Drafting

Entry Drafts

Design Drafts

Note Stacks

My Desk

Late November, 2007
Drafting
How does the form and appearance of a text affect its reception and reading? What might a textual lexicon look like that encompasses both the visual and verbal aspects of text production? Can the blending of texts (e.g. stories, poems, images, etymologies, essays, and quotations) create evocative bricolages and hypertexts that stimulate learning and research? How might different artistic and authorial selves and voices occupy the same textual product? Can autoethnographic accounts and life histories further the artist's awareness of the self and society? Can re-writing the past inform and transform the present? Can the textual process transport the artist-researcher (the bricoleur) into new domains of awareness and being? How can the bricoleur (the collagist) transform the conventional 'book' product into an artefact or work of art? What forms of representation are available to the artist-researcher through new and old technologies (e.g. desktop publishing and the printing press)? What audiences exist for these types of textual performances? These questions represent a cross-section of my interests in text production.

“Students of media are persistently attacked as evaders, idly concentrating on means or processes rather than on ‘substance’” (McLuhan & Fiore, The Medium is the Massage, 1967, p. 10).
Drafting

Personalising Ethnography

Entries 1.

Cunts 2.

Logocentrism 3.
Drafting
Drafting
Pedagondag: The Impossible Homecoming

I have lived in over 30 abodes in my 3½ years on planet earth, and so my 'home' is not the house or the flat. It is the river, the liquid-mood world, the epiphanic encounter, and the shifting plurality of rest. I have never experienced the name 'identity' and believe I never will. I am, as the main character in the 1980 film Permanent Vacation says, 'a certain type of tourist on a permanent vacation.' I am the vagabond-tourist whether I like it or not: a wayfarer, lost and found on the currents of postmodern life, both in and out of control of my life and the places and experiences I visit and happen upon on the way. The Postmodern Pedagondag tries to make visible this process—thoughtfully, playfully, solemnly—unlike traditional (modernist) pedagogies which play down the chaos bubbling beneath the surface of everyday life. When those we love do the most alarming and unpredictable things, such as throw themselves off cliffs, have fatal heart-attacks while cooking steak at the kitchen stove, or die of drug overdoses and car accidents in the prime of their lives, the very real presence of terror and uncertainty can no longer be pushed aside: instead, chaos speaks, and it speaks in a language no socialised human being can comprehend or endure, so loud and so pervasive that the everyday myths that dominate our lives are exploded into smithereens. It is then that the very 'real' indifference of the universe (as Astrid Cameron might say) shames us down on the ego which is desperate to make certainty and immortality from the nothingness that otherwise surrounds it. As Mausaur discovers in The Outsider: it was as if that great rush of anguish had washed [him] clean, emptied [him] of hope, and, gazing up at the sky-sky sprinkled with its stars and planes, for the first time, the first, [he] had [the] first brush against the cold indifference of the universe. (Cameron, 1942, p. 120). It was then that Mausaur first of the epiphanies that humanity had slapped upon him and finally, at peace, ready to take his execution of the Frankenstein's electrically charged lines of thinking enough to make their own realities, notions rather than submit to those made by others. To those who dare to drift and tour against the grain of habit. Those are the 'Others' that society hates.
The return to the book is then the abandoning of the book...

(Derrida, Writing & Difference, 1967/2005, p. 373)

‘Living under conditions of overwhelming and self-perpetuating uncertainty (i.e. postmodernity) is an experience altogether different from a life subordinated to the task of identity-building in a world bent on the building of order (i.e. modernity)’ (Bauman, Postmodernity and Its Discontents, 1997, p. 25).

…under the name of literature you can, you should be able to publish anything you want, with no restrictions, no censorship, in principle’ (Derrida, Deconstruction Engaged, 2001, p. 116).

Today’s man and woman can hardly treat their life as a pilgrimage, even if they wished to. One can plan one’s life as a journey-to-a-destination only in a world of which one can sensibly hope that its charts will remain the same or little changed throughout one’s lifetime – and this is blatantly not the case today. Instead, the life of men and women of our times is more like that of tourist-through-time: they cannot and would not decide in advance what places they will visit and what the sequence of stations will be. What do they know for sure is just that they will keep on the move, never sure whether the place they have reached is their final destination (Bauman, Life in Fragments, 1995, pp. 268-269).

