



Eschatologies

Diaries of a Vagabond

Andrew Miller

The background of the entire image is a collage. On the left side, there is a close-up of a woman's face, looking slightly to the right. She has dark hair and is wearing a dark, ribbed turtleneck sweater. The right side of the collage consists of several rectangular panels showing a dense, sun-dappled forest with green foliage and trees. The overall color palette is dominated by greens and browns, with a strong red color used for the title text.

Bric-a-brac

Diaries of a Vagabond

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This text is designed to be *viewed* as much as *read*, thus disrupting traditional academic discourses and literacies and logocentric and restrictive conventions surrounding research and learning. Knowledge exists outside and beyond the white A4 page, 12 point fonts, footnotes and references, and serious academic texts and articles. It is *this* knowledge, and these *sites* of learning and being, that this artist-researcher wishes to explore. *And why in the name of text not?*



This text was inspired by Zygmunt Bauman's *Life in Fragments* (1995) and Gregory Ulmer and Jacques Derrida's ideas on *picto-ideo-phonographic* writing (where writing extends beyond the page and beyond prose). Together, these ideas have led me to 'build' a graphic memoir bricolage out of bits and pieces of memory and artefact. The final product—or art(e)fact—presents multimodal screens where aesthetic elements are as important as verbal elements.



To write is to produce a mark that will constitute a kind of machine that is in turn productive, that my future disappearance, in principle, will not prevent from functioning and from yielding, and yielding itself to, reading and rewriting.

(Jacques Derrida,
'Signature Event Context,' *A Derrida Reader*,
1991, p. 91)

We live, not inside reality, but inside our representations of it.

(Christopher Butler,
Postmodernism, 2002, p. 21)

I change myself, I change the world.

(Gloria Anzaldúa,
Borderlands La Frontera: The New Mestiza, 1987, p. 70)

Murray said, 'I don't trust anybody's nostalgia but my own. Nostalgia is a product of dissatisfaction and rage. It's a settling of grievances between the present and the past. The more powerful the nostalgia, the closer you come to violence...'

(Don DeLillo, *White Noise*,
1986, p. 258)

... what he sought was always something lying ahead, and even if it was a matter of the past it was a past that changed gradually as he advanced on his journey, because the traveller's past changes according to the route he has followed: not the immediate past, that is, to which each day that goes by adds a day, but the more remote past. Arriving at each new city, the traveller finds again a past of his that he did not know he had: the foreignness of what you no longer are or no longer possess lies in wait for you in foreign, unpossessed places.

(Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*,
1972/1979, p. 25)

6

Remembering as a means of
forgetting
...



'Life-stories' hold us
together and stop the world
falling apart
...



IN THE END



9

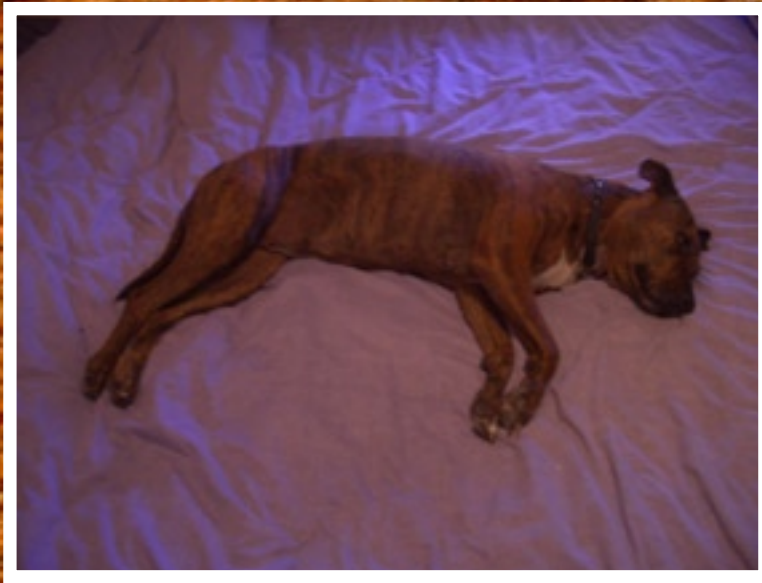
2009



Perhaps the sense of our journey does not lie only in one direction, perhaps there is no terminus at the end of the tracks to justify our insistent movement forward? Perhaps we are riding blinded by a future whose redemption ultimately lies at our backs, in the rubble, misery and confusion that we think we have already overcome?

