in another it is about how to research, teach, and create using the very strategies that rationalists and neo-liberals wish to outlaw and erase: that is, using the hidden side of neo-liberal life, the underbelly of postmodernity, the critical and counter-hegemonic side, the side beneath the bullshit. The side that seeks to de-mythologise, de-socialise, and de-mystify. The side that seeks liberation not domestication – transformation not enculturation – love not hate (Freire, 1996; hooks, 1994). The side that seeks to shake off its nightmares and awaken from consumerism. To *un-do – e-merge*

God save me from me

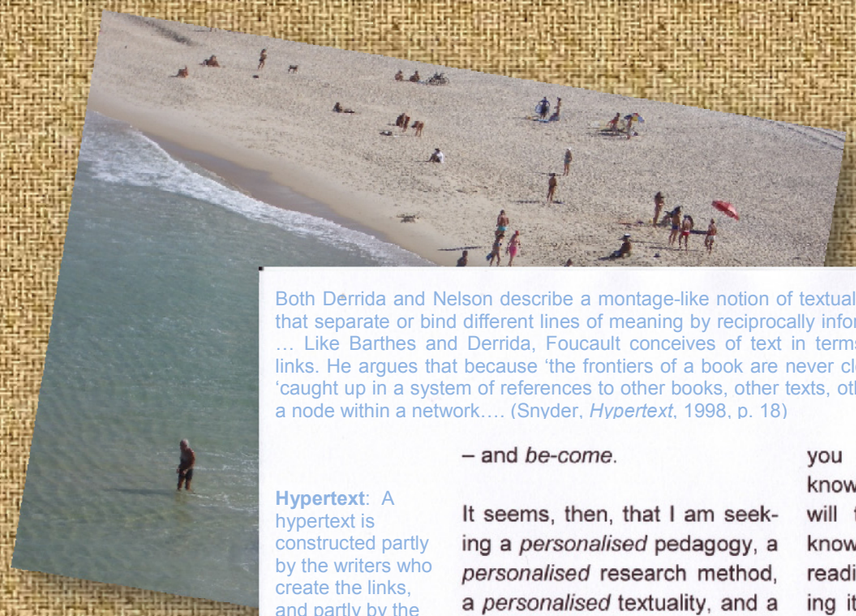
Note to Self: Remember, universities are not safe places. The violence of universities might be less bloody than in the street, but it can be equally brutal and cruel. Never underestimate the ego, particularly in quasi-meritocracies where the ego is sharpened for battle.

And not just outside of universities: there are deeply conservative hegemonic forces at work within universities too. Post-structuralists & Freireans alike name their oppressors and make critical interventions in the systems that control them.



Much of the 'writing' of this text happens in the un-written: in the aesthetic & pictographic; in the explorations that go on outside & beyond the prose & 'bona fide' pages in the centre of the text; in the margins, in the

in ways personally relevant,



& meaningful, to me …

collage, in the aesthetic choices & experiments; in the palimpsests of images & extras; in the texts that exist 'outside' & beyond the hegemony of the traditional assessment process… In me & you, as interpreters.

Both Derrida and Nelson describe a montage-like notion of textuality, a web of ideas that separate or bind different lines of meaning by reciprocally informing one another. … Like Barthes and Derrida, Foucault conceives of text in terms of networks and links. He argues that because 'the frontiers of a book are never clear-cut', the text is 'caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network…. (Snyder, *Hypertext*, 1998, p. 18)

Textual blitz

Hypertext: A hypertext is constructed partly by the writers who create the links, and partly by the readers who decide which threads to follow. Unlike printed texts, which generally compel readers to read in a linear fashion – from left to right and from top to bottom of the page – hypertext encourages readers to move from one text-chunk to another, rapidly and non-sequentially. Hypertext differs from printed text by offering readers multiple paths through a body of information…

(Snyder, *Hypertext*, 1998, pp. ix-x)

– and *be-come*.

It seems, then, that I am seeking a *personalised* pedagogy, a *personalised* research method, a *personalised* textuality, and a *personalised* life 'style' that will help me rage against the neo-liberal machine (a *p*-pedagogy, a *p*-search, a *p*-text, and a *p*-style). I am seeking something on the *other side* of normality, in the border territories, between and beyond corporate life, in the twilight zone. Somewhere else.

So let's cast ourselves into the currents of postmodern life. Let's drift and tour simultaneously. Let's ride the waves to the deserted beach. Let's dream of oblivion and beyond.

Let's begin by leaving…

Site-map

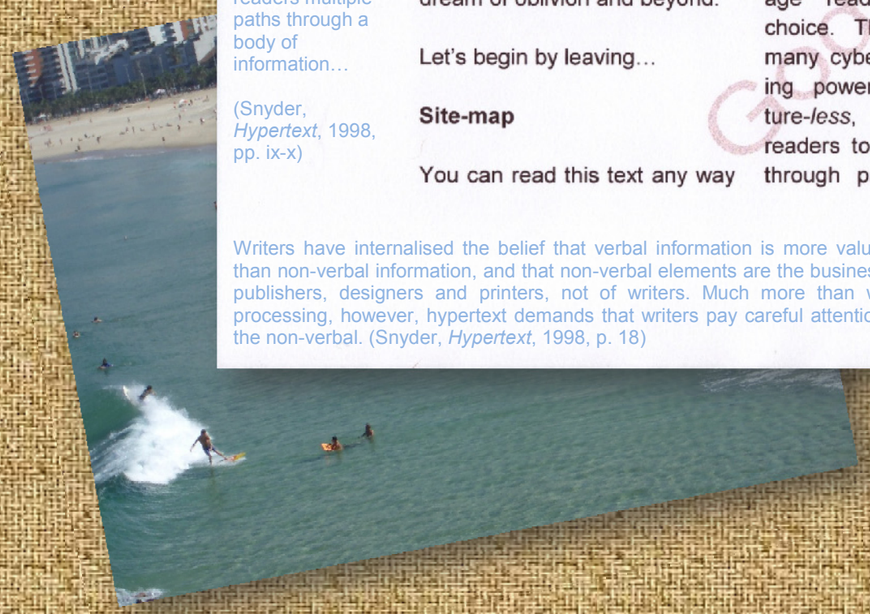
You can read this text any way you like. I have no way of knowing which trajectory you will take. I have no way of knowing whether you are skim-reading this sentence or reading it word for word. I have no way of knowing whether you started at the 'conclusion' or ended at the 'introduction.' Roland Barthes (1973/1990) uses the word 'tmesis' to describe how readers (of books) read some parts of the text while skimming others, thereby building the text as they go along. Espen Aarseth (1997), Dianne Longley (1999), and Ilana Snyder (1998) note that while books traditionally follow linear formats (one page following the other) they can include hypertextual elements that encourage reader interaction and choice. They also note that many cyber-texts, far from being power-*neutral* and structure-*less*, actually guide readers to particular texts and through particular frameworks despite the apparent 'freedom of choice' offered to users (hence why some cyber-forums prompt billion dollar buyouts). No text, in this sense, is completely totalitarian or completely democratic. Conventional books—based on the linear 'codex' format—do tend to walk readers from A to Z, but this need not mean that readers comply. Similarly, the cyber-text, with its apparent plethora of options and labyrinthine networks and links, may not be as democratic and 'anti-hierarchical' as they appear. The technology itself excludes vast populations of people from the global network, while electronic infrastructures determine what kinds of texts and what kinds of choices exist for users and makers. So don't be deceived: the ICT[4] revolution can be both subjugating *and* liberating depending on its use (like all media).

