

Department of Social Sciences and International Studies

**Learning Reflective Practice:
An Autoethnographic Performance in Six Movements**

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy of
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DECLARATION

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any other university.

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Date:

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a performative autoethnography exploring how first-year students learn at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia from 2008 to 2014. Working with research into autoethnography and performance ethnography, I consider the liminal positions of first-year students, their approaches to learning, and their struggles to convert the unfamiliar space of campus into places that enhance their learning.

To provoke critical reflection in myself and my readers, I blend narrative, poetry and composite choruses made up of a broad range of voices that I have heard within the university. Through these approaches, I seek to create a complex structure that “‘works’ by not working the way [readers] expect” (Lather and Smithies 1997, 48), thus provoking new ways of reading. I also introduce a provocateur character who problematises the instinctive responses to first-year students I find in myself, my fellow teachers and the university executive. My exploration is situated within both local and worldwide contexts: at Curtin, my research has taken place in a period of significant restructuring of teaching, learning and administration; while universities, believing that they mitigate against deep and sustained learning.

The importance of uncertainty, messiness and polyvocality was a central finding of this research. Insisting that learning is partial, hesitant and situated, and valuing the power of not knowing, I invite the reader to join me in reflecting critically on the specific learning environments I inhabit and on the broader educational contexts that shape them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A range of supervisors played parts in shaping this thesis over seven years. Dr Leah Mercer believed in Bella's role in the work, and her strong ear for dialogue has helped bring life to Bella's voice. I also appreciate her meticulous reading and generous feedback. Professor Graham Seal's overview of the final thesis and capacity to see me through the university thesis submission system were very helpful. In the early years, Associate Professors Philip Moore and Joan Wardrop guided me patiently through my initial exploration of autoethnography.

I have been extremely fortunate to be part of a passionate, collegial group of postgraduate students, many of whom also became sessional tutors in the Communications units and inspired me with their dedication to the students. With Joy Scott I explored autoethnography and personal voice, co-wrote papers and gave presentations. Together we struggled to find our voices, shared our writing, and lived through the highs and lows of teaching first-year students. Her friendship has been central to shaping the scholar, writer and teacher I now am. Sandy Adams has been a supportive fellow student, and a stimulating and highly reflexive teaching partner. I continue to find our many hours of teaching conversations engrossing. Maureen Gibbons, my poet-friend, encouraged me to write poetry when I insisted I could write only prose. Her confidence and thorough feedback have taken me to places I didn't think possible. Her teacherly approach to some of the most challenging first-year students has also inspired me. All three of these fellow student-teachers urged me to explore Bella's role in my work at a time when I was unsure, for which I am very thankful. Along with Joy, Sandy and Maureen, other postgraduate students and sessional tutors have been important over the past seven years, particularly Janice Baker, Helen Fordham, Thor Kerr, Liam Lynch and Margaret Patrikeos. As the last of the 'gang' to submit my thesis, I sense the end of a rich era.

The volunteer students and teachers gave willingly of their time in the early years of my research, and were crucial in developing my ideas about teaching. I am deeply appreciative of them, as of all the students and teachers I have worked with over fifteen years at Curtin, who have helped shape my understandings of first-year student learning. I continue to believe that teaching first years is one of the most rewarding positions in the university.

I am also grateful to the many colleagues at Curtin University who have supported my thesis writing, including Jan McKay, Trish Dooley, Kerry Pedigo and Werner Soontiens. During hectic teaching times when I have had little progress to report, they have been encouraging and solicitous. My fellow Communications Coordinators Katie Fielding and Cathryn Wilkinson and unit administrator Kally Whitehead have shared the heavy coordination role, which has allowed me time for writing – no small contribution to the thesis! Leigh Brennan has worked on the formatting and layout of this thesis, and his valuable experience of many years in the performance field has helped translate its performative aspects onto the printed page. I value his meticulous and very willing work.

At home, my husband Warren has been encourager, reader, critic and ‘domestic god’ when I have been immersed in writing. I suspect he is as excited as I am to see this project nearing its conclusion! As a fellow teacher and curriculum designer, his perspectives have enhanced and provoked my thinking; nevertheless, his most important contributions have been his emotional support and his tireless belief in my capacity to write this work. I dedicate it to him.

For Warren, who believes in me as a teacher and writer – thank you!

CONTENTS

| | |
|--|-----|
| Declaration | i |
| Abstract | ii |
| Acknowledgments | iii |
| Contents | v |
| Prelude | 1 |
| First Movement: Setting Out | 4 |
| Theme 1: Approaching the Research | 5 |
| Theme 2: Curtin University | 9 |
| Theme 3: Structure of the Thesis | 12 |
| Second Movement: Speaking Up | 31 |
| Theme 1: Connected Learners | 32 |
| Theme 2: Autoethnography | 37 |
| Theme 3: Writing the Other | 43 |
| Theme 4: Story and Poetry | 50 |
| Theme 5: Reflexivity | 54 |
| Theme 6: The Role of the Reader | 67 |
| Theme 7: Ethics | 69 |
| Third Movement: Being in the Margins | 77 |
| Theme 1: Liminality | 77 |
| Theme 2: Margins, Borders and Boundaries | 110 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Theme 3: A Teaching Reflection | 124 |
| Fourth Movement: Learning | 132 |
| Theme 1: A Student Struggles | 132 |
| Theme 2: Confident Students | 137 |
| Theme 3: Learning the Languages of Academic Communities | 141 |
| Theme 4: Competitive or Collaborative? | 148 |
| Theme 5: Graduate Attributes and Student Learning Outcomes | 153 |
| Theme 6: Student Engagement | 157 |
| Theme 7: Engaging Learners | 160 |
| Theme 8: Critical Reflective Thinking | 164 |
| Theme 9: Connected Learning | 169 |
| Theme 10: The Teachers Reflect | 170 |
| Theme 11: What is Learning? | 172 |
| Fifth Movement: Making a Place | 176 |
| Theme 1: Turning Space into Place | 176 |
| Theme 2: Embodiment as 'Hanging Out' | 181 |
| Theme 3: Curtin Town | 187 |
| Theme 4: Postmodern Spaces | 189 |
| Theme 5: Students' Experience of Campus | 191 |
| Theme 6: Communities of Practice and Apprenticeship | 197 |
| Theme 7: Sketching the Classroom Space | 199 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| Theme 8: Developing Teacher Places | 204 |
| Sixth Movement: Critiquing | 210 |
| Theme 1: A Teacher Chorus | 210 |
| Theme 2: Introducing the Managerial University | 215 |
| Theme 3: A Fast-Track Education | 223 |
| Variation: A Panoptic Interlude | 228 |
| Theme 4: Bakhtin and de Certeau | 240 |
| Variation: The Curtin Carnival | 245 |
| Postlude | 250 |
| References | 257 |

Prelude

Sharon¹ is sitting in my office, looking tight and awkward. She's conservatively dressed in a straight red knee-length skirt, white blouse and flat brown leather sandals. Her blond, bobbed hair is shoulder-length, and she's slightly built, with hunched shoulders. I wonder whether she always stoops like this, or whether she's particularly fearful, and I try to relax her with a smile and a few words of small talk. She's in her early twenties – what the institution, and the students themselves, call a “mature-age student” because she hasn't come straight from school at seventeen. She doesn't look mature this afternoon, just nervous.

Sharon has dropped into my office with her class tutor, Lesley, after their morning class. She huddles in one of the chairs surrounding my little square table, as close to the door as she can, and Lesley lowers herself onto the chair opposite. I pull the side lever on my computer chair to lower it to their level. It drops with a thud and Sharon flinches, startled. The office is full.

I'm not surprised to see them, because Lesley has expressed concern to me, as unit coordinator, several times about Sharon. She's not engaging in workshop activities, and the other students, after initially trying to include her, have given up. While they're discussing issues, doing referencing exercises or preparing thesis statements for their essays, she sits apart and works alone. I've noticed her myself around campus – always slightly off to the side of the roaming, massing students. In their first few weeks on campus, first year students float, divide and coalesce in clumps, as they try to shape their environment into places they can manage. But even in these amorphous masses, Sharon stands apart. No one consults her about where to go for the next class; no one discusses with her their responses to the previous lecture (or, more likely, the previous lecturer); no one invites her for a coffee or a beer at the Tavern.

We're now just over half way through the semester – it's Week 7 of 12 – and Lesley has told me that Sharon has missed the previous two weekly classes and has not responded to emails. Two weeks doesn't seem much to some students, but Lesley and

I are worried. While we can't penalise students for not attending class, we have found over the years that first-year students who miss classes are more likely to fail than those who attend regularly. A two-week gap in the first semester opens a huge hole. The places students are mapping for themselves – the classroom, their area of campus, and the campus as a whole – are still only lightly inked at this stage, and an absence of two weeks can dissolve the map. Sharon has returned to class today, but Lesley tells me later she noticed that her links with the other students were even more tentative than before, that she seemed sullen, disengaged and further separated from the rest of the class.

I anticipate that Sharon has come to discuss her problems engaging with the other students. Most of the students who come to talk feel safe to confide in me, I believe, because they identify me as outside their home department and on the margins of the institution. I assume that Sharon is like these other students. I'm feeling hesitant about the conversation, because I'm not qualified to deal with relationship issues. I silently rehearse the suggestion that she go to the university counselling service for more professional help.

But my assumptions are rocked: she has come to complain about the unit and about Lesley's teaching, and I reel at her suddenly expressed anger. She's not been attending class, she explains, because she's learning nothing. Lesley can't keep the students under control, and the room is full of chatter and laughter. I know Lesley's class is particularly lively – I've popped in myself and enjoyed their energetic responses – and I suggest to Sharon that she join in with the activities rather than resist them. Sharon becomes more assertive: it's my fault, she declares, that the unit is not conducive to her learning because of the way I have organised it – too many students muddling around not knowing answers, and too much time wasted listening to each other. She's not paying fees to hear what other students think, but to get answers from experts. Her favourite part of the course is the lecture series given by the senior professor in the department, in which he gives valuable information and the students make notes in silence.

I explain to Sharon my theories about how we learn. She's not impressed. I talk about differences between learning content and learning processes, and how we

Communications teachers work hard to help students map classroom places that are conducive to their learning. She reiterates: she is learning nothing in the classroom place created for this unit. I know Lesley is an excellent teacher, and scores highly on student evaluations; her students report that she challenges them to think critically and reflectively about their studies and their discipline. I suggest to Sharon that in a university environment many different approaches to teaching can co-exist, and that she could benefit from more than one. She reiterates: the noisy classroom and the unstructured unit are giving her nothing, and she would prefer not to attend.

While I'm taken aback by Sharon's attitudes to learning, I'm moved by her determination and bravery. She appears jittery, but determined to state her criticisms strongly, and to the two people who are their target. The power imbalance between us doesn't silence her. I pride myself on making my classrooms inclusive places where everyone can learn and be heard, but I am reminded, yet again, that this is not always possible.

This conversation leaves all of us dissatisfied. Sadly, in the end I straighten my shoulders and 'pull rank'. I tell her she will have to pass the unit in order to get her degree, and I urge her again to try to participate in the classroom activities, which I believe will help develop her communications. Though I don't say this to her, I hope they will also help her engage with the other students more positively because I believe she will learn more deeply if she builds a network of friends she can discuss ideas with. And I suggest she make an appointment with the university counselling service, whose counsellors are experienced in talking to students about their learning styles. As she leaves my office I sag, knowing I have failed to connect with her.

First Movement: Setting Out



And I forgot the element of chance introduced by circumstances, calm or haste, sun or cold, dawn or dusk, the taste of strawberries or abandonment, the half-understood message, the front page of newspapers, the voice on the telephone, the most anodyne conversation, the most anonymous man or woman, everything that speaks, makes noise, passes by, touches us lightly, meets us head on.

Jacques Sojcher, from *La Demarque Poetique* 1976²

Although the spirit of my conversation with Sharon is unusual, it is just one of dozens of meetings I have each semester with students in my role as Communications Coordinator at Curtin University, in Perth, Western Australia. I have held this position since 2000, coordinating compulsory, credit-bearing units, in which students develop their communications, or academic literacies, in the context of the disciplines they are studying.

At Curtin University, a unit is a semester-length course or program. Full-time students take four units each semester; that is, eight a year. Some units are compulsory, others are optional or elective. In almost all courses at Curtin, one Communications unit is compulsory within the first year (usually the first semester). These Communications units are taught by various teams throughout the university, shaped within the contexts of the students' courses; that is, they focus on topics associated with their disciplines, and on written and spoken genres appropriate to those disciplines. Many terms are used worldwide to describe similar courses – for example, Academic Literacy, Composition, English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes and Communications, each with slightly different focuses. I use the term 'Communications', since that is the term used at Curtin.

By the term 'Communications' I refer to discipline-specific, embedded academic literacy courses, taken by all first-year students, rather than those identified as needing remediation. They are much more than study skills courses, and closer to the

academic literacy courses discussed by UK language educators Mary Lea, Brian Street and their colleagues (Lea and Street 1999; Lea and Stierer 2000; Lillis and Turner 2001; Street 2004), and involve critical and reflective thinking, academic writing, information literacy and interpersonal communications. These courses have become increasingly common in Australia and overseas in recent decades (Chanock 2007; Chiseri-Strater 1991; Hyland 2006). My research focus has been limited to students in the Faculties of Humanities, and Science and Engineering, since I work only within these faculties, take part in ongoing educational conversations about these disciplines, and have easy and regular access to their students and academics.

FIRST MOVEMENT, THEME 1: APPROACHING THE RESEARCH³

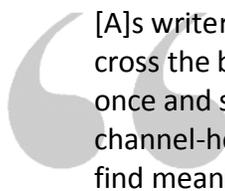
The research question

I began this research in 2008, seeking to examine the Communications units I was coordinating, within the context of the university's approaches to first-year student learning. I wanted to consider the ways in which the units were successful and problematic; the enablers and constraints that were placed on them by the university system, and by the wider social contexts of the early twenty-first century in Perth; and how I could play my part in reshaping the units so that they would better enhance the learning of first-year students in their particular contexts. I was also questioning how the units could best support beginning students from low socio-economic and other diverse backgrounds, since the number of these students has been increasing rapidly over the past two decades at Curtin, as in most universities in Australia and overseas (McInnis, James, and McNaught 1995; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005).

My approach to this question was initially ethnographic: I would interview selected students, and observe classes taught in a range of disciplines. In this way, I sought to hear and represent the voices of first-year students, whom I saw as the least powerful members of the university community. I believed that a significant proportion of my colleagues undervalued first-year students, regarding most of them as unproven, not

dedicated or hard-working enough to succeed, and likely to be weeded out of the institution by the end of their first semester. My aim was to explore what learning feels and looks like for first-year students and their teachers at Curtin University in the early decades of the twenty-first century, and in doing this to hone the Communications units to enhance what I would come to see as student learning. As my project developed, I realised that I was engaged in autoethnography (as I will explore in the Second Movement), in that I could not discount my own position in the institution and in the Communications units. I also tuned into the voices of the many sessional (that is, part-time, untenured) teachers who teach the units (twenty-five in the most recent semester of the unit I coordinated in 2015), who are central to the ways learning happens in the units, but whose voices, like those of the first-year students, are largely ignored within the institution. This project thus became political in ways I had not initially envisaged.

Postmodernist writers inspired me to experiment with forms and structures to give voice to these members of the Curtin community, and to place the most ordinary person alongside the most powerful, as described by Australian writer Drusilla Modjeska:



[A]s writers and as readers we'd learned from post-modernism that we could cross the boundaries of discipline and genre, that we could be several selves at once and speak in more than one voice. We'd learned to fast-forward and channel-hop and cut up our time lines; we'd learned to distrust the heroic and find meaning in the ordinary. (Modjeska 2002, 166)

The 1970s undergraduate I had been was transforming into a postmodern researcher and writer, in processes that were both exhilarating and uncomfortable.

In the later years of my research, 2012–2014, its political emphasis increased, as the university undertook three major restructures, all of which impacted on student learning: the first restructure focused on approaches to assessment, making teachers more accountable for their grading and feedback to students; the other two restructures reshaped the workforce, first academic, then administrative (which came

to be called ‘professional’), in order to increase the research profile of the university, and to make it more financially efficient. Even as I write this, these three restructures continue to impinge on the Communications units, and have caused me to focus more strongly than I had initially intended on the impacts of the university administrative and executive contexts on student learning. This has led to the university itself becoming a character in this work, part of the multivoiced chorus I will create; this character’s words will be taken directly from the Curtin website.

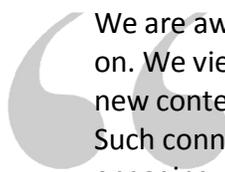
Research participants

During the interview phase of my research, in 2009 and 2010, I interviewed twenty first-year students from the Faculties of Humanities, and Science and Engineering, first individually and then six of the most willing again in groups. Two chose to return at the end of the next two semesters for further interviews. All but one of these twenty students were enrolled in vocational or applied courses, a proportion that mirrors the student group in the two faculties: in the Faculty of Humanities, enrolments in Cultural Studies, Social Sciences and Fine Arts are dwarfed by those in applied courses such as Professional Writing, Internet Studies, Creative Advertising and Architecture; in the Faculty of Science and Engineering, a handful of students enrol in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics, a number overwhelmed by the thousands who study Engineering, Mining Technology, Computer Science and Actuarial Science. I also formally interviewed ten staff members and sessional tutors. In addition, during the six years of my research project, I reflected in my journal on hundreds of incidents that I witnessed and participated in as a teacher and coordinator. The journal entries included in this work are selected directly from this journal. In addition, the majority of the fragments of sessional tutor voices that appear in this work come from this latter source, rather than from formal interviews, since my coordination involves regular formal and informal meetings with sessional tutors, both individually and in groups.