(Iain Chambers, *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*, 1995, p. 30)





MEMOIR & MYSTORY



People tend to weave their images of the world out of the yarn of their experience.

(Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Love*, 2003/2006, p. 87)

I LIVE ALONE. I have done so for a number of years now. Before that I lived in share-houses and doss-pits. This may explain why I close my bedroom door at night and why I feel uncomfortable and exposed with it open, even in summer, when a breeze would be nice. Sapphire, my dog, sleeps at the end of my bed. It occurs to me that if I died in my sleep she would have no escape. My death would go unnoticed for weeks, possibly months. My body would rot back to bone before the authorities broke in. Sapphire, poor girl, would be all

¹ An American hobo symbol from the 1920s and '30s. Translation: 'The police here are not friendly to hobos.'



Shine on you crazy
diamond.

Pink Floyd

alone and entombed. She too would die. Her death would be slow and gruelling—drawn-out, agonising, thirsty, hungry, and lonely. How many days would she nudge at my head before nibbling at my ears? Before crying out and moaning at the emptiness? Would she drink my blood and eat my heart? Would she scratch the door to shreds and her paws to bone? Would she bark at the night until hoarse and defeated? *Ahooooooooo—*

I hate to think. But even if I did leave my bedroom door open her prospects for survival would hardly improve. She could drink from the toilet to stave off thirst, but eventually her food would run out. My flesh would fade. Shit would pile up. Piss would sink in. The stench of decomposing dog would replace the stench of decomposing human.

Ahooooooooo—

Even still, this is no way to start a memoir. Memoirs usually dwell on past experiences rather than dream about future horrors. ‘Future nostalgias’ are usually the morbid luxury of eschatologists and doomsday prophets, not damp-eyed memoirists and self-obsessed megalomaniacs. Unless, of course, you take the view that memoirs capture the

An autobiography promises feats worthy of record, conversations with famous people, a central role in important events. There is none of that here. At the very least, an autobiography implies a summing up, a certain closure, that hardly suits someone of my years, still busy charting his way through the world. ... Finally, there are the dangers inherent in any autobiographical work: the temptation to color events in ways favorable to the writer, the tendency to overestimate the interest one's experiences hold for others, selective lapses of memory. ...

'fragments' of life while autobiographies capture the 'whole' of life, in which case reflections on the perversities that go on 'inside' the head are just as permissible as the heroic feats that go on 'outside' the head. I'll take the view that neither memoir nor autobiography can actually capture life, either in part or in full, and instead take the view that both endeavours merely represent possible *versions* of life, in part or in full. On a different day, in a different context, using a different perspective, in a different mood, a different story would be told. It all depends on *how* the story is told and who or what is included and ignored. One 'life' could mushroom into multiple *lives*—one 'self' into multiple *selves*. And all would be true. As Paul Carter notes in *The Road to Botany Bay* (1987), "...the true dialogue the writer conducts is not with external reality, but with language itself" (pp. 142-143); that is, with what Jacques Derrida calls the 'undecidability' of language and the 'free play' of signs (i.e. polysemy). Carter continues:

We clarify our ideas by setting them out. By covering the previously clear page, we give our un-

(Barack Obama,
*Dreams From My
Father*, 1995/2008,
p. xvi)

ruly thoughts an order and perspicacity all their own. The linearity of writing (in contrast with the multi-dimensionality of experience) and the linearity of the logic it expresses reflects neither the nature of experience nor, for that matter, of history, but rather the limitations of the medium (p. 157).