Nonetheless, this text is neither a book nor a cyber-text. It is neither linear nor non-linear. It can be read from A to Z or from Z to A. I do not own the trajectory. Even still, for those familiar with the guided tour—or the pre-paid packaged holiday—it might be nice to note that you can walk a well worn path from A to Z rather than hack at the undergrowth with a machete to clear your own path. There is a map but you needn't follow it. In fact, I describe this text as **hyper-textual** since it *can* be read in multiple ways (but not in unlimited ways like some cyber-texts) and it does provide forks in the road, hyper-links, and reader 'choice' (to some degree). Having said that, you will struggle to read each page from top to bottom and left to right since most pages are divided into two distinct bands (or

[H]ypertext exposes our western bias towards information which can be measured by pages and paragraphs comprised of words…

(Snyder, *Hypertext*, 1998, p. 18)

[4] ICT: Information and Communication Technologies.

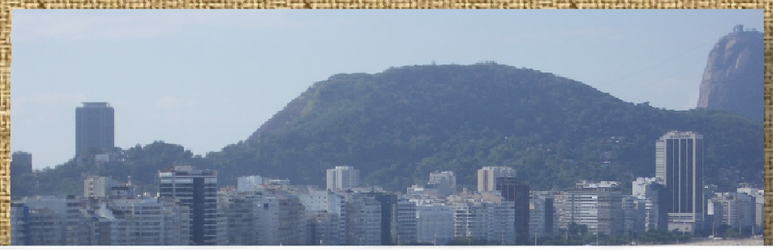


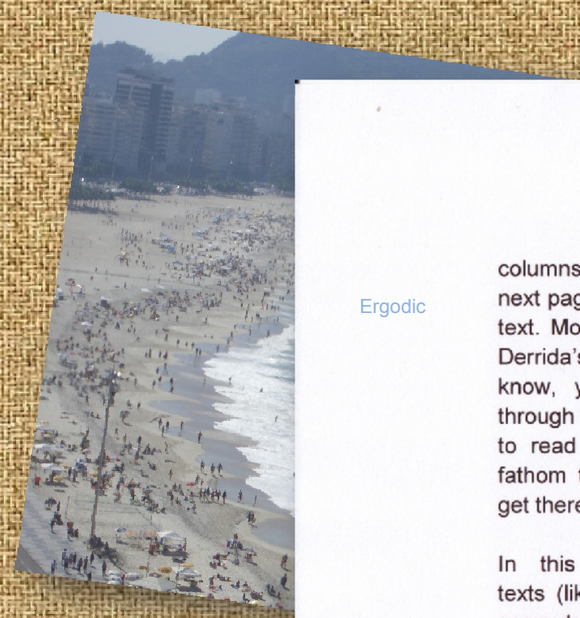
Writers have internalised the belief that verbal information is more valuable than non-verbal information, and that non-verbal elements are the business of publishers, designers and printers, not of writers. Much more than word processing, however, hypertext demands that writers pay careful attention to the non-verbal. (Snyder, *Hypertext*, 1998, p. 18)

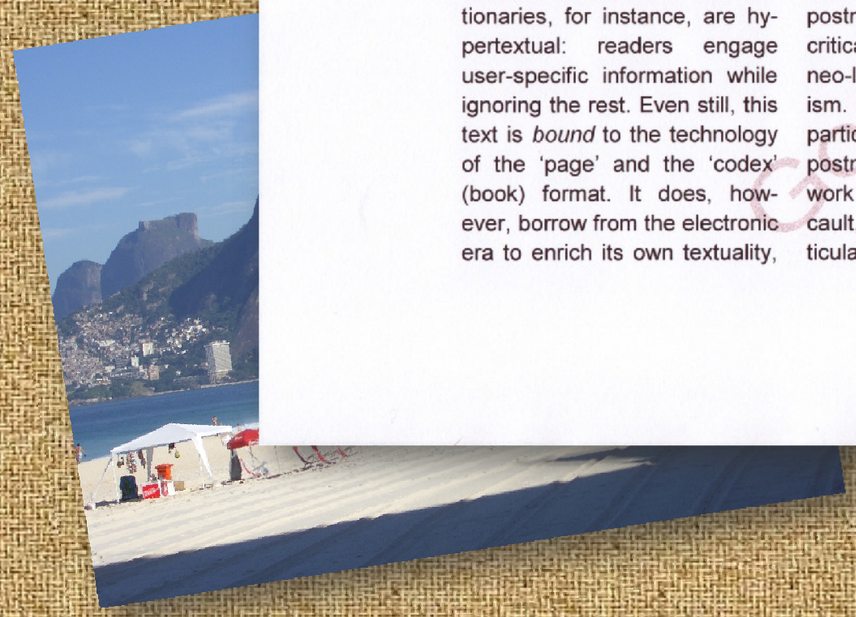
Hypertext is essentially a network of links between words, ideas and sources that has neither a centre nor an end. We 'read' hypertext by navigating through it, taking detours to notes, and to notes to those notes, exploring what in print culture would be described as 'digressions' as long and complex as the 'main' text.. (Snyder, *Hypertext*, 1998, p. 18)

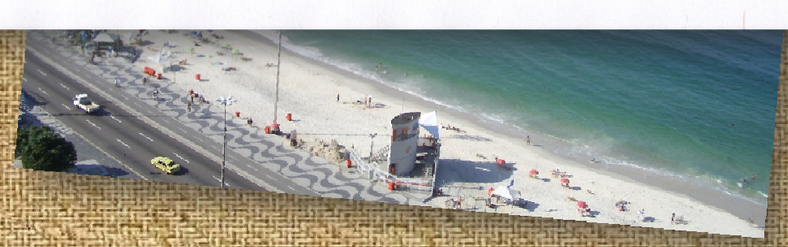
10

as acts of *love*, not hate.









