

# The Ridiculous Madman



*One day in hell a funny thing happened ...*

Andrew Wayne Miller



*Bitumen rose up out of the desert and covered the sand ...*

*And we put on shoes to protect our feet ...*

2008

Dereliction in a postmodern world



Cover painting: *Untitled*, oil on cardboard by Andrew Miller, 1988 (30 x 20 cm), re-found 2005. Reproduced by permission of the maker.

Cover design by Andrew Miller (2007).  
Layout based on Ned Kelly's head in Sidney Nolan's painting *Kelly* (1962).

## Acknowledgements

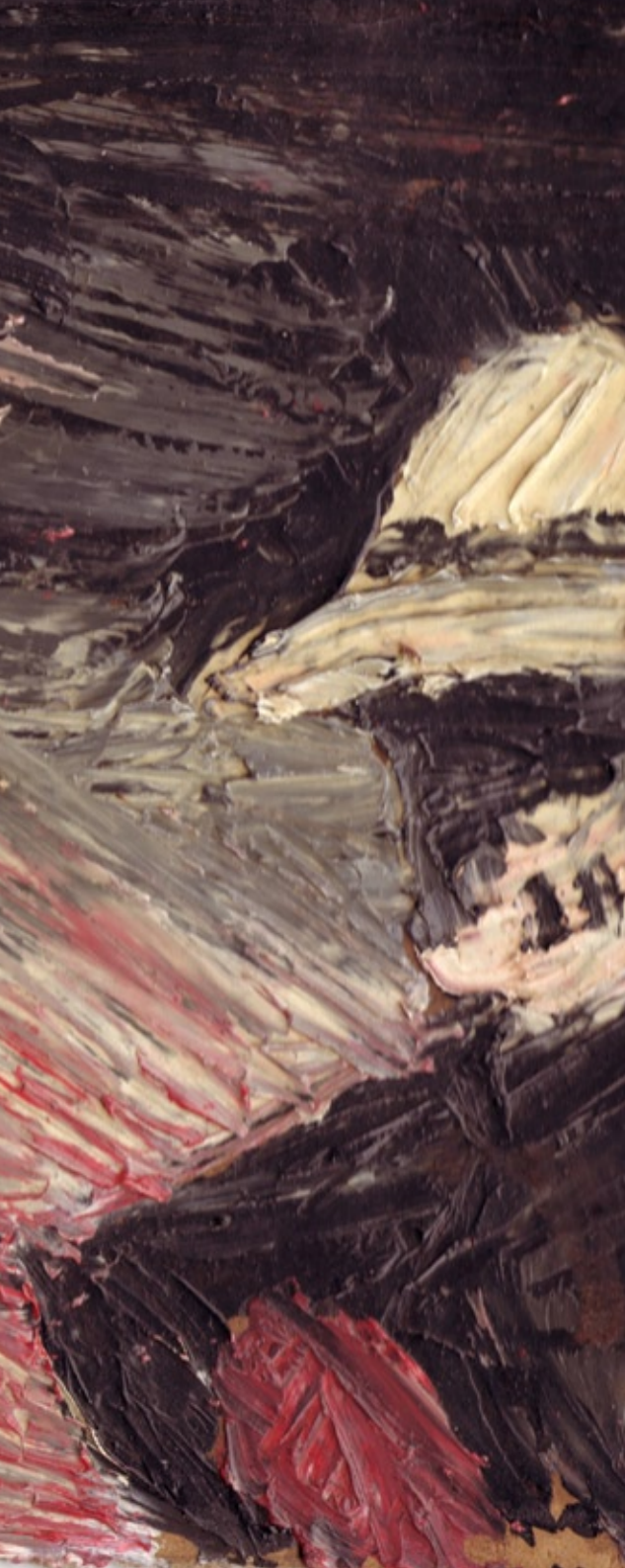
There are many thanks to extend. To Lyn Wilkinson and Rick Hosking for their ongoing support and encouragement through the writing, researching, designing, and dreaming of these various art(e)facts.