Which explains, in part, why this text is *multi-modal* rather than *monomodal* (i.e. visual, verbal, and episodic, rather than verbal and linear), and why it attempts, as Derrida advocates in *Of Grammatology* (1967/1976), to break with the linearity of the book even while encased *within* the book.² Such a text would be what Derrida calls ‘pluri-dimensional’ and what Julia Kristeva (1980) calls ‘polyphonic’ and ‘dialogical’ – as opposed to

² Derrida writes: “The end of linear writing is indeed the end of the book, even if, even today, it is within the form of a book that new writings—literary or theoretical—allow themselves to be, for better or for worse, encased. ... This is why, beginning to write without the line, one begins also to reread past writing according to a different organization of space. ... Because we are beginning to write, to write differently, we must reread differently. ... What is thought today cannot be written according to the line and the book...” (pp. 86-87).



‘monological.’ Contemporary critics like Espen J. Aarseth (1997) and Ilana Snyder (1998) might call this ‘cybertextual’ or ‘hypertextual’ respectively. I might call it ‘para-eclectic-al’ or ‘scatter-textual’ interchangeably.

In *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts* (2006), Zygmunt Bauman picks up on the order-building ambitions of storytelling. He writes:

Stories aid the seekers of comprehension by separating the relevant from the irrelevant, actions from their settings, the plot from its background, and the heroes or the villains at the centre of the plot from the hosts of supernumeries and dummies. It is the mission of stories to select, and it is in their nature to include through exclusion and to illuminate through casting shadows. It is a grave misunderstanding, and injustice, to blame stories for favouring one part of the stage while neglecting another. Without selection there would be no story (p. 17).

This is because, as Walter Doyle and Kathy Carter (2003) point out,



THERE IS NOTHING OUTSIDE THE TEXT.

Derrida

We as human beings tend ... to interpret our lives by weaving comprehensive frameworks in which the incidents, people, actions, emotions, ideas, and settings of our experience are brought together, inter-related, and situated. In this process, we sort through our experiences, dividing the pertinent from the extraneous and filling in the gaps as we construct sensible renderings or accounts of our personal histories (p. 130).

In other words, storytelling is an order-building and meaning-making exercise. You can't *not* do it. We are language creatures who 'make' sense by 'making' stories. *There is nothing outside the text*, as Derrida says (1976, p. 158). All our experiences are mediated through language and interpretation. Clearly, then, there is no one way to write a memoir or autobiography. There are, as Derrida and Michel Foucault have taught us, *innumerable* ways to represent the past.³ And these need not be 'true'

³ As the *Collins English Dictionary* notes, the verb 'represent' means (1) to stand as an equivalent of, (2) to act as a substitute or proxy (for), and (3) to act as or be the authorised delegate or agent for (a person, country, etc), among other connotations. In the same dictionary, the term 're-present' means (1) to present again. As Derrida might note, the thing that 'represents' (in this



Even better than
the real
thing.

U2

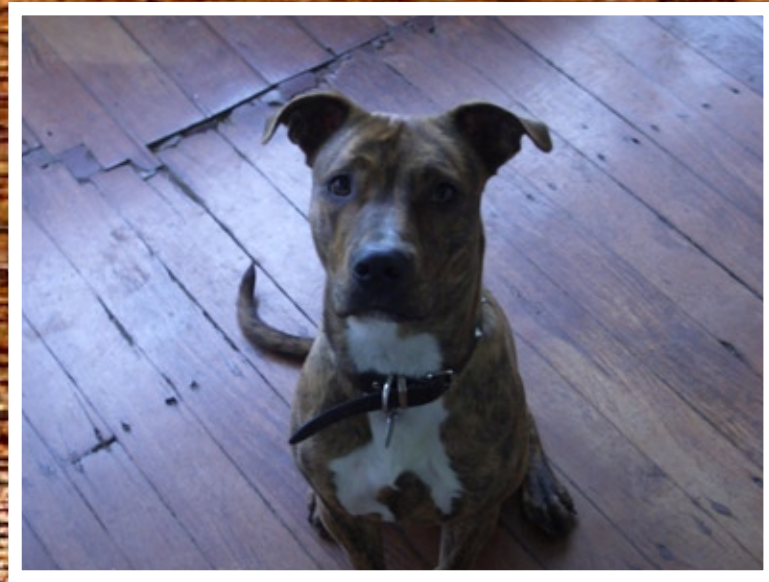
in the rational or empirical sense. In fact, most of our stories are untrue, half-truths, exaggerations, fabrications, utter lies, or fictions when measured against the paragon of 'actuality' and/or an extra-linguistic 'reality' (which the poststructuralists remind us we don't have access to anyway).

