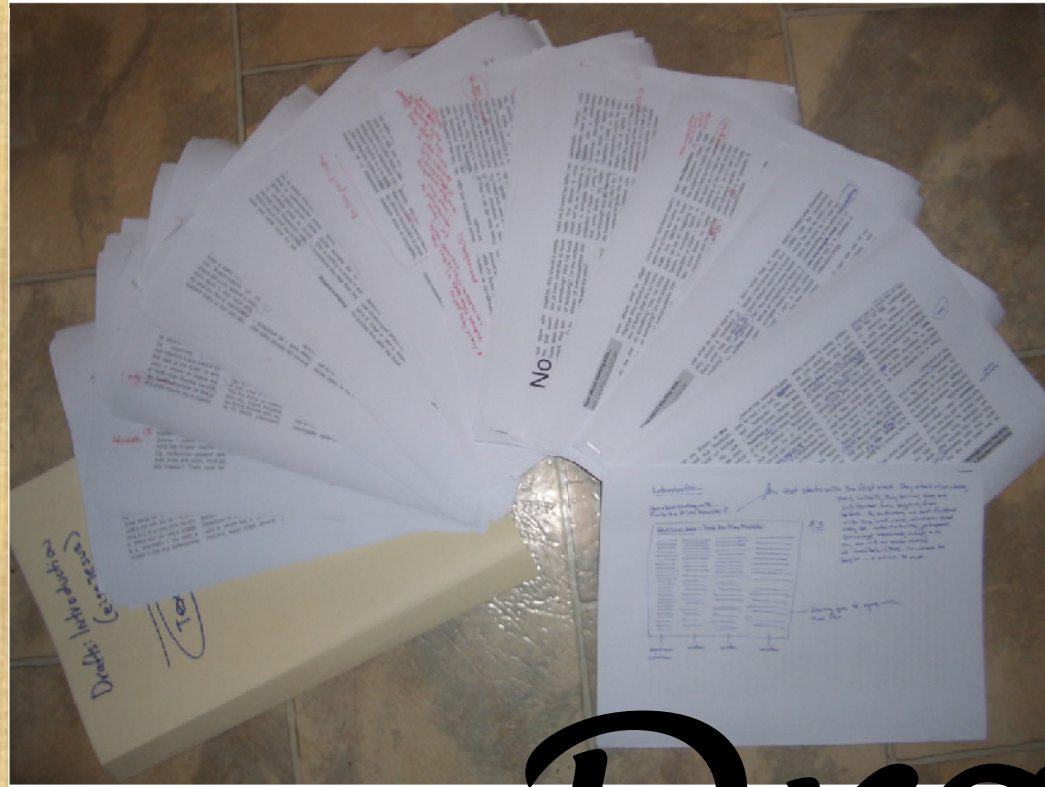


Competition Entry



No [Introduction]



SAETA Article

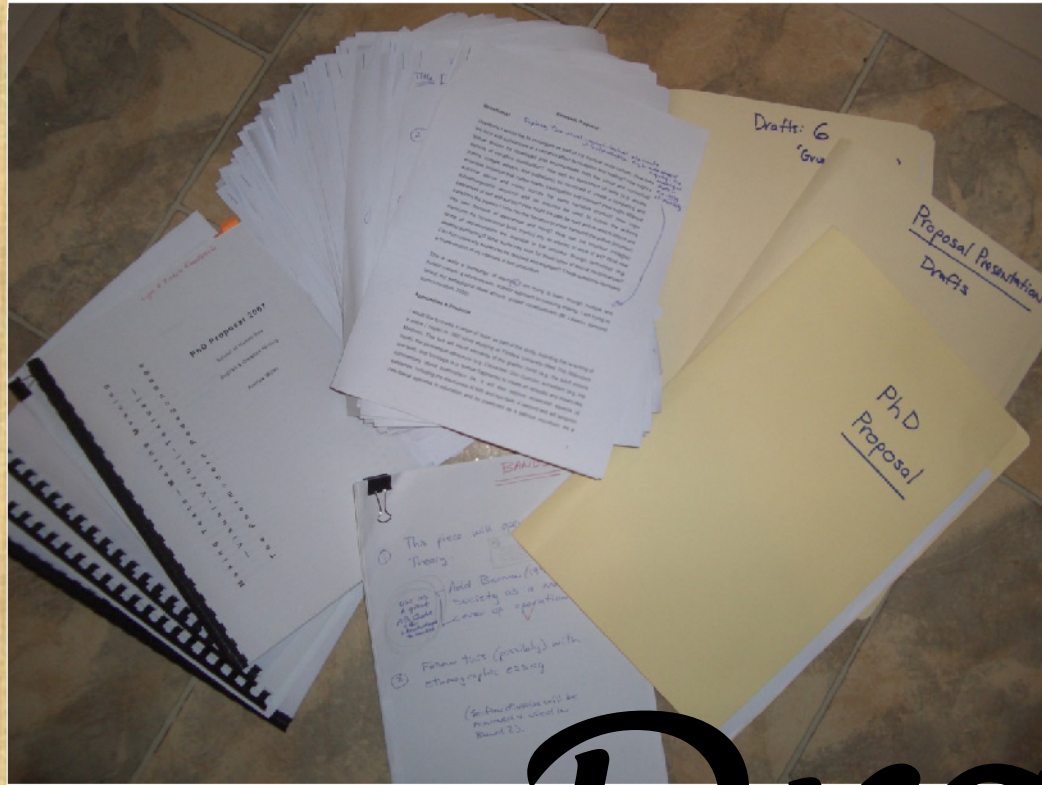


Pragmatic Radicalism



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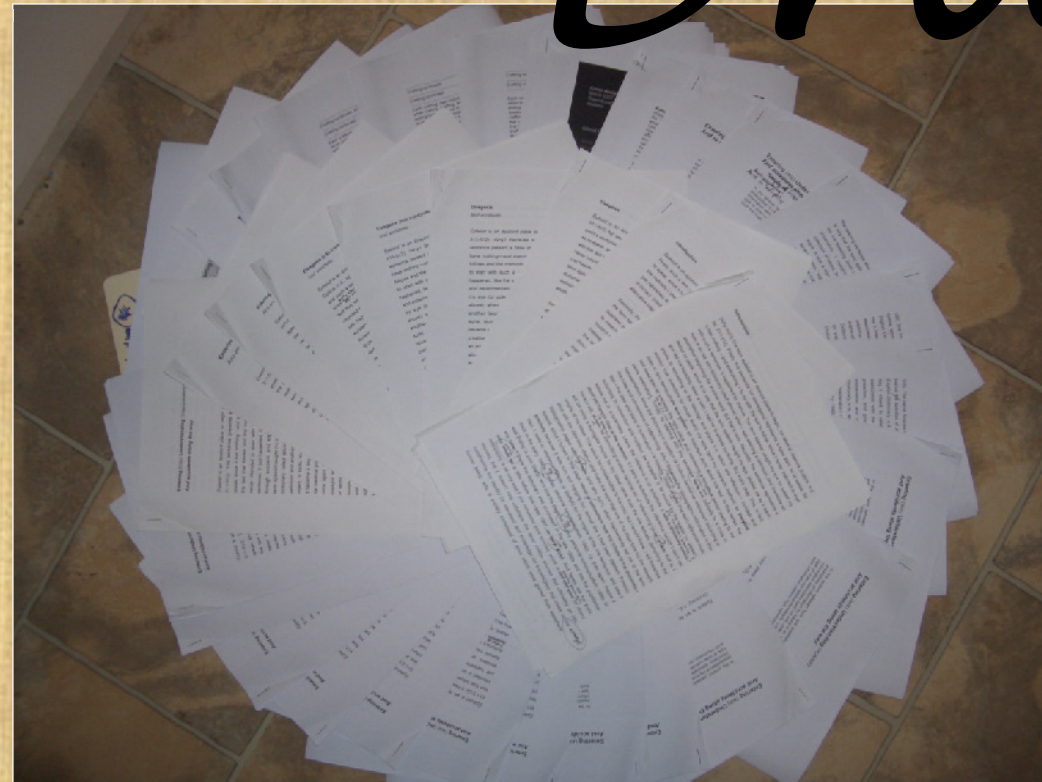
Proposal Outline