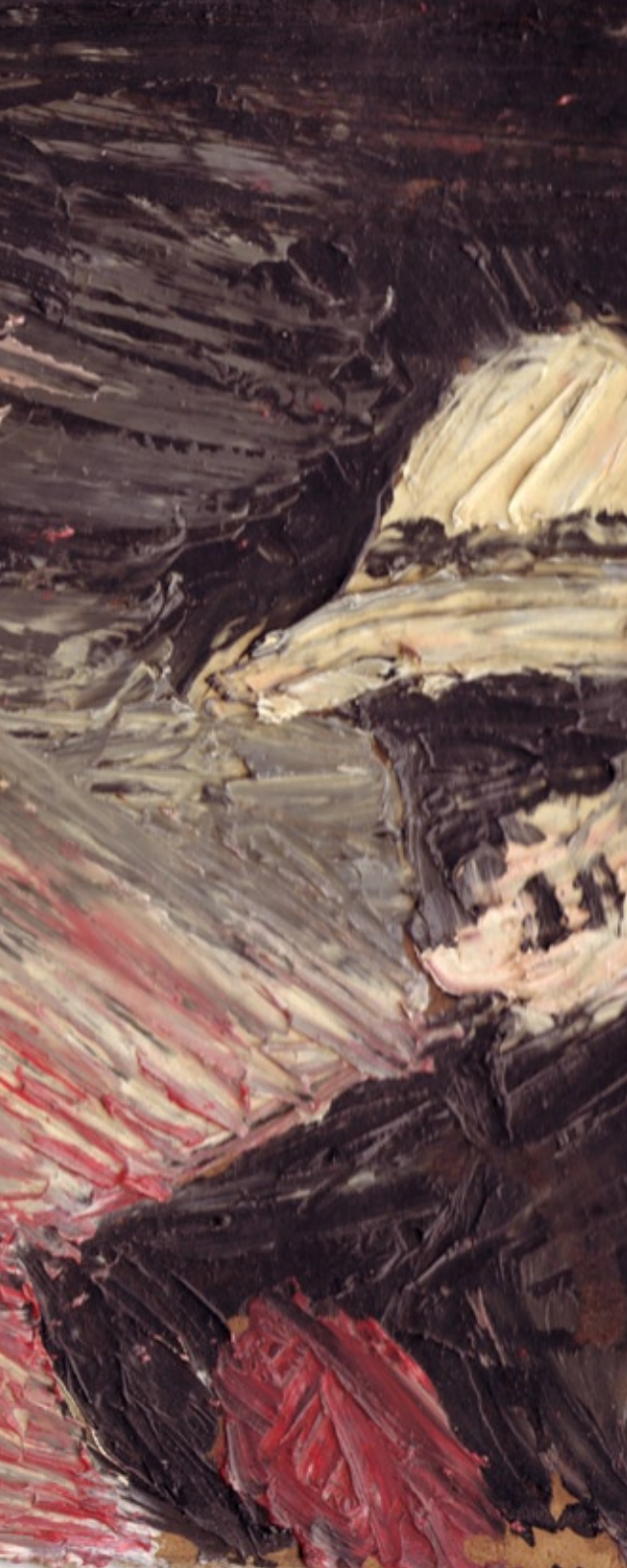
My ‘para-eclectic-al’ and ‘scatter-textual’ theories and practices have not always been well received, but in the hands and hearts of these ‘pedagonds’ they have always met with serious contemplation and rigorous critique, particularly those aspects that chip away at the walls of institutional dogma and essentialist notions about what constitutes legitimate scholarship and authentic knowledge in a neo-liberal age. Like me, these ‘pragmatic radicals’ (as Garth Boomer might say) do not pretend to know the outer limits of these messy endeavours, but instead remain open to the otherwise un-knowable and un-thinkable possibilities *to come*. In short, it is hard to do anything new and original in an old and agonised world, and even harder in an education system committed to a back-to-basics, (neo)modernist past. But when such theories and practices fall on co-creators and co-intentional re-creators—and not deaf ears—(as Paulo Freire might say) then the potential for dreaming and playing is once again restored.

Many thanks also to my friends and colleagues at Flinders University, particularly Sam, Christine, and Sharyn for their insights, debates, discussions, feedback, and support. Thanks also to Flinders University (the machine) for the resources, teaching opportunities, and funding that made this ‘pedagondage’ possible.

To Sapphire, dear thing, for nudging her nose into my heart and soul and reminding me that there is a warm and vibrant world beyond the PhD blur. Eyes peering up from the darkness beneath the desk, imploring the dreamer back from beyond, back to safety and back into the home. Sometimes life is about filling a bowl with food and watching the back of a dog head bury itself in crumbs. And this is enough.

And to you, dear reader, for the journey just started but not yet begun, may the madman bear you well in the textual storm to come...





The future is unlikely to become a kingdom of certainty. The future is, fully and truly, *out of control*, and the credible guess is that it is destined to remain out of control...