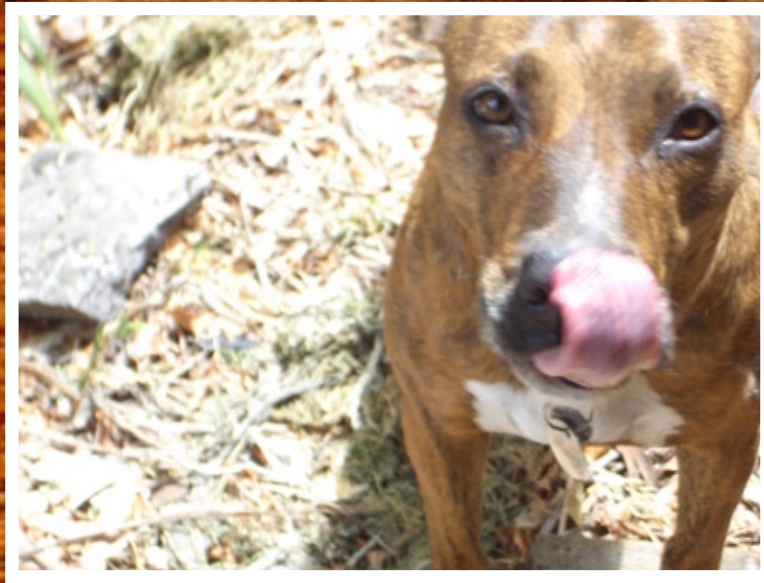
The victors, after all, write history. And if I'm alive to talk or write that history into being then I'm sure as hell going to shape it to fit my needs and interests. This makes me, in a sense, an unreli-

case, the numerous narratives being constructed to *represent* the past) *stands in for* 'the-thing-in-its-absence' (in this case, the lives-lived). To represent the past, then, is to offer up a series of signs and symbols which *stand in for* the *absent presence* (the past), and thus do the work of tenancy. My text(s) will stand in for the lives-lived and the experiences-experienced: they are not the lives-lived themselves. They *represent* the past, *stand in for* the past, but are *not* the past. They are *the present* (the narrative *now*). I am 'presenting again' the past (from the standpoint of the present) and 'standing in for' (and speaking on behalf of) those who are absent (the dead or otherwise departed, including former selves). And the moment from which I narrate, *the now*, is itself slipping quickly into the past, *the then*. Forget about trying to step into the same river twice, you can't even step into the same life twice—or the same world twice. These phantom constructs are slipping into the past as quickly as one thought replaces the next.

able and hostile witness. After all, consciously or unconsciously, I will conceal as much as I reveal. I'll soften my defects and talk up my assets. And somehow, by some means, these makeshift versions of history will be 'truer' than their originals. They will be 'hyper-real,' as Jean Baudrillard might say, or *more real than real*. Simulacra histories: *even better than the real thing* (as U2 have sung). As infamous underworld hit man Mark 'Chopper' Reid proudly suggests, *don't let the truth stand in the way of a good story* – particularly when your post-prison career relies on writing books and telling yarns that embellish your past life.

This text is no exception. It fights as much with language and representation as it does with memory, reflexivity, ego, incompetence, bias, and the context in which it is produced (i.e. the modernist institution of the PhD which makes it almost impossible to think and act outside the existing *prose-centric, answer-insistent, project-directed, order-dependent* 'structured' paradigm). It won't attempt to write or perform one story or one truth, but *multiple* stories and *multiple* truths. Like Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook* (1962), the frag-





I am writing my
self 'into'
being.