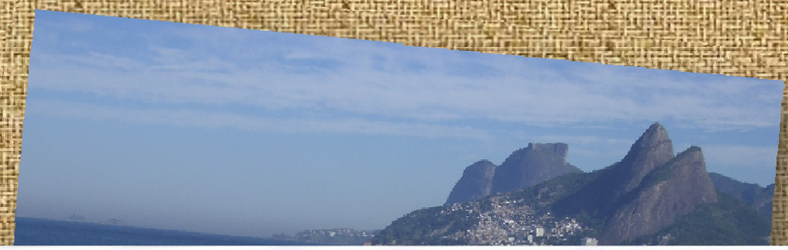
columns) that carry over to the next page and to the end of the text. More likely, as readers of Derrida's (1986b) *Glas* will know, you will need to leaf through the text twice (or more) to read both bands. You will fathom this (or not) when you get there.

In this sense, paper-based texts (like this ***Eise****Jesus*) and computer-based texts (like the Internet) can be equally hypertextual depending on how they are 'set up.' Hypertextuality is not exclusive to electronic texts or cybertextuality (Aarseth, 1997; Longley, 1999; Snyder, 1998). Encyclopaedias and dictionaries, for instance, are hypertextual: readers engage user-specific information while ignoring the rest. Even still, this text is *bound* to the technology of the 'page' and the 'codex' (book) format. It does, however, borrow from the electronic era to enrich its own textuality, thereby borrowing from the future to inform the past. It is, in a sense, an 'illuminated manuscript' (an object of antiquity) that seeks ideas and inspiration from the cyber-text (a virtual *non*-object of the *continuous*-present and *impossible*-future).

What follows is a collection of texts (a bricolage) more or less based on the dilemma of living, learning, teaching, and creating in a neo-liberal age using a wide variety of theories and practices that can be loosely described as 'postmodern' or 'poststructural.' It distinguishes between the *critical* and *counter-hegemonic* kind of postmodernism and the uncritical, pro-hegemonic, and neo-liberal kind of postmodernism. It distinguishes between a particularly 'French' view of postmodernism (as found in the work of Derrida, Barthes, Foucault, Kristeva, etc) and a particularly 'American' view of neo-liberalism (as articulated by Reagan, Thatcher, Keating, Howard, Costello, etc). One kind of postmodernism thinks in terms of 'texts' and 'discourses' while the other thinks in terms of 'money' and 'economics.' One uncovers the *collusion* of language and power while the other disguises *and normalises* the collusion of language and power. And one attempts to liberate people from 'false consciousness' while the other attempts to imprison people *through* false consciousness.[5]

What follows, then, is a 'triparite' text made up of *pictographic*, *ideographic*, and *phonographic* elements (i.e. a ***picto-ideo-phonographic*** textuality) and multiple bands and multiple hyper-links (more will be said about this later). These features appear at both the *macro* and *micro* levels of the text. In this sense the text can be divided in various ways (if desired). One 'taxonomy' could view the overall text as made up of three sections (or palimpsests): (1) the *introductory / contextual* section (which you are reading now); (2) the 'left-hand' *theoretical* section (coming next); and (3) the 'right-hand' *figurative* section (which runs parallel to the theoretical band). Another 'taxonomy' might make more of the *visual*, *verbal*, and *tactile* elements of text production (as I do later). Another might identify that each **textament** has its own unique textuality and its own unique agenda (this is particularly evi-

[5] Although not directly referenced here, many of the ideas expressed in this paragraph were 'prompted' (not uttered) by a lecture I saw at the AATE National Conference in Canberra by Livio Dobrez (2007). This lecture enabled me to consider two very different 'versions' of postmodernism *and* postmodern ideology (and I am sure there are others).



This is NOT an essay or exegesis.

dent in the upcoming 'right-hand' *figurative* column and its 'entry-based' structure). Or one may oppose all taxonomies and claim that the text is ***scatter-textual*** and ***para-eclectic-al***: a stream-of-consciousness kind of research and writing that makes and disseminates texts like a machinegun.

A stream-of-consciousness that seeks a new kind of hyper-coherency, not a Joycean or Derridean incomprehensibility and un-decidability, but a kind of textual vortex that makes sense when it needs to, *when I need it to*, when the word and the text and the wor(l)d are all I have: because the text of *You* is as unreadable to me as the text of *Me*. Because I don't know how to know Sarah and I no longer need to. Because, as Tyler Durden reminds us in *Flight Club*, "It's only after we have lost *everything* that we are free to do *anything*" (Linson, Chaffin, Bell, & Fincher, 1999).

Nonetheless, the sketches I made when imagining the composition of this text will reveal that each text and each section does function according to some guiding principle, even when that principle is to escape principles (**Refer 7**: *Site Maps*; **Refer 8**: *Tourist Brochure*).

And finally, it might be fitting to re-articulate the driving *anti-*question at the heart of this text (and this project). And so:

*What is it to research, teach, learn, live, and create using postmodern theories and practices in an otherwise back-to-basics neo-liberal age / within a system of education torn between the order-building certainties of modernity and the order-destroying **un**certainties of **post**-modernity?*

This question is, of course, deliberately provocative and deliberately ambivalent. It provides me space enough to manoeuvre and space enough to reach the most *temporary* of conclusions to the most enduring and aporetic of problems. To make possibilities not answers. So why did the chicken cross the road? The logical answer: *To get to the other side*. The postmodern answer: *Which chicken? What road? Who says? How come? And why ask? (More questions)*.

And so let's begin by avoiding the road. And, like Jim Morrison and The Doors (1985) suggest, let's *break on through to the other side*…■

Some critics have suggested that this 'eisegesis' doesn't fulfil the requirements of the 'exegesis' and that I may, in fact, have to write an *exegesis* of the *eisegesis*. This process could take a lifetime and still not finish. My entire PhD project could amount to a series of explanations of explanations…

Coined terms / Neologisms

- Pedagondage
- ~~wellbeing~~
- para-eclectic(al)
- textmire
- art(e)facts
- textaments
- wor(l)d
- textographer
- brutescape
- pedagond
- *p*-pedagogy
- *p*-search
- *p*-text
- *p*-style
- ***Eise****Jesus*
- scatter-textual

Such terms emerge from a love of language not a hatred of language. It's about putting language back into the mouths of users and taking it out of the pages of dictionaries. I don't just want to inherit language: I want to sculpt it like playdough.

And why not?