Research position: radical humility

In this work I place myself within the group of critical pedagogy theorists, who see education as complex, situated, and interconnected, and who critique tertiary

education (and education in general) for the ways in which it privileges some voices while silencing others.⁴ They focus on unpacking the institutional and discursive positions and practices that underpin their research in order to stay reflexively alert to how these positions and practices shape their consciousness and their educational approaches. I therefore seek to number myself among those who, in the words of Critical Pedagogy theorists Joe Kincheloe and Kenneth Tobin, approach their research “with a radical humility, a fallibilism, an awareness of the complexity of our task” (2006, 4):



We are aware of how little we know about the immensity of it all, but we push on. We view ourselves and our ways of seeing in the light of new horizons and new contexts, in the process recognizing previously unnoticed connections. Such connections alert us to new dimensions of what we are capable of engaging – the ones we previously missed. Critical, yet humble, we push for something better. (Kincheloe and Tobin 2006, 4–5)

The interrelation between Kincheloe and Tobin’s description of educational research and the poem by Sojcher I cited at the opening of this movement is evident. Kincheloe and Tobin go on to cite scientist Illya Prigogene’s phrase “extraneous perturbations” (1984, quoted in Kincheloe and Tobin 2006, 5) to describe the almost limitless repercussions that can arise from a small change in one variable, creating a complexity they see as demanding both acknowledgment and reflexivity. I am reminded that my complex educational world is shaped, in the words of Sojcher, by “circumstances, calm or haste, sun or cold, dawn or dusk, the taste of strawberries or abandonment ... everything that speaks, makes noise, passes by, touches [me] lightly, meets [me] head on” (de Certeau 1984, 16). Sharon’s voice expressed in my office that day was not a fixed entity – on another day she might speak more subtly or more boldly, more positively or more negatively, or she might choose not to speak at all – but once spoken her voice reverberates as loudly as the voice of the most enthusiastic student: hers is one part in a multivoiced performance that keeps me alert, and challenges my ideas about students, teaching and the institution.

Sharon's voice will not be the only negative student voice heard throughout this performance: her resistant voice will speak alongside naïve, critical, unsure and supercilious voices, as well as enthusiastic, excited, confident and passionate ones. I will try to listen with "such pointy pricked-up ears that [I] hear what language says inside my own [and others'] words at the very moment of enunciation" (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997, 85). Although impossible to maintain, this goal is certainly worth striving for, and the act of struggle itself enriches the learning experience. This is the reflexive approach central to my research.

In selecting words and phrases from interviewees, sections from my journal, and voices from informal conversations, my "pointy pricked-up ears" have heard sounds that have disconcerted my academic side. These sounds have pushed this thesis far away from being an academic production, which I can bring together neatly, towards being an unwieldy performance of disparate sounds that insist on being heard.

FIRST MOVEMENT, THEME 2: CURTIN UNIVERSITY

Throughout this work it will become evident that the Curtin campus in the Perth suburb of Bentley is as much a character in this autoethnography as its students, teachers and administrators. Its voice is part of the chorus I hear and seek to present.

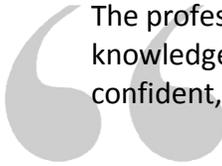
Curtin had its origins as a large institute of technology, the Western Australian Institute of Technology (WAIT), which was set up in 1966 on a suburban campus in Bentley, six kilometres south of the Perth city centre. At this time, Perth had only one university, the prestigious 'sandstone' University of Western Australia (UWA). In contrast to UWA's 'pure' research focus, WAIT marketed its applied, vocational courses such as journalism, librarianship, design, mining technology, and paramedical disciplines such as pharmacy, medical imaging and occupational therapy. When it received the status of university in the 1980s, it was initially named Curtin University of Technology, and became Curtin University only in 2010. It maintained WAIT's focus on the vocational, practical aspects of its courses – and still does – in order to distinguish itself from the

other four universities by then operating in Perth. This single statement sitting above the Curtin Courses search box on the homepage until 2015 trumpets its focus:

Our courses are applied, innovative and grounded in the real world.

This single sentence seeks to distinguish Curtin from UWA – its older but smaller sibling, and most significant rival – by implying that UWA’s courses are impractical and belong in the stereotypical ivory tower of traditional universities rather than “in the real world”.

Curtin’s recent change of name, though slight, indicates the next stage in its move from local institute of technology to broader academic institution with international aspirations. The campus itself is a visual sign of all the stages: the squat, grey concrete buildings date from the era of WAIT. Most are of three and four storeys, with red-tiled, sloping roofs, scattered around the hilly campus, and seem to revel in their functional nature. These are in tune with the harsh feel of the campus – it is dry and windswept, and situated the furthest of the six Perth university campuses from the softening impact of the ocean. Interspersed throughout these concrete buildings are red-brick, flat-roofed infill buildings that belong to the early university era, with decoratively shaped windows and brickwork, softer, more subtle than their predecessors, connoting quiet sophistication and good taste. Then, from the past few years, a further smattering of infill buildings insist on their place on the campus, brazen in glass, steel and spacious foyers. All are individually designed, some with sponsors’ names and logos on the front (BHP Billiton, CSIRO), and all could take their place among public buildings in modern cities anywhere in the world. The Engineering Pavilion, typical of these buildings, is marketed as “a unique facility in WA combining leading-edge technology and a sustainable focus” (Curtin University of Technology 2009, 5). The name “pavilion” is an interesting choice for this building, resonating with images of world trade fairs, and open spaces where learners and researchers can network briefly on their journeys to other places. The School of Engineering’s marketing presents this building as supporting high-level communication among a community of scholars and professionals, encapsulating “a new type of engineering [that] is emerging”:

 The profession demands graduates who continue to have the fundamental knowledge and skills of engineering science, but who are also highly socialised, confident, sophisticated and self-motivated. (Curtin University 2013)

Rather than focusing on the classrooms, lecture theatres and academics' offices that inhabit this building, this marketing emphasises that the "internal layout of the building will encourage academics and students to interact outside the confines of formal teaching spaces." I will explore issues of space and place further in the Fifth Movement.

It is no coincidence that these latest buildings house the disciplines in which Curtin strives to make its international reputation: minerals, resources, chemistry and engineering. They reach out to international markets, summoning students and prominent academics to an environment worthy of them. To further this international focus, by 2014 Curtin University had five other campuses in Western Australia, in addition to the main Bentley campus, one in Sydney and two in South East Asia, as well as off-shore partner institutions in a further seven countries, mainly in South-East Asia. A marketing campaign for the new Resources and Chemistry precinct resounds with the drumbeat of Curtin's international focus, and its claims of state-of-the-art research and technology:

new frontiers

revolutionary vision

perfect foundation for high-impact and industry-relevant research

exciting new Chemistry epicentre

cutting-edge research

key player with a dynamic future in this field

world-class facility

research and development powerhouse recognised across the globe⁵

First-year students

Into this dynamic and outward-focused world, many thousands of first-year students arrive in March each year. Curtin is the largest university in Western Australia, and one of the largest in Australia. In 2009, for example, there were more than ten thousand first-year students on the main Bentley campus out of a total of more than thirty-two thousand undergraduate students on that campus.

FIRST MOVEMENT, THEME 3: STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

Performativity

I view my work over the past five years as practice-led research, exploring the practices of teaching and learning for first-year university students. Drawing on theories of performativity (Gergen and Gergen 2012; Haseman 2006; Langellier 2003; Lincoln and Denzin 2003; Schechner 2006; Spry 2001; Turner 1987), I will create this thesis itself as a performance. In the spirit of the multi-voiced chorus I am creating, I will use musical terminology to indicate its structure: six movements, with each of these movements sub-divided into themes, with the culminating movement including two variations on these themes. The entire performance will be bookended by a prelude and a postlude. Themes in musical pieces, as in literary works, represent the main ideas of these works. Variations support these themes, but alter them in some way “perhaps by adding extra notes, changing from major to minor or vice versa, changing harmony, rhythm or time signature, or when the theme is played in the bass” (Education Scotland 2016). Throughout, I will seek to avoid the hierarchies common in academic writing, where the voices of ‘ordinary’ people are interpreted only through the voice of the academic: a “god’s eye perspective” (Gergen and Gergen 2012, 55). My performance in creating it interrelates with the performances of myself and the other characters enacting it. The interrelationships are not simple, and develop in a multitude of directions. For example, while my writerly performance is shaped and reshaped by the performances of all the actors in the world I am

exploring (including myself), some of these actorly performances are shaped by my performance as a writer, as participants adapt their performance to suit what they see as the conventions of being observed and interviewed.⁶ In this way, I view 'performance' in a very broad sense, influenced by the writings of Richard Schechner, a significant figure in the founding of Performance Studies as a discipline:



A performance studies scholar examines texts, architecture, visual arts, or any other item or artifact of art or culture not in themselves, but as players in ongoing relationships, that is “as” performances. (Schechner 2006, 2)

This reflects the embodied, performative nature of the learning I explore. Brad Haseman traces the term “performative research” back to the 1962 work of philosopher of language, J.L. Austin (Haseman 2006, 5). Haseman describes performative research as practice-led, arising from a wide range of creative practice. He contends that it is becoming so significant in current academic work and so distinct from both quantitative and qualitative research that it is, in fact, a third research paradigm (2006, 5). Ethnographer Dwight Conquergood echoes this concept of a third paradigm in his description of academic scholarship and society in general taking a “performative turn” (Conquergood 1989). He traces this back to Victor Turner, whom he sees as the founding father of performative ethnography (Conquergood 1989, 84), with his descriptions of human beings as belonging to the species *homo performans*, that is, beings that create both themselves and their cultures through performance (Turner 1987, 81). Conquergood sees performative ethnography as an ethical act, concerned with building strong connections between researchers and the “real people, humankind alive” they study, connections that bridge gaps that might arise in researcher-‘subject’ relationships in traditional qualitative research (Conquergood 2002, 399). To those who insist on the superiority of quantitative research over qualitative and performative research, Kenneth Gergen and Mary Gergen (2012) respond unequivocally; while many commentators acknowledge that quantitative research excels in accuracy but argue for different

criteria to be applied to the other two paradigms, Gergen and Gergen (2012, 25) are not prepared even to concede this: “In terms of accuracy, science is no more objective than a poem or a short story. It simply uses a different vocabulary”.

I will structure this thesis as a performance in six movements, each comprising a collection of themes. The students and teachers of Curtin University are characters in many of the themes, and are listed in the List of Characters on page 31. I incorporate these characters within this performance in three different ways: for those I interviewed – both students and teachers – I quote their words directly from transcripts of my interview recordings; I also create single composite characters, often constructed from several students or teachers; in addition, I create composite choruses, modelled on Ancient Greek drama’s use of the chorus to represent ‘the people’. I craft the voices of these last two groups of people – both composite individuals and choruses – from the words I heard in student and teacher interviews, and continue to hear while inhabiting the world of Curtin University. I have chosen some of these words because they resonate for me, from my work with first-year students and teachers; others have surprised or challenged me, insisting on being included.

I will use story throughout this work as a means of reflecting on everyday practices. In this way, I situate myself within the philosophies of Michel de Certeau, who sees stories as “the decorative container for a *narrativity* for everyday practices” (1984, 70, emphasis in the original). I will generally write these stories in the form of vignettes, written in the present tense.⁷ Through these vignettes I seek to create a sense of immediacy in the described experiences, and to engage my readers in these experiences “in more open, evocative, emotional, embodied and sensual ways than is possible in more standard forms of writing” (Sparkes 2009, 32). Similarly, autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis describes her aim in using stories as her “attempt to integrate physical bodies, feelings, talk, motives, actions, and face-to-face interactions” (2009, 15). Stories create connections between experiences that in postmodern times

we recognise are fragmented, disunited and incomplete: de Certeau asserts that “what the map cuts up, the story cuts across” (1984, 129).

Bella in the wings

My main voice in this performance, the voice the reader will generally follow through movement by movement, is not singular: sometimes I narrate; sometimes I speak as an interpretive ethnographer; sometimes I am an analytic researcher; sometimes I respond to a media text or a poem; sometimes I muse in my reflective journal.

Nevertheless, I contend that the person speaking in these voices is relatively coherent – she is the academic, reflexive teacher and student whom I will call Jane. From time to time I will undercut Jane’s voices with another voice – that of the provocateur and critic who seeks to challenge Jane. She is, of course, another part of me, and to emphasise this I will call her Bella, the familiar version of my middle name Isobel, and also the name of my grandmother after whom I was named. Granny Bella was a determined, feisty and at times cantankerous Scotswoman, a very appropriate model for my challenger. Bella’s role in this performance will be to disrupt its flow: to make things unsafe, to open up problems where Jane creates too-easy solutions, to introduce discordant notes into Jane’s analytical and interpretive voices; that is, to make things messy. She will speak from the wings rather than from the stage itself, unseen but insisting on being heard. She will play a central role in my search to create what Susanne Gannon calls “borderwork”, work that moves back and forward across many genre, discourse and contextual borders, an approach she bases on Hélène Cixous’s “texts that get away, that escape ... that can’t be finished” (Cixous 1998, 44, quoted in Gannon 2007, n.p.).

Bella’s voice in the wings will grow from the voices I hear around me each day, and that I heard in my interviews with students and teachers; but it is, of course, my construction. I am provoked by the call of Elizabeth St. Pierre to “the space of rigorous imagination” (1997c, 371), with the purpose of challenging my own initial responses and easy assumptions, coming to think more deeply and to consider new angles. While it is my own construction, I hope that in starting from voices I hear around me, I will

give Bella the power to catch Jane out and up, to be clown-like, to play with language, to challenge, subvert and shock, to write “from all sides of [her] mouth” (Schutzman 2002, 81), to be a clown:



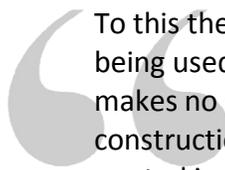
Clowns are cultural metasemioticians who use irrationality and perversion to comment on how illogical and depraved much of our day-to-day thought is. They represent a part of ourselves that has never really belonged to us. (Schutzman 2002, 81)

Throughout this work, and in my previous published papers (Grellier 2013, 2014; Grellier and Scott 2010; Scott and Grellier 2012), I have searched for satisfying and authentic ways in which to represent the voices I hear without smothering them with academic commentary and endorsement. It has been a challenging struggle, but I believe it is particularly important when working with people with less power and academic capital than myself. It is very easy to lapse into the academic voice: I have generally found that my rewriting involves rephrasing my comfortable, separate academic voice into the personal, connected voice of the teacher, student and involved researcher. In this struggle I am not alone. Patti Lather and Chris Smithies, for example, experienced it in their research with women living with HIV/AIDS: “we wanted to give pride of place to those stories, uninterrupted by our coming in and saying what the women’s words ‘really meant,’ as is typical of academic research” (Lather and Smithies 1997, 49–50). They confronted this problem with a range of layout and typographical solutions, with many pages laid out in two halves, the women’s words running uninterrupted across the top of each page and their own discussion across the bottom. Many of their sections involve their own parallel stories, personal responses and extracts from their research journals, rather than academic analysis; they use text boxes for brief academic discussion and background details. Their most intriguing solution is the introduction of angels, which are central to the book and act as both a thematic and an organising motif, “as a way to move between and among the layers of meaning and levels of knowing involved in living with HIV/AIDS” (Lather and Smithies 1997, 51). While I do not equate Bella with the

angels – she is decidedly earthly, even earthy – she provides a similar mechanism that both connects different layers of the narrative and disrupts its easy flow.

Central motifs

Because of the complex, divergent, multivoiced nature of this performance, I will interweave three motifs throughout, with the aim of creating some coherence within the complexity. John Keller, in his review of the motif- indexes of folklore arising from the work of folklorist Stith Thompson, describes motifs as “individual themes, those single, subsidiary incidents, which taken together form more complex narratives” (Keller 1951, 6). Thompson himself, when asked to define a motif, responded ambivalently:



To this there is no short and easy answer. Certain items in narrative keep on being used by storytellers; they are the stuff out of which tales are made. It makes no difference exactly what they are like; if they are actually useful in the construction of tales, they are considered to be motifs. (Thompson 1955, quoted in Georges 1997, 205)

Whether motifs are seen as themes, incidents, items or “stuff”, their most important aspect for my work is their recurring role in the structuring of complex narratives (Georges 1997).

Motif 1: Connected knowing

The first of my motifs is that of “connected knowing” (Belenky et al. 1986, 112), the knowing that arises not just from the mind, but from the body and from the emotions, as well as from relationships with others: shared understandings, interconnections and empathies. Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues distinguish this from “separate knowing”, which arises from individual critical thinking, analysis and reasoning. Writing thirty years ago, they located connected knowing with women rather than men, although they did acknowledge that it was not particular to women. In a later interview, Belenky saw connected knowing as growing in reaction to the dominant male society:

What we are really doing, though, is describing characteristics that women and men have developed in the context of a sexist and aggressive society, a society in which the public and private spheres of living have been drastically segregated. (Belenky, Ashton-Jones and Thomas 1990, 284)

Poet-novelist Margaret Atwood's rich evocation of the ancient "mothertongue" languages of in her poem "Marsh Languages" encapsulates the motif of connected ways of knowing.

"Marsh Languages"

The dark soft languages are being silenced
Mothertongue Mothertongue Mothertongue
falling one by one back into the moon.

Language of marshes,
language of the roots of rushes tangled
together in the ooze,
marrow cells twinning themselves
inside the warm core of the bone
pathways of hidden light in the body fade and wink out.

The sibilants and gutturals,
the cave language, the half-light
forming at the back of the throat,
the mouth's damp velvet moulding
the lost syllable for "I" that did not mean separate,
all are becoming sounds no longer
heard because no longer spoken,
and everything that could once be said in them has
ceased to exist

..... .

Translation was never possible.
Instead there was always only
conquest, the influx
of the language of hard nouns,
the language of metal,
the language of either/or,
the one language that has eaten all the others.

Margaret Atwood, from *Morning in the Burned House*⁸

I equate language and knowing throughout this section, an association that is particularly apt for relational, connected ways of knowing. Rather than *having* knowledge, ideas, facts and information, which are the nouns of the conquerors, speakers of the “dark, soft languages” *experienced* knowing. Their knowing was the noun-verb-adjective of the mother languages (and the hyphenated noun-verb-adjective is important here, hinting at complex, multidimensional ways of being: a ‘knowing’, she ‘is knowing’, a ‘knowing person’). Rather than reflecting off bright, hard surfaces, mothertongue speakers were reflective in warm, dark places. Atwood depicts marsh languages as organic, embodied, oozing and deep: not just the rushes are tangled but “the roots of rushes”. Rather than the knowledge of separate, bounded ideas that have to defeat, destroy and “eat” seemingly contradictory ideas, it was a process of accreting, which Atwood, like Belenky and her colleagues, sees as being destroyed by a conquering, patriarchal society.