Miller

ments will hopefully converge to tell another story, a bigger story, a more accurate and false story. The various narrative threads and episodes will form a *bricolage* of life, an incomplete and thorough account of past and future memories and imaginings. I am writing to find out who I am (*and who I might become*) and where I've been (*and where I might go*). I am writing my identity *into* being rather than pretending to capture a pre-existing subject. No such subject or history exists. I am inventing my 'selves' as I go along, even past selves and past histories. As Janette Turner Hospital points out in *The Last Magician* (1992), the past is never finished: *it lies in wait, just ahead*. It is a story we keep writing and inventing from cradle to grave. The past keeps bobbing up in the present, every bit as 'real' as its original, and the ghosts of yesteryear keep crowding our heads and speaking our names. While I'm talking to you I'm talking to my dead dad. *Ahooooooooo*— I'm both present and absent from *this* moment and *that* moment. I have a foot in every day I've ever lived. At the 2008 Adelaide Writers' Week, Robyn Davidson suggested that "The past is not sealed, immutable. It doesn't be-



long to anyone” (2 March 2008). She added that in her memoir *Self Portrait with Imaginary Mother* (unpublished at the time) she wanted “to keep the past open.” In fact, she wanted her dead mother to write her own story. And why not?

I too want to keep building and altering my innumerable pasts to fit my present needs and circumstances, and to let the dead ‘speak.’ Of course, as Carolyn Ellis and Arthur Bochner (2000, p. 745) point out,

Narrative truth seeks to keep the past alive in the present. Stories show us that the meanings and significance of the past are incomplete, tentative, and revisable according to [the] contingencies of our present life circumstances, the present from which we narrate. ... After all, stories rearrange, re-describe, invent, omit, and revise. (original italics)

Possibly, then, Mrs Smith is right when she says that “Autobiographies tell more lies than all but the most self-indulgent fiction” (A.S. Byatt, ‘On the Day that E.M. Forster Died’, 1987). What’s more, the whole premise of the film *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) is that, not only is the past not

John Connor:
 'The whole thing
 goes: The future's
 not set. There's
 no fate but what we
 make for ourselves.'

*Terminator 2:
 Judgment Day* (1991)
 Accessed 10.2.09:
[www.imdb.com/title/
 tt0103064/quotes](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0103064/quotes)

John Connor:
 [voiceover] 'The
 future has not been
 written. There is
 no fate but what we
 make for ourselves.
 I wish I could
 believe that ...'

*Terminator 3: Rise
 of the Machines*
 (2003)
 Accessed 10.2.09:
[www.imdb.com/title/
 tt0181852/quotes](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0181852/quotes)

When talking about
 their lives, people
 lie sometimes,
 forget a lot,
 exaggerate, become
 confused, and get
 things wrong. Yet
 they are revealing
 truths. These truths
 don't reveal the
 past 'as it actually
 was,' aspiring
 to a standard of
 objectivity. They
 give us instead
 the truths of our
 experiences.

(Marjorie L.
 Devault, 'Personal
 Writing in Social
 Research,'
 as cited in
 Wikipedia, 17.6.08)

set, *the future is not set*. The future, like the past, is subject to change and revision: a mirage floating and shimmering on the distant horizon. So, I'm not just re-writing and re-imagining the past, *I'm re-writing and re-imagining the future*. For the future emerges *out of* the past. Change one and you change the other. "How do I guess at the future?" asks The Seer in Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* (1988/1998). "Based on the omens of the present. The secret is here in the present. If you pay attention to the present, you can improve upon it. And, if you improve upon the present, what comes later will also be better" (p. 103).

This text, then, is part memoir, part autobiography, part autoethnography, part 'mystory' (Finley, 2005; Ulmer, 2004), part fact, part fiction, part *anything goes*. It is an example of what I call 'The Postmodern Pedagogodage' (Miller, 2008a, 2008b): a vagabond-tourist pedagogy that drifts and tours simultaneously. This is a textual and pedagogical theory and practice that picks and chooses from the bric-a-brac of postmodern life while insisting on eclecticism and dilettantism as a matter of principle and course. It learns and unlearns in equal

... I think once something is written down it is necessarily frozen ... and it takes on an authority ... [that] destroys the actual fluidity of life – the fact that life is constantly changing – that life is a dialogue between ... what actually happens and one's own interpretation of what actually happens. So, yes, I think ... in this form, the memoir form, and autobiography, and indeed biography, inherently have these problems, which is to set a life ... or a time ... in amber ... and it can be very unfair, seemingly, to real characters who are set in that amber.