And some of us prefer illusion to despair.” (Nelson, The Simpsons)

The novels I have read in 2007, which may or may not have influenced the construction of this text, include:


Turner Hospital, J. (1989). Obscenities Queensland. UQP.


Turner Hospital, J. (1997). Oyster Queensland. UQP.


Plus:


*Some of us prefer illusion to despair.*

(Nelson, The Simpsons)
Late November, 2007

"Questioning the Questioner"
(for questioning the question)

In 2007 I presented my PhD proposal to a panel of academics and interested colleagues at Finders University. Most observers found my project exciting (even bewildering) and perfectly consistent with my previous work, which involved both verbal and non-verbal forms of writing and presentation and pragmatic and radical means of negotiating the hegemonic structures of educational institutions. But not everyone. A small minority found my work too "anti" for comfort and needed assurance that the anti-theiological (and anti-exegetical) could be loving and affirmative and not simply hateful towards the academy, academics, or the system per se. A dispute arose over the legitimacy of my question. One observer suggested that my question wasn’t a question, but a “field” of inquiry, which somehow meant that it wasn’t legitimate and couldn’t be authorised. I was devastated. It certainly looked and felt like a question to me. It certainly looked and felt like a question to my supervisors. But suddenly it wasn’t a question and would need immediate revision if my project was to continue. There seemed no distinction between the creative writing project and the classical dissertation. I felt I had entered George Orwell’s 1984 where meaning and language had devolved to serve the needs and interests of the ruling hegemony. I felt betrayed by the very system meant to support me. My student card and future were at stake. I didn’t have the heart to say that I had nearly finished my exegesis or that, at the beginning of my candidature, I had intended to do my entire PhD without any question at all just to see if it could be done; or that I had considered devising a completely ‘non verbal’ question to avoid words, sentences, and question marks altogether. But I didn’t. This was the most conservative question I had. It was my ‘pragmatic-radical’ attempt to reconcile my needs as a learner with those of the university that supports me. Ironically, too, my PhD question was about this very issue: about conservative forces preventing new ways of being and knowing from entering the university and education system. And here were just such forces, on cue, to disqualify the very question that would question the question and question their authority. Now, it seemed, I needed a new question: a ‘real’ question, with ‘real’ answers, and ‘real’ knowledge. My very principles as a teacher and researcher had been rocked. Did this mean that I had to re-write my entire exegesis to satisfy the demands of the few, whose concern over this issue seemed to extend beyond genuine care and interest for me to wider ideological debates (i.e. between modern and postmodern accounts of knowledge, learning, and representation); or did I have to ‘fit’ a posthumous question to the finished text to simply provide a platform for the few to leave their mark on the flesh of the project and the psyche of the PhD candidate, who would now know his place? Did this group really feel threatened by the question—or just me? Whose interests were served? Whose learning was helped? Whose future was promoted? Whose wellbeing was at stake? Whose project was it?
The immediate application of [applied grammatology] is to overcome the desire of the professor to conclude, to render a question inert through resolution, to reduce the tension of a problem or an interpretation to the nirvana state of zero pressure by designing a decided meaning (Ulmer, 1985, p. 145).

Aside

Ironically, not only had I written the question ‘under erasure’ but so to had the establishment. I had done so to challenge ‘question-lic’ and ‘question-dependant’ approaches to learning and knowledge production in education systems, while the establishment had done so to uphold such approaches. The question, it seemed, was undergoing a ‘double’ erasure: erased by the questioner to draw attention to the nature of questioning and order building in a (post)modern world, and erased by the establishment for being ‘deviant’ and ‘non-compliant’ (i.e. for not getting into the spirit of the question). The whole ‘question of the question’ seemed lost on the deniers. This was a battle over the privilege or non-privilege of the question itself, as a signficant gesture and cognitive device, without even considering the content of the question and what it meant or asked. It was about whether the question itself, as a structure, as a habit of mind, as an institution, could be re-imagined, brutalised, or de-constructed within the hegemonic structure of the university system. This was, I believed, a ‘creative writing’ project and not a classical dissertation; as such, it should have been free to ‘play’ with and ‘disturb’ the convention of the question in any way it liked; to bend it, twist it, and/or ignore it as part of its politics of representation and part of its politics of education. This was a question that ‘blinked’ on and off as required, coming into and out of focus so that knowledge could be constructed, not on the basis of pre-determined questions and pre-determined answers, but on the basis of the arts-based, narrative-inquiry, grammatical process, which discovers and bulks knowledge on the run. It does not shut down the learning process by pre-determining the learning journey by pre-determining the question and syllabus. It does not stand over the learner like a Sinit Rupequr. Instead, this sort of (anti)question mutates and