BELLA (*butting in from the wings*): I love that word ‘accrete’, Jane ... when I run my fingers through the word I feel soil crumbling. YOU LISTENING TO ME? (*Jane seems not to hear her – she’s on an academic roll – and yet, Bella’s image has resonated, because she takes up Bella’s sense of sensuality.*)



Elizabeth Grosz (1989) sees words as sensual, edging into places far beyond denotation:

“To speak as a woman means to undo the reign of the ‘proper’ – the proper name, property, propriety, self-proximity. It means to evoke rather than to designate, to overflow and exceed all boundaries and oppositions. It involves speaking from a position in the middle of binaries (the so-called position of the ‘excluded middle’), affirming both poles while undoing their polarisation. To speak with meanings that resonate, that are tactile and corporeal as well as conceptual, that reverberate in their plurality and polyvocality. (Grosz 1989, 132)

Grosz does not seek balance here, nor the defeat of one pole by the other; she advocates an embodied position inside the binaries, accepting and even exalting in the tensions that play out inside, represented by the varied reverberating voices. Sandra Harding echoes this motif of connected knowing, and distinguishes it from patriarchal theorising, in a powerful musical image:



We need to learn how to see our theorizing projects as illuminating "riffing" between and over the beats of patriarchal theories, rather than as rewriting the tunes of any particular one ... so that it perfectly expresses *what we think at the moment we want to say*. (Harding 1986, 649, emphasis in the original)

Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1987) encapsulate this sense of connected knowing in the figuration of the rhizome. In a more nuanced concept than the 'connected knowing' of Belenky and her colleagues, they contrast the rhizome with the tree of traditional Western hierarchical structures of knowledge and language. They deny the concept of a mother tongue, as evoked by Atwood: "There is no mother tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language within a political multiplicity" (1987, 7); however, they join Atwood in summoning images of organic matter that clumps, entangles and grows uncontrolled. Rhizomes have no beginning and no end; one is always in the middle, as described by Grosz above. They are never singular, but are composed of ruptures and discontinuities. The figuration of the rhizome destroys hierarchies; opens up relationships between elements that might seem disconnected in traditional, analytic views of the world; and leaves open possibilities for endless connections and growth in all directions. The rhizome is the "and ... and ... and" of connected knowing that has the power to "shake and uproot" the either/or tree structure (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25). This knowing arises from relations and flows, rather than from static meanings, definitions and exclusions.

Rhizomatic knowing has been increasingly adopted by higher education researchers, feminists and critical practice educationalists in particular, seeking to open tertiary institutions to a broader range of voices than have traditionally been accepted, and to evoke the fragmentary, multifaceted nature of educational practice.⁹ Since rhizomatic

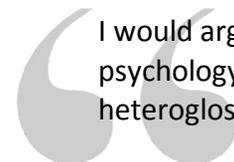
constructions layer multiple voices in an infinitely expandable chorus, the “rhizomatics of proliferation, crossings, and overlaps” (Lather 1997, 299), such constructions can challenge institutional hierarchies and discursive practices that privilege some voices over others, and that stipulate acceptable disciplinary practices (Alvermann 2000; Grellier 2013, 2014; Hagood 2004; Kamberelis 2004; O’Riley 2003; Sellers and Gough 2010).

Motif 2: Polyvocality



[I]t is entirely legitimate to draw from the full range of genres, styles, dialects, tropes, and forms of communicating that our cultural traditions have developed (or might develop). (Gergen and Gergen 2014, 214)

My second motif is polyvocality. Throughout this performance, voices will speak, sing, chant and whisper, in harmony, discord and cacophony. Dan Rose outlines his concept of ethnography, which resonates strongly for me, and provides a valuable model for this work:



I would argue that the future of ethnography – whether in sociology, psychology, critical legal studies, planning, or folklore – will be a polyphonic, heteroglossic, multigenre construction. (Rose 1990, 56)

Working from the philosophies of Mikhail Bakhtin, and seeking to break down hierarchies that privilege particular voices over others, I will create a “ribboning of voices” (Gergen and Gergen 2012, 69). I will juxtapose voices in different registers: formal and informal, academic and conversational, narrative and reflective, voices of the silenced and voices of the privileged, single voices and choruses, voices from the front, from the sides and from off stage. James Clifford’s phrase to describe such polyvocality resonates here: “a bewildering diversity of idioms” (1983, 119), which is both unsettling and exhilarating.

Most of the voices that speak in this work are constructions, not accurate transcriptions. (Indeed, I would argue that all voices – even those that appear to be unmediated between the speakers’ lips and the page – are constructed.) I will craft these voices from those I heard in my interviews and hear in my day-to-day work;

sometimes I will adapt the voice of a single person, sometimes I will combine several people into a composite character with one voice, and sometimes I will create a chorus that I acknowledge contains many voices. I am inspired by Modjeska's discussion of the diaries she constructed for the voice of the main character in her novel *Poppy*. Despite the complaints of some readers that they were fabricated, Modjeska claims that they are the "most truthful parts of the book" and that they helped her avoid the trap of "mawkishness and special pleading" that she felt were present in her own voice as narrator in her first draft, as well as allowing her to show deeper and more complex levels of the story than she had been able to do initially. "It became a different, gentler, more painful process," she adds (Modjeska 2002, 88–89).

Bakhtin's work on polyvocality and heteroglossia is central to my work. He contends that we humans are born as dialogical beings, recognising and speaking in a wide range of voices that differ in genre according to the context of our utterances; the range increases during our lives as we relate to others, and is limitless because of the infinite range of human experience in which it is developed. Our polyvocality means that human beings can be neither fully understood nor limited. He distinguishes between primary, everyday genres and more complex secondary genres such as "novels, dramas, all kinds of scientific research, major genres of commentary, and so forth" (Bakhtin 1986, 62), contending that while they are fundamentally different from each other, both types of genre need to be studied in order to explore the full range of human experience. The secondary genres are constructed and distilled from primary genres in particular cultural, scientific and artistic contexts. While the term 'polyphony' refers to individual voices, 'heteroglossia' invokes the socio-cultural context of language (Morris 1994, 113). Bakhtin asserts that "[a]ny utterance is a link in a very complexly organized chain of other utterances" (1986, 69), and uses the phrase "speech communion" (1986, 70) to gesture towards this complexity. Bakhtin thus encourages me to view language as relational, and to interplay different varieties and registers of language within vocal choruses. Heteroglossia has strong links with the connected ways of knowing I explored above.

Many autoethnographers are exploring possible approaches and structures for multi-layered, multivoiced works. For example, in *Revision* (2009), Ellis interleaves her own autoethnographic pieces with later reflections on these pieces by herself and others, and with pieces ‘written back’ by some of the subjects of her work; educational researcher Patricia O’Riley (2003), in her study of educational technology, incorporates story, conversation and a play script including the characters Coyote, Cyborg and Rhizome, who refuse to bring the play to an end; and autoethnographer Tami Spry (2001) interplays her “Being Here” voice of the academic with her “Being There” voice of the poet and storyteller, in a playful allusion to the title of a work by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, one of the first academics to insist that writing ethnography is a literary pursuit. Such approaches emphasise the unfinished messiness of autoethnographic research. As Lather and Smithies (1997, 48) explain of their own book: “The book ‘works’ by not working the way we expect a book to work: a linear unfolding of information that builds towards a sense of being on top of a situation through knowledge”.

Bakhtin (1981) recognises the opposing centrifugal and centripetal forces that exist in all communications, the former pushing us into ever greater diversity, and the latter pulling us back from being overwhelmed by chaos; and he grieves that the centripetal forces tend to overwhelm the centrifugal, forcing us towards monologism. He argues that only in the polyphonic novel can these centripetal forces be fully resisted, since characters can have full consciousnesses rather than being represented through the writer’s voice only (1981, 271–73). I contend that in recent decades other genres with equal potential for polyvocality have evolved, including experimental autoethnographies; and I seek to explore the potential in this performance.

Motif 3: Messiness

“If the world is complex and messy, then at least some of the time we’re going to have to give up on simplicities. ... We will need to teach ourselves to know some of the realities of the world using methods unusual to or unknown in social science. ... Perhaps we will need to know them through the hungers, tastes, discomforts, or pains of our bodies. These would be forms of knowing as

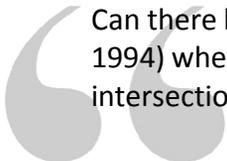
embodiment. Perhaps we will need to know them through 'private' emotions that open us to worlds of sensibilities, passions, intuitions, fears, and betrayals. (Law 2004, 2–3)

My third motif is the motif of messiness, introduced from the beginning of this movement in Jaques Sojcher's poem, and recurring throughout. Chance intersections, "everything that speaks, makes noise, passes by, touches us lightly, meets us head on" can create either "the taste of strawberries or abandonment", and often the two mingle and intertwine. Messiness is created by researchers who challenge the possibility of discovering 'truth', who acknowledge research as "a space surprised by difference into the performance of practices of not-knowing" (Lather 2009, 18). Arts practice theorists Carole Gray and her colleagues suggest that researchers who embrace "messiness, randomness, non-linearity, adaptivity, feedback, and so on" (1995, 14) are influenced by recent chaos and complexity theories, which are changing world paradigms far beyond academic research, impacting on new technologies, mass media and even political hegemonies (Gray et al. 1995).

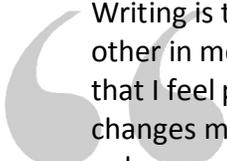
I see messiness as a connected, embodied way of knowing, in which we allow apparently discordant voices to play in tension with each other, feeling the impact of this discordance in our bodies, rather than adopting separate intellectual approaches of having one conquer, colonise or exploit the others; or of creating one composite voice that balances them all comfortably. Many feminists speak strongly against seeking balance, including Grosz in the passage I quoted above (page 19). Cultural theorist Gayatri Spivak, in a conversation with two colleagues, calls such balancing "too elegant a solution" (Spivak, Sipiara and Atwill 1990, 296). St. Pierre urges the researcher to "learn not to balk at the task of working bewilderment for all it's worth" (1997a, 281). I think also of Michelle Fine, who celebrates the "knottily entangled" (1994, 72) connections between the Self and the Other; and of Robin Tolmach Lakoff, who contends that the argumentation of linguistics, like the language of feminism "must be made more supple and subtle, more open to ambiguity and indeterminacy" ([1975] 2004, 23). The voices of Grosz, Spivak, St. Pierre, Fine and Lakoff rise in complex harmony here,¹⁰ underlining for me how much my three motifs

are interlinked: connected ways of knowing and using language are both polyvocal and messy. Mary and Kenneth Gergen (2000, 1025) advocate the productive, creative possibilities of such tension. Educational theorist Jack Whitehead locates the messiness within each of us in his wonderful phrase “the significance of ‘I’ ... as a living contradiction” (1989, 41).

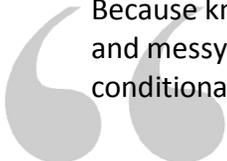
In this performance, I embrace messiness not as a danger to be cleaned up and controlled, but as a challenge to stay open, to open further, to accept – and indeed welcome – the unknowing. The voices I hear advocating messiness are the voices of people comfortable with connected ways of knowing:



Can there be a research that ... resid[es] in messy 'spaces in between' (Robinson, 1994) where centers and margins are both situated and yet constantly changing intersections of interpretation, interruption and mutuality? (Lather 2009, 17)



Writing is the passageway, the entrance, the exit, the dwelling place of the other in me – the other that I am and am not, that I don't know how to be, but that I feel passing, that makes me live – that tears me apart, disturbs me, changes me, who? – a feminine one, a masculine one, some? – several, some unknown, which is indeed what gives me the desire to know and from which all life soars.... It is distressing, it wears you out; and for men this permeability, this nonexclusion is a threat, something intolerable. (Cixous and Clément 1986, 85–86)



Because knowledge (and thus truth) always emerge out of the embodied, rich, and messy process of being-in-the-world, it is always perspectival and conditional. (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis 2005, 32)

These four authors write of the messiness inherent in research, writing and thinking. The power in messiness comes from accepting the impossibility of knowing. As these authors attest, “interruption”, disturbance and “permeability” promote rich ways of being in the world. If one can accept constantly changing borders, perspectives, intersections and horizons, the resultant messiness can give rise to startling interconnections. The focus is on process, on becoming, and on spaces between rather than on entities. Lather seeks the contradictory forces of “interruption and

mutuality". Cixous describes meeting other parts of herself when she writes, parts she only half knows or does not know at all, and being unable to keep these parts out. However distressing the encounters are, she sees them as making life "soar". US research theorists George Kamberelis and Greg Dimitriadis celebrate the fact that knowing is uncertain, complex, embodied and inextricable from daily living.

Structure of the performance

While I adopt this rhizomatic, heteroglossic approach in all movements, each movement has a unifying theme that is illuminated by Sharon's story. In the Second Movement, I will open up concepts of autoethnography and reflexivity essential to my working with Sharon's story, and with first-year learning in general. I have adopted autoethnographic approaches in order to highlight the interrelations within this performance between the first-year students, myself as a teacher/researcher, other teaching colleagues, the university executive and the institution itself. These interrelations are highly complex and frequently changing: their 'strawberries or abandonment' nature will be evident throughout. In this sense, my research is reflexive: I will challenge and question all five participant groups in their intersections, in order to shed light on the students' learning. I seek to make all five groups unfamiliar to me, though they might initially seem familiar, in order to explore the world of their intersection.

I will move on to consider the first-year experience in the Third Movement, exploring the particular issues of transition, liminality and 'inbetweenness' that many first-year students face. Sharon resisted my coaxing to participate in the connected learning community of the classroom, but even for those who do engage in the communications classroom, this world is very much on the margins of the overall university community. The students themselves speak of feeling disoriented and unsettled, and many teaching staff regard first-year students as not yet bona fide students: yet to prove themselves, to identify with a particular discipline, or to develop effective approaches to learning. For those who survive into their second and later years, the successful transition to more central positions is often a matter of "chance

introduced by circumstances”, in Sojcher’s phrase. These circumstances might include the friends they make during their first semester; their connections into university support services; their early experiences in the discipline they have chosen; and a vast array of experiences outside the university context, including relationships with family and friends, their health, demands of paid employment and sporting commitments. Even the distance they live from campus and how public transport from their homes integrates with their class timetable can impact on their chances of success. For example, I have spoken to several students over the past five years who have been forced to withdraw from units when compulsory classes have been timetabled at times they cannot attend because public transport is not available to them at those times.¹¹

Sharon challenged my ideas about learning and about student support that underpin the communications units. In Sojcher’s phrase she “met head on” my commitment to connected learning, which I will explore in the Fourth Movement. Her refusal to engage with the other students in ways I thought productive, both for herself and for the others, provoked me to question how learning can best be promoted. My belief in the value of face-to-face, engaged learning communities was rocked yet again in 2013, when I began to teach and coordinate an entirely online version of an undergraduate degree offered at Curtin through Open Universities Australia. The first cohort of students included a group of twenty highly active, articulate adults, who communicated frequently through online forums, questioned, challenged and kept my co-teacher and me fully occupied in responding to them. They participated in online team oral presentations, communicating across Australia and overseas; and they conducted synchronous online collaboration meetings, which they recorded so that I was able to listen later. It was an exhilarating semester. In a final reflection at the end of the semester, one of the most active, engaged and engaging of students, Neil, disclosed that he suffered from autism and was incapable of studying face to face, and that any hopes he had of achieving the Masters degree to which he aspired would rest with online learning. I had had no inkling of this during the semester, and had even chosen him to chair a group project, which he did in lively, connected ways that no

subsequent student has approached.

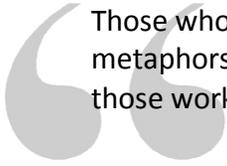
While I continue to seek ways in which all students can feel comfortable to engage in classroom activities, Sharon and Neil have forced me to accept that the learning of some students is not enhanced by face-to-face interactions. In addition, they confronted my deeply held belief that interpersonal communication is a vital part of the overall range of communication processes, particularly for those students enrolled in vocational courses aimed specifically at client-centred professions, as both of them were. Is it possible, I wondered, for students to be successful communicators when they cannot relate well face-to-face with their fellow students, and in Sharon's case refuse to engage with them? It was important that I challenge her approaches to learning, so that she might benefit by questioning and adapting them for her own future learning, but I ultimately had to acknowledge her unwavering refusal to accept my position on this. While I still felt her refusal was detrimental to her learning, I began to see learning as much more complex than I had believed for many decades. In Neil's case, he was a highly successful communicator in an online environment, the most engaged student and the strongest critically reflective thinker in a very strong group of students, but he acknowledged finding it impossible to communicate in face-to-face situations. He has forced me to recognise that my previous definition of successful communication was limited, and that it is not my role to dictate to any student how to develop communications. Rather than criticising myself for my earlier limited thinking, I see my changing ideas as a very positive result of the reflective processes, believing with Belenky that "[t]he struggle to understand students is very life-enhancing, even if you don't always get it right" (1990, 286).

Sharon also challenged my commitment to building a supportive, inclusive space for learning, which I will explore in the Fifth Movement. I enjoy a noisy, bubbling classroom, and can sense myself provoking discussion if I feel the room is too quiet. In particularly silent groups, I sometimes move around the room inviting each student to say at least one sentence about a subject. In their end-of-semester evaluations,

students often comment on this approach, with the overwhelming majority appreciating that I have coaxed them to participate, however shy they felt initially. But Sharon reminds me that a few students would prefer silence, and that some believe that the only useful contributions come from the teacher or lecturer.

This performance culminates in the Sixth Movement in an exploration of the managerial university of the twenty-first century, of which Curtin is but one example. It is an era of fast-tracking, whose focus is on enabling students to gain professional qualifications while they maintain demanding work and personal lives. Sharon was engaged in many hours paid work each week in order to support her studies, a situation that increased her resentment against learning activities she did not believe were productive. The university system increasingly offers students alternatives to attending classes – iLectures, online versions of on-campus units, and a focus on submitting assignments and meeting learning outcomes rather than on attending and participating in classes make it possible for students to graduate from their courses with minimal classroom engagement. Most current Curtin academics, themselves educated in a system that privileged dialogic learning, rail against the directions in which universities are heading, and dispute the university's view of what learning entails. This struggle will form the basis of the Sixth Movement.

While I see my role as challenging students' beliefs, so that they think in depth about their learning, Sharon held out against my questioning. And in the end I must let be, and acknowledge her as someone whose views of learning are different from mine and deserve my recognition, and whose courage and determination I respect greatly. I am reminded of the description of the value of reflexivity made by British Professor Andrew Sparkes, whose interest in research methodologies and embodiment lead him to publish regularly on the topics of autoethnography and reflexivity. He sees reflexivity as valuable not in converting us to other people's viewpoints, but in opening up our own thinking:



Those who make the effort to understand the discourse, rhetoric, and metaphors of others, even if they end up in strong disagreement, can seek in those works new ways of viewing their own. (Sparkes 1991, 123)

¹ “Sharon” is a pseudonym, as are all names of students and tutors in this performance, unless otherwise stated.