Memory selects, and interprets – and what is to be selected and how it needs to be interpreted is a moot matter and an object of continuous contention. The resurrection of the past, keeping the past alive, can only be attained through the active, choosing, reprocessing and recycling, work of memory.

(Zygmunt Bauman,
Liquid Love,
2003/2006, p. 87)

measure. It forgets and remembers simultaneously. It welcomes creative digressions and spontaneous asides every bit as much as it plans packaged tours and structured holidays. It creates and disrupts and builds and destroys. In this sense it draws inspiration from the creative and transgressive feats of 'travel' writers like Frank Moorhouse (*Room Service*), John Steinbeck (*Travels with Charlie*), Bruce Chatwin (*In Patagonia* and *The Songlines*), Robyn Davidson (*Tracks*), Geraldine Brooks (*Foreign Correspondence*), Anna Funder (*Stasiland*), Jerzy Kosinski (*The Painted Bird*), Barry Lopez (*Arctic Dreams*), Jonathan Raban (*Passage to Juneau* and *Bad Land*), picture book authors like Matt Ottley (*Requiem for a Beast*), and Gary Crew and Peter Gouldthorpe (*The Lost Diamonds of Killiecrankie*), and discursive essayists like Michel de Montaigne (*Essays*), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (*Reveries*), and Henry David Thoreau (*Walden*). These authors do not follow one road or one argument or one plot. Their texts are simultaneously structured and un-structured and planned and unplanned. They are neither essays nor novels in the 'monological' sense. These writers and artists leave the path

(Robyn Davidson,
Adelaide
Writers' Week,
2 March 2008)

A story is not like
a running track. A
story is a river,
made by the joining
of many streams. We
can explore a few,
but we can't turn
back to trace them
all. We have to
choose carefully.

A story is also
like a road. It
leads forward, but
turnings constantly
branch off from
it. We may go down
a few, but not
all. Some are even
dangerous. Every
breath of a good
story contains other
stories, entering
and leaving it, most
of which will never
be heard. That's
what makes a good
story good.

(Indra Sinha, *The
Death of Mr Love*,
2002, p.132)

and enter the scrub. They cross borders and mix genres. They keep their options open, as Zygmunt Bauman (*Wasted Lives*, 2006, p. 107) might say, and are ready and willing to turn left rather than right and backward rather than forward as whim will have it. Itineraries change. Interests peak and wane. *Bricoleurs* know that just as many stories turn up in the sewers and backstreets of hell as on the boulevards and terraces of utopia, and that the stories of beggars and vagabonds are every bit as compelling as those of tycoons and tourists. One man's truth is another woman's lie. As Nietzsche says, *there are no facts, only interpretations*, and travel writers know that *all* journeys and *all* stories are provisional. *Until-further-notice*.

This text is as much a recount as it is a future imagining. It is an eschatological memoir and future-looking reminiscence. And this is as it should be—neither here nor there—neither then nor now. It is a simulacra memoir. A copy of a copy of a lie. Of a truth.

Ahoouoooo—

So let's start again. Let's pray I don't die in the night and trap Sapphire in hell. Let's pray I install



AHOOOOOOO---

Sapphire

a trapdoor so she can escape if need be. And let's pray I leave ample food by the backdoor to tide her over until help arrives. Just as I did Santa and his reindeers as a child.⁴

So let's start somewhere else, somewhere nearer the truth than fantasy, somewhere nearer the beginning than end. Let's start, as they say, *in medias res*, in the middle of things, and turn away from this troubling room and troubling aside. I've already wasted 2,558 words on this digression and only have 30,000 left to play with.

So let's begin by playing somewhere else.

Let's begin by leaving...