Confidential

Texts of resistance against conservative regimes …

Text from friend:

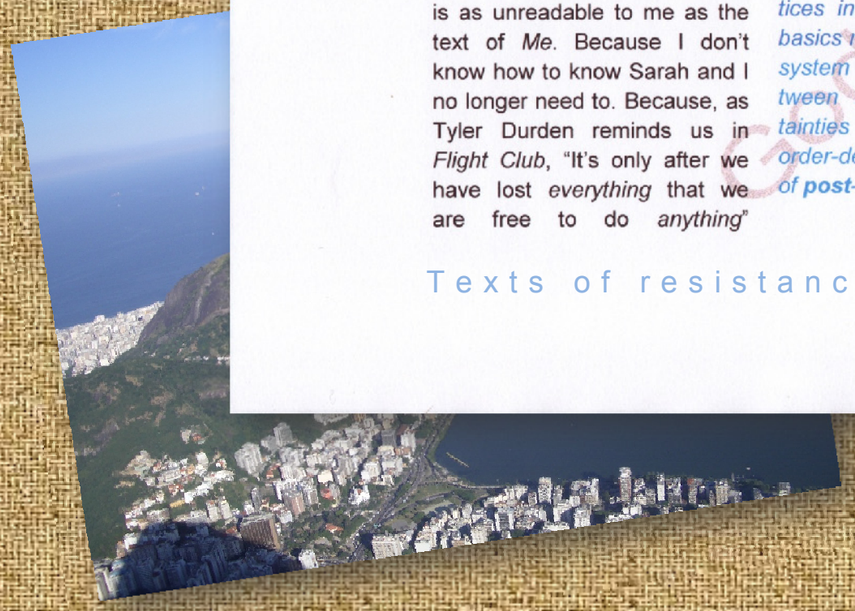
Whoever said that one was born just once? Jacques Derrida.

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
21-May-2007
12:21:40

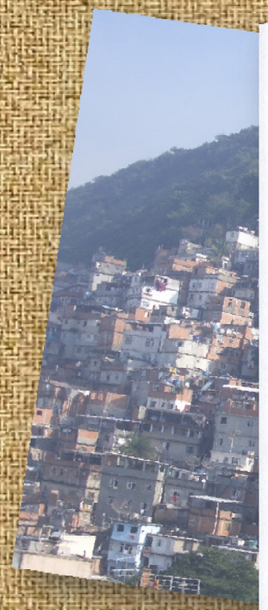
Re-defining the PhD 'aesthetic'

This statement could be deemed logocentric.



The 'word' obliterates the 'image' in the PhD

This is a personal learning journey — an artist-researcher's scrapbook — with broader pedagogical implications for teaching theory and practice.



Given that many of the texts in this text have been scanned into place, grafted from one context to another, all 'corrections' will simply be pasted in over the top, like patches, to show how worked and wounded all texts really are. This technique can be construed as an extreme form of metafiction where the crafting and drafting process is made more obvious (and bloody) by being turned inside out and outside in. This text wears its guts on its sleeve.

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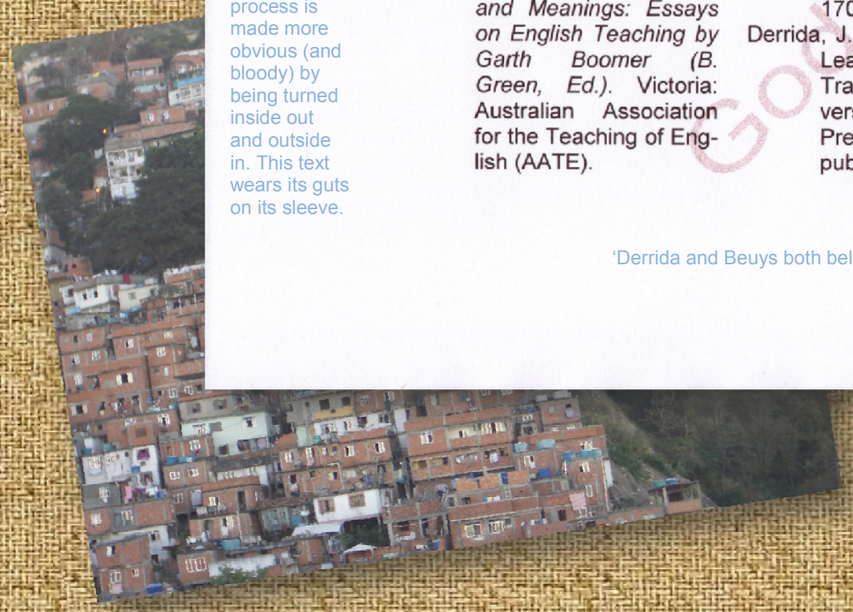
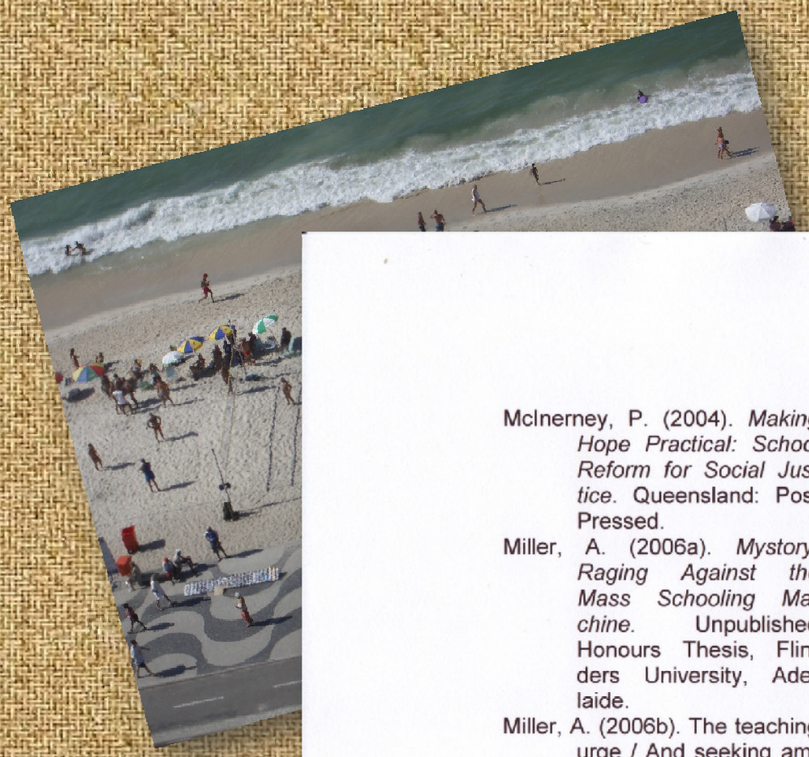
'Derrida and Beuys both believe the *unreceivability* of a provoking work is itself an effective form of reception' (Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 1985, p. 249).