² This passage was originally written in French by poet and philosopher Jacques Sojcher and published in his 1976 collection of philosophical essays on the reading of poetry, *La Démarque Poétique*. It follows a paragraph on how he comes to make meaning slowly from a poem by working and reworking it, integrating it into his own experience, even into his dreams. This paragraph is presented as an aside, written in brackets, and suggesting the impact of chance and surprise that can disrupt even the hardest-won meanings. It was translated by Steven Rendall as part of his translation of Michel de Certeau’s *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984, xvi). Sojcher’s original sentence reads thus:

(Et j’oubliais le hasard de la circonstance, le calme ou la précipitation, le soleil ou le froid, le début ou la fin de la journée, le goût des fraises ou de l’abandon, le message à demi entendu, la une des journaux, la voix au téléphone, la conversation la plus anodine, l’homme ou la femme le plus anonyme, tout ce qui parle, bruit, passe, effleure, rencontre.) (Sojcher 1976, 145)

³ I will explain my structure of movements and themes below.

⁴ For example, Michael Apple (2004), Paolo Freire (1993), Henry Giroux (2001), bell hooks (1994), Joe Kincheloe (2004) and Peter McLaren (1995). Kincheloe sums up the critical pedagogy position clearly: The proponents of critical pedagogy understand that every dimension of schooling and every form of education practice are politically contested spaces. Shaped by history and challenged by a wide range of interest groups, educational practice is a fuzzy concept as it takes place in numerous settings, is shaped by a plethora of often invisible forces, and can operate even in the name of democracy and justice to be totalitarian and oppressive. (Kincheloe 2004, 2)

⁵ All phrases are from the written text and video on the Resources and Chemistry Precinct webpage on the Curtin website, viewed February 2013.

⁶ According to social scientist Robert Dingwall (1997, 58) “[a]n interview is a point at which order is deliberately put under stress. It is a situation in which respondents are required to demonstrate their competence in the role in which the interview casts them.”

⁷ Present-tense vignettes are also created by Chaudhry (1997), Jones (1998), Roth (2005a), and Sparkes (2009) in their autoethnographies on Muslim communities in the US, women’s music, the observer/observed and sensuous embodiment in sport and exercise respectively.

⁸ Atwood 1995, 54.

⁹ While many feminists have been critical of Deleuze and Guattari’s work because of their unaware masculinist tendencies, Grosz (1993) contends that, read with caution, there is much of value for feminists in *A Thousand Plateaus*, particularly in their work on rhizomatics.

¹⁰ There is certainly not an unadulterated harmony here: Lakoff’s seminal (1975/2004) work focuses on the ways in which women give up their identity by choosing weak language and hedging their statements in order to maintain their gendered positions in society. While the others may not disagree with her contentions about general language use in women, their focus is on advocating and celebrating complex, divergent and challenging language use among women (and those men who use language in similar ways).

¹¹ Most Curtin students live off campus, and the public transport system to Perth’s outer suburbs is very inconsistent. Because of demands on classroom space caused by rapidly increasing enrolments, classes are now timetabled between 8am and 7pm each day.

Second Movement: Speaking Up

List of characters who participate in this performance

JANE the author

BELLA the provocateur

CURTIN UNIVERSITY the institution

Interviewees and informants (pseudonyms, in order of appearance)

Students

Marie Phillips

Peter Primrose

Rob Jackson

My Tien Dang¹

Dave Robertson

Cadel Brown

Michael Foster

Sara-Jane Clifton

Jordan Smith

Larry David

Elizabeth Jones

Ben Wright

Chantal Borel

Sam Tucker

Janice Rogers

James White

Michael Anderson

Rachael Fenwick

Alan Grove

Gabriel Morelli

Chris Longley

Charles Carmichael

Ruth Jones

Teachers (pseudonyms unless specified within the performance)

Angela Black

Blossom Green

Marilyn McGee

Fred Plunt

Sally Brown

Joy Scott Sarah

Jenkins

Elizabeth Ross

Sandra Adams

James Barclay

Composite Characters (in order of appearance)

Students

Sharon

Neil

Tom

Greg

Monica

Liam

David

Steve

Sessional teachers

Lesley

Simon

Brenda

Bill

Meg

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 1: CONNECTED LEARNERS

The first day of semester and the students and I are eying each other surreptitiously. There are twenty-two of them, mainly new school leavers, but one or two men look a little older. I've been teaching in this course for six years now, and I'm not surprised to see eight female students among the males – the usual proportion with this group. They're sitting in silent rows, all facing the front of the room, and I make a mental note to change this as soon as I can – I couldn't get into the room before class to move the furniture, so I'll have to get them to do it during the class. Before I ask them to introduce themselves to each other, I start by introducing myself. I tell them I understand some of the bewilderment they may be feeling this semester because two years ago I moved from academic literacy research into postgraduate social sciences study. For months I felt rudderless, not recognising names, concepts and approaches, and not confident to write because the disciplinary language was alien to me. The students are looking at me thoughtfully, some recognising the feelings I'm describing, others smiling cynically, and I can hear their thoughts as clearly as if they were speaking aloud: "I know this trick – she's trying to establish a connection with us. How could she remember what it feels like to be a first year?" Then one of the slightly older men, maybe twenty-five, with dark spiky hair and an eyebrow ring, speaks up. I'm relieved he hasn't put his hand up, as recent school-leavers always do, just thrown his voice into the room. "What are you studying for your PhD?" His voice sounds genuinely interested, and I can feel the energy of the room lift (or is it my own energy lift I'm feeling?). "I'm looking at how first-year students learn, what it feels like, and what helps them learn best." "Ah, cool," he replies with a spark, "so you ARE really interested in us!" It's going to be a good semester, I tell myself.

I begin this movement standing in front of a new class on the first day of semester, because my relationships with my students sit at the core of my teaching and my research. In this focus, I align myself with commentators such as Gergen and Gergen, who see the self not as unified and coherent but as relational. In the Gergens' social constructionist position,² humans construct reality in response to our social and cultural relations (K. Gergen 1994; 2009), as encapsulated in Kenneth Gergen's version of Descartes' *cogito ergo sum*: "I am linked, therefore I am" (2009, 400). My initial confidence with this class was immediate and instinctual: I recognised in this situation the value of having at least one engaged, connected student in my class, especially a student who sought to connect with me as a person. From the beginning Tom ignored the 'rules' that most students embody in their early days at university: put your hand up if you want to speak; relate only from your head; ask questions rather than making statements; keep emotional barriers between yourself and your teachers. I trusted that Tom's desire to connect in emotional as well as intellectual ways would pull the other students into engaging in those ways also, with each other and with me. It would also relax me, and give me permission to engage more fully with the students from the beginning. In the first few weeks of a semester, I usually feel corseted, as I manoeuvre through ways of being with new groups of students, negotiating their expectations and my own awkwardness; but at this moment, in this class, the corset laces melted away. In this first class there was a chance intersection of at least three favourable elements: the fact that Tom registered in my class (there were three other alternatives he could have chosen); my own favoured approaches to teaching (many of my colleagues keep desks in straight rows, and few begin by having class members introduce themselves); and my choice to mention immediately my own postgraduate studies (I do not always do this in my introduction). This chance intersection did in fact lead to an unusually positive learning environment, which developed with the semester.

In the Fourth Movement, I will examine various views of learning. Before I begin to do this, however, I will take this movement to situate myself, my students and my approaches to this performance. This vignette encapsulates much of my impetus in

this study. I began postgraduate studies wanting to explore how we were conducting the Communications units: in what ways they were effective, and how we could improve them. I quickly realised that the richest and most enjoyable way I could do this would be through ethnography, with participant observation and interviews with students and their tutors, but I had no disciplinary background in the social sciences. Gradually I realised I was engaged not in ethnography, but in autoethnography. My position in the university has a major impact on my conversations with the participants, and I can read my day-by-day experiences, teased out in my journal, only as embodied experiences in the context of who I am in the organisation and as a teacher of first-year students. Ethical issues prevented me from engaging these particular students as interviewees in the research, but my experience with them, as with all classes I have taught, has enriched my understandings, and my day-by-day research reflections have enriched my teaching over the past years. In addition – and this discomfited me greatly – by engaging in a new field of study, I was experiencing what it means to be a novice.



BELLA (*in the wings*): No way novice! No-vice, not nice! Come on Jane, that's disingenuous! Piffle and poppycock! You feel like your students do? As if ...! You're not disoriented OR powerless OR bewildered. You know how the university works, and you're in a position of power compared to them, even if you feel you're on the margins ...

JANE: But ...

BELLA: And if you ever get stressed, you can go back to your office and lock the door – **BOLT THE DOOR OF YOUR BOLT-HOLE.** These students don't know where they are, have nowhere to run to ...

JANE: But ...

BELLA: No, no wonder they looked at you cynically when you claimed you were like them! Lighten up! Get real! AND you're also the expert in the unit you're teaching them, AND you have power over their marks, so you can't ...

JANE: Now that's where I do relate to them, Bella – that feeling of not understanding a subject. This vignette happened in my first year of this research project. Ethnography was such a new world to me that most of the time I was feeling lost in an enormous shapeless forest – none of the trees stood out from others, I couldn't see any pathways between them. Don't forget, I completed my undergraduate studies in the early 1970s,

long before postmodernism. Everything was new and ... (*Jane's voice falters – she's running out of energy.*)

BELLA: Hmm ... **WHATEVER!** ... Just don't lose sight of your relative power here!



This entry from my reflective journal at the end of the first year of my research suggests some of my initial wanderings. It seemed aimless at the time, but looking back I see it as early path-finding.

Reflective Journal 2 June

Kondo? Clifford? Bourdieu? hooks? Willis? Bakhtin? Giroux? Portelli?

Ellis? Lincoln? de Certeau? Narayan? Brookfield? Geertz? Aaaarrgggghhh

☹ How can I map them to each other and sketch out any meanings?

Will he be important for my work? Will she? Should I spend more time

reading her or move on to him? How many notes should I take? What

if I have just read the most important idea for my whole thesis and

missed its significance? What if I can never grasp it again? What if I

take so many notes for fear of losing anything that I can't see my way

through them all? What if I paraphrase an idea and miss its

significance? How do I know where I'm going when I can't see the final

shape? It's Henry James's "loose baggy monster"³ and it's devouring

me. I'm not bewildered by the writing process – that's a well-worn

trail for me – but by the totally foreign world I have dropped myself

into. A year ago I had heard of none of these people, and now I feel

like I'm trapped inside them.

By the end of the first year, the concept of autoethnography gave me the focus that has remained throughout this performance. For me, it is authentic, open-ended, messy and satisfying:

I think ethnographers, especially those in the vanguard of new ethnographic genres, are learning to write better, less soothing, more faithful and ultimately more truthful accounts of their fellow humans than ever before. (Van Maanen 1988, xiii)

I situate myself at the centre of my stories, but my stories are not about a central 'I'; rather, I draw on memoir to situate my stories as a relational 'I', myself/s that are implicated in a complex and messy arrangement of relationships with my Chinese colleagues. (Scott 2013, 17)

When novelists imagine characters, they imagine worlds that characters inhabit, worlds that are laden with values. Whenever they reduce those multiple worlds to one, the author's, they give a false report, an essentially egotistical distortion that tells lies about the way things are. (Booth 1984, xxiv- xxv)

I had reconnected with what had been slowly drained out of literary studies at Cambridge – in a word the social connection, the connection with real life in all its tumbling profusion and messiness. (Willis 2000, x)

Apart from the richness of their ideas, this selection of quotes is significant in two ways. First, I include a quote from fellow postgraduate student and sessional tutor at Curtin, Joy Scott, among quotes from more recognised researchers as part of my attempt to break down academic hierarchies. Second, I interleave among the social scientists a literary critic, Wayne Booth, who writes about characters in novels, underlining my insistence on the constructedness of ethnography and of identity.

Several years after this initial floundering, I look back with gratitude on the fact that my reflective study of the learning challenges of first-year students coincided with my own arrival in a different disciplinary world. My new disciplinary experiences, as I gulped, stuttered and shrugged my way through the early months, ensured that I was unable to distance myself from the students I was studying, pulling me back time and again into an

embodied empathy with their confusion and distress.⁴ I have learned to let go of the fearful grasping for the one essential piece of external knowledge, and to recognise that I am constructing my own knowing as I travel, using literary more than traditional ethnographic techniques to create a series of kaleidoscopic worlds, rather than recording an accurate description of a fixed and pre-existing world (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Geertz 1988). I will explore this image of mapping in the Fifth Movement, but in this movement I will begin by exploring the major approaches I have used in the performance: autoethnography and narrative, before finishing with three significant focuses of my work: reflexivity, the role of the reader, and ethics.

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 2: AUTOETHNOGRAPHY

Jane is sitting alone working at her laptop; Bella is in the wings. Jane hears Bella's interruptions but absorbed in her monologue she seldom engages with them.

Jane: So what is autoethnography? (*She's hesitant, struggling.*) Let's start with a definition from Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, key figures in the field:

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. (Ellis and Bochner 2000, 739)

(Jane sits back and look at the screen.) Yes, it's clear and crisp, and I like its mention of multiple layers and the way it distinguishes autoethnography from autobiography by emphasising its cultural dimensions. But it leaves so much unsaid. Let's try another definition, this one from anthropologist Professor Deborah Reed-Danahay, another key figure. She claims that there is no one agreed definition of autoethnography and that it incorporates "various intersections, various blendings of genres and voices" (Reed- Danahay 1997, 3). This harks back to my motif of polyvocality, and Geertz's 1980 phrase "blurred genres" is also apt here. In keeping with this blurring, the autoethnographer is a boundary crosser with "multiple, shifting identities" (Reed- Danahay 1997, 3). OK, now this is getting somewhere ... I'll add to this the ideas of Dwight Conquergood: "Ethnography is an

embodied practice; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing” (Conquergood 1991, 180, emphasis in the original). That’s good! Embodied knowing is central to my performative autoethnographic position, and I want to foreground it early. Reed-Danahay introduces the concepts of the vulnerable and multidimensional self, not just the academic mind, and the fusion between social science and literature evokes Clifford Geertz (1988) and James Clifford and George Marcus (1986), all of whom I want to acknowledge as influences in my work. Conquergood anchors ethnographic knowing in the body rather than in the mind - that’s important for my understanding of my own learning and that of my first-year students. All of our practices in coming to know our new worlds – and in living with and embracing the unknowing – are deeply embodied.

But it still doesn’t feel like the right place to start ... Maybe I need to start at the beginnings and trace the history of the word. That’s with David Hayano (1979), whom most people cite as the first to use the term in academic writing. He defines autoethnography as writing about one’s “own people”, and stresses, like Reed-Danahay, that it takes many forms. Now I’m moving into the field of ‘native’ ethnographers like Kirin Narayan (1993), Purina Mankekar (1999), Jayati Lal (1996) and Lubna Chaudhry (1997), all of whom returned to their countries of birth to conduct research.

BELLA: Interesting, Jane ... they’re all women! And they’re all living in Western countries and marginalised. Doubly – multiply – marginalised as academics – female AND non-Western. But when they revisit their homes, they’re marginalised in these societies too. Boundary crossing isn’t easy or comfortable.

Jane: Anthropologist Marilyn Strathern (1987) adds her voice to this chorus by asserting that even if ethnographers work with their own people, this doesn’t guarantee they are able to represent their people’s voices. Zora Neale Hurston ([1942] 1984), one of the earliest African-American ethnographers in the US, experienced this dislocation as a ‘native’ ethnographer returning to her home state in the 1920s to

research the communities she grew up in. These 'native' ethnographers have been key in my thinking over the past few years, prodding me whenever I start to see my own position in the university as transparent.

But none of these approaches feel like the best places to start this search for autoethnography. (*Jane sits back, deep in thought.*) Maybe I need to emphasise the concept of the many voices that need to be heard in order to create a full and satisfying chorus. I could use my favourite word 'heteroglossia' ...

BELLA: What a great word, 'heteroglossia'! Roll it around on your tongue – you can taste and feel its sound!

Jane: And it's a good way to acknowledge my debt to Bakhtin. It will give me a solid framework from which to articulate my own many voices – teacher, researcher, student, colleague, coordinator, writer, lover of words – as well as the voices I'm hearing from my student and teacher participants, my colleagues, and the university administration. It's important to me to construct my autoethnography from all of these voices, in harmony, dissonance and even cacophony ...

BELLA: I like that ... 'cacophony' is a lovely word too ... hard and soft sounds jammed together in one word, like what you're trying to do in this performance ...

Jane (*not listening, pensive*): Or maybe I need to focus on the autoethnographer's aims: "On the whole, autoethnographers don't want you to sit back as spectators; they want readers to feel, care and desire" (Ellis and Bochner 1996, 24). That fits with what I'm trying to do ... but ... (*Suddenly she straightens up, throws her head back and laughs.*) Of course ... I get it now! That's why this has been so difficult to get out! This is an autoethnography, so I need to start with me, not with scholars' definitions!



BELLA: DUH!

Jane (*ignoring Bella*): Start where I am. Why am I writing it? Construct myself in my contexts. Start with the personal, and the academic will flow around and among it all. Think back to when I began to consider this research ... (*Staring into the distance out of her window, eyes unfocused, Jane takes herself back several years.*)

I am at a conference, during a coffee break, and I'm approached by a senior academic. I haven't spoken to him for many years, but we used to know each other well – he was my ex-husband's close friend, but I've seen him only from a distance in the past twenty years. I've been teaching in secondary schools and 'playing with' various part-time positions while his tertiary career has been stellar. "What are you doing here?" he asks, and it sounds abrupt to me. "I'm teaching at Curtin University, in Communications. I've been there for eight years." "How did you get that position? Do you have a doctorate now?" "No, the focus is with first-year students, and they're more interested in my teaching and curriculum experience. I'm really enjoying it." "My daughter has a doctorate in Communications, and she can't get a position anywhere." The tone is definitely accusatory now. "That's a shame! They're encouraging me to do doctoral studies; there's good support ..." But he's gone, moved through the crowd to someone more deserving of his attention.

...

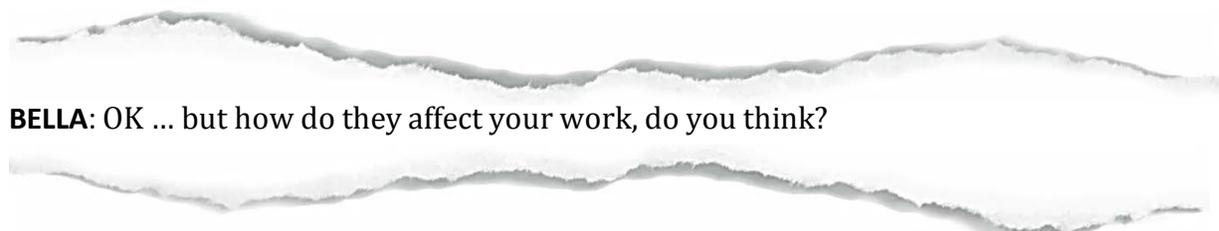
Several months later, and I'm having coffee with a colleague I've always got on well with ... (*Bella interrupts in the wings: Ha! Sounds like most of your key conversations happen over coffee! But Jane's not listening, still caught up in the earlier years.*) He's friendly, almost collegial. "Oh, I think what you do is valuable," he says, "but you're not really an academic. You're just a helper." I stop mid-sip, the word "just" echoing through the rest of the conversation.