changes as new questions arise and new possibilities emerge. Let me repeat: it’s not the question or destination that counts; it’s the possibilities and processes that count. It’s a question that’s always already to come (as Jacques Derrida might suggest) and always already beginning again. It’s never finished. It’s a question that’s not quite there and not quite that. It’s a question that doesn’t know what it wants or where it’s going. It’s the pedagogic ‘question’ that drifts and tours simultaneously, overturning and inverting certainties while plunging headlong into Chaos. Yes, to make the point that all ‘orders’ and all ‘structures’ (whether imposed by the university or not) are provisional: until-further-notice. Like Cizyndas’ monument, all structures and all orders, even the monarchy of the question as the only method capable of making bona fide knowledge, will crumble and fall away. Sooner or later. I mean to hasten this run for the sake of this project and for the sake of ruining the notion of the project ‘enterprise’ itself. To look elsewhere for knowledge and elsewhere for meaning beyond the mind-imposed structures of the education system, which privileges certainty, linearity, and modernist rationality while confounding and outlawing uncertainty, discontinuity, and postmodern irrationality. This project doesn’t answer the question in words, but in design, gesture, spirit, and mood. It is a ‘non-verbal articulation of the inexplicable and un-seayable.’

Despite the politics of the question, and despite the politics of the gesture, the question itself does ask a general question about what it means to ask such questions and make such gestures in a world intent on disqualifying such endeavours and protecting the status quo. To keep death, chaos, and shit out of sight and out of mind. As such, the content of the question does. I believe, ask a legitimate question about the world around us. No question, after all, is intrinsically to this question or
Like Derrida: who creates learning opportunities in places we hadn’t expected, not so much to centralise these locations as to acknowledge them as valuable sites of contemplation.

End aside.

Derrida adds that impossibility (a pure event; a pure pardon, a pure hospitality) might happen, fleetingly, and without our full knowledge. If so, we would be passive in relation to it, and might not know it had happened, or, only barely (Deutscher, How to Read Derrida, 2005, p. 106).

"The fact that until recently the word 'shit' appeared in print as s— has nothing to do with moral considerations. You can't claim that shit is immoral, after all! The objection to shit is a metaphysical one. The daily defecation session is daily proof of the unacceptability of Creation. Either/or: either shit is acceptable (in which case don't lock yourself in the bathroom!) or we are created in an unacceptable manner. / It follows, then, that the aesthetic ideal of the categorical agreement with being is a world in which shit is denied and everyone acts as though it did not exist. This aesthetic ideal is called kitsch" (Kundera, The Unbearable Lightness of Being, 1984/1999, pp. 245-246).

PERFORMING THEORY
It seems that ‘learning,’ the supposed centre-piece of university life, sometimes comes a very distant second to the whims of convention and the structures of power. Sometimes it all boils down to power and politics—and the learner can toe the line or go to hell. After all, it’s the student who is at risk, not the examiner. And when an English department renames itself ‘English, Creative Writing, and Australian Studies,’ and allows a wave of ‘progressive’ candidates to enter its halls, isn’t it signalling a change in attitude to the types of knowledge and project that can be produced? Doesn’t it signal the transcendence of the classical ‘modernist’ dissertation by new and creative alternatives, thereby welcoming the exploration of new forms of cultural expression and knowledge? At the institutional level it seems so, but at the level of the individual it seems not. Some creative projects are too creative and too novel for their own good. Some students ask too much of the minds and hearts of others. This makes this type of ‘arche-writing’ doubly suicidal and doubly necessary.

This was a sad day in my university life. My project seemed threatened by the vested interests of the few over the many. The conservative lobby seemed more powerful than the progressive lobby. My future and my project seemed the sole property of one ideology? (This trend did later swing.)