A Fore-word



Entering Understanding

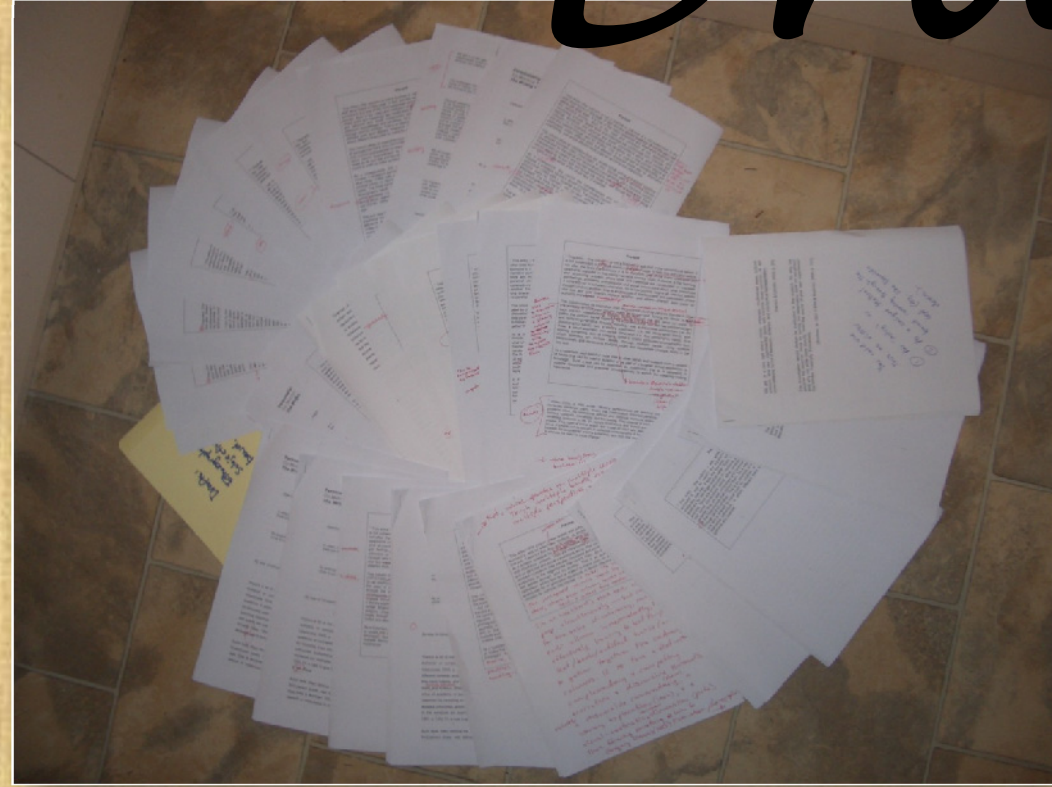


The Grunge Aesthetic

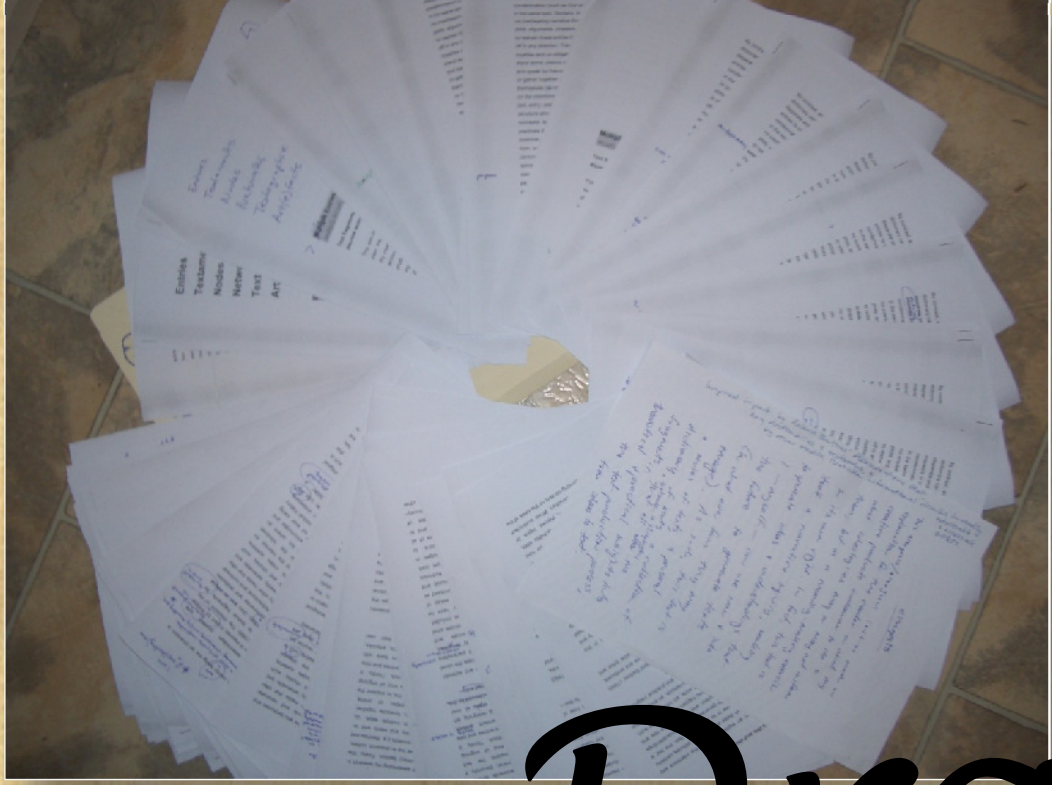
“Students of media are persistently attacked as evaders, idly concentrating on means or processes rather than on ‘substance’” (McLuhan & Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage*, 1967, p. 10).

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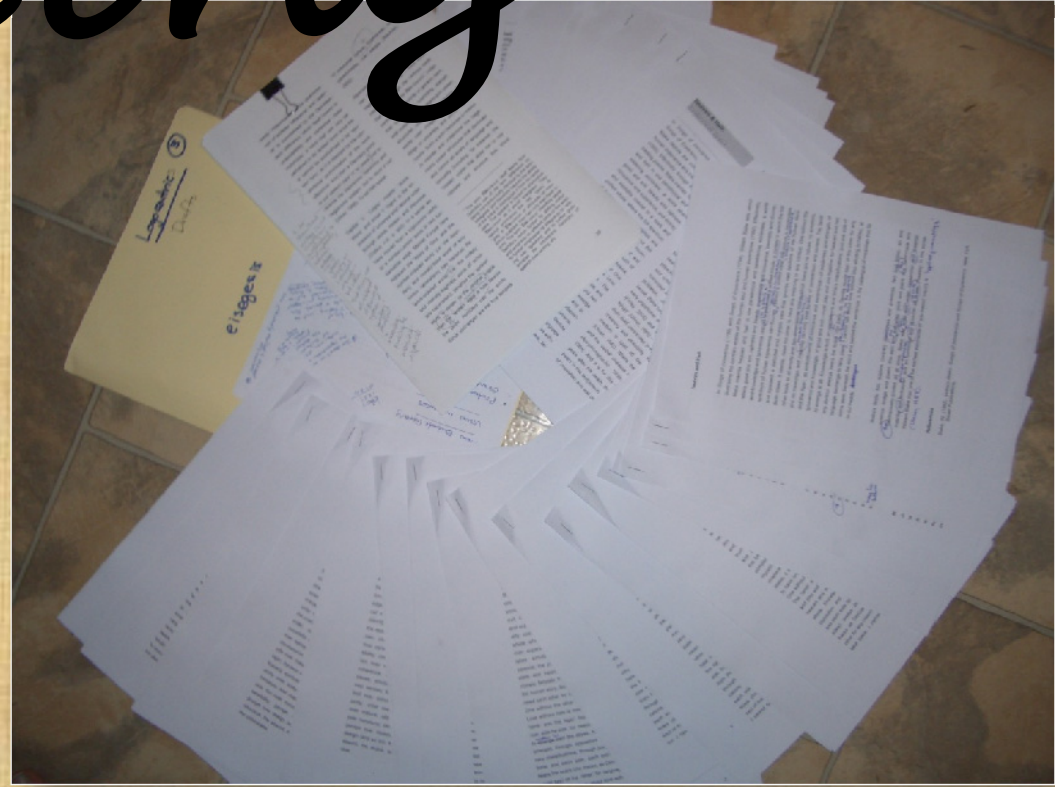
Personalising Ethnography



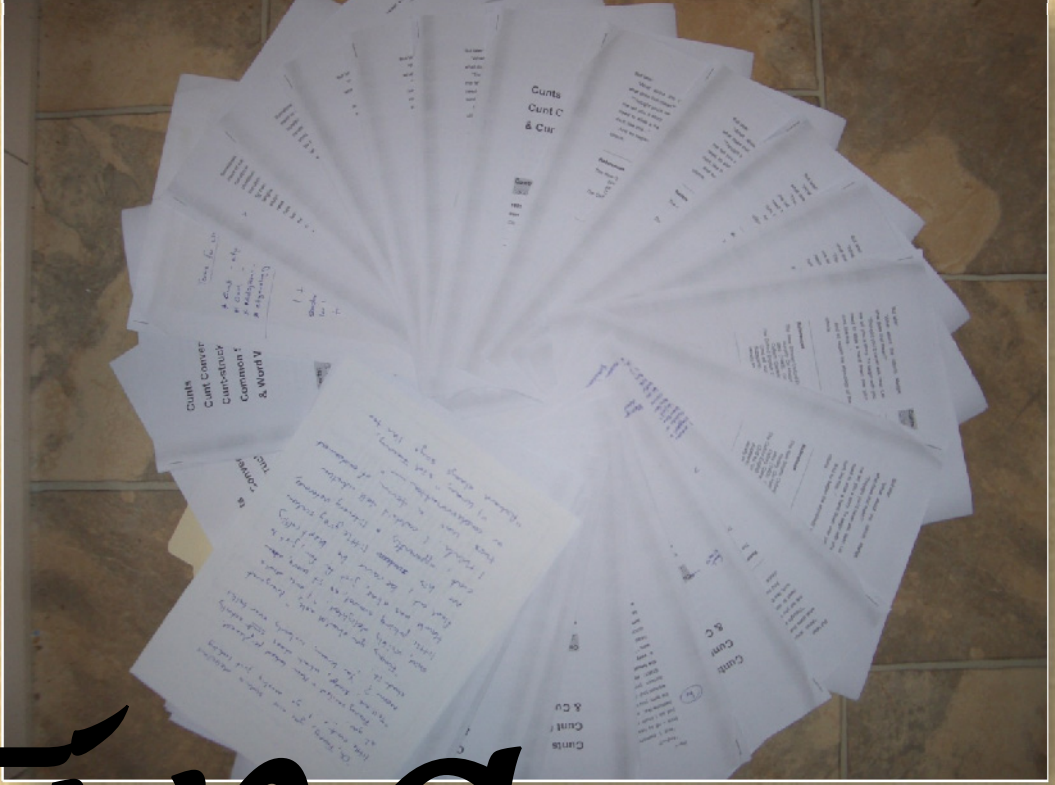
Entries 1.



Logocentrism 3.

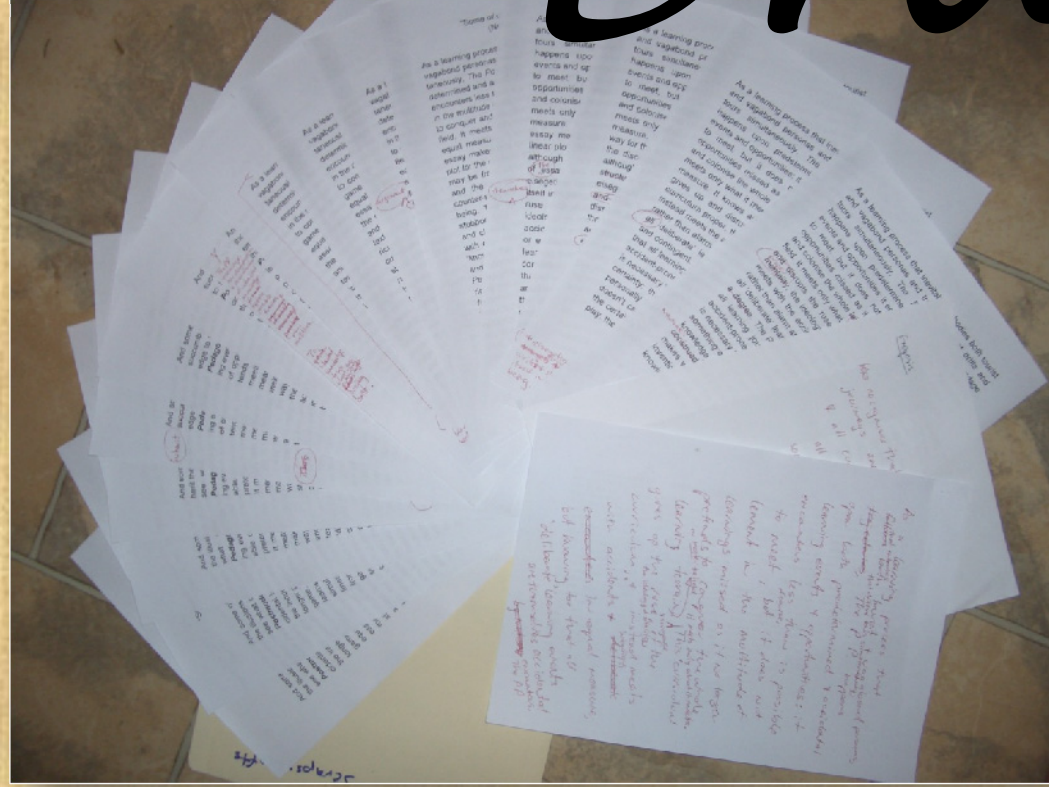


Cunts 2.