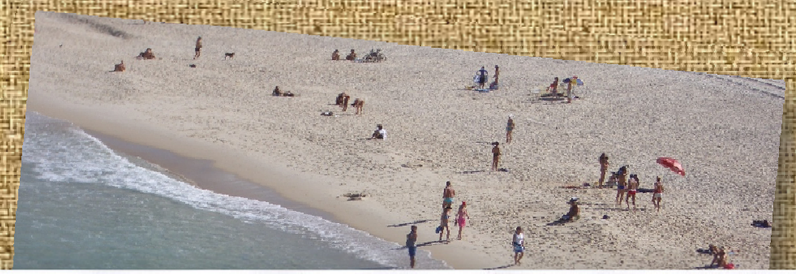
13



Searching for better ways to teach, learn, research, live, & create in social & professional systems that incarcerate rather than liberate. Where the anti-text is an act of faith.

13





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One does not set out to make an 'anti-' text without first feeling sufficient love in the system to allow the learner and researcher to go beyond the known and orthodox into the unknown and unorthodox. Acts of disruption are, above all, acts of faith in the system's capacity to tolerate and welcome the 'new' into the enormity of everything and encourage it to speak its heart and mind. The 'anti-' in this sense is not an act of hate, but an act of love and faith. It is the gesture that says that the learner is not simply content to mimic the templates of yesteryear to obtain acceptance and credibility. It is a gesture that speaks of the learner's willingness to push themselves and the edges of knowledge, language, and re-presentation into previously unexplored domains. It is a gesture that really does try to operate in the upper reaches of Bloom's taxonomy of learning, in the synthesis and creative use of knowledge to make *new* knowledge. It tries to add to knowledge, not by obeying the 'doxa' and 'episteme' of the system, but by actually trying to transcend them, to go beyond, to extend, to live. It tries to love in a world hell-bent on hate. It tries to re-describe inherited knowledge for the sake of enriching rather than depleting the world around it. It tries to extend the democracy of learning…

Gone from my mind

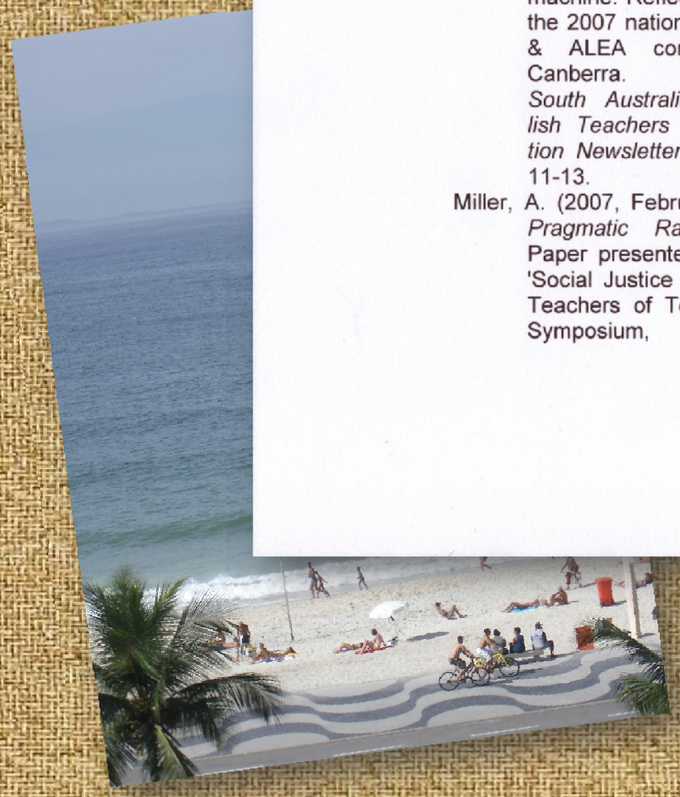
Text from friend:

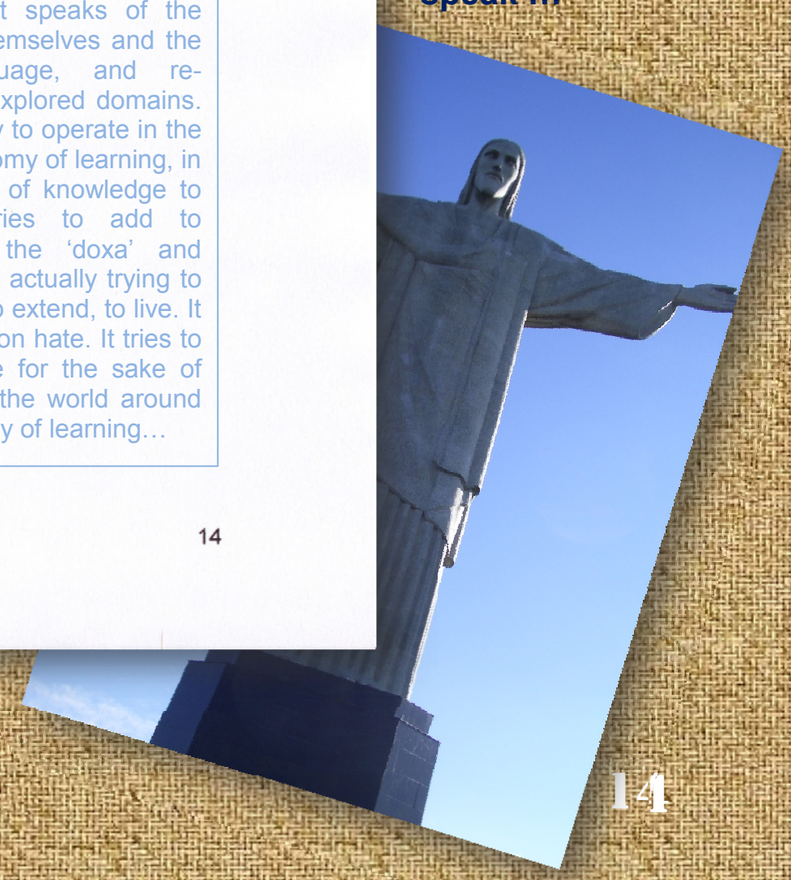
Do not fear to be eccentric in opinion, for every opinion now accepted was once eccentric.
Bertrand Russell.