Zygmunt Bauman, *Society Under Siege*, 2002, p. 143

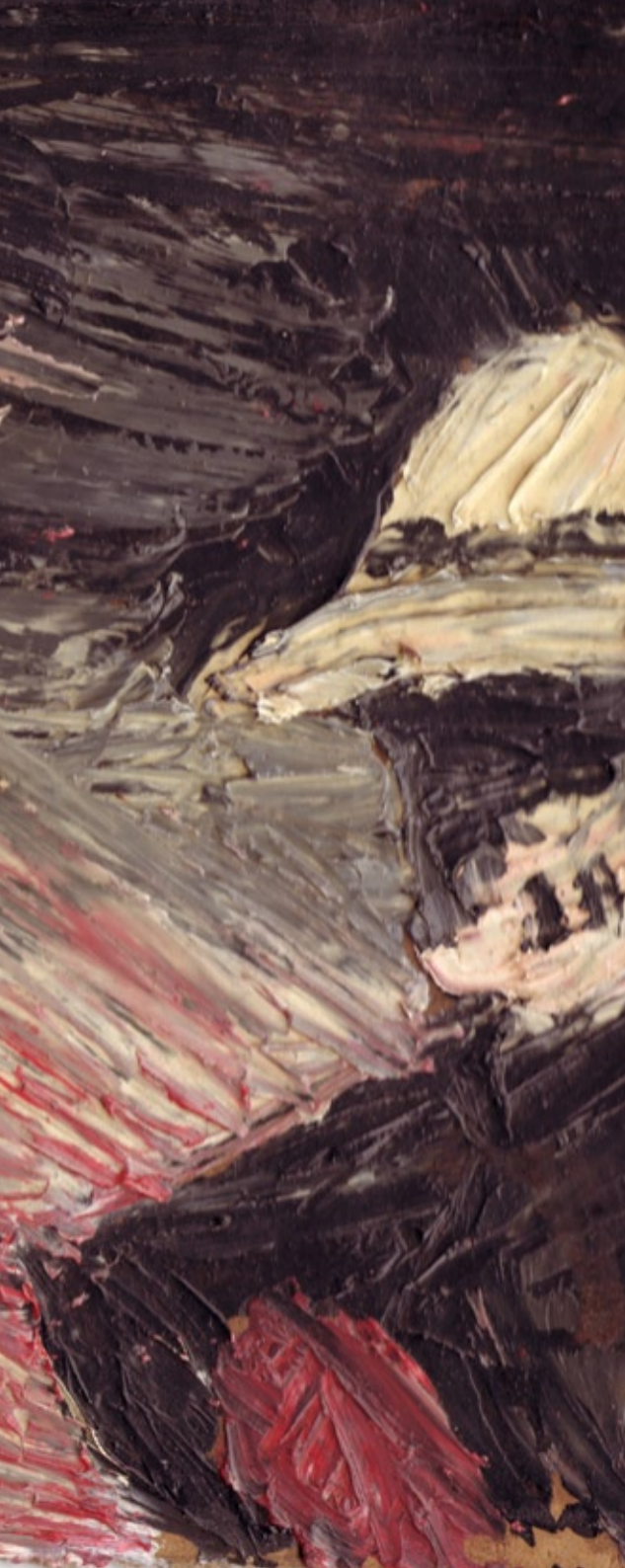
If I die before I wake, then help me, God, transmigrate.

### The Ridiculous Madman

Andrew Miller was born in Adelaide in 1970, two weeks late and feet-first, the second of three children for his mother and the first of two children for his father. He was ‘from his mother’s womb / Untimely ripp’d to avoid her death (*Macbeth*, Act V, Sc. VIII). He spent his childhood in the Adelaide Hills and at Blanchetown on the River Murray and dropped out of school at sixteen to work as a chair-assembler in a factory for almost no wages. Since then he has been a university student, artist, writer, builder’s labourer, nail-hand, research assistant, project officer, welfare recipient, lost soul, dropout, and wayfarer, among other things—none of which are nice. He lives in Adelaide in a rented house with his dog Sapphire and their collection of succulents and fish.

By accident or design, knowingly or unknowingly, Mr Miller occupies a privileged, white, male, middle-class, neurotic, left-wing, heterosexual, thirty-something, able-bodied, Occidental, mainstream position, among other locations (ideas inspired by L. Wilkinson, personal communication, February 15, 2007). These positions, characteristics, dispositions, and discourses represent the socially situated perspectives used in the making of this textual artefact in a globalising, intertextual, text-laden, multimodal, neo-liberal, world.

This inscription (auto/biography) mimics the inscription found in Richard Flanagan’s *Death of a River Guide* (1994). Ironically, after presenting *Death of a River Guide* to Flanagan for signing at an Adelaide Writer’s Week festival in 2004, Flanagan wrote: ‘For Andrew—who knows what a book’s for—best wishes, [signed] Richard Flanagan.’ This text explores that very subject. Flanagan’s curiosity had been raised by the fact that his novel had taken part in other stories beyond its covers: the story of the ‘near death’ of *Death of a River Guide*; the story of a dog called Bubby who had torn the book to shreds; the story of Mr Miller sticking the book back together with tape; and the story of Mr Miller bringing this very same book to the



author for signing, torn and tattered, some years later. The book was no longer a book, but an artefact, an object of antiquity and adventure, bearing the scars and teeth marks of its various inscriptions and multiple lives. Both Miller and Flanagan saw the funny side—*the other side*—the side of intertextual potential. This text continues that *seeing* and those *moments...*



**It is the fault of the poor their poorness.**





When  
living with  
terror is  
all *you*  
know...



you know no **terror**



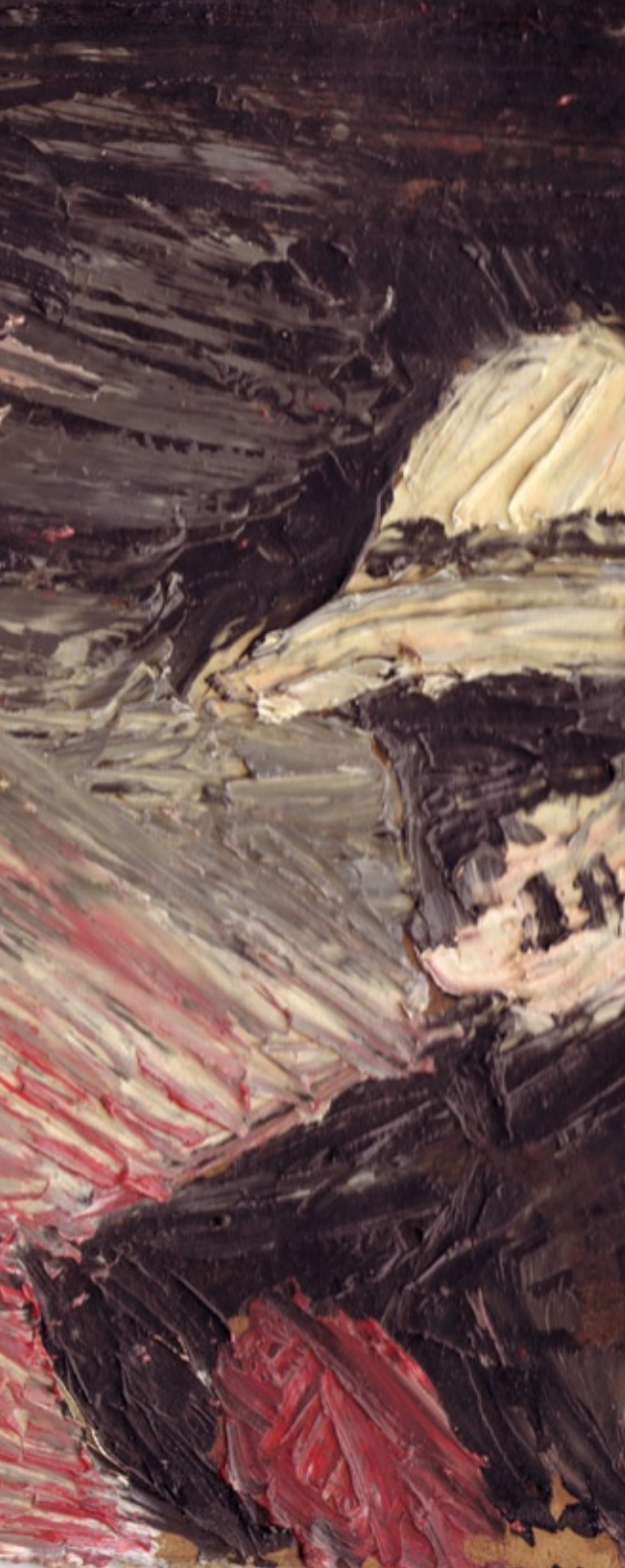
### About this Art(e)fact

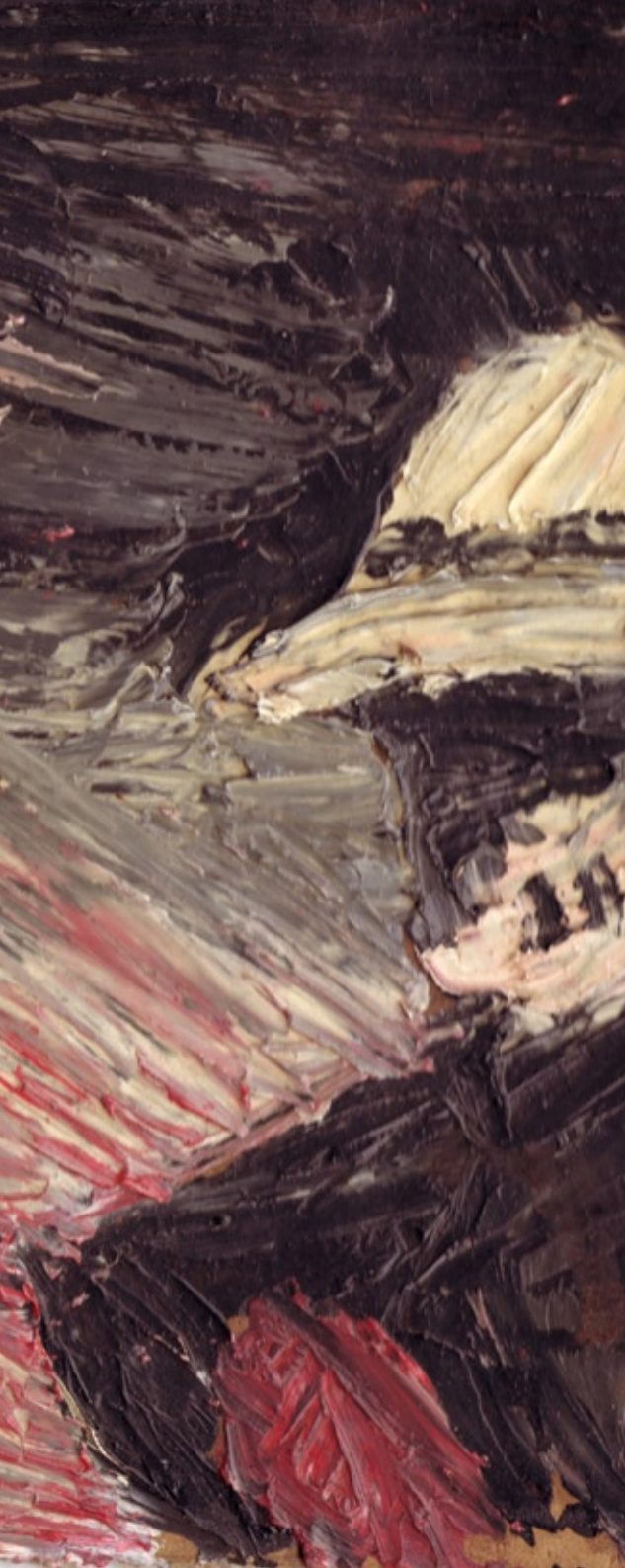
(—this text, book, script, novella, bricolage, etc).

This object (if it is an object) and this narrative (if it is a narrative) is an autobiography (of sorts). It may not seem like an autobiography, but it is an autobiography. What appears surreal, symbolic, fractured, messy, *unconscious*, and arbitrary is indeed how the author set out to represent his experience of life, or at least episodes and fragments of life. It is a figurative rather than literal account, both fictive and factual, both subjective and truthful. It indulges in all manner of lies. Who, you may ask, is narrating this inscription? This is Mr Miller too—the bricoleur—and Jack—the picaroon and journeyman. We are divided, you see, and uncertainty and dislocation are our customary experience. We experience no coherency and no singularity—no agreement or resolution, just absurdity and simultaneity. Whilst autobiographical, this text is also an autoethnography, a narrative inquiry, a messy text, an arts-based inquiry, a bricolage, a palimpsest, a graphic novel, a film script, a memoir, a chronicle, and a work of art and design. It is scatter-textual, para-eclectic-al, carnivalesque, and fabulationist.

Patrick White once said that he was all of his characters (source unknown: probably David Marr's biography). So it is with Mr Miller and his various guises and voices. He is polyvocal and polysited—a text made up of texts / a fabric of traces—but he can't help it. He has experienced life in no other way. His separation from him *Self* and from certainty (possibly God) has been painfully obvious from the beginning (if there was a beginning / if there is an end). What may appear unusual to you, at a glance, is what is normal and commonsensical to us (to him, her, it, and me), at a stare. The mainstream discourse that peddles the coherent identity and the unitary self, however popular and powerful, however safe, however well-meaning, has failed to put this Humpty Dumpty back together again. So be it.

In *Wuthering Heights* (Brontë, 1847), Catherine and Heathcliff both claim to be the 'Other'; that is, the selfsame. 'I *am* Heathcliff,'





Catherine says; 'I *am* Catherine,' Heathcliff says. Both, in fact, are Emily Brontë and the language that speaks Emily Brontë (if I understand Heidegger). So it is with Mr Miller and his characters, this text, and all manner of bric-a-brac and debris that goes into making up the individual, the society, the text, and the worlds he, she, and I inhabit (and inherit). We are all part of yesterday, today, and tomorrow's texts, identities, languages, and fictions. And all texts are simultaneously about their authors (their contexts, histories, and signifying practices) and their societies, whether they mean to be or not. 'Such is life,' says Ned Kelly, and 'God bless' says Mother Teresa.

But the madman is never sure of anything. His mind is seldom made up. And nor is mine.

'*Do you fit the legend?*' asks the Levi Company.

Yes, but I'd rather not, say I.

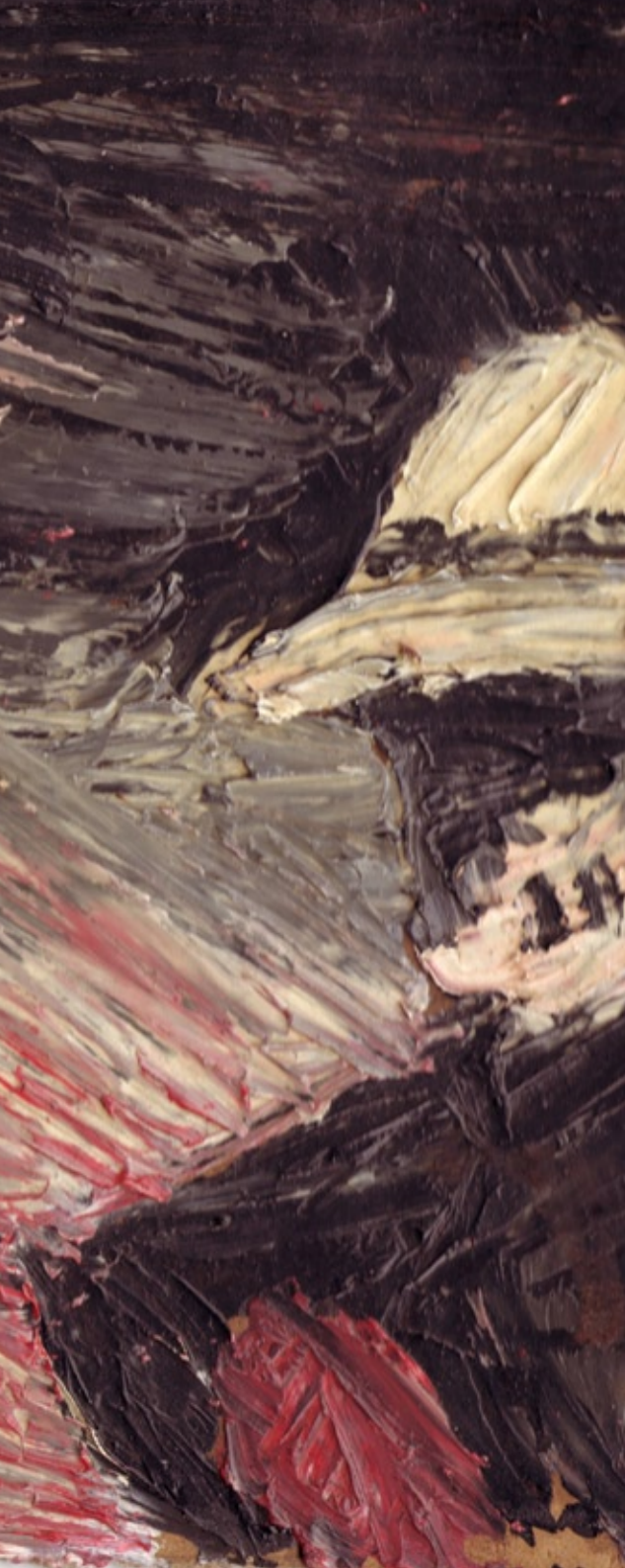
Circe

22.2.07 / 23.2.07 / 24.2.07 / 3.2.08 / 11.2.08 / 13.2.08 / 14.2.08  
/ 15.2.08 / 12.3.08 / 26.3.08 / 28.3.08 / 30.5.08 / 6.6.08 / 7.08

[Number of visits to the text to revise, erase, & curse]

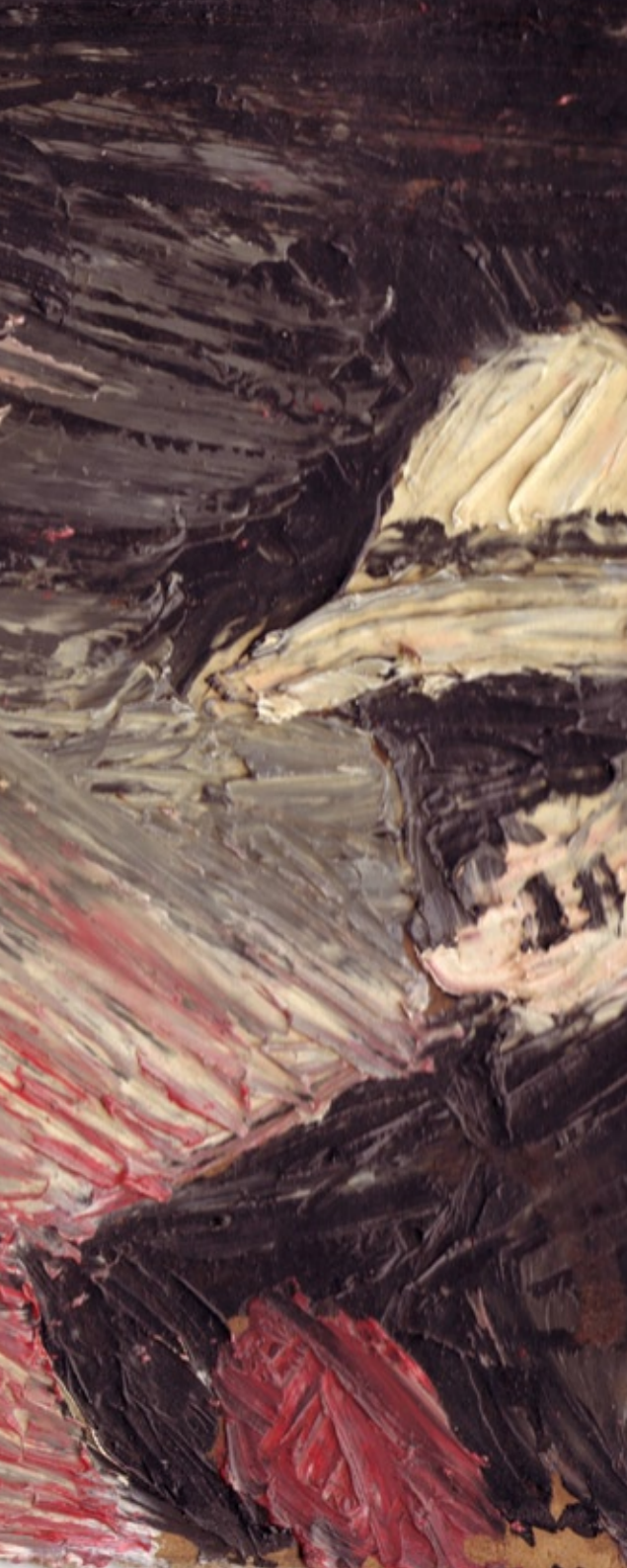
**Circe** *n.* *Greek Legend* the enchantress represented by Homer as turning the companions of Odysseus into swine by a magic drink (*Macquarie*, 2006, p. 218).

**Autobiography** *n* an account of a person's life written by that person (*Collins Australian Dictionary*, 2005, p. 45). [So what's a memoir? According to Judith Barrington, 'Autobiography is the story *of* a life, [while] memoir is a story *from* a life' (as cited by Rick Hosking, personal communication, 2008). More accurately, this text is less a memoir and more a 'chronicle' since it blends fact *and* legend, and real *and* imagined experiences (hence the subtitle: *The Chronicles of Jack Diggins*). It combines happenings as experienced by the senses and happenings as experienced by the mind and imagination. After all, some of life's most memorable and deeply-felt experiences actually occur through the *re-living* and *re-imagining* of 'real' experiences in the mind's eye. The 'un-real' texts are often more real than the real: *hyper-real*.]



### Art(e)facts

This text is as much a work of *art* and *design* as it is a work of *fiction* and *writing*: what I call an ‘art(e)fact’ (that is: art + ‘fact’ + electracy = faction: part fact, part fiction, part word, part image = fabulation). In this sense, it is a work of ‘arche-writing’ (as Jacques Derrida and Gregory Ulmer might say), since it is interested in all manner of ‘inscription’ and all manner of ‘telling’ and ‘uttering’ in an electronic age; in all manner of meaning-making performances (semiosis). In this sense, to cite Ulmer again (*Teletheory*, 2004), it may be considered a work of ‘literacy’ that is approaching ‘electracy’ (i.e. electronic literacy). It is a ‘paper-based’ text that is informed by ‘cyber-based’ texts and computer software (e.g. by Microsoft Word and Adobe InDesign). It is a paper-based text trying to behave like a cyber-based text; a ‘meat-space’ text (as William Gibson might say) trying to escape into ‘hyper-space’ text (as Jean Baudrillard might say), thus *escaping* the book while *honouring* the book. This is a book that doesn’t quite know how to behave; a book that doesn’t quite know who or what it is; a book that doesn’t quite know where it belongs; a book that is simultaneously a textbook, a novel, a script, a picture book, a hypertext, a polemic, an experiment, an artist’s book, and a series of patterns, collages, and screens. It is a book that sometimes forgets *that it is a book*. A book that sometimes forgets the occasion and its most unremarkable cause: to challenge the status quo and build alternative knowledges from the fragments in between. And this is as it should be—and *why not*—in a postmodern age: a confused and rambling ‘pedagondage’ that drifts and tours simultaneously, a ‘messy text’ (as George E. Marcus might say) that knows and unknos in equal measure. Para-eclectic-al and art(e)factual. What I call ‘scatter-textual.’