...

A senior academic takes me aside for a 'chat'. "I think it's great that you've written a textbook for first-year students, and it's good for the university that it's selling well throughout Australia. You should be very proud. But I feel awkward that I advised you badly two years ago when you were first thinking of the textbook. I should have pushed you to forget about that and start publishing, or begin your PhD. This has put your career back. I just never thought of you as a researcher. And you should spend less time working with your sessional tutors – that doesn't add value to your career or to the School."

...

Another few months later, and another coffee break, this time with some of the sessional tutors in the communications team. There are twenty classes running in the unit I am coordinating this semester, and we're talking about what we can do to make the classes as rich and comparable as possible. "Why don't we start an online folder, so that we can share all our resources?" suggests Meg. Brenda, the newest tutor in the group, jumps in quickly. "That would be great! I'm always worried that I'm letting my students down because I haven't done this before. I'll start us all off by setting up the folder and inviting you all in."



BELLA: OK ... but how do they affect your work, do you think?

Jane: My voices throughout this performance are a direct response to these experiences. They're getting clear in my head now. The loudest is the "I'LL SHOW YOU" voice – my vulnerable self: I'll research something I feel passionate about, and I'll do it in ways that resonate with my views of teaching and learning, and I'll also show you I can be a researcher. It may be late in my career, and I'll certainly not rise into a

position of power in the university, but **I'LL SHOW YOU** (and there's a little voice that jumps in, 'and me too') that I can do it. And I can hear and feel the judderings of my stamping foot.⁵

BELLA: Phew! ... juddering, muddering, shuddering ... you want to tune in to those vibrations. They might take you out of yourself or, better, INTO yourself ... open up new ways of thinking ... think with all sides of yourself!

Jane (*caught up in her thoughts, still not listening to Bella*): Then there's my passionate voice as a language process specialist: Language is not content, which we can lecture about and expect students to learn. As with other processes, we need to help students develop their own language consciously, over time, and in the context of the disciplines in which they are studying. No decontextualised inoculation. Teachers who do this well should be valued, not marginalised as 'helpers', or Othered.⁶ Research in how best to do this is as significant as research into mining engineering or health sciences or economics. This voice is persistent – I spend a lot of my professional life struggling to convince my colleagues that I belong. It's another uncomfortable feeling, one that rises in my throat and all too frequently chokes me.

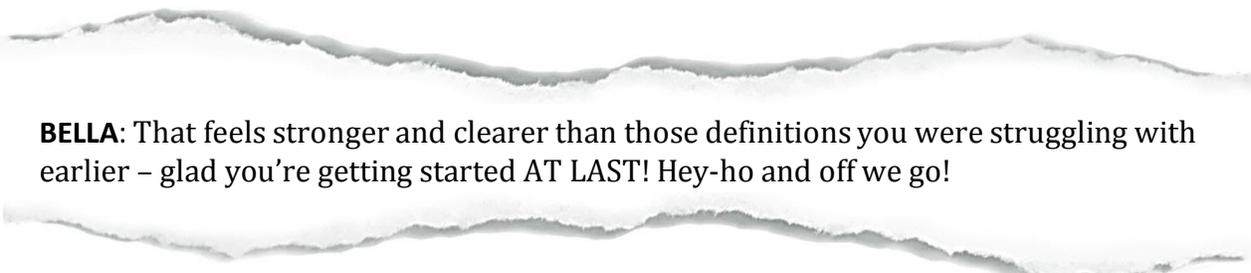
A third voice joins the chorus – the advocate for sessional tutors: My coordinator role involves working with large teams of sessional tutors. I am overwhelmed by the commitment and passion many of these tutors bring to their teaching, despite their being the least valued and least secure members of the university teaching community.⁷ They think more about their teaching than many of my academic colleagues who are engrossed in their research, and they work more together as a community of learners. I value these teachers' understandings of learning, and will include their voices in this autoethnography.

Then a last voice sneaks in, and I'm trying not to hear it – the voice of the pragmatist: The university climate is changing. No longer can I rely on my teaching and curriculum

development experience to ensure my position. I have to get a PhD to keep my job. And I'd better do it quickly – just last week I heard about a colleague in another school losing her teaching position because she had no higher degree, even though last year she won an award as the department's best teacher. Just hope I can finish this before the spotlight turns on me.

So it's a soupy chorus of fears, aspirations, passions, pragmatics, some of which we can retrieve from our memories more easily than others. Some we can be proud of, and others we barely admit to ourselves.⁸

The selves that are constructed and written are complex and relational. They are not research instruments, or props. They are gendered, racialized, sexualized, embodied and emotional. In contrast to fieldnotes (which are often private) and the partial autobiographical accounts (which are usually oriented to the research process), ethnographic writing which locates the self as central gives analytic purchase to the autobiographical. (Coffey 1999, 126–27)



BELLA: That feels stronger and clearer than those definitions you were struggling with earlier – glad you're getting started AT LAST! Hey-ho and off we go!

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 3: WRITING THE OTHER

While my own voices may be useful starting points in this performance, I try to push beyond them. I agree with Gannon (2007), who argues that putting ourselves into our autoethnographies limits our work to our current horizons. She advocates trying to stretch ourselves beyond these horizons by striving to have the Other speak in our work alongside ourselves. This is a connected way of working: opening ourselves up to a range of voices that might be on the edges of our hearing, voices that we might hear faintly, in chords and echoes that drift in and out of our awareness. This seems to me very challenging, valuable work, provided that I recognise that all voices in my

performance are secondhand, that I am hearing, constructing and interweaving these voices through my own conscious and subconscious awareness.

It is important to base my constructions in an acknowledgement of my many selves, but then to move out from these selves listening intently. A human radar beam, I search out into distant spaces, not mechanically and mindlessly picking up all sounds, but filtering and shaping the sounds as they arrive. In order to foster these 'soundings', I use a multitude of tricks and techniques, stories, multiple voices, word puns and playfulness, all with the aim of catching myself up and unawares, "both getting out of the way and getting in the way ... as [I] give testimony to what are [my] own stories and larger than [my] own life" (Lather and Smithies 1997, xiii-iv). I seek to keep myself and my reader constantly 'on the *qui vive*', an evocative phrase generally used to describe sentinels vigilant against trespassers. The French question '*qui vive?*', meaning literally 'who is living?', describes myself and my reader, alive, alert and surprised by unexpected connections. Our bodies are engaged: like Cixous our ears are "pointy pricked up" (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997, 85) and like the witches in *Macbeth* our thumbs are pricking in anticipation.

The very act of writing experimental autoethnography helps to provoke this enlivened writing/reading. While many academics warn of the risks of experimental writing for early academics who seek a stable career,⁹ experimental ethnographies hold much attraction for me, because of their power to disorient and challenge the reader/writer. Commentators in the past decade have increasingly called for such disturbing approaches for the very reason that they open readers to new ideas and ways of seeing. For example, St. Pierre, in writing about poststructural figurations, advocates "working bewilderment for all it's worth" in order to create "rigorous confusion" (1997a, 281), which can challenge apparently coherent, satisfied thinking. Associate Professor Chaim Noy from the University of South Florida urges himself to reject as completely as possible traditional approaches to writing his doctoral dissertation, in favour of embodied processes, despite the "emotional unrest" he experiences in doing this:

But somewhere in my body it was clear: The further the better. The further the dissertation breaks free and drifts away, the further it journeys, the more generative and creative the processes that occur. The further the better. (Noy 2005, 364)

Through this focus on discomfiting myself and the reader, I problematise the university culture, and my own position in it, in order to provoke us to question what we seem to see.

Jane's office in the Humanities building, furnished with a computer desk, computer with double screens, cupboard and small table with four chairs. The walls are covered in photos from her recent French holiday. Fellow PhD student and sessional tutor Simon has called by to give her feedback on the draft she emailed him. He stands propped in the doorway, about to rush off to a meeting.

Simon: Yes, it's working better now ... but a bit weird that you argue for non traditional forms of writing by using traditional academic prose. Don't you think that's a problem?

Jane: But it's so instinctive! So much academic power in this language – it's like that powerful stanza from Tami Spry describing the hold that “the Academy” can have on her:

And in spite of myself,
my shadow selves
can still be seduced
by its empty opulence,
even when it feels like
an unkind, disembodied,
consumer of knowledge.¹⁰

Simon: Well, maybe it's a problem, but maybe it's the way it should be, if you want to write in academic contexts. It's what I'm doing in my thesis – pushing boundaries but only so far. Have to be some rules! We keep being told to make it easy for our examiners ... I'm not going too far out there – too risky!

You know that article by Laurel Richardson about lyric poetry? OK, she includes poems in the article, but she admits she's justifying it through "essayic prose".¹¹ That way her arguments are convincing to an academic audience ... she's honest about that. Maybe that's what you have to do to be valued.

Jane: Hope not! Not saying I want to get rid of all academic prose – I'm using plenty in this thesis. But I don't want to ... to use the academic voice as the final interpreter – 'You can play as much as you like, but in the end, your expert voice needs to come in and tell your reader how to read this.' There have to be other ways!

Simon: Maybe ... but ... It's alright for you – you've got a permanent job. I can't afford to be a sessional tutor much longer ... gonna give them what they want.

Jane: Yeah, I understand that. I can take more risks ... where I am in my life now ...

Researching "my people"

In studying the world of Curtin University, I acknowledge being "deeply invested in [my] studies, personally and profoundly" (Pereira, Settelmaier and Taylor 2005, 56). I seek to problematise both the world I am constructing and myself as a member of this world, to "drench the story in ambiguity" (Sparkes 2000, 33). Many commentators assert the particular challenges of researching one's own community, of defamiliarising it so that one can question its underpinnings.¹² In particular, I join the range of autoethnographers who attempt to identify and challenge assumptions about tertiary learning, teaching and academic disciplines (e.g., Graebner 2005; Jones 1998; Meneley and Young 2005; Noy 2005; Tompkins 1996).

Our situation as autoethnographers of the academy is unusual even among those who are studying 'their people': as is typical of this group of autoethnographers, I have not gone away and come back to study the culture I was born into, like Hurston, Narayan

and Lal; I am not studying a different sub-culture within my own geographical setting, as British anthropologist Judith Okely (1996) studied the gypsies camped on the M1 outside London, or French sociologist Loic Wacquant (2004) studied a African-American boxing gym in Chicago. I am studying my own culture, in my own place. It might be argued that the first-year students at one edge of my academic world and the university executive at the other are indeed different sub-cultures from my own as a classroom teacher and part-time researcher, and both of them do at times feel alien to me. Nevertheless, this study involves the intersections of my sub-culture and those that are intimately related to it in the world in which I have worked for many years. Okely sums up the complexities of this situation when she describes “the ambiguous or non-geographical boundary between own or other cultures and the special problems of doing research in one’s own country” (1996, 8). She argues that believing one is studying one’s own culture leaves one open to mishearing the words of others, and that it took her some time in her own research with Gypsies in England to tune her ears to the words of others she had assumed were speaking the same language as her (Okely 1996, 23). Scholar, writer and practitioner in Performance Studies, Mady Schutzman, echoes her warning:

“Did the Reagan administration fashion my students’ notions of self-identity, education, ambition, ethics, pleasure, and accountability in ways that my Vietnam generation can’t quite comprehend? (Schutzman 2002, 64)

This is a timely reminder for me, particularly given the generational and power gaps between me and the students and sessional tutors I work with. Like Schutzman, I completed my undergraduate studies in the Vietnam era. I often hear my breath catching as my students talk about their aspirations and approaches to education (Grellier 2014), and I realise how different they are from mine.¹³

Meeting room in the Humanities building, with a view of tall trees. Three students from different courses are sitting casually with Jane around an oval table. Coffee cups, coke cans and an open packet of Tim Tams lie on the table.

Greg: Yeah, I'm really enjoying my course. It's great to come out of the office at the end of the day and think about new ideas. That's not what I expected ...

Monica: But isn't that what uni's supposed to be about? That's what I came for – to think about new ideas, to make a difference in the world.

Greg: Dunno ... I never thought about it like that. I'm here to get a degree. Need it to get promotions at work – so I can stay off the tools. I can even ...

Monica: That's pretty limited – that's not what uni's for. We're here to explore ideas, to ...

Sharon: It is for me – I'm here to get a degree too, and then I can get back into real life. Sick of having no money – have to live with mum so I can afford to run my car. But I'm not interested in what other students think. A waste of my time. Just wanna hear from the lecturers – they're the experts. Give me the answers and let me get on with it!

Greg: I agree with Sharon about getting a degree. I'm thirty in six years' time and I want to be settled by then, get on with the rest of my life. But I hadn't expected all the interesting ideas. Thought it would just be boring old lectures. I like discussing ideas with the young kids in my classes – they look at the world differently from me and my mates, and they even ...

Jane: Hang on a minute, Greg. You're twenty-four and you reckon you see the world differently from the eighteen year olds?

Greg: Yep, things are moving fast these days, Jane. Gotta keep up! I'm getting ready to settle down. I'm determined about this study – more determined than I've ever been about anything. But these young kids are just starting – more interested in having fun.

Monica: That's not fair! I'm eighteen and I wanna do more than have fun! I'm here to learn about things, important things. And I don't care about getting a job. I know I'll have to settle down sometime, but right now I want to think and question the world. What kind of ideas are you talking about anyway, Greg?

Greg: Well, I'm studying Construction Management, and I've worked in the building industry since I left school. But I never thought about how the industry destroys the environment, or whether we should worry about it. Never thought about how labourers get treated – I started there too, and I reckon it's good for you to be on the bottom for a while. Most of the kids in my class say it's none of our business how migrant building workers in the Middle East are exploited – still don't know if I should care about that. But I might want to work in these countries when I graduate. Still, it's interesting to think about how ...

Monica: It's really important! I'm doing Environment Biology, and I reckon every course here should make students think about the environment. Especially you guys in Construction. Did you know that construction is the most polluting industry in all of Australia? Your course ...

Greg: Hey, that's not ...

Monica: Your course should make you think about that, and question it, not just help you get a job. And you should care about workers in the Middle East because they're human beings, not just because you might work there one day.

Greg: Well ...

Sharon: What do you ...?

Jane: I certainly aim to get my students to think and challenge and question what they're learning ...

Greg: Hey, I thought us students were supposed to be on the margins here, Jane. It's not me and Sharon who're on the margins – it's you and Monica. Have you looked at the Curtin website lately? It's all about preparing students for the real world, giving us the qualifications we need for work. I don't see much about thinking and questioning. But I AM finding my classes interesting – lots of challenging ideas. Hope that continues for the next five years!

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 4: STORY AND POETRY

In crafting performative stories, I seek the “state of mutuality” that “crosses boundaries of meaning” that Gergen and Gergen (2007, 139) contend arises when we listen to other people's stories. They go on to list the five possible results of the shared narrative experience: receptivity, familiarity, witness trust, empathic witnessing and recreating the self. I am aware of a large number of my many selves nodding vigorously in agreement with these results: “Yes! These are the states of ‘readerliness’ that I seek to evoke through this work,” they say.



BELLA: *(mutters from the wings but Jane can barely hear her. Her tone is insistent but most of her words are lost.)* ... what about? ... illusory ... dangerous ... hah! *(Frustrated at not being able to hear Bella clearly, Jane returns to her own voices.)*



Stories are more than a valuable addition to my performance; they hold a central place. Arthur Frank, who worked extensively with stories of illness, quotes Julie Cruikshank, anthropologist and documenter of the stories of indigenous Canadian women, from a 1994 conference: “You have to learn to think *with* stories” (Frank (1995, 23). He understands this sentence to advocate that we see stories as complete in themselves, and that rather than think *of* or *about* them – that is, analyse them – we think *with* them – that is, apply them to our own lives and embody them. My work

sees stories from this perspective. I seek to tell stories that not only are representative of experiences in the world of Curtin University, but also invite readers to think *with* them, applying them to their own lives as teachers, learners and members of institutions. When I include myself as a player in these stories, I choose to present myself in many roles, with strengths and foibles, with passions and fears, in order to open a wide gamut of positions in which readers might place themselves in each story. They do not have to choose between heroes and villains, but can position themselves in an almost unlimited array of roles in each story. By revealing my own foibles and fears, stories also help me break down the power inequalities a little between myself, the students and the sessional tutors.

In addition, by making stories central to my performance, I seek to embody my commitment to the students I teach and the sessional teachers I work with. The stories are varied, representing the characters in a range of situations, but I hope they treat these people gently, with warmth and compassion. Even when I portray students who are awkward, angry or tentative, I hope that my empathy is evident. Equally, I seek to show my warmth and appreciation for the sessional tutors who work energetically with me, despite their under-appreciated position in the university. In my marginalised position, which I will explore in more detail in the Third Movement, I have little difficulty thinking *with* the students' stories of dislocation, and *with* the sessional tutors' stories of pressured commitment to their students' learning. I seek to create what Professor Ronald Pelias of Southern Illinois University, in his seminal 2004 study, calls "a methodology of the heart", one that "invites identification and empathic connection" (Pelias 2004, 1).

By writing vignettes in the present tense I represent these narratives as typical of the happenings in my world – they are not one-off, finished events, but recur frequently in slightly different forms. They are at once singular and representative of everyday practices; and they allow me to reflect on practices that I would generally take for granted. While I bear in mind Geertz's call for "thick description" (1973), and therefore paint the pictures in some detail, I am also aware of the repetitive nature of many of

the experiences and want to gesture towards this quality by emphasising their collective performative qualities.

A particularly challenging use of story in ethnographic works is created by Margery Wolf in *A Thrice-Told Tale* (1992). Wolf juxtaposes three versions of the same event that occurred during her fieldwork in Taiwan: a young mother behaving very strangely was thought by some of the villagers to be possessed by a god and therefore sacred, but she was eventually decided to be mentally ill and so was driven from the village. Wolf does not report in any of the versions that she heard what became of this woman, and was left unsettled by the event. She presents three versions of it: a story version, excerpts from her fieldnotes, and a more traditional ethnographic analysis. The story itself includes fictional elements, which she does not include in the other two versions. For example, she sets the mounting tension of the mother's behaviour against the backdrop of an approaching typhoon, which did not occur at that time, and – even more dramatically – has the typhoon hit her village as the mother is driven out, with the inference that the resultant flooding kills large numbers of the villagers, including this mother.