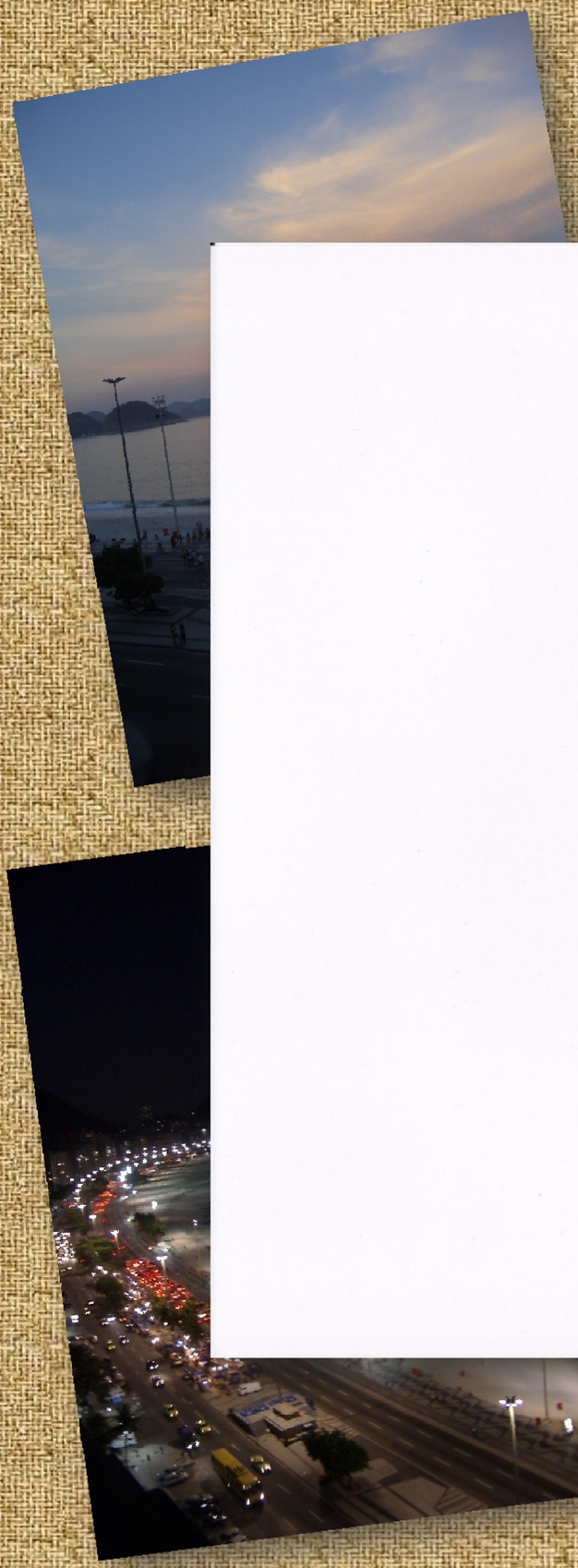
Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

Sent:
2-Nov-2007
17:22:45

Letting the 'aesthetic' speak …





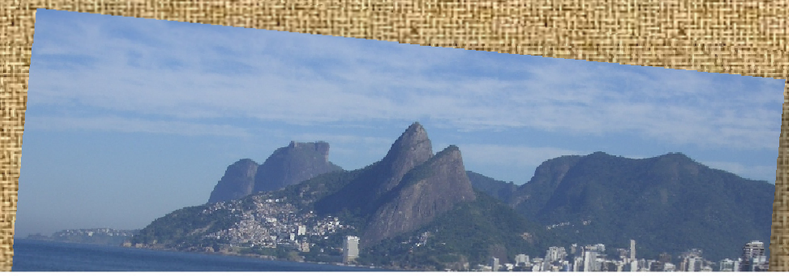


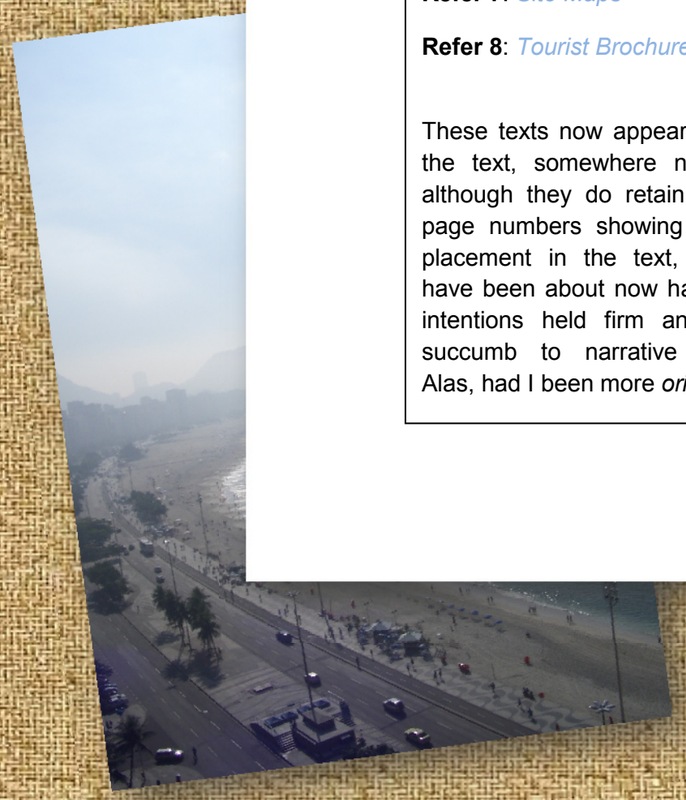
***and* you**

God save me from me

It's not just what it 'says' in words

but what it also says in 'looks'





List of texts:

Refer 1: *Symposium Flyer*

Refer 2: *Symposium Paper*

Refer 3: *Competition Flyer*

Refer 4: *Competition Entry*

Refer 5: *SAETA Newsletter Article*

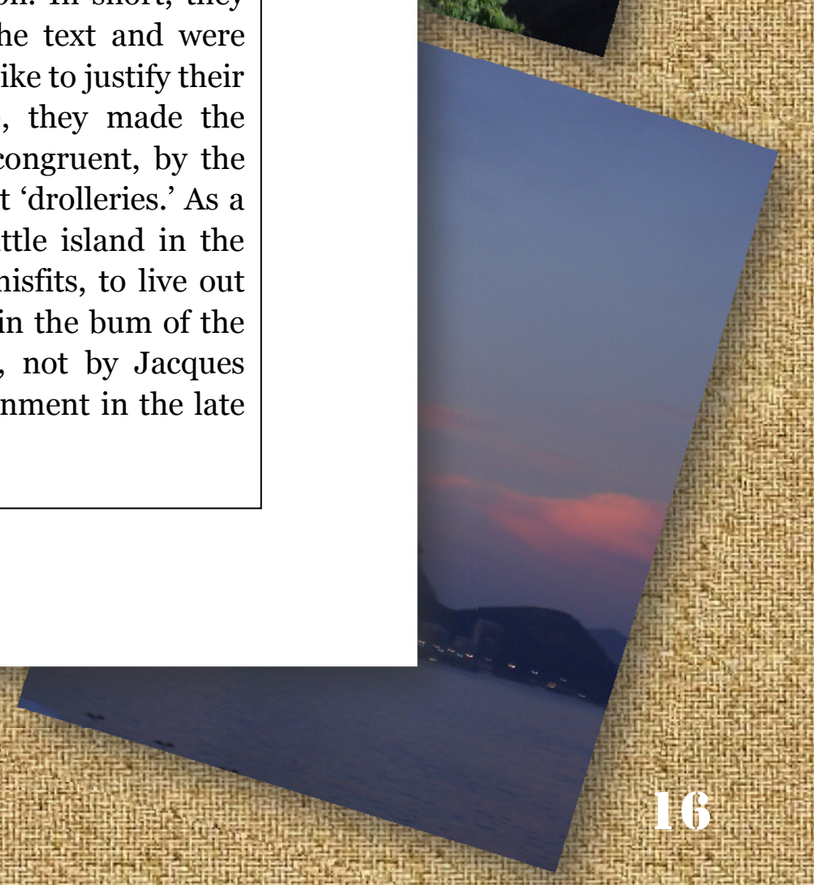
Refer 6: *Report Card*

Refer 7: *Site Maps*

Refer 8: *Tourist Brochure*

These texts now appear elsewhere in the text, somewhere near the end, although they do retain their original page numbers showing their original placement in the text, which would have been about now had my original intentions held firm and had I not succumb to narrative conventions. Alas, had I been more *original*.

These texts, as extended footnotes, as footnotes brought back into the text proper, as footnotes given entry visas and permanent citizenship, as footnotes re-introduced to the privilege of the mainstream discourse, as extended parentheses (as Jacques Derrida might say), have since been '(re)dumped,' '(re)exiled,' and '(re)stripped' of their legitimacy and privileged status and *demoted* to the 'appendix' of the text (if anywhere). They have endured a double violence and a double rejection, made all the more cruel by their brief inclusion. In short, they 'got in the way' of the structured chaos of the text and were considered too rigid, too cogent, and too essay-like to justify their inclusion. In this sense, being orthodox(*ish*), they made the chaos too chaotic, too disturbing, and too incongruent, by the simple fact that they were too 'straight' and not 'drolleries.' As a consequence, they have been deported to a little island in the dark depths of the text, as illegal aliens and misfits, to live out their days forgotten and unseen, behind bars, in the bum of the text. I was taught this technique of *erasure*, not by Jacques Derrida, but by the Australian Coalition Government in the late 1990s and early 2000s.



The verbal and non-verbal can speak together

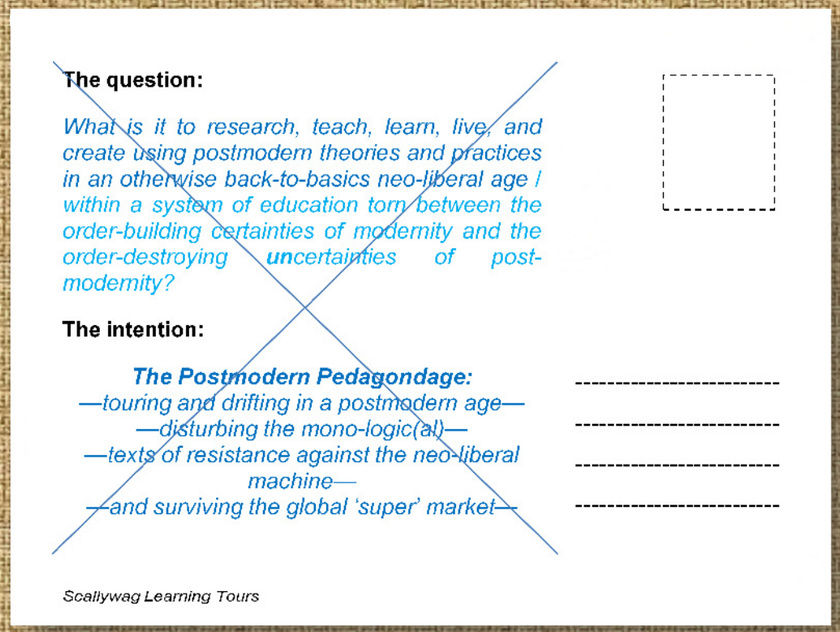
About the Question

The question is deliberately provocative and deliberately ambivalent. It provides me space enough to manoeuvre and space enough to reach the most *temporary* of conclusions to the most enduring and aporetic of problems, to make *possibilities* not answers.

Similarly, the 'products' made as part of this project do not so much 'answer' this question as set out to produce possible strategies for dealing with it. These solutions may not prove satisfactory or even conclusive—and may be abandoned or improved by subsequent endeavours. All 'answers,' in this sense, are provisional (*until-further-notice*) and opportunities *to begin again*, hence why the question (over there) is written under erasure: *written only to be dismissed and destroyed*.

This represents a polemic in its own right and draws attention to the nature of 'questioning' and 'order-building' in a postmodern world. These texts 'embody' *partial*-solutions rather than articulate *total*-solutions. They are as much *visual* solutions as verbal solutions.

'Settle for nothing now and you settle for nothing later.'



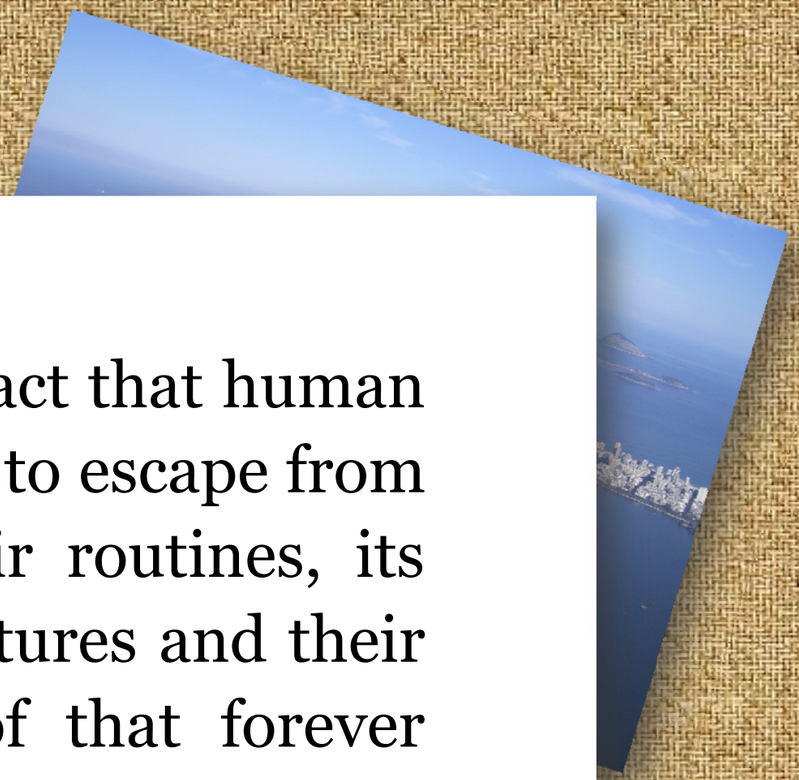
Text from friend:

I never give in to the temptation to be difficult just for the sake of being difficult. That would be too ridiculous. Jacques.

Sender:
Gavin
[phone number]

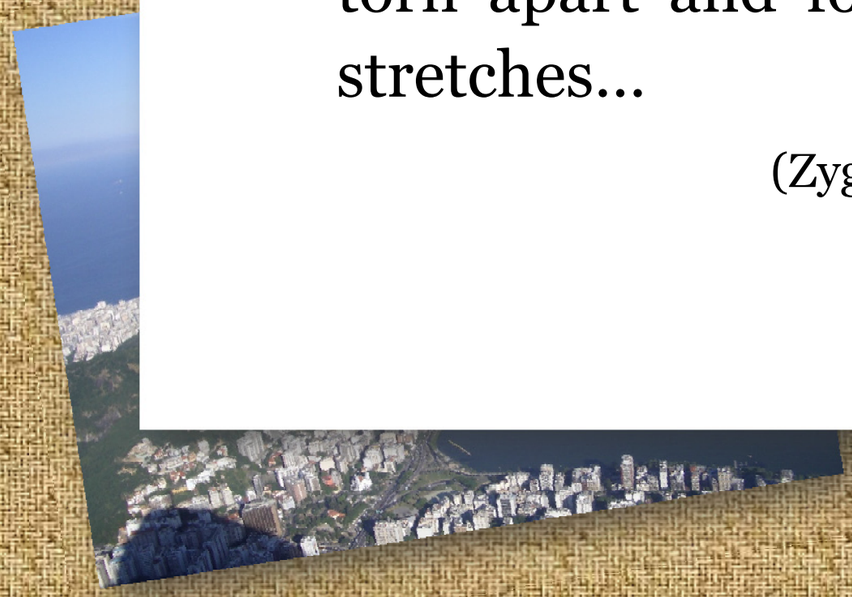
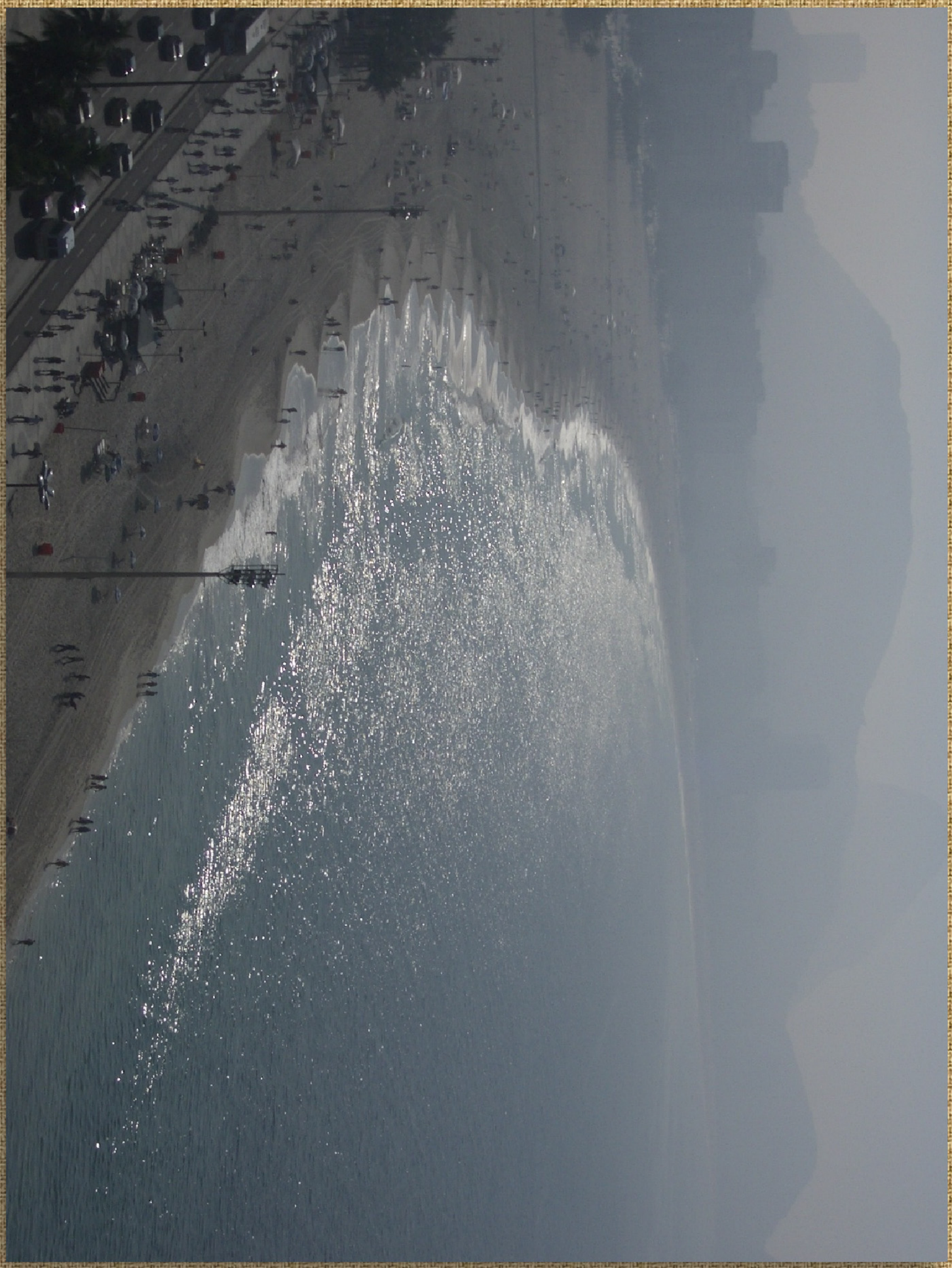
Sent:
21-May-2007
12:27:07

Have faith, you will learn to decipher and invent this text. Pattern recognition is beginning already.



It is, we may say, a pristine and 'brute' fact that human beings exist in the never-ending ... effort to escape from chaos: society, its institutions and their routines, its images and their compositions, its structures and their managerial principles, are all facets of that forever inconclusive and relentless escape. *Society, we may say, is a massive and continuous cover-up operation.* And yet the best the escape ever succeeds in coming up with is a thin film of order that is continuously pierced, torn apart and folded up by the Chaos over which it stretches...

(Zygmunt Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, p. 14, my italics)



Copacabana: Tourist Mecca