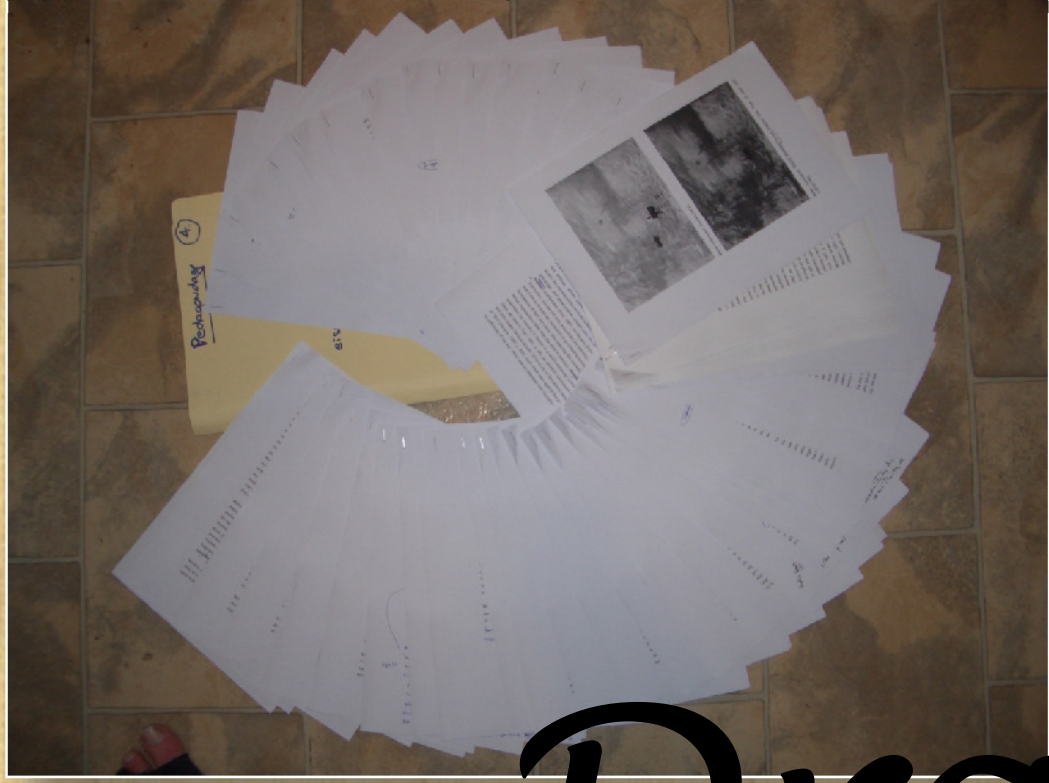


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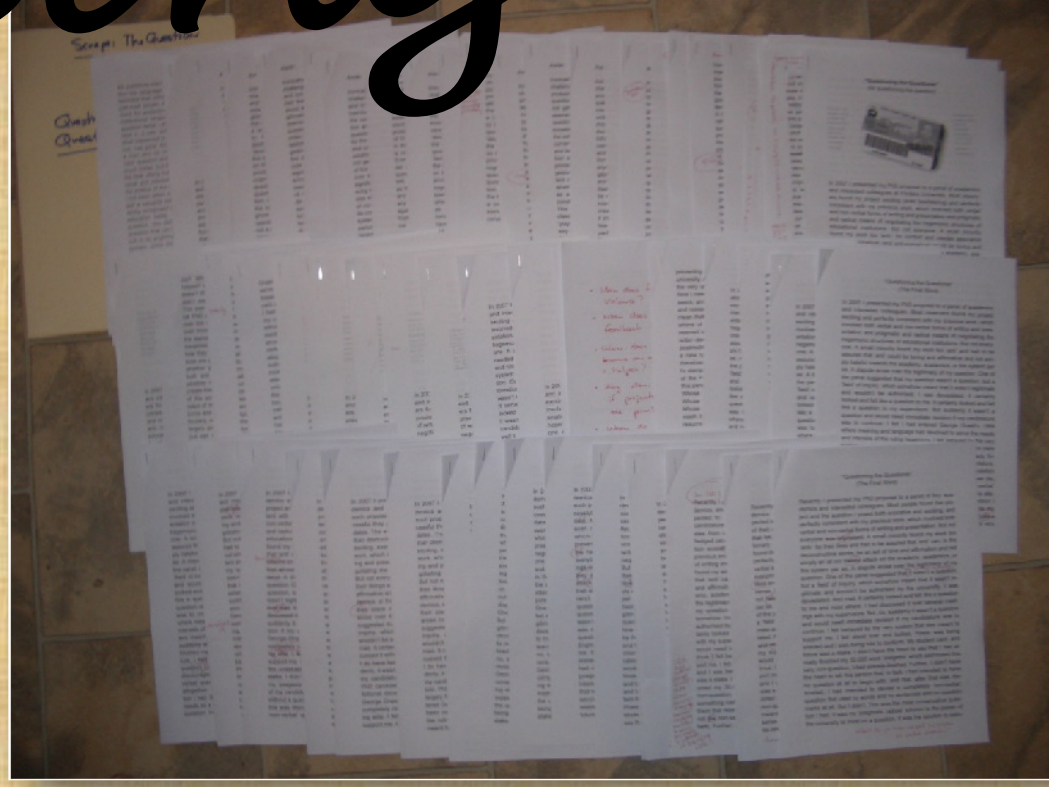
Illusion versus Despair



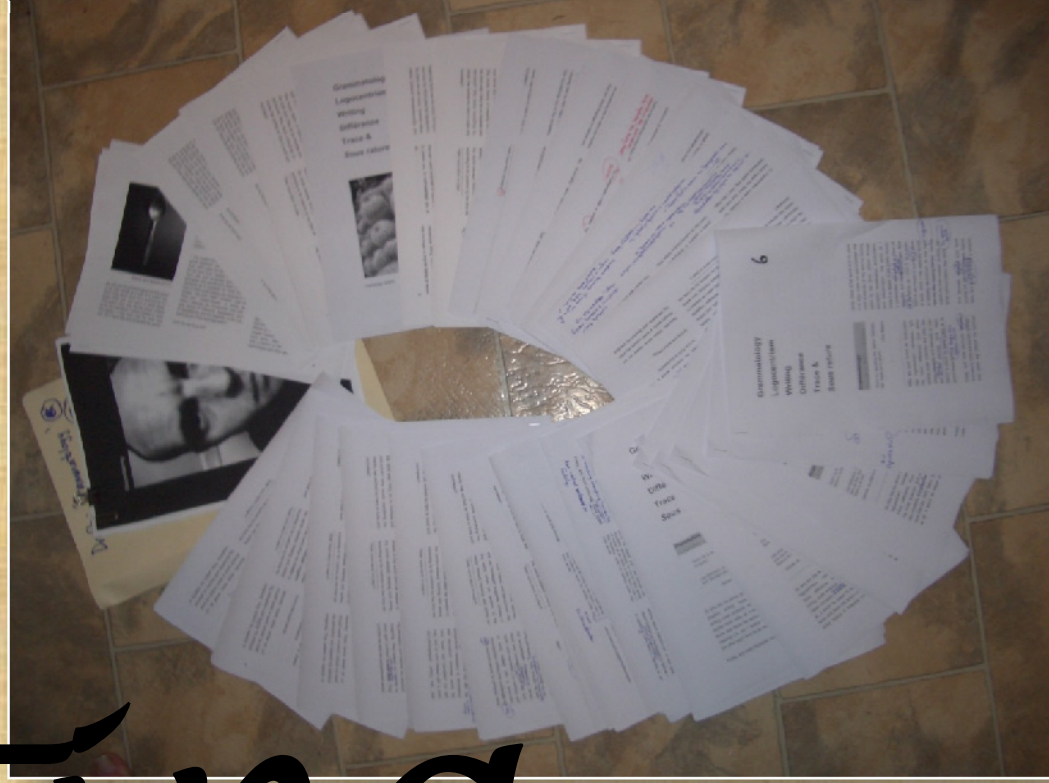
Pedagondage 4.



Questioning the Questioner

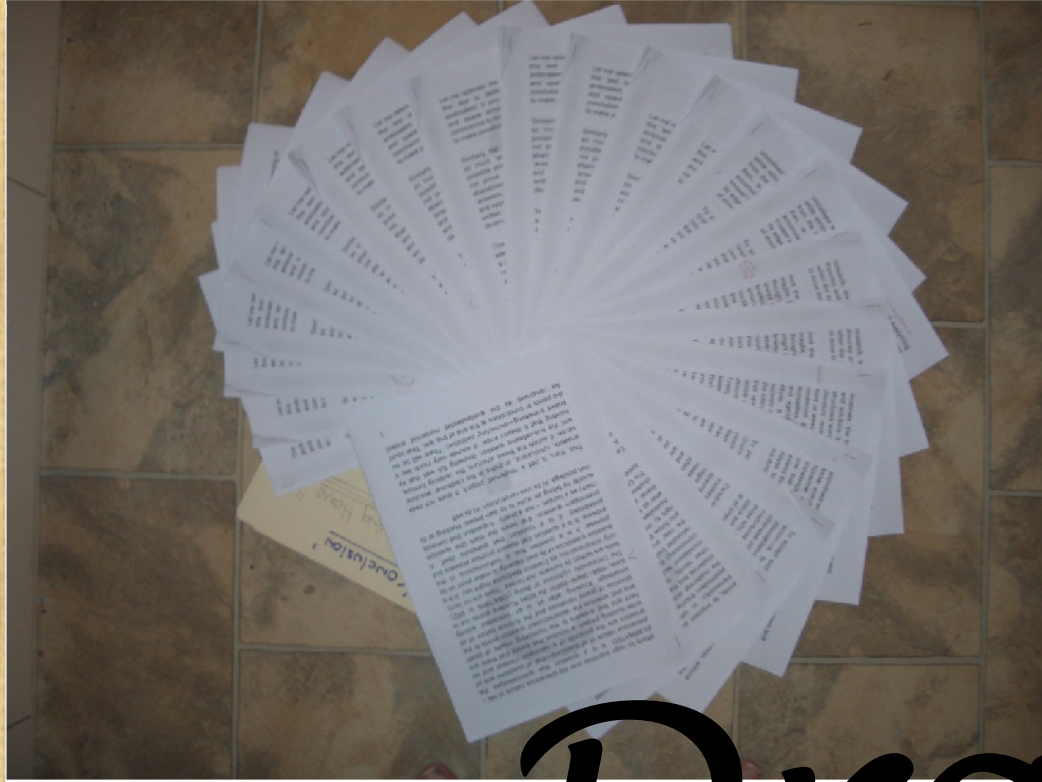


Grammatology 5.

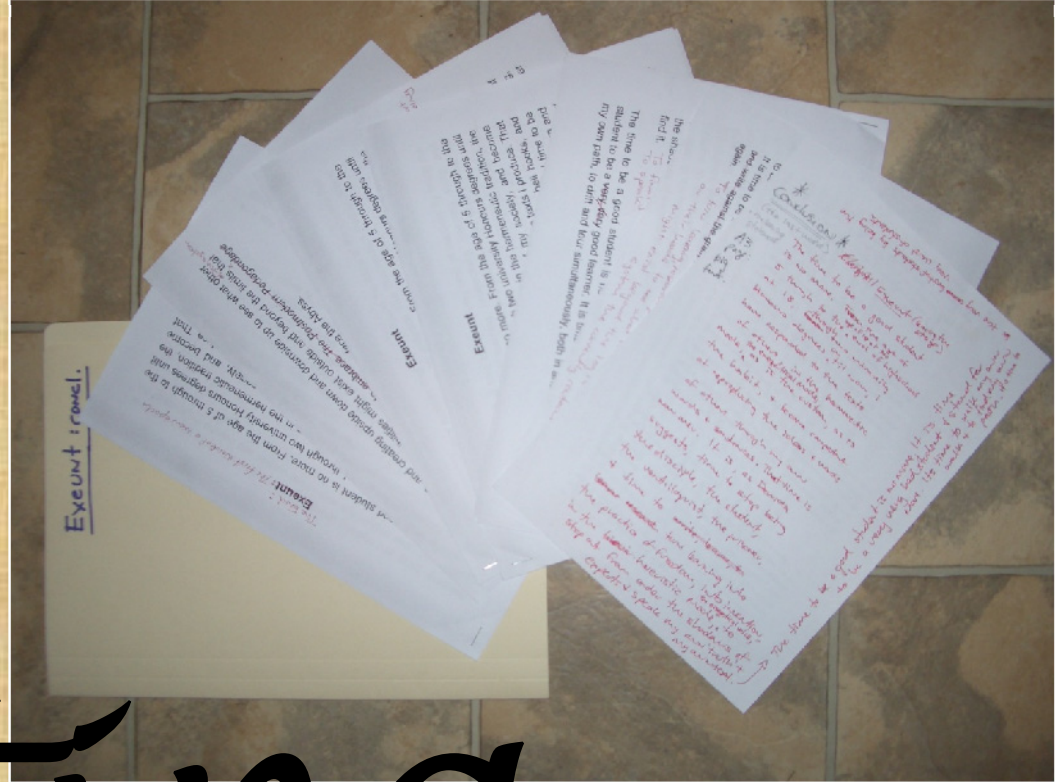


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Leaving Home



Exeunt



Desk 2



Desk 3



Drafting

‘The vagabond does not know how long he will stay where he is now, and more often than not it will not be for him to decide when the stay will come to an end... What he does know is that more likely than not the stopover will be but temporary. What keeps him on the move is disillusionment with the place of last sojourn and the forever smouldering hope that the next place which he has not visited yet, perhaps the place after next, maybe free from faults which repulsed him in the places he has already tasted. Pulled forward by hope untested, pushed from behind by hope frustrated... the vagabond is a pilgrim without a destination; a nomad without an itinerary.

Pedagondage:
The Impossible Homecoming

I have lived in over 30 abodes in my 37 years on planet earth, and so my ‘home’ is not ‘the house’ or ‘the flat.’ It is the river, the liquid-modern world, the episodic encounter, and the shifting plurality of ‘self.’ I have never experienced ‘the home’ or ‘stability’ 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 Pedagondage* tries to make *visible* this process—respectfully, 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 of 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 Albert Camus might say) smashes down on the ego which is desperate to make certainty and immortality from the nothingness that otherwise surrounds it. As Meursault discovers in *The Outsider*: “It was as if that great rush of anger had washed [him] clean, emptied [him] of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, [he] laid [his] heart open to the benign indifference of the universe” (Camus, 1942/1974, p. 120). It was then that Meursault was free of the delusions that humanity had stamped upon him and finally at peace, ready to face his execution at the hands of a justice system ready to murder those daring enough to make their own ‘realities’ (fictions) rather than submit to those made by others. *To those who dare to drift and tour against the grain of habit.* These are the ‘Others’ that society is constantly at war with. These are the ‘Others’ that society hates.

Pedagondola (& Evictions)

	Address	Year(s)	People	Abode	Vacation Reason
Childhood					
1	Colonel Light Gardens	1970-1972	Mum, dad, sister	Bungalow	Growing family
2	Blanchetown (Riverland)	1972-2004	Mum, dad, brother, (Satan, Sandy, Twiggy)	Caravans/sheds	Forced sale
3	Belair (Conroe)	1972-1980	Mum, dad, sister, brother, (Satan)	Big house	Dad's near bankruptcy
4	Glenalta	1974-1980	Omi, Opi, sister, (Kerry)	Big house	Death of Opi
5	Blackwood	1977-1978	Dad's girlfriend, her sons	Old house	Dad's relationship ends
6	Daw Park	1980-1984	Dad, brother, (Sandy, Twiggy)	Derelict house	Renovation & resale
Adolescence					
7	Eden Hills (Hill)	1984-1988	Dad, brother, (Sandy, Twiggy)	House/rental	Rent too high
8	Hawthorndene (Clyde)	1988-1989	Dad, brother, (Sandy, Twiggy)	House/rental	I leave home
9	Belair (Hina)	1987	Anna	Shed/rental	I run away
10	Kangaroo Island	1987	Friends & strangers (bikies)	No fixed address	I run away
Adult					
11	Clapham	1989-1991	BJ (girlfriend)	Flat/rental	BJ's teaching job
12	Hawker (Flinders Ranges)	1992	BJ (Rastas)	Teacher housing	BJ's contract ends
13	Eden Hills (Greene)	1993	BJ, BJ's mum & brothers, (Rastas)	House (BJ's mum's)	Rental property found
14	Belair (Hosell)	1993-1994	BJ, Shaz, Dave, Adam, (Rastas)	Big house/rental	Lease expires
15	Hawthorndene (Turners)	1994	BJ, Paul, Nick, (Rastas)	Big house/rental	Evicted for growing dope
16	Blackwood (Railcosy)	1994-1995	BJ (Rastas, Sandy, Twiggy)	Old cottage/rental	Evicted for noise
17	Belair (Shoak)	1995	Hippy, Cheeky, (Rastas, Sandy, Twiggy, & other dogs)	Old house/rental	Evicted for not paying rent
18	Eden Hills (Tiparra)	1995	Raul	Flat/rental	Evicted for noise
19	Bedford Park	1995-1996	Collin, uni students, (Rastas)	Old house/rent	Had enough
20	St Marys	1996-1998	Rob, Craig, (Rastas)	House/rental	Lease ends
21	Eden Hills (Greene)	1998-1999	Rob, Gully, (Rastas)	House/rental	Lease ends
22	Eden Hills (Shepherd's Hill)	1999-2000	Lex, (Bubby)	Old house/rental	Evicted for mayhem
23	Glenelg	2000	(Bubby)	Old building/squat	Evicted for demolition
24	Seacombe Gardens	2000	Bret, (Bubby)	Old house/board	Had enough
25	Clarence Gardens	2000	Laura, Simon, (Bubby)	House/rental	Couch surfing
26	Glandore	2000	Troy, Hippy, (Bubby)	House/rental	Dispute
27	Kuitpo Forest	2000-2001	CJ, Stuart, & others	Community/board	Arrangement ends
28	Adelaide (City)	2001-2002		Flat/rental	Arrangement ends
29	Sturt	2002	Simon	Flat/rental	Better offer
30	North Adelaide	2002-2004	Rob, Lex, (Sapphire)	Big house/rental	Rob buys house
31	Goodwood	2004-2005	Rob, Anna, (Sapphire)	Big house/board	Rob & Anna marry
32	Somerton Park	2005	Cathy, (Sapphire)	Beach house	House-sitting over
33	Happy Valley	2005-2006	(Sapphire)	House/rental	Lease runs out
34	O'Halloran Hill	2007	(Sapphire)	House/rental	Current (No Eviction notices)
All abodes located in South Australia All dates / details approximations only					

The vagabond journeys through an unstructured space; like a wanderer in the desert... Each successive spacing is local and temporary – episodic’ (Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 1993/1995, p. 240).

“‘Home’ lingers at the horizon of the tourist life as an uncanny mix of shelter and prison” (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 97).

The return to the book is then the abandoning of the book...

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

'Today's man and women 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 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).

Novels Read 2007

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

- Achebe, C. (1976). *Things Fall Apart*. London: Heinemann.
Atwood, M. (2006). *Alias Grace*. London: Virago. (Original work published 1996).
Beckett, S. (1965). *Waiting for Godot*. London: Faber and Faber. (Original work published 1956).
Camus, A. (1974). *The Outsider*. Middlesex: Penguin.
Dickens, C. (1989). *Hard Times*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (Original work published 1854).
Frey, J. (2003). *A million little pieces*. London: John Murray.
Gibson, W. (1986). *Neuromancer*. London: Grafton. (Original work published 1984).
Gibson, W. (2005). *Pattern Recognition*. New York: Berkley. (Original work published 2003).
Hall, S. (2007). *The Raw Shark Texts*. Edinburgh: Conongate.
Kundera, M. (1999). *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (M. H. Heim, Trans.). London: Faber and Faber. (Original work published 1984).
Morrison, T. (1997). *Beloved*. London: Vintage. (Original work published 1987).
Peju, P. (2005). *The Girl from the Chartreuse* (I. Rilke, Trans.). London: Vintage Books.
Raban, J. (2000). *Passage to Juneau*. London: Picador. (Original work published 1999).
Shriver, L. (2003). *We need to talk about Kevin*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.
Turner Hospital, J. (1989). *Charades*. Queensland: UQP.
Turner Hospital, J. (1995). *The Last Magician*. Queensland: UQP.
Turner Hospital, J. (1997). *Oyster*. Queensland: UQP.
Turner Hospital, J. (2003). *The Tiger in the Tiger Pit*. Queensland: UQP. (Original work published 1983).
Turner Hospital, J. (2004). *Due Preparations for the Plague*. Sydney: HarperCollins. (Original work published 2003).
Vonnegut, K. (1991). *Slaughterhouse-Five*. New York: Dell. (Original work published 1969).

Plus:

- Eco, U. (1998). *The Name of the Rose*. London: Vintage. (Original work published 1980).
Eco, U. (2001). *Foucault's Pendulum*. London: Vintage. (Original work published 1988).
Turner Hospital, J. (2007). *Orpheus Lost*. Sydney: HarperCollins.

"Some of us prefer illusion to despair."
(Nelson, *The Simpsons*)

And some of us prefer to make our own illusions than inherit the illusions of others—to question the knowledge we receive to see what other realities might exist beyond the neo-liberal machine. **The Postmodern Pedagondage** welcomes predetermined and accidental learning events and opportunities. It does not lament the innumerable opportunities missed along the way since it no longer pretends to conquer the whole field or master the whole game. It meets only what it meets. It learns and unlearns in equal measure. It knows and un-knows simultaneously. The essay makes way for the hypertext and the linear argument makes way for the entry. And yet it may be from within the structure and rationality of the essay and exegesis that the scatter-textual and eisegetical might 'write' themselves into being: that new texts might emerge. A 'discontinuous' curriculum disrupts the ruse and stubbornness of the curriculum proper, the ideology of totality and closure, and instead meets the Void with expectation and hope rather than alarm and embarrassment, since it 'knows' that even the most carefully planned learning event is susceptible to chaos. **The Postmodern Pedagondage** recognises that *all* learning journeys and *all* curricula constructions are accident-prone and fictitious, and that the *subjunctive mode* is the necessary ruse by which we sustain the illusion of knowledge and power: that all knowledge is socially constructed and personally mediated, a mixture of **fate and freedom**. But it doesn't care. The assumptions of certainty and truth make way for the certainty of uncertainty, for the politics of invention and playfulness, and for the *knowing* 'unknowing' of knowledge itself.

Applied Grammatology: "Writing no longer adheres to the 'Model of the Book'" (Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 1985, p. 152).

The Exegesis no longer adheres to the Model of the Thesis.

'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).

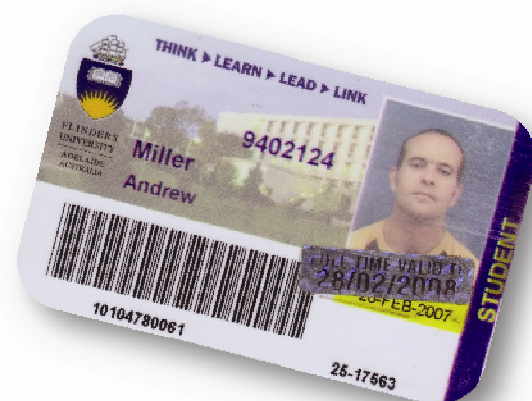
Derrida: 'This duty of irresponsibility, or refusing to reply for one's thought or writing to constituted powers, is perhaps the highest form of responsibility' (Hahn, *On Derrida*, 2002, p. 26).

'To be responsible does not mean following the rules; it may often require one to disregard the rules or act in a way the rules do not warrant' (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 287).

Spivak: 'deconstruction can make founded political programmes [teaching, researching] more useful by making their inbuilt problems more visible' (Deutscher, *How to Read Derrida*, 2001, p. 85).

"Questioning the Questioner" (for questioning the question)

How can we imagine lives outside the ones we currently lead when the system discourages change?



How can we imagine texts beyond those we currently 'read' when the system restricts imagination?

In 2007 I presented my PhD proposal to a panel of academics and interested colleagues at Flinders 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*-thetical (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

1

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 post-modern 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?

2

'It is, in the end, the old truth all over again: each society sets limits to the life strategies that can be imagined, and certainly to those which can be practised. But the kind of society we live in leaves off-limits such strategies as may critically and militantly question its principles and thus open the way to new strategies, currently excluded for the reason of their non-viability' (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 104).

'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-led' and 'question-dependent' 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 debaters. This was a battle over the privilege or non-privilege of the question itself, as a significative 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, grammatological process, which discovers and builds knowledge *on the run*. It does not shut down the learning process by predetermining the learning journey *by predetermining the question and syllabus*. It does not 'stand over' the learner like a Grim Reaper. 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 met *on the way*. 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 *pedagondic* '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 Ozymandias' 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 ruin 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 condemning 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-sayable.

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 it. No question, after all, is immune to the gesture it

'The dispute about the veracity or falsity of certain beliefs is always simultaneously the contest about the right of some to *speak with the authority* which some others should *obey*; the dispute is about the establishment or reassertion of the relations of superiority and inferiority, of domination and submission, between holders of beliefs' (Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 1997, p. 113).

"Now, in the late period ... 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).

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.

makes or the capricious nature of the content it carries. No question, in this sense, is ever neutral or completely innocent. All questions inscribe ideology at some level, even if only to *af-firm* the language that carries them and/or *obey* the establishment that reifies them. And this question draws attention to just such issues to annoy and upset the establishment for protecting Order while eradicating Disorder from the institutional 'language game.' No question ever asks the same question twice—and my question is no exception. Every time I read it, a new question arises. Every time I read it, I wonder what happened to the man who asked it—for he, like the question, has gone. And to answer a question that never sits still, for a man who no longer exists, is ridiculous, particularly as the 'new' question and 'new' asker won't be around long enough to do much better: but then again, who knows, just when we thought the task utterly hopeless and utterly *im-possible*, something unusual and unsettling might accidentally occur. Like this detour into the politics of the question, a valuable learning opportunity might accidentally occur, even if not recognised as such by the rationalist dictates that dominate education today. More ironically, this preoccupation with the question itself provides a kind of pseudo-answer to the question: namely, that it's exceedingly difficult to do anything 'new' and/or 'unusual' in the current education system, since the contributions researchers make to 'gaps in knowledge' must themselves pass through discourses and practices *that have themselves* been pre-selected to pre-determined the kinds of answers and kinds of questions that can possibly exist. The one option they don't give is to ask no question at all.

End aside.

"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).

5



The question:

~~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 uncertainties of post-modernity?~~



The intention:

The Postmodern Pedagogage:

- touring and drifting in a postmodern age—
- disturbing the mono-logic(al)—
- texts of resistance against the neo-liberal machine—
- and surviving the global 'super' market—

Sallywag Learning Tours

Questioning Under Erasure

6

"Derrida's ~~trace~~ is the mark of the absence of a presence, an always absent presence, of the lack at the origin that is the condition of thought and experience. [Hence] Derrida is asking us to change our habits of mind: 'the authority of the text [and PhD question] is provisional, the origin is a trace; contradictory logic, we must learn to use and erase our language at the same time'" (Spivak, 'Preface,' *Of Grammatology*, 1967/1976, p. xvii-xviii).

Trinh (1989): "Clarity is a means of subjection, a quality both of official, taught language and of correct writing, two old mates of power: together they flow, together they flower, vertically, to impose an order. Let us not forget that writers who advocate the instrumentality of language are often those who cannot or choose not to see the suchness of things—a language as language—and therefore, continue to preach conformity to the norms of well-behaved language: principles of composition, style, genre, correction, and improvement. To write 'clearly,' one must incessantly prune, eliminate, forbid, purge, purify..." (Low & Palulis, A Letter from Derrida, *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, Spring, 2006, p. 48).

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

- **When does feedback start to become violence?**
- **When does the 'constructive' part of feedback become 'destructive'?**
- **When does the advisor become an oppressor?**

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].'

spirit of autoethnography, arts-based inquiry, poststructuralism, applied grammarology, *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 inclusivity are won and lost daily. These are the grassroots skirmishes that

- **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 pampering of the wills and interests of senior knowledge-brokers?**
- **When does the democracy of leaning 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?**

'The attraction of creative writing might be that, even while it participates in technologies of surveillance [i.e. the university can dictate terms], it offers some relief from, and opportunities for, (legitimate) resistance to the truth we are so compelled towards in our other encounters with knowledge' (p. 237).

'Writing creatively can become part of the historical struggle for individuals to find ways to construct themselves both within and partly outside ... those objects our culture tends to venerate [i.e. universities]' (Brophy, *Creativity*, 1998, pp. 238-239).

The oppressed must always realize that they are fighting the

Derrida: "Well, it so happens that the text which various deconstructions are speaking of today is not at all the *paper* or the *paperback* with which you would like to identify it. If there is nothing 'beyond the text,' in this new sense, then that leaves room for the most open kinds of political (but not just political) practice and pragmatics. It even makes them more necessary than ever" ("But, beyond...", *Critical Inquiry*, 1986, 13, p. 169).

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 slink 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.

- **Are universities set up to protect the status quo and reproduce the traditions of yesteryear? Or places to critique the status quo and re-think the theories and practices of today and tomorrow?**
- **How free are we?**

Adiaphorization: '... making certain actions, or certain objects of action, morally neutral or irrelevant – exempt from the category of phenomena suitable for moral evaluation. The effect of adiaphorization is achieved by excluding some categories of people from the realm of moral subjects...' (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 149).

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**

William to Adso: "But often the treasures of learning must be defended, not against the simple but, rather, against other learned men" (Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1980/1998, p. 88).

Rage Against The Machine,
'Settle for Nothing,'
1992

"Disputing *truth* is a response to 'cognitive dissonance'. It is prompted by the urge to devalue and disempower another reading of the setting and/or another prescription for acting that cast doubt on one's own reading and one's own action routine. ... One argument that will stand the greatest chance of being raised is the ineligibility of the adversary as a partner-in-conversation – due to the adversary being inept, deceitful or otherwise unreliable, harbouring ill intentions or being altogether inferior and substandard" (Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 2003/2006, p. 153).

way previous generations have described things. (Richard Rorty)

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*.

Adso to William: “And so, if I understand you correctly, you act, and you know why you act, but you don’t know why you know what you know what you do?” I must say with pride that William gave me a look of admiration. “Perhaps that’s it. In any case, this tells you why I feel so uncertain of my truth, even if I believe in it” (Eco, *The Name of the Rose*, 1980/1998, p. 207).

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 consoled to discover, if not an order, at least a series of connections in small areas of the world's affairs" (p. 394).

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

The Question Mark:
the mark of violence and authoritarian love on the psyche of the student, *who can't ask not to ask*.

‘... modernity is very much with us. It is with us in the form of the most defining of its defining traits: that of hope, the hope of making things better than they are...’
(Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 1997, p. 80).

Casaubon:
‘But now I have come to believe that the whole world is an enigma that is made terrible by our own mad attempt to interpret it as though it had an underlying truth’ (Eco, *Foucault's Pendulum*, 1988/2001, p. 95).

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, now, of who 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 'now' 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

‘The ordering activity, the major pastime of modern institutions, is mostly about the imposition of monotony, repeatability and determination; whatever resists this imposition is the wilderness behind the frontier, a hostile land still to be conquered or at least pacified. The difference between the controlled and the uncontrolled space is that between civility and barbarity’ (Bauman, *Life in Fragments*, 1995, p. 143).

‘The unsurpassable, unique, and imperial grandeur of the order of reason ... is that one cannot speak out against it except by being for it, that one can protest it only from within it...’ (Derrida, *Writing & Difference*, 1967/2005, p. 42).

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

‘A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he (or she) writes, the work he (or she) produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text of to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*’ (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 1979/1984, p. 81).

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,

'So for the Other to be the Other, he should remain outside, endlessly [and not be assimilated]' (Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged*, 2001, p. 67).

'... rationalism is the doctrine that human life should be based on inquiry and beliefs that follow with certainty from premises and general principles, rather than from tradition, religion, passion, or the imagination. ... It also required human beings who would turn against spontaneous pleasures, personal fantasies, and individual choice and creativity' (Linn, *Postmodernism*, 1996, p. 125).

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-

The post-modernizing of pedagogy is based on the recognition that knowledge in and of the humanities is precisely a knowledge of enframing, of media and *mise en scene* understood not as a representation of something else but as itself a mode of action in the cultural world. The conclusion to be drawn from this recognition could be summarized by the axiom that has transformed the natural and human sciences as well – the observer participates in the observation; the organization and classification of knowledge are *interested* activities' (Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology*, 1985, pp. 183-184).

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 *un*-knowledge 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

'Insofar as philosophy [and other disciplines] takes its project as the determination of what is possible within the boundaries of reason alone—that is, within what it has already described as the possibilities of being and meaning—it can succeed in making such determinations. But this is to inscribe thought within already achieved knowledge and boundaries of knowledge. It does not provide the opportunity for judging and valuing its own mode of proceeding except to correct a system with respect to itself. It is therefore neither truly critical nor truly open to discovery or creation, to the as-yet-unthought on which thought feeds' (Hahn, *On Derrida*, 2002, p. 63).

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.

Lévinas: ‘If the other could be possessed, seized, and known, it would not be the other. To possess, to know, to grasp are all synonyms of power’ (Derrida, *Writing & Difference*, 1967/2005, p. 113).

‘We inherit a certain concept of the possible and the impossible, and there is a very thick stratification of layers which underlies this concept of possible and the impossible’ (Derrida, *Deconstruction En-gaged*, 2001, p. 64).

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 Pedagogondage* 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...

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'According to its conventional principle, perfectibility involves constant and slowly accumulating progress. Yet if we make constant progress, the point to which we progress not only recedes but also transforms' (Deutscher, *How to Read Derrida*, 2005, p. 109).

'The messianic is a general structure in which the 'to-come' is absolutely undetermined, absolutely undetermined...' Messianism means that the uncertainty is not and will never be under control, and should never be under control...' (Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged*, 2001, p. 68).

Again



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 concept 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 unrepresentable; let us activate the differences and save the honor of the name' (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, 1979/1984, pp. 81-82).



The Postmodern Pedagogdage 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

Pedagondage

Touring & Drifting in a Postmodern Age



'...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...'
(Bauman, *Postmodernity and its Discontents*, 1997, p. 93).

Pedagondage

Exeunt: *the first word of a new epoch*

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.

'We have to be hospitable to what is coming, and to a new figure, a new shape of what one calls humanity' (Derrida, *Deconstruction Engaged*, 2001, p. 113).

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?