One day in hell xii  
he came to believe  
in the colossal nothing-  
ness that ruled the  
world through rul-  
ing nothing. There  
was no rule because  
there were no rules.

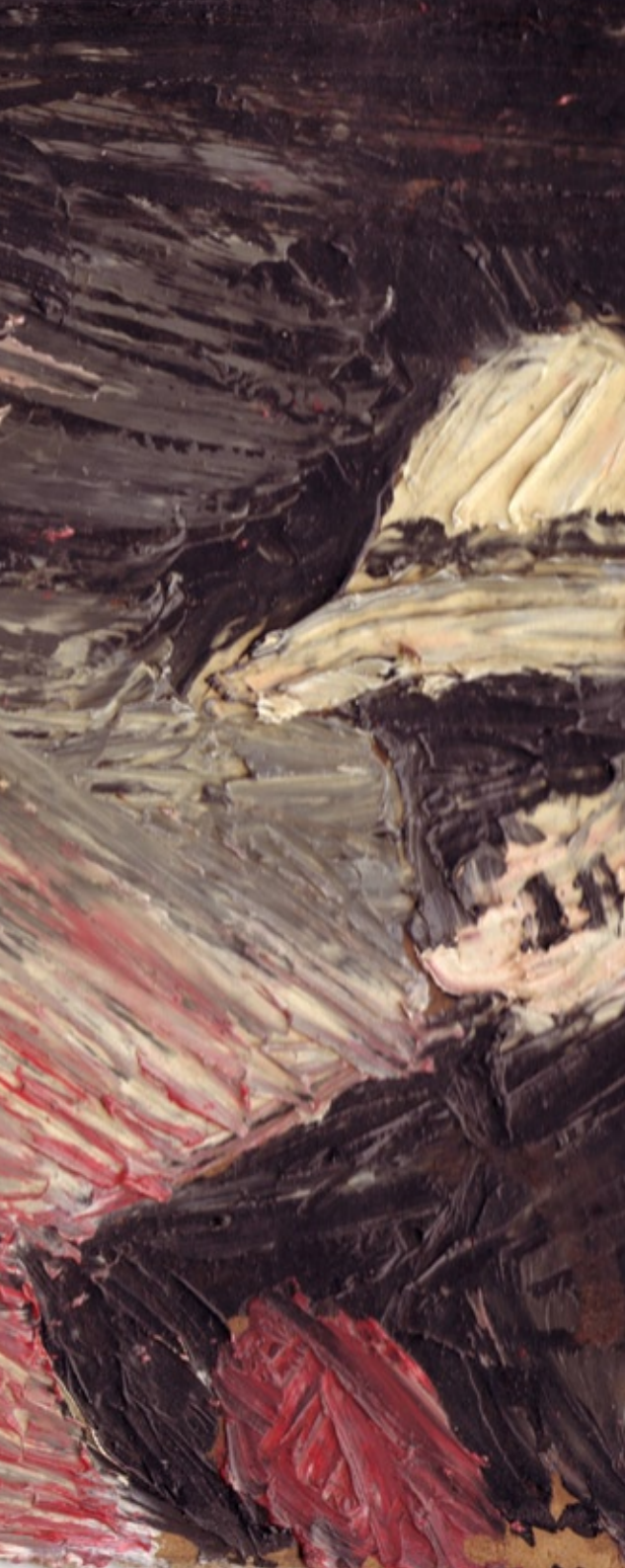
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If ... in the postmodern world the basic dictum is: 'I shop therefore I am', we need to reflect on the question of what happens to those who cannot shop and are therefore excluded from the basis of social identity. This is of particular importance as the old principles of the welfare state are challenged by new values of consumerism. In this new world, pensions, healthcare, and social support shift from the responsibility of the state to the responsibility of the individual.

Nigel Watson, 'Postmodernism and Lifestyles,' in Stuart Sim (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Postmodernism*, 2006, pp. 43-44



*Meditations on Touring & Drifting  
in a Postmodern World*