Most remarkably, and going very much against the grain of poststructuralism, I was expected to endure my fate in silence, yes, to become complicit in my own subjugation. When they say jump, you say how high. But as my Honours thesis taught me: the personal is political. I can name my oppressors in the spirit of autoethnography, arts-based inquiry, poststructuralism, applied grammality, conscientisation, and other critical pedagogies that inform my work. Like the band Rage Against The Machine shouts: Settle for nothing now and you settle for nothing later. And like Marilyn Cochran-Smith and Michael W Apple suggest: you are implicated in the politics of education whether you like it or not, by design or by default. In other words, if you allow injustices and abuses of power to occur in silence (to you and to others) then you’re saying ‘yes’ to the status quo and ‘yes’ to such practices; if you speak out and act up you’re saying ‘no’ to the absurdities of the system and fighting for its improvement. This is an act of love not hate. It’s about being an active participant rather than a passive recipient. It doesn’t make me a nihilist: it makes me a believer. And even though it is risky to speak out and act up, and there might be penalties and repercussions to face and endure, my personal ethics demand that I speak openly and frankly about the political battles I encounter in local and personal contexts to also shed light on global and social contexts, where wars over social justice and iniquity are won and lost daily. These are the grassroots skirmishes that

Kevin Brophy (1998, p. 215) has a solution to the ‘exclusion’ of creative practice from legitimate status in English departments. He suggests three contradictory and interrelated practices to satisfy research diversity: 1) an information-based practice of scholarly research; 2) a practice based upon interpretive, critical and theoretical thinking (hermeneutics); and 3) the production of creative texts in response to literary history and contemporary textual practices (heuristics).

- Why allow creative writing research if projects deemed too creative are penalised and restricted?
- When do the ‘suggestions’ become ‘directions’ and the ‘directions’ become ‘ultimatums’?
- When does learning turn into exercises in conformity and the pacifying of the wills and interests of senior knowledge-holders?
- When does the democracy of learning turn into the totalitarianism of learning?
- Why allow us to read the most provocative and counter-hegemonic of texts but not allow us to enact these teachings in practice?
- Why allow us to read the most provocative and counter-hegemonic of texts only to have us respond to them in the most conservative and hegemonic of products?
- Why discourage learners from producing their own ideas simply because they contradict or undermine the establishment?
Jean-François Lyotard advocates and the ground-level guerrilla tactics that Norman Denzin encourages. It seems we all have our own ‘culture wars’ to wage or escape: we either fight these wars or sink into the crowd and become complicit in our absence, perpetrators in turn who administer these atrocities to others because we didn’t have the guts to stand tall and speak out.

Today, even though I’ll probably be condemned for speaking my mind, I will speak the unspeakable for my benefit if no other. I will wear my heart on my sleeve and make a stand. It’s my right, after all, as Paulo Freire bell hooks, and Susan Finley suggest, to name my oppressors, imagine a life lived otherwise, and make critical interventions in the world that tries to control me. A world that is trying to domesticate me into the logic of a system I so desperately want to escape. To make education the practice of freedom, not subjugation.

Unfortunately, while the university seems happy for me to read the most ‘radical’ and counter-hegemonic of literature, it seems (at times) very reluctant to allow me to enact it in practice. And this, for me, as a teacher who has never finished learning or loving the world, is surely one of the saddest follies in education of all, and surely one of the most pressing issues to address if we really mean to empower students rather than simply extend the power of the powerful. Ideas that remain imprisoned within the confines of the idea, unable to reach fruition through action or practice, are WASTED.

Remember, too, that had I not written this piece I would have chosen silence. You would not have known that I had made this momentous decision. But I would have known. I would have known that I had sold-out my principles for the sake of conformity and possible promotion. And this bruise would have been deeper and bluer and more enduring than the bruise administered by the system. Moral exclusion is such an ingenious strategy because it vindicates the violence it delivers to those it judges to exist outside and beyond the scope of its protection: that is, to those deemed ‘deviant’ by the system and therefore worthy of the punishments from those within the system. Let’s face it: I don’t have a leg to stand on when it comes to the power of the system to declare me wholly and totally at fault and wrong. But I have me—and it’s in this shifting and precious plurality that I place my loyalty and my love. It is this precious plurality that I wish to defend.

If we don’t take action now
We settle for nothing later
Settle for nothing now
And we’ll settle for nothing later

Rage Against The Machine, ‘Settle for Nothing,’ 1992
Leaving home

*oblivion and beyond*

Let me reiterate: the question I outlined at the beginning of this text 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’ I make 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 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-answers. After all, the question, as a gesture, as an institution, as a flag driven hard into the surface of an undiscovered moon, is the very embodiment of modernity itself, writ large as a bold proclamation to go where no other scholar has ever gone before, to colonise the murky and uncharted depths of an untamed and uncivilised world: the rational crusade to go everywhere and know everything while eliminating flights of fancy and hysterical outbursts from the hallowed halls of official knowledge (Linn, 1996; Ward, 2003). This, then, is a different type of encyclopaedia: one that accumulates atypical and aberrant entries to extend the knower’s unknowing even further, if not into the Abyss, to its edge, to stare up and down its enormity while not dying of shock.

To paraphrase Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (‘Preface,’ Of Grammatology, 1967/1976, p. xiv), the practice of ‘erasure’ (sous rature) involves writing a word, crossing it out, and then printing both word and deletion: “Since William: “And I, on the contrary, find the most joyful delight in unravelling a nice, complicated knot. And it must also be because, at a time when as philosopher I doubt the world has an order, I am compelled to discover, if not an order, at least a series of connections in small areas of the world’s affairs” (p. 341).

William: “I have never doubted the truth of signs. Adso, they are the only things man has with which to orient himself in the world” (p. 492).

William: “I behaved stubbornly, pursuing a semblance of order, when I should have known well that there is no order in the universe” (Eco, The Name of the Rose, 1980/1998, p. 492).
the word is inaccurate, it is crossed out. Since it is necessary, it remains legible.” My question, then, is written under erasure and under duress: conceptualised, written, crossed out, acknowledged, and abandoned in one scatter-textual gesture: since the question is inaccurate, it is crossed out; since it is necessary and demanded, it remains legible. It is a question that questions its own legitimacy and its own origins. It is a question that recognises its own complicity in staging and fulfilling the answer to follow, or, in the absence of an answer, bestowing failure upon the inquirer (in this case, me). It is a question that, being present (even when absent), epitomises what Zygmunt Bauman might describe as the quintessential ‘modernist’ obsession: to eradicate uncertainty and irregularity from the world and bring order to chaos; to tame the world by rationalising the world; to solve the problem of uncertainty and death by banishing them from paradise. DEATH – the final insult to all our efforts to reign supreme over the precarious nature of life – ELIMINATED. It is a question that acknowledges the precarious nature of all questions—that all questions and all answers are the products of a rationalist mindset and an order-building project, a mindset that insists that there are hard and
fast answers to the humiliating insults of death and shit; whereas the ‘deconstructed’ question points to the absence of grand narratives and the fictional nature of all knowledge. Knowing, after all, is an ‘interested’ activity. As Milan Kundera points out in *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984/1999, p. 282), texts are written by humans, not horses. There are no facts, only interpretations, as Friedrich Nietzsche might say. It is a question suspicious of its own capacity to make good on its promise. It is a question that is self-conscious in the extreme. It is a question that doesn’t promise answers but possibilities. It is a question that questions itself. A postmodern question, that bears the mark (the question mark) as a burden – not a trophy. A question that commits suicide by taking an épée to its own breast. Hacking at its own privilege. At its own construction. At its self.

This, then, is not a ‘modernist’ project. It does not seek answers, conclusions, or truths in the traditional ‘absolute’ sense: it avoids the thesis structure, the certainty formula, and the non-reflexive question (knowing full well that by insisting that it doesn’t know, it sounds very much like it

"Of course," he says, "we have no idea, nor do we, or what the inhabitants of our future might be. In that sense, we have no future. Not in the sense that our grandparents had a future, or thought they did. Fully imagined cultural futures were the luxury of another day, one in which 'now' was of some greater duration. For us, of course, things can change so abruptly, so violently, so profoundly, that futures like our grandparents' have insufficient hold to stand on. We have no future because our present is too volatile. We have only risk management. The spinning of the given moment's scenarios. Pattern recognition." (Gibson, *Pattern Recognition*, 2003 / 2005, pp. 58-59).
knows something—something definitive). There will be no dot points or conclusions at the end of this text. That could be construed as the quintessential modernist project incarnate: the traditional dissertation that offers answers and solutions through thousands of carefully ordered and structured words: the archetypal introduction, methodology, literature review, findings, discussion, and conclusion to lead us back from the brink. This is not the quintessential modernist project: it is a collection of texts, discrete textualities, and fragments (textaments), all grappling with arguments and agendas of their own making at the mouth of the Abyss. It is, therefore (and note how quickly this text appeals to rationalist arguments, linear arrangements, and the internalised voice of the master), a ‘postmodern’ project that upsets its own heritage and its own indoctrination—where it can. It revels in uncertainties, ambiguities, and re-descriptions of inherited ‘knowledge’—in what Jean-François Lyotard might call ‘language games,’ what Nietzsche might call ‘the will to power,’ and what Richard Rorty might call ‘creative re-descriptions.’ This type of inheritance, as Jacques Derrida might suggest, is an act of love—not hate. It dares to interrogate the knowledge it receives and the
world it inherits: *to do the duty of not taking the world and its knowledge for granted*. To put its hand up and ask new questions of the teacher (and, through the teacher, the society that legitimises and employs the teacher). To ask our leaders to speak *to* us, not *at* us? To ask permission to speak back.

Ironically, some commentators have encouraged me (not necessarily maliciously) to use postmodern theories and practices *from a modernist standpoint*—in other words, to make a postmodern text using modernist formulas; in other words, to imprison postmodern theories within modernist frameworks; in other words, to pretend to engage postmodern theories and practices while secretly saluting the modernist *doxa*; in other words, to make a modernist text that simply *looks like a postmodern text*. In other words, *to write the classical dissertation*. This roundabout technique guarantees (consciously or sub-consciously) the expulsion of forbidden thinking from the rationalist institution. It does so by feigning acceptance of the ‘new’ and ‘exotic’ while secretly plotting its demise. If you follow this logic then Prime Minister John Howard was
right to ‘intervene’ in the cognitive and affective lives of Australian learners in 2006 and 2007: there is no place, after all, for the ‘postmodern’ and ‘poststructural’ in the neo-liberal education system since such perspectives could challenge the devolution process and incite democracy. The Other, in this model, is not welcome, for it may elect to speak. And speak back.

Could Nietzsche do anything but go insane in such a world? A world that encourages (or at least tolerates) a certain amount of critical reading but which absolutely deplores (and even punishes) critical practice?

This begs several questions: Do we brutalise students—do we commit violence against them—when we insist that their knowledge constructions adhere to our own? That deviations from the norm will be punishable by failure? That knowledge constructions must obey the models of the previous generation? That knowledge ‘transgressions’ will be considered knowledge offences, thwarted through the ‘panopticon’ of the assessment process and the discourses we use to condemn, coerce,
and knuckle them into line? Do we, as Garth Boomer suggests, spread ‘barbarity’ every time we insist that students build knowledge for our sakes and not their own? Do we commit violence against our students every time we insist that their texts mimic those we made? Whose knowledge (and whose future) do we build when we violently intervene in the cognitive and affective knowledges of those we claim to help? Whose interests do we serve when those we ‘teach’ (those we violently ‘brand’ with our name) have no other option but to do as we say? When we give them no choice but to obey? Is the teacher that demands a cogent answer to an impossible question ‘anti-’ learning and violent in the extreme? Is the student who inherits the past by questioning it not the most ‘perfect’ student and most ‘loving’ human being? Aren’t the ‘anti-text’ and ‘counter-hegemonic perspective’ among the few saving graces we have to contemplate a better future and a better life beyond the annihilation of the last century? Beyond the terrorism and rendition of the new century?

Is it possible to ask such questions without being assaulted? Is it possi-
ble to ask such questions (to will to power) without assaulting those I put the questions to? Is it possible to speak without committing violence to myself and to others? Is not the modernist project a particular type of unknowledge that doesn’t actually want to know all that it could know? A pretend search, the simulacra of research, a foil to knowledge? A dead end of sorts? So is it possible to research, teach, learn, live, and create using postmodern theories and practices in an otherwise back-to-basics neo-liberal age when the system is set up to disqualify such attempts and to force the flawed knowledge-seeker back to the fold?