What I find most interesting here is Wolf's reflexive overview of the entire text: the story seems more vivid to her than the other two versions, she concludes, because the story brought her more closure in relation to the event than the other two. She was troubled by the open-endedness of the event – she actually labels it a “non-event” (1992, 88) – and was unable to resolve it through more traditional ethnographic approaches, so turned to a narrative representation. She was aware in retrospect that her feelings of discomfort during the event led her to unconsciously suppress some of the details in her fieldnotes, but felt liberated by the possibilities allowed in the fictional approach of the story:

“In this view of ethnographic narrative, we are able to shape our stories to present more satisfying – and in a strange way more complete – versions of events than traditional ethnography allows. (Wolf 1992, 88)

I support Wolf's approach here, in the belief that experimenting with any non-standard ethnographic method is valuable, provided we do it reflexively. I find problematic, however, her view of narratives as allowing closure. My interest is in narrating everyday practices at Curtin University. In this situation, there is no value in my constructing imagined stories in order to resolve particular events. While participants in my vignettes might challenge some of the perspectives I have presented on these situations, and while I certainly have shaped them as I write, my stories do not include fictional elements created consciously in order to resolve situations. They are writerly rather than fictional. Like Wolf, however, I see the stories as much more than illustrations of interpretive and analytical responses. Like her also, I believe that humans create stories in order to engage with the world. My view of narrative, however, is much less coherent than Wolf's. Its fragmentary and multifaceted nature makes it more likely to problematise events and practices than to explain them, more likely to disturb than to satisfy. For this reason I value its role in reflexive analysis, and make it central in this performance.

Poetic rendering

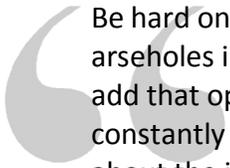
Another reason for including story is the ancient adage that it is better to show than to tell: that in rendering experience, we allow readers the opportunity to engage all of their senses in addition to their minds: we promote embodied readings. A highly distilled version of this rendering is found in poetry, which is increasingly being integrated into academic work. I made brief mention above, through the voice of the tutor Simon, of Laurel Richardson's (1997) paper advocating lyric poetry alongside ethnographic narrative and analysis within academic writing. Richardson suggests that lyric poetry may be preferable to narrative in some situations because it deconstructs the experiences that traditional narratives shape and reshape, thus being more likely to reflect the messy incompleteness of people's lives. I find the poems she includes in this paper very powerful in evoking fragmentary but intense moments. Gannon (2004) moves still further from logic and control by writing poems composed completely from fragments of her dream journals, piling one subconscious image on another in a

(non)search for her multiple selves, and ultimately in a powerful contribution to poststructuralism's denial that the self is singular and fixed.

Both of these poet-writers advocate poetry for its power to coax readers to respond in embodied ways. In this, they are joined by Katie Fitzpatrick (2012) and by Vivienne Elizabeth and Barbara Grant (2013), who contend that poetry can even play a role in studies of higher education. Fitzpatrick avers that writing poetry can steer her into connected ways of being an educational researcher; in a time of increasing managerialism in tertiary institutions, Elizabeth and Grant turn to poetry to evoke their experiences of its destructive impact on academics. I will add my voice to their chorus against managerialism in universities in the Sixth Movement.

Poetry – both my own and that of others – therefore sits alongside narrative and multiple voices in this performance, in the desire to be playful, provocative and reflexive. Through this poetry I seek to coax myself and my readers into a broader range of responses, and to create heteroglossic choruses of voices that constantly challenge any attempts at order and control in this performance.

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 5: REFLEXIVITY



Be hard on your opinions. A famous bon mot asserts that opinions are like arseholes in that everyone has one. There is great wisdom in this, but I would add that opinions differ significantly from arseholes in that yours should be constantly and thoroughly examined. ... We must think critically, and not just about the ideas of others. Be hard on your beliefs, take them out onto the verandah and hit them with a cricket bat. Be intellectually rigorous, identify your biases, your prejudices, your privileges. Most of society's arguments are kept alive by a failure to acknowledge nuance. (Minchin 2013)

This excerpt from a university graduation day speech by Australian comedian Tim Minchin advances two of my aims in this performance. First, it is part of the breaking down of the academic hierarchies that privilege the academic voice over all others. Minchin's voice interplaying with the academic voices on reflexivity helps establish the

heteroglossic chorus. Thus, I seek to reach understandings far beyond those I would have gained by limiting myself to my own academic interpretivist voice, “some widened space to speak beyond [my] means” (Lather and Smithies 1997, xvi). Its second role is in disconcerting both me and the reader with its provocative, incongruous images (Minchin’s most frequent comedic technique), helping to catch us unawares. In this way it is part of my overall aim that we might catch glimpses of our old, unexamined ideas about teaching and learning, and inspect them critically.

My interest in reflexivity has a dual focus in this performance: first, in this movement and throughout the rest of the performance, I explore and develop my own reflexivity in relation to my teaching practices. In addition, I am also interested in how I and my fellow tutors in the Communications units can work with students to help them become more critically reflexive. This will be a focus of the Fourth Movement.

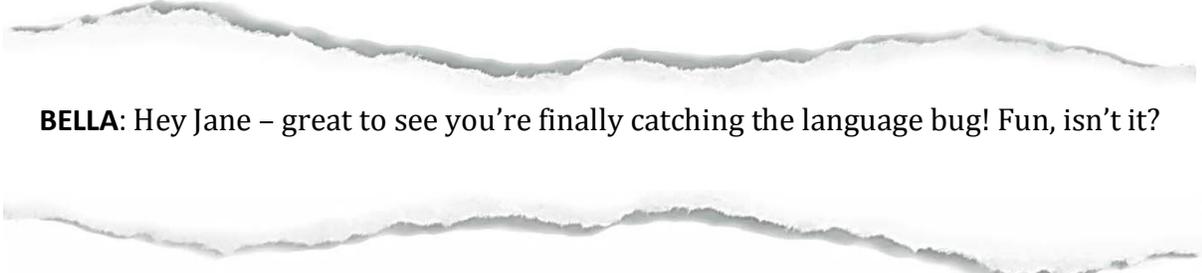
Minchin’s words are a node in the rhizomatic (non)structure I am building. Rhizomatic structures play a central role in my reflexivity because they allow me to juxtapose elements that are not logically connected, but to create interconnections that can be playful, startling and exhilarating: “It’s like plugging in to an electric circuit” (Deleuze 1995, 8). A by-product for me is that I can indulge in my love of words: rhizomes give me the excuse to play with words in the service of critical reflection. Word puns and poems are the tools of the Trickster, who flits into the rhizome, throws her puns and riddles, and then flits out:¹⁴

Rhizomes are great
They distress and discombobulate
Derange, disgorge and disinter
Tumble and torture
Confuse and create
Juggle and jumble
Shatter and spin
Perturb and pirouette
Uproot, upturn and un-control
Fuddle and muddle and throw around
Addle our brains and rattle our bones

Make up down and in out
Clear foggy and true false

We can riddle, and riff, and rile ourselves
Fold back, fold up, fold out
Laugh, shrug and jig our feet
Leap up, flit in, waft out
Stop, wait, sit

And, and, and ...



BELLA: Hey Jane – great to see you’re finally catching the language bug! Fun, isn’t it?

Since there was no break between my living and working in my institution and my starting to study it, I reflect on what has marked the move from participant to participant-researcher. I suggest it is merely intent:¹⁵ in deciding to undertake this study, I have subtly changed my relations with the rest of my community. And – more significant and more challenging – I have changed my position in relation to myself. My teaching activities have not changed, at least on the surface, but the eyes with which I watch myself and others have changed focus. I have grown Critical Reflector Eyes, which have become more and more piercing as I have worked (or more sparking, to use Deleuze’s image of the electric circuit). Or rather, in the spirit of Andrew Sparkes’ (2009) claim that Western people focus too much on sight at the expense of the other senses, I seek to taste, touch and smell experiences as well as hearing them – I am learning to embody the Critical Reflector.



BELLA: Critical? Ha ha! Still not listening ... dangerous ... LISSSTEN! ... it's not ...

On a practical level, this change of being was marked by my starting to keep a reflective journal. In this journal, I documented my responses to events and ideas I was encountering, trying to focus on how my responses were being shaped by my own perspectives and my position in the university. I also started to write vignettes of experiences I was having in my day-to-day teaching life, as narratives written in the present tense in order to evoke my own sense of the daily practices I was observing around me. In the second year of my research I read Judith Okely (1996), who recommends the triple focus of self-analysis, the diary and autobiography. I realised that I had established sound initial habits, and was grateful to the group of colleagues who had talked to me about early research approaches. Okely sees this tri-partite approach as a mechanism for avoiding “cultural counter transference” (1996, 39), that is, the transference between the researcher and her participants. This transference can work in both directions: as a researcher I am shaped by the experiences of those I am listening to, but I also shape their responses by the framework within which I listen to them. Without reflexivity, I risk perpetuating this transference. This issue lies at the heart of the dilemma I will reflect on later in this movement in the section on ethics: the predominating sense of empathy and compassion I feel when talking with students about their early feelings of dislocation.

Over the first few years of participant observation and reflection, I began to realise what rich material was contained in my teaching life, which I had for so long walked through without much thought, as if blinkered. So I add another visual image of reflective practice to the growing group: it is like removing blinkers so that I start to see taken-for-granted layers. The disconcerting aspect of this newly unblinkered state is that I have been teaching for more than thirty years, and in the world of Curtin for fifteen years, so I cannot hide behind the excuse of having been disoriented in a new

world. I realise how comfortable it is to teach and organise ourselves in a blinkered state.

Victor Turner sees reflexivity as being expressed in the subjunctive mood; he describes it as “suffused with *orexis*, with desire and appetite, as well as involved with knowing, perceiving, and conceiving” (1987, 103). He describes it as “men and women, of a given group and culture, wholly attending, in privileged moments, to their own existential situation.” He concludes that “any society which hopes to be imperishable must whittle out for itself a piece of space and a while of time, in which it can look at itself honestly” (1987, 122). The role of “desire and appetite” makes of reflexivity a deeply connected way of knowing – it is much more than an intellectual pursuit, combining sensory perceptions and even the female conception. With the lyrical phrase “a piece of space and a while of time”, Turner portrays reflexivity as organic, growing over time and multifaceted. This is an inspiring description for my work, in which I seek to look honestly at my world, and see this striving as a time of privilege.

The tutors reflect on reflection

Coffee shop outside the Humanities building under a broad canopy of trees. Five sessional tutors are taking a break between classes. The Curtin character hovers during the conversation and joins in at the end.

Brenda: I know we communications tutors put a lot of our energy into being reflexive – that’s what I’ve loved most about coming to teach with you all. It’s really challenging, but I also feel supported. But surely all lecturers are reflexive? Isn’t that what uni’s about?

Lesley: Don’t bet on it! Lots of people have been here for thirty years and they’ve stopped thinking. That’s what the system does to you – you have to shut down to survive.

Bill: Aw, come on Lesley – you’re just tired after all that marking! You need a break. Maybe they don’t reflect on their teaching, but they do on their disciplines. I had a great conversation about ethics with two guys from Urban

Planning yesterday. We should do more about ethics in our unit – it's good for first years to start thinking about it.

Brenda: Mmm, how could we approach that? I don't know anything about ethics.

Meg: Course you do – you're looking at it in your PhD, aren't you?

Brenda: But that's just about the ethics of working with students. That's not relevant ...

Meg: Yes it is! Remember these are first-year students. They don't need heavy theory – just to start thinking about issues. You know enough to get them started. And there's that great video on the ethics of bringing Asian guest workers into the Middle East and then stranding them – we could start there with the Built Environment students.

Brenda: Never thought about that. That's my PhD – never thought how it would apply to my teaching.

Meg: That's what makes us good teachers – that we're students too. We relate to the students. Haven't forgotten what it takes to learn new things, like senior people here. We start off with a bit of vulnerability.

Simon: Well I understand how some of these guys feel. Some of those seventeen year olds get really stroppy when we're not in control. They've paid their fees and we're supposed to be the experts. I understand why you want to feel like you're in charge when you stand in front of a class.

Lesley: But if we always know the answers, that changes our relationship with the students – we have to be vulnerable to start them building a learning community. If we stay in charge they're always going to behave like high school kids. And anyway, how can we know all the answers? That's what's wrong with some of the old professors here. Haven't they heard of postmodernism? There ARE no answers.

Bill: That's a bit too far for some of them, Lesley – they've spent a lifetime becoming experts in their fields!

Lesley: ... and I also think some of them are scared of first years.

Brenda: What?

Lesley: Yes, you talk to some of the oldies here – they spend a lot of time talking about how to keep control in their classrooms. I talked to one last week who wouldn't let his students out for a break during a three-hour class in case they didn't come back. Poor kids were hanging out for a coffee!

Meg: Some of them are so out of touch with young kids you'd think they're from another planet.

Bill: Well, what do you expect? If you don't have kids of your own, and you're totally absorbed in your work, it's easy to lose touch. They forget what they were like at seventeen ...

Simon: ... or maybe they were different...

Lesley: Ha! Some of these guys were never seventeen!

Meg: We're teachers, so of course we're reflexive about how we do it. For some of the others teaching just gets in the way of their research.

Bill: And they resent teaching first years the most – after first year they start to relate to them as people. One of the guys yesterday said he doesn't even try to learn his first years' names. Reckons he'll get to know them if they survive into second year. I dunno ...

Simon: But you can understand that when you think how many of them drop out after first year, or switch courses. It's hard enough teaching a big group, but when half of them don't want to be there ...

Meg: But if we don't get to know them, no wonder they drop out. Teaching is not just about stuffing content into their heads. It's more ...

Lesley: The university doesn't support us to do much more than that. Keep loading us down with extra admin – no wonder we don't have time to get to know the students! No joy in it! I came here to work with students, not waste time filling in websites. If this goes on, I'm leaving.

Bill: Know what you mean, Lesley! I might be only 10 per cent good at admin, but you're minus 10 per cent – not your strength!

Lesley: Ha ha! And I'm proud of it! At least I'm good at important things, like getting students to think ...

Simon: Yes, definitely to think ...

Meg: First, to think ...

Brenda: And last, to think ...

Bill: Always to think!

Lesley: Think outside the box

Curtin: Real-life experiences ...¹⁶

Simon: Think differently

Curtin: Innovation ...

Meg: Think laterally

Curtin: Efficiency ...

Brenda: Think logically

Curtin: Viability ...

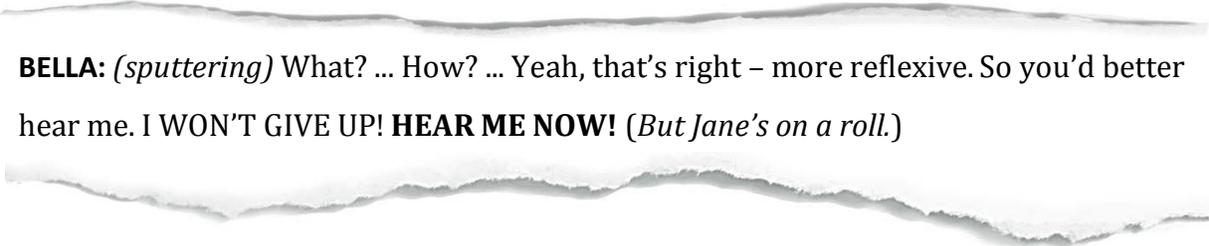
Bill: Think creatively

Curtin: Productivity ...

Lesley, Simon, Meg, Brenda and Bill: ALWAYS TO THINK!

Images of reflection

Although much has been written about reflexivity over the past decades, most analysis of what constitutes reflexive practice has tended to remain figurative: sensory images of seeing and hearing more acutely are common, as I have suggested above. In the spirit of de Certeau's 1984 study of everyday practice, however, I seek here to examine some of the practices that enable me to become more reflexive. Of course this is difficult; hence the proliferation of images rather than descriptions of practice. It is also highly personal: practices that might push me to become more reflexive might leave another person cold.



BELLA: (*sputtering*) What? ... How? ... Yeah, that's right – more reflexive. So you'd better hear me. I WON'T GIVE UP! **HEAR ME NOW!** (*But Jane's on a roll.*)

First is the practice of discomfiting myself in some way, pushing myself off centre and off balance by challenging my own behaviour or responses in a particular situation. This might happen if I listen to a student or colleague's view of teaching that differs from my own, as in the examples of Sharon and Neil in the Prelude, or feel in my body the awkwardness of a situation in which I am not in charge, as when I struggle to master technology in classrooms, trying to present myself as competent to my students.

The deliberate practice of identifying my assumptions and then questioning them is central to my reflexivity.¹⁷ While this is a straightforward conscious practice, it is not easy: my blinkered eyes make it difficult to recognise that my socially constructed perspectives on teaching and learning are not absolute truths. For example, I generally strive to maintain control in the classroom in the first few weeks of classes. Some of my colleagues urge me gently to relax, to let go of control in order to encourage students to take more responsibility in building a community of learners. Critical reflection during this project has alerted me that my easy assumption of the need to

be in control is underpinned by my feelings of awkwardness with new groups of students that I described in the vignette of Tom that opened this movement. Only now am I aware how much I embody the need for control in order to deal with this awkwardness: my tight jaw and knotted shoulders, and feelings of being tightly laced into a corset sit at the heart of my first few weeks each semester.

Another useful practice is validating ways of knowing that are not generally accepted within academic discourse, “including feelings, daydreaming, emotions, and the like, particularly as these emerge in intimate relationships ... getting into the head and body of the researcher as a social actor, and gaining an insider’s perspective” (Noy 2009, 102). While critics might claim that such ways of knowing are ungrounded and unreliable, Cixous’s wonderful description of knowing that arises in the “in(terre)conscious” (Cixous and Calle-Gruber 1997, 88) grounds them as interminglings of the unconscious and the earth (French *terre* = earth), not comfortable and balanced composites, but jostling juxtapositions, in which the brackets both connect and separate the parts. The echoes of Margaret Atwood’s marsh languages are distant but audible. I am fortunate to work with first-year students in Communications units, and with a group of committed sessional tutors who share my focus on these vulnerable ways of knowing. Since we and our students are working in small groups on the margins of the institution (see the Third Movement) and privileging communications, we are more often actively embodied in our work than if we had been lecturing on disciplinary content to large groups of students. In my personal and working relationships, therefore, I place a range of non-academic ways of knowing at the centre of my thinking, and if I am distracted from this focus I am surrounded by people who will ease (or squeeze) me back into it. In this preference for non-traditional, connected ways of knowing I am similar to most autoethnographers.¹⁸

The discomfiting that results from my throwing myself out of equilibrium enables another reflexive practice: questioning my own position and authority in the organisation. I am much more likely to question from an off-centre, off-balance position, and more likely to elicit questioning and reflexivity from those I am

researching with, since they are more likely to join me in vulnerability. On an organisational level, my position on the margins encourages my research participants to relate to me through their emotions, since we are generally more comfortable to confide in people we do not identify with the power structures of our organisation (Portelli 1997). This questioning of my own position leads, however, to a related but contradictory practice: my accepting that, whatever goodwill and determination I bring to deconstructing my own position of authority within the organisation, my attempts are not innocent (Visweswaran 1994). I need to remain as much as possible in an active state of questioning my own position as reflexive practitioner – both what it achieves and what it limits – and of acknowledging my own tendencies to believe I am seeking the ‘truth’ (Pillow 2003). This is the ultimate vulnerability for a researcher – to reject the possibility that there is a truth while acknowledging that in my deepest hopes and dreams I am, in fact, seeking truth.