The past is not sealed, not immutable, and it does not belong to anyone. It is an impression left by the telling of stories. I want to invent a world for my mother in which she is free to speak for herself and for her time—to fictionalise her own life. It is what we all do incessantly in an effort to find a personal truth (that glint of gold) to make sense of ourselves and of history—to keep the past open.

(Robyn Davidson, Adelaide Writers' Week,
2 March 2008)

⁴ From years of experience I can assure you that Rudolf likes carrots and Santa likes beer.



Are we not as
pebbles in the
stream of fate, now
washed together in
some sandy bay, then
scattered along the
margin and then
dispersed? And when
the rain of time
descends and swells
the stream we are
swept before the
tide, some over
cascades, some in
deep bedded pools,
some on shore, and
some are hurried
away until lost
in the ocean of
Eternity. This is
the life of man.

(William Anderson
Cawthorne,
Literarium Diarium,
Wednesday October
26, 1842)

Britt's 'Mulligan Stew' ['Hobo Stew']

Twenty stew pots are used. They hold:

450 lbs. beef
900 lbs. potatoes
250 lbs. carrots
35 lbs. green-red peppers
300 lbs. cabbage
100 lbs. turnips
10 lbs. parsnips
150 lbs. tomatoes
20 lbs. chilli pepper
25 lbs. rice
60 lbs. celery
1 lb. bay leaves
24 gal. mixed vegetables
10 lb. kitchen bouquet flavouring

About 400 loaves of bread are served. The finished stew fills about 5,000 8-oz cups.

(Accessed 13 December 2008 from: <http://www.brit-tiowa.com/hobo/logo-symbols.htm>)

DOG LIST

Name: Satan
Breed: Labrador
Colour: Black
Period: 1970s-1980s
Death: Run over

Name: Bless
Breed: Bull Terrier
Colour: White
Period: 1 week 1990s
Death: Gave away

Name: Sandy
Breed: Labrador+
Colour: Sandy
Period: 1980s-1990s
Death: Gave away

Name: Rastas Vardaman
 Goathead
Breed: Staffy+
Colour: Russet
Period: 1990s
Death: Run over

Name: Bad Girl 'Bubby'
Breed: Staffy
Colour: Chocolate
Period: 1990s-2000s
Death: Brain Tumour

Name: Twiggy
Breed: Labrador/Kelpie+
Colour: Black
Period: 1980s-1990s
Death: Gave away



Name: Sapphire ('Puppy')
Breed: Staffy/Ridgeback+
Colour: Russet brindle
Period: 2000s
Death: Going strong









Date: Sat, 31 Jan 2009 15:26:37 +1030
From: Andrew Miller <andrew.miller@flinders.edu.au>
To: Samantha Schulz <samantha.schulz@flinders.edu.au>
Subject: Memoir aesthetic
Part(s):  2 Memoir.pdf application/pdf 4732.51 KB 

Check out this massive file (hope you can open it).
Don't expect you to 'read' it, but it will give you another example of the
aesthetic I'm working on for my Memoir (bricolage) piece.

One question: Which of the two title pages do you think works better? Both
'look' the same but use different titles. One possible title for the memoir is:
'Eschatologies: Diaries of a Vagabond' and the other is 'Bric-a-brac: Diaries of
a Vagabond'. Check them out on the pdf and let me know what you think (if one
stands out, etc).

This is also an experiment to see whether I can send such large files to
Flinders people (as this piece will be a 'pdf' piece rather than a printed
document - so I need to know how big the files can be when sent, etc). The
ultimate goal for the memoir is for the examiners to read it 'on-screen' as
pdfs - not as printed pages (something I don't think has been done before).
This way its kinda filmic! You're me test-case-send, Sam!

:)

Andrew Miller
Flinders University
English / Education

We are built from
layers of text, meaning,
& experience
...



These pages will be no more than a formless record of my reveries. I myself will figure largely in them, because a solitary person inevitably thinks a lot about himself. But all the other thoughts which pass through my mind will also have their place here. I shall say what I have thought just as it came to me ...

(Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, 1792/1979, p. 32)