And the answer (which I said I wouldn’t give) is, yes, maybe, just maybe, by accident and miracle, just when we thought it was impossible, surprise surprise, the impossible might shed its ‘im’ and become possible, for a moment, the briefest instant, in the darkness of our down-turned eyes, the gift arriving, just when we tried so hard to make sure it wouldn’t—nay, couldn’t—arrive (Derrida, 2001). Perhaps it happened in this text, momentarily, against all odds, when we weren’t looking. Perhaps something different emerged in the rubble, misery, and confusion...
that we thought we had already overcome (Chambers, 1995, p. 30). When we blinked. When we spat. When we forgot.

Perhaps nothing happened at all.

What I do feel confident about, if not entirely certain, is that a critically literate and engaged person would be derelict in their ethical duties if they did not question the logic and inheritance of the system that dominates their lives and restricts the kinds of realities and life strategies they can possibly imagine and possibly enact in a wor(l)d with more potential than we currently permit. To mindlessly accept the status quo as it is is to terrorise the Other for being different. It is to terrorise the Other before they even exist. To accept such an inheritance—without question, without action—is to be even more anti-social than the ‘disestablishmentarianism’ articulated here. It is the otherwise orderly and complicit who willingly profit from the misfortunes of others that commit the greater violence, not those who undermine their own privilege by disturbing the status quo for the sake of improving the world for all people at all times.
For those who grind against the grain.

Paradoxically, such a method of questioning and learning involves the un-learning and un-doing of historical assumptions so that new descriptions and new realities might emerge from the debris. And it is this kind of messiness and doubt that The Postmodern Pedagondage attempts to accommodate and accept: not to spite tradition and throw eggs at the establishment, but to enrich tradition and make the establishment better. The modernist faith in perfectibility and progress is at least one dream worth dreaming again, even if we now know that the perfect society and perfect (dis)order is always already beyond us and always, already, to come: an incomplete project and impossible task that never reaches completion but is always beginning...

The nineteenth and twentieth centuries have given us as much terror as we can take. We have paid a high enough price for the nostalgia of the whole and the one, for the reconciliation of the conceptual and the sensible, of the transparent and the communicable experience. Under the general demand for slackening and for appeasement, we can hear the mutterings of the desire for a return to terror, for the realization of the fantasy to seize reality. The answer is: Let us wage war on totality; let us be witness to the unpresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name’ (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 1979/1984, pp. 81-82).
The Postmodern Pedagondage is just one possible response to one impossible question. The two texts to follow will use this pedagogy to explore still others. But their stories and their responses are their own. The text just gone represents the learnings and speculations of the people I was in 2007. The texts to follow will have their own years and their own people. May they speak or unspeak their own ‘truths’ – and may they begin again where this text started.

20.10.2007

Andrew Miller
...I suggest to you that in our postmodern society, we are all – to one extent or another, in body or thought, here and now or in the anticipated future, willingly or unwillingly – on the move; none of us can be certain that he or she has gained the right to any place once for all and no one thinks that his or her staying in one place forever is a likely prospect.

The time to be a good student is no more. From the age of 5 through to the age 18 at the end of high school, through two university Honours degrees until now, I have responded to the texts of others in the hermeneutic tradition, the exegetical mode, as is the custom and habit of my society, and become competent at reproducing the ideas of others through the texts I produce. That time is now over. It is, as Garth Boomer, Jacques Derrida, Paulo Freire, bell hooks, and Gregory Ulmer might suggest, time to stop being the disciple and time to start being the speaker: time to turn learning into the practice of freedom and invention, to embrace the heuristic and eisegetical counter-hegemonic tradition, and step out from under the shadows of experts and respond critically and creatively to the world as I find it. To learn to speak after years of listening.

The time to be a good student is no more. It is time to be the very worst of students to be the very best of learners: to turn learning, researching, teaching, living, and creating upside down and downside up to see what other realities and other possibilities might exist outside and beyond the limits of the system that currently contains me. It is time to face the Abyss. It is time to speak.

And why the fuck not?