And ... and ... and
 through the cracks
 a tendril grows

pushes

stretches

reverberates with echoes

the young shoot in search of the truth
 impossible tender abashed pale green
 still hidden from light

pushes towards

the secret

no!

“the feeling of the secret”

that she knows

she will never know

that she feels when she dreams

when she writes

that she will never know

but is present

*“a kind of heart beating”*¹⁹

Autoethnography of educational institutions

I place myself alongside anthropologists Anne Meneley and Donna Young in their contention that those who seek to write autoethnographies of academic practices need to do more than just “position [themselves] within the text, but to engage in a critical reflection on one’s relationship with others, as circumscribed by institutional practices and by history, both within and outside of the academy” (Meneley and Young 2005, 7). They go on to suggest that such reflexivity requires “critical detachment and the ability to think ironically”. I bring such focuses to my own role as a teacher, as well as to the contexts of my teaching colleagues and the university as a whole. My quest is to problematise the context in which Curtin’s first-year students begin their studies, rather than to clarify and simplify it ...

BELLA: PROBLEMS?? I’ll give you problems! If only you’ll listen ... (*But Jane is in mid-sentence and can’t be diverted.*)

... and I believe that autoethnographic and reflexive approaches are most likely to achieve this, by interplaying descriptions, stories and analyses that extend, challenge, jostle and jar against each other. Such interplayings create the chorus which can provoke critical reflection, providing space well beyond the writer herself: indeed, by allowing silences and unresolved chords, the chorus “allow(s) the reader to speak back to the text” (Pillow 2012, 190). This protects in some way, according to Associate Professor of Gender Studies at the University of Utah, Wanda Pillow, against the dangers of privileging reflexivity for itself. She creates the term “reflexivity of discomfort” to challenge the notion that just by virtue of being reflexive one must necessarily arrive at ‘the truth’. It is “a reflexivity that seeks to know while at the same time situates this knowing as tenuous” (Pillow 2012, 188).

Pillow’s reflexivity of discomfort resonates throughout this performance: by questioning myself and by showing my confusions, misconceptions and frailties, I

challenge the reflexive process itself. Since just by being reflexive, I am not guaranteed of reaching a 'truth', since all is subject to 'the taste of strawberries or abandonment', I seek to open a space within the chorus for my readers to speak their own disagreements, or to view angles I had not considered. While I can guard against my own confusions in part by becoming more aware of them, this does not guarantee I will always avoid their traps; therefore, I strive to empower my readers to make their own meanings from my performance.

The dangers of the power imbalance between the students and me are very evident to me; and if I risk forgetting them, the formal research ethics structures of the university (see Theme 7 below) remind me. Daphne Patai, in her work on the dangers of US academics researching with Third World women, emphasises the dangers of "interviewing 'down'" (1991, 137), which she describes as researching people who have less economic, political and social power; this warning can be applied equally to my situation with first-year students. It is significant that the vast majority of those who volunteered for formal interviews were mature-age students, so the factor of differing maturity was reduced; nevertheless, even students of my own age and cultural capital would be disadvantaged because of my greater familiarity with and position in the institution. Of course, the preponderance of mature-age students among my interviewees has also skewed my research – yet another incidence of chance that I have encountered during this project.

Patai's response to ethical issues of interviewing reiterates the connected knowing motif I touched in the First Movement: she avows that feminist research must be grounded in a commitment to and engagement with women: "Such research is *for* women, as the popular formula has it, not merely by or about them" (Patai 1991, 138, emphasis in the original). In the same way, I see my research as *for* first-year students and *for* sessional tutors: my teaching and research life in the university centres on supporting and representing the interests of these two groups of people, rather than merely studying them. Despite my best efforts to reduce the difficulties of the power imbalance, however, I agree with Patai (1991, 139) that in researching a group I see as

less powerful, I risk aligning myself with those in power. In telling stories like Sharon's, am I reflecting on what enables student learning in order to enhance that learning, or am I exposing her (and other first-year students in similar and different contexts) to criticism and even ridicule? Or am I treating her as an object to be analysed?²⁰ I suspect all of these things.

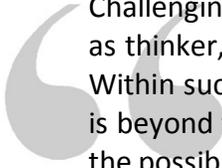
On the other hand, the alternative is to do nothing, and along with Lather, I choose to roll up my sleeves and have a go, being alert throughout to the inequities of the contract between myself and the students:

“Rather than take refuge in the futility of self-critique, however, I want to attempt it as aware as possible of its inevitable shortcomings, all that which remains opaque to myself. (Lather 1993, 685)

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 6: THE ROLE OF THE READER

“Writing and reading are not separate, reading is part of writing. A real reader is a writer. A real reader is already on the way to writing. (Cixous 1993, 21)

One powerful element of rhizomatic analysis is that it foregrounds the reader as the meaning maker in the text. In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari transfer the meaning-making process from writers to readers in an echo of the mapping image I will discuss more deeply in the Fifth Movement: “Writing has nothing to do with signifying. It has to do with surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come” (1987, 5–6). In this image, readers make maps by connecting nodes to each other in their own patterns. While writers can provide an array of nodes or points on the map, they cannot control the connections readers might make among those nodes (or, indeed, with nodes outside the text). In their exploration of women with HIV/Aids, Lather and Smithies create an image of the reader as brooder, which is in tune with Deleuze and Guattari's view of reading:



Challenging any easy reading via shifting styles, the book positions the reader as thinker, willing to trouble the easily understood and the taken-for-granted. Within such a book, reading both becomes a kind of brooding over that which is beyond the word and the rational, and gestures toward the limits as well as the possibilities of knowing. (Lather and Smithies 1997, xvi)

As a reader of this passage, I make my own connection between the brooding reader and an external node: Rodin's famous sculpture, "The Thinker". I see the qualities I associate with the Thinker in the sculpture – his furrowed brow, his intense self-absorption and his solid dignity – and I apply these qualities to Lather and Smithies' portrayal of the reader. This enhances my appreciation for the reader, and I am very willing to see the act of reading as moving "beyond the word and the rational". I also fold back their second sentence on the phrase from Deleuze and Guattari quoted above, "realms that are yet to come", which enhances their suggestion that reading can reach towards the outer regions of discursive structures and ways of knowing. In this work, Lather and Smithies take their place within a movement that seeks to fracture previously accepted definitions of academic writing in order to provoke new ways of reading.

The implications of these ideas for my writing are profound, particularly given my commitment to the messiness of experience. While in the role of Lather and Smithies' reader I made an instant, subconscious connection with a work of art that represented for me an ennobled character, the word "brooding" could as readily have encouraged a connection with a threatening, evil or buffoonish character, which would have altered my response to the reader as evoked by Lather and Smithies. Or I might have made the same connection with "The Thinker", but not have previously experienced the subject of that sculpture as noble. Or I might have made no connection at all and been left bemused. In addition, I might read the same passage in a different time and context and make very different connections. (There are echoes here of Sojcher's "element of chance introduced by circumstances" from the Prelude.) Deleuze, Lather and Smithies all acknowledge the power of readers to make meaning from a book, and

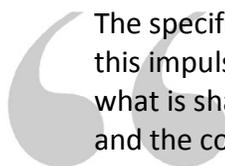
argue that this meaning is not inherent in the book itself, but in the act of reading: “If it doesn’t work, if nothing comes through for you, you try another book” (Deleuze 1995, 8). I must therefore accept that readers will make a broad raft of connections between elements within my work and outside it. I can support those connections in the ways I write, evoking connections I myself have made, and offering readers a rich collection of elements that they might be able to connect to. I can also encourage them to make their own connections by modelling such connection-making in my writing, being heteroglossic, playful, irreverent, embodied and connected to what I write. Ultimately, I have no power to shape the meanings readers make, or to ensure that they make any meanings at all. They may just choose to “try another book”.

SECOND MOVEMENT, THEME 7: ETHICS

At the organisational level, the ethics that underpin this research are clear and indisputable: I cannot interview any student whose marks I control, or any tutor whose position I have power over; and I cannot allow students to make a large time commitment to my research project.²¹ I must do no more than I claim to be doing: that is, when students and tutors agree to be interviewed they must know the position from which I am working and my purposes in speaking with them.²² I must also guarantee anonymity for all research participants, unless they request to be named after reading their words in my finished work.

As Michael Lambek, Professor of Anthropology at University of Toronto, contends however, institutional regulations and protocols are “far removed” from the deeper ethical issue of “the balance between passion and action” (2005, 233) that underpins any ethnographic research project. At this deeper level, several ethical issues have arisen during my work. The first is the issue of my capacity to listen deeply to the voices from my participants, and at the same time to acknowledge the barriers to hearing them clearly. As well as the generational, institutional and power barriers between me and my students I discussed earlier, personal qualities shape the ways I

hear their voices. Professor of Communication at Michigan Technological University Patty Sotirin's (2010) concept of radical specificity is key here. During this research project I have gradually realised how invested I am in supporting students emotionally in their first semester of studies: compassion and empathy for their disorientation are dominant emotional responses in my research with the students. Stories of feeling dislocated and disturbed always touch me. I can now see many reasons for this; not the least was my experience as a fourteen-year-old Scottish migrant from an all-girls college struggling to fit into a co-educational Australian high school. It is not just the overall liminal experience of being in a new country that resonates for me, but the experience of feeling dislocated in an educational institution. I can still feel the distress physically, in my scrunched shoulders and shallow breathing. While I do not see my responses in themselves as negative, I am aware of the dangers that accompany them in this research project, and in my teaching in general. In a blur of "empathic resonances" (Sotirin 2010, 11), I am in danger of losing particular voices in a bland chorus. Sotirin suggests I risk entering into a conspiracy with the students to neutralise their individuality in my and their general story of disorientation:



The specificities of any particular experience ... are repressed and obscured in this impulse to recognition and compassion; we reconcile what is different to what is shared and the opportunity to think beyond the dominant, the familiar, and the common is stifled. (Sotirin 2010, 11)

Conquergood labels this kind of response "the enthusiast's infatuation" (2002, 404), and warns that it results in shallow responses that trivialise the Other and prevent the researcher from deep moral engagement: "Superficiality suffocates self as well as other" (Conquergood 2002, 405). In order to guard against my empathy flattening the way I hear and understand the voices of the participants, the multiple voices – including Bella's voice from the wings – are vitally important.

Sotirin's reference to Deleuze is a valuable reminder to me: "... following Deleuze, we must move from the relation between 'this' moment in its generalizable features with such other moments toward a sense of 'thisness' that retains its specificity" (Sotirin

2010, 9). Throughout this performance, therefore, I seek to find the “thisness”, which Deleuze and Guattari term the “haecceity”, in the vignettes and in the choruses.



(Now at last Jane can hear Bella's voice.)

BELLA: Listen to me ... LISTEN TO ME! *(Stamping her foot, she is angry and urgent.)* I've been trying to speak for a whole movement, and now YOU WILL LISTEN TO ME!"

You ignored me earlier when you were talking about empathy and trust in story. You could hardly hear me then. Now you've FINALLY worked your way a bit closer to me, so now you'll hear me out. STAND UP *(She waits, impatient. Jane is mystified.)* Jump up, that's it. Now sit in this chair opposite – let's see if that can change your perspective, shift your shape, remould your brain ... unmould ... de-rust ... sluice out the sludge ...

Maybe now you can see this empathy stuff isn't just illusory, it's dangerous! You're right, you lose everyone's voice in a fog of good feeling. But IT'S MORE THAN THAT! What about the students who don't express this disorientation in ways you recognise? What about THEM? What do you do with them? Even if they say they're feeling disoriented, the texture of their emotions will change from day to day – from minute to minute. We're NOT static! Stop thinking of disorientation as if it was stable, definable. And stop seeking out experiences of dislocation in students so that you can empathise with them. This is no different from any other way of categorising students – exam results, background, ethnicity ... they're all a trap! Look for ways to allow their individual voices to speak, not to categorise students.²³

Come on, Jane! You've read Spivak's article.²⁴ Well-meaning post-colonialists claim to support the colonised but, in fact, silence them: represent them as an homogeneous group and speak on their behalf. It's exploitative, and that's what you're in danger of doing with first-year students ... *(she pauses, running out of energy)*. PHEEEEEW ... it's a relief to be heard at last!

JANE: Wow! Never thought about ... I'll have to think about it more, but I DO hear you now. You never give up, do you?

BELLA: No way – that's the fun! AND you need me to help you learn how to reflect ... Not letting you get away with schmaltzy thinking – schmaltzes, waltzes and fairy floss, they rot your brain!



My second ethical issue is my role as interviewer. While I might strive to listen to the haecceity of specific experiences, I am concerned about my role as questioner of the

participants. In agreeing to be interviewed, they understand that the conversation will be about the first few weeks of semester, what it feels and looks like to be an early university student, and what constitutes tertiary learning for them. Many of them have difficulty describing their sense of dislocation in specific detail – as, indeed, would many older, more experienced adults. They can mention the disorientation of being lost and confused in a large, new space; the confusion of dealing with new electronic systems; and the nervousness of being unsure of future learning activities, and of their capacity to succeed in these activities. Beyond this, however, few can be more precise. And I am neither equipped to pursue these feelings in more depth, nor desirous of doing this. I am not a psychotherapist, and do not want to delve deeply into their fears and distresses. Nor am I confident that, given my position in the university, they would feel free to speak openly, and may even subconsciously strive to give me responses they think I might want, or to behave in ways they see as appropriate for interviews. For example, here is interviewee Peter Primrose at his first interview:

What is learning? Hmmm (*pauses*). Is it within the rules of this interview to ask what you [Jane] think it is first?

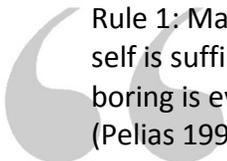
Several commentators consider the ethical issues raised when teachers research with their students (and I would add sessional staff to this group of research participants). Because of the limited time teachers are able to spend interviewing their students, these interviewees cannot become empowered or able to own their own narratives, in the ways valued by qualitative researchers Jaber Gubrium and James Holstein (2003) in a postmodern “interview society”. In addition, Thomas Newkirk (1996) contends that even when teachers hide the identities of their informants and balance critical comments with positive ones, their relationship is “seductive”, and they can end by betraying these informants. This seduction can involve teachers collecting data for our own ends rather than to make a difference in the lives of our participants. Alternatively, while we might strive to benefit our participants in some way by representing their voices, other people who read our work might misuse the work to

judge or regulate in a destructive way the groups we have represented (Finch 1984; Jordan and Yeomans 1995; Nathan 2005, 160; Wolf 1992, 137-138):



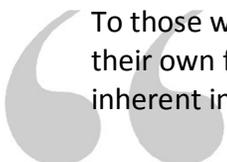
[E]ven in the modern (or postmodern?) era, the state still has a direct interest in promoting research that provides it with facts for the purposes of social regulation (Abrams, 1968; Gorrigan & Sayer, 1985; Gorrigan, 1990). (Jordan and Yeomans 1995, 393)

This danger is particularly significant for the sessional tutors whose voices I have represented in this performance. While several of them have requested to be named, others have preferred pseudonyms believing that some of their views on student learning and the role of the institution might harm their future employment and promotion prospects. A yet more insidious ethical issue underpins my choice to articulate my own position in this work. While it is important to me to be authentic and grounded in my position in the research, too great a focus on myself risks privileging my own voices and overwhelming those to whom I seek to give voice in the performance.²⁵ The dilemma is succinctly expressed by Professor Ronald Pelias from the University of Southern Illinois:



Rule 1: Make sure the self is at the center of the report. Rule 2: Make sure the self is sufficiently in the background. Self-indulgence is not permitted. Being boring is even worse. To continue, find a label: autobiographic ethnography. (Pelias 1994, 163)

I remind myself also of the warnings of ethnographer Paul Rabinow, speaking in the 1970s, in a voice that could equally be speaking today, of the “symbolic violence” visited on all groups being studied ethnographically:



To those who claim that some form of this symbolic violence was not part of their own field experience, I reply simply that I do not believe them. It is inherent in the structure of the situation. (Rabinow 1977, 130)

With these hazards ever present, I choose, nevertheless, to continue this performance. I do so knowing that the final movement will bring no clear ending; that the performers will at times speak against and across each other; that Jane will be sometimes awkward, sometimes too glibly academic, and often unknowing; and that Bella will wait forever in the wings seeking to coax Jane into new positions.

¹This student has asked that I acknowledge her voice with her real name rather than a pseudonym.

²Although Ken and Mary Gergen are seen as key figures in social constructionism, they do not label themselves as social constructionists – in their eyes, social constructionist theories are no more ‘truths’ than any other theories, and do not define who they are (Gergen and Gergen 2008, 146).

³Henry James used this phrase to describe some nineteenth century European novels “with their queer elements of the accidental and the arbitrary” (James 1984, 1107).

⁴Similarly, Elizabeth Wheatley examines the impact of her own ovarian cancer “scare” on her ongoing study with survivors of heart disease, which “forc[ed] me to recognize our shared vulnerability, precariousness, and frailty as human beings” (2005, 97). She concludes that her resultant writing is more authentic and grounded than it would have been without this experience, which pushed her to rediscover her “place within a moral community of sufferers ... [which] privileges empathy over explanation, compassion over judgment, and the lived bodies of participants over a way of seeing that obscured what I sought to find” (2005, 97).

⁵As well as my personal struggle to belong, such striving to be accepted as an academic is very common among specialists in Communications and similar programs throughout the Western world. For example, Chiseri-Strater (1991) claims that composition specialists are regarded as “foreign” by other academics in US universities, and their contribution not valued; Rosemary Clerehan (2007) challenges a decision at Monash University to reclassify academic language and learning specialists as general rather than academic staff; and Peter Elbow (2002), from the University of Massachusetts, devotes an entire article to asserting that composition specialists can offer valuable contributions to literature academics.

⁶Chanock 2007.

⁷Rebekah Nathan, an experienced academic in an unnamed US university, lived for a year undercover as a first-year student in a residential college of the university. She asserts that her university is typical of US institutions in employing “a growing cadre of cheaper part-time and non-tenure track teachers in the classroom. Although these instructors are often the most committed and talented educators, they are also the ones most likely to be overworked, to be grossly underpaid, and to have the least voice in the curricular and governance decisions at their universities” (Nathan 2005, 152).

⁸I think of the story of leading critical pedagogy theorist Joe Kincheloe, told by his wife Shirley Steinberg after his death, of the incident that drove him to become a published researcher in order to escape from the small Southern American university in which he worked after graduation: when he organised to teach his tertiary students on the site of a local African-American high school in order to develop their awareness, he was chastised by the Dean of Education: “We don’t teach in no nigger schools” (Kincheloe 2012, viii). Kincheloe’s drive for social justice was central to his entire professional life; other voices would have mingled with this one, however, and underpinned his determination to escape from the oppressive culture in which he felt trapped. When we speak for people we love after their deaths, we understandably highlight their admirable qualities, but none of us would claim that their motivations are univocal.

⁹For example Kincheloe (2007). The risks are not limited to being rejected by “mainstream” academia, however. Kenneth Gergen (2001, 3) discusses the risks of being so caught up with non-traditional groups of thinkers (in his case, fellow theorists of social constructionism) that one becomes isolated from thinkers outside one’s group, and may even become paralysed in a world of self-congratulation.

¹⁰ Spry 2001, 708.

¹¹ Richardson 1997, 233.

¹² For example, Renato Rosaldo (1989, 39) contends that contrary to traditional ethnographies, writers of 'native' ethnographies strive to make the familiar unfamiliar: "Social descriptions by, of, and for members of a particular culture require a relative emphasis on defamiliarization, so that they will appear – as they in fact are – humanly made, and not given in nature." Okely (1996, 14), in her ethnography of her experience in a girls' boarding school, underlines the need to problematise the familiar context: "What had been made normal through childhood and acculturation, I was to unlearn as strange and historically and culturally specific."

¹³ Leading Australian researcher into higher education trends over the past twenty years, Craig McInnis (2002), comments on the disjunction between general expectations of higher education in Australia that it should develop students' lifelong learning processes and the focus of many students themselves on learning vocational skills.

¹⁴ Ian Stronach (2002) is just one educational researcher who summons the word-playing Trickster. He plays with words (*writing/riting; spoor/spoof/spook*) in his rhizome of educational research in order to "make light of the serious". See also George Kamberelis (2004) on the value of the Trickster in educational analysis.

¹⁵ The integral place of intent in reflexivity is emphasised by key researchers into the reflective process in learning, David Boud, Rosemary Keogh and David Walker (1985), who explore a range of possible intents.

¹⁶ These abstract nouns are all taken from the Curtin website and contrast here with the tutors' active verbs.

¹⁷ Many commentators write about critical reflection as challenging assumptions, for example, Brookfield (1987, 1995), Mälkki (2010), Mezirow (1998).

¹⁸ For example, Ellis (2009) begins her recent autoethnographic study with a description of a dream in which she is showering fully clothed in front of her students; Jane Tompkins (1996) explores tertiary education through the story of her own emotional breakdown and temporary withdrawal from tertiary life.

¹⁹ The two phrases in quotation marks are from Cixous (1993, 85, emphasis in the original). The rest of the poem is mine.

²⁰ Bertha Baldwin, the 93-year-old great aunt of Performance Studies Professor D. Soyini Madison, who worked with her on an oral history, encapsulates vividly this concern: "I don't want my good name and what I'm telling you to be tossed around up there at that there University like some ol' rag" (Madison 2003, 469).

²¹ Although I understand the university's position, this has been frustratingly limiting for my research. I look with envy on Lather and Smithies (1997) working with women with HIV/AIDS, who attended dozens of support group meetings and had hundreds of pages of transcripts from which to construct their writings, or Nathan (2005), who lived under cover in a college dorm for a year with undergraduate students, or anthropologist Sherry Ortner (2003), who traced most of her fellow students from final high school year in New Jersey, and then visited them in their homes throughout the US for sometimes lengthy interviews.

²² In contrast, Dan Rose (1990) writes about doing fieldwork in a working class area of Philadelphia without telling his companions that he was a researcher. It was against his initial judgment but his supervisor advised him to do this so that he could gain insights into his companions without their being guarded against him: "What occurred was a collapse of the role distance between my neighbors and myself. I had no identity, no status to hide behind except what I could pick up locally" (Rose 1990, 13). Nathan expresses concern about the ethics involved in her work: "Can a researcher who has not fully disclosed her identity record *any* of her own personal experiences in her field notes? Anything that anyone has said in her presence? Can she publish these accounts?" (Nathan 2005, viii).

²³ Lather concludes that we must “move away from fantasies of mutuality, shared experience and touristic invitations to intimacy” into more authentic “counter-practices of queering, disidentifying, denaturalizing and defamiliarizing” (2009, 19).

²⁴ “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (1988).

²⁵ Added to this are the more generalised dangers, commonly aimed at autoethnographers by critics of “self-indulgence, wallowing in one’s feelings, and the like” (Roth 2005b, 19).

Third Movement: Being in the margins

Third Movement, Theme 1: Liminality

Two Curtin students are on the train to campus sitting directly behind Jane, who is eavesdropping. From their conversation it's clear that they're third-year Humanities student mentors, on their way to their first meeting of the year with their first-year mentee groups.

Student 1: What're you gonna say to your students today?

Student 2: Tell them to hang in – it'll get better.

Student 1: Yeah, first year's shit!

Student 2: They just need to hang in – second year's better.

Student 1: Yeah, tell them it'll get better ... Third year's gonna be good.¹

Reflective Journal, 20 March:

It's Week 3 and I've just returned my students' first piece of reflective writing. As usual, it's been mainly descriptive rather than reflective – the students needing to put their feet on the ground of the campus – how they got here, why they're here and how they're feeling about being here. So I tell them the story of the two mentors on the train. Titters and gasps when I say the word "shit", but a few relieved shrugs and nods too – "my feelings are normal!" Then a voice jumps in from the corner – Sarah, a young woman who has been almost silent through the first two classes, who has appeared disengaged, almost petulant. But now she's animated: "I don't feel like that at all – I'm excited! It's good to feel independent."

These experiences – a conversation I overheard on a train and a student's comment made in passing in the classroom – remind me of three things: first,

most people find their first year of undergraduate studies difficult, even those who are responsible and engaged enough to volunteer to be student mentors in later years; second, for a few people, feelings of excited anticipation and freedom dominate; and third, after thirty years of teaching I still misread students' responses: I cannot trust my assumptions. In addition to being surprised by strawberries or abandonment moments, I may not be able to distinguish between them.

In this theme, I separate the voices of the students and teachers from my own scholarly and ethnographic voices in order to allow all to play against and across each other without one dominating. The individual voices are in the top half of each page, while my scholarly writing is in the bottom, with Bella's voice from the wings cutting through the bottom half from time to time. It is possible to read through either half from page to page without reading the other half, or to read both halves of each page before turning over so that the voices in both halves echo, harmonise and cut across each other. In this structure I am inspired by Lather and Smithies' 1997 study of women living with HIV/AIDS, which separates the women's voices from the researchers' in the same horizontal structure, in the search for "some widened space to speak beyond our means" (Lather and Smithies 1997, xvi).

A student chorus

I got lost three times yesterday
The campus is so big
I was late to class
I couldn't find my room
I'm overwhelmed
Getting behind already
At school my teachers organised
me
 told me when to do things
 gave me help
 scared me into working
 hard

The campus is so big
I was late to class
I don't know anyone

I'm hopeless
I need to be more committed
 work harder
 be more organised
 more focused
 have a plan
 learn from my mistakes

The campus is so big
I was late to class
I don't know anyone

Why didn't my teachers help me
organise myself?
 learn to reference
 use databases
 write lab reports
 think more deeply

School should prepare you for
university
I'm getting behind
I've missed two classes
Everyone's started their essay
 and I haven't

The campus is so big
I was late to class
I don't know anyone



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

Disorientation and unease

In the first weeks and months, the student chorus sings of disorientation and unease, with occasional sharp notes of excitement bursting through. Most of the first-year students in my research are between childhood and adulthood, a stage that is seen as a highly emotionally disturbed part of one's maturation, a "delicate, uncertain, malleable state" (Szokolczai 2009, 148), which is intensified for first-year students by their being in a new world. The world of the Curtin Bentley campus is both physically overwhelming (up to forty thousand students and between fifteen hundred and two thousand teaching staff during the years of my research) and organisationally

Student interviewees speak

The first four weeks have been exhilarating, a rollercoaster. Periods you're doing a lot, periods you're not doing that much. It can't really be helped because every unit's separate and it just overlaps weirdly. I'd like it to be more even though ... (Sarah-Jane Clifton)

I can already feel the satisfaction I get from education, looking back at what I've done, saying, "I'm proud of what I've done. I'm glad I put the effort in and I'm glad to reap the rewards of that as well." (Michael Foster)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

bewildering to them. For the first time they are required to negotiate timetables, enrolments, online access and orientation around an educational campus without a parent's guidance. While some, like Sarah, find the independence exciting most of the time, many are predominantly disoriented.

The image of the world one is entering as a new country, with a new culture and language, is common in studies of transition.² New arrivals can feel as disoriented as they would in a new country; even though their new world seems to have many similarities with the world they are leaving, its rules, conventions and language are unfamiliar to them. Linguistic anthropologist A.L. Becker provides a valuable insight into this disorientation:

One of the most profoundly transforming experiences a person can have is learning another language, particularly if the language to be learned is distant from one's own. The experience can be like that of an explorer entering terra incognita, except that the rigors are not disease, hostile natives, starvation and losing oneself in an alien landscape, or at least not the same pathologies, hostilities, deprivations, and confusions, but rather an erosion of certainty and comfort at another level of one's being, a level, furthermore, which is very difficult to talk about because it is the level of languaging itself, and to talk about it means to put that experience into the categories and figures of one language rather than the other. (Becker 1991, 226)

Student interviewees speak

This is probably the most serious I've been about anything for a long time, ex-girlfriends included. This is purely for me. No one else is going to do it but [*emphatically*] me. I want to do it. No one else wants me to do it. And by jove³ I'm going to do it. (Rob Jackson)

This is an important time, getting started on a promising future kind of thing. High school was just the next year, more study, another bunch of books to read. You have to do it. Whereas uni, I'm choosing to want (*emphatically*) to do it! I didn't have to start this year – I could have started next year. But I'm glad I started this year actually, because the study's already in me and I want to get it started now. Not to get it over and done with, but to get a step ahead compared to all my friends at home who've just stayed behind. (My Tien Dang)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

BELLA: Hold on, Jane – you know better than this! These students are just giving you what they think you want ... The interview format's shaping what they're saying. They're keen students – they've self-selected as interviewees – and they're performing for you. Most of them are middle-class and they ...

JANE: Yes, but not all ...

BELLA (*laughs*): Yeah, and with strong cultural capital – and they know the rules of being interviewed. They're on their best behaviour ... And their voices may not sound so strongly on a different day, or in a different context. Just wait till Sojcher's abandonment tastes stronger than the strawberries – wait till they have to stay up all night to finish an assignment, or get disappointing first-semester results, or strike a unit they find boring, or develop glandular fever, or fall in love and want to spend more time with ...

JANE: OK, OK, point made! And it's true that Rob Jackson pulled out of the course before the end of his first semester and hasn't been back. He was the one who told me he was more serious about study than he was about anything else, even his ex-girlfriends. And he was so determined that I was sure ...

BELLA: Ha! So all you can say is that these voices were strong at the time and in the context of semi-formal interviews. They're just part of the chorus ...

Student interviewees speak

Orientation helped – the main thing was meeting some lecturers, seeing them in the face. You know when you come to your first class, “Yep that’s ... I’m in the right spot.” (Michael Foster)

My husband works fly-in-fly-out on the mines. When he’s away for a week, I have time for study, but in the weeks he’s home, he wants me around more. I struggle to keep up with the assignments. (Janice Rogers)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

JANE: Yeah, as significant as any other voices!

The unknown world of tertiary studies is stranger for some than for others; many experience an “erosion of certainty and comfort” in this world. Many of the first-year students at Curtin lack the language to understand and explain their discomfort, as Becker suggests. Some focus on physical disorientations, such as getting lost around campus or not recognising their lecturers; some bemoan their own inabilities, for example, to manage their time or to develop independent study habits; while others criticise their previous education for not preparing them better for university requirements. Ethnographer John Van Maanen highlights the complexity of life for young people discovering new worlds at a time of transition in their own lives:

[I]ndividuals undergoing any transition are in a more or less anxiety-producing situation.... Matters concerning friendship, time, purpose, preparation, demeanor, competence and the person’s future are suddenly made problematic. (Van Maanen 1982, 86)

Notes of excitement

Despite the common feelings of disorientation, notes of excitement sound through my research interviews and my day-to-day observations. The students who volunteered to

Student interviewees speak

I've been out in the workforce and living by myself for a while now, and I know what I need to do. I don't want to live a mediocre life – that's why I am studying. The hours at uni are quite easy to cope with, quite manageable, so that's a big difference from a 9 to 5 job, or I used to do 9 to 8 at night sometimes, so it's just a big difference, a lot more free time. So instead of working nine to ten hours in a day, you can do two to three hours at uni and then go home and do your six hours study. ... It feels like a very significant year ... It's a big change of lifestyle. But it's a choice, it's not something I have to do. I feel good about the fact that I have chosen it myself. (Dave Robertson)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

be interviewed for my research are likely to be among the most positive, engaged students in their group, and it is no surprise that notes of excitement pealed more commonly through my interviews than I hear in my everyday work as a Communications Coordinator.

I hear several voices from these students. First is the voice of self-determination: “I want to do it. No one else wants me to do it. And by jove I'm going to do it.” Added to this is the voice of pride: pride in having matriculated, and pride in being determined to make an effort. Then there is the excitement and exhilaration at new experiences and changing lifestyles. In terms of Becker's comment quoted above, for these students at the moment of our interviews their excitement in experiencing “one of the most profoundly transforming experiences a person can have”, overrode their “erosion of certainty and comfort at another level of [their] being”.

LIMINALITY

Few students have the language to recognise their disorientation as an almost inevitable human response to being in a new world, exacerbated for most of them

Student interviewees speak

The campus feels like an airport – I was in Singapore airport and it feels like that. Like it's before a journey and everyone is preparing. The whole time studying here is like a preparation, like for the next part of life. (Sara-Jane Clifton)

I think that at uni there's a sense of "Once we get out of here, we're in the workforce." Here you still get to be casual, you still get to be a student. Like, you come in free dress and what not. But you know that at the end of this four years you're going to come out with a degree, and you're then going to have to start working, start thinking about independence, full independence like buying a house and all those things. But here you can still ... it's acceptable if you're still living with your parents, and all that. It's that impending thought that soon you are going to be fully fledged, working full-time. This is like a little transition period towards adulthood, I guess. I'm quite happy to avoid adulthood and responsibilities for a while. (Jordan Smith)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

because they are in transition from youth to adulthood, in a liminal state of "betwixt and between" (Turner 1967), having left their old world but not yet belonging to their new one (Van Gennep 1960). Interviewee student Sara-Jane Clifton described her feeling of being in transition in an evocative image of the campus as an airport departure lounge.

As Sara-Jane Clifton, Turner and Van Gennep suggest here, the entire undergraduate period can be seen as a liminal time, when students' learning is a preparation for the next phase of their lives: professional work, or postgraduate studies and academic life. Nevertheless, the first year – and particularly the first semester – is the most distilled experience of this liminality, when students confront a new world whose culture and

Teacher interviewees speak

Transition periods can be times of special creativity: our students can step outside their normal lives and be inspired and mentored by senior people in their new world. As teachers we can guide them. (Angela Black)

With first years I try to break down that barrier between me-lecturer and you-student by being approachable. To approach them as a person, who can give them knowledge and skills, and who understands that not everything you do in class is exciting, or relevant even sometimes. But still, if they look down below what they're doing, there's a skill involved or a bit of knowledge that might be useful, hiding behind what they do. I've just got to get them engaged and to think. (Fred Plunt)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

language are unfamiliar to them.

Sacred periods

Ethnographer Arnold Van Gennep (1960, 18), in his seminal work on liminality, sees the liminal state as sacred, with the traveller “find[ing] himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds”. Anthropologist Victor Turner (1967, 96) describes this as being outside of normal social categorisations: “[Liminal personae] are at once no longer classified and not yet classified.” Student interviewee Jordan Smith was excited by the prospect of postponing the responsibilities of adulthood for a few years. He welcomed the liminal period in particular because it allowed him to postpone the responsibilities he foresaw in his adult life: to dress formally, to work full time and to take on debts.

In traditional studies of liminal periods (e.g., Turner 1967; Van Gennep 1960), emphasis is placed on the role of the guide, sometimes in a religious role and at other times presented as an experienced mentor who will guide the transitioner through the

Student interviewees speak

Teachers have to care about what they're teaching, but I don't know if I would say passion is important for me because I don't need a jokey lecturer to get the point across. It comes back to how you learn. As long as the information they're presenting is good and they know what they're talking about ... We have one lecturer who talks in a monotone the whole time and I have no problem in getting what he's said – I just take notes. They can say things flat, as long as the information is good. (Cadel Brown)

The younger lecturers are more approachable and easier to talk to. They can add in little sly comments and just relieve the pressure a bit. They can add a little joke and the whole lecture hall is just laughing – it's just good to get that sense of tension out of the conversation. (My Tien Dang)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

liminal period. Some teachers, particularly older and more experienced ones, see their teaching role in this light, emphasising the connected learning that students can experience with a senior mentor. A few students echoed this vision of the teacher. Sharon, whose story began the Prelude, for example, was inspired by the lectures of a senior academic, and several interviewees commented that their teachers' passion for learning had motivated them (see the Fourth Movement). However, most students valued those teachers who were most ordinary: they sought out those who were friendly and inclusive rather than inspirational. It is significant that the few student interviewees who valued inspiration were of mature age; the new school leavers all sought people who were easy to talk to, funny or inclusive.

The first year of undergraduate studies is a particularly distilled liminal state: students are passing from a childhood controlled by parents physically, financially, mentally and emotionally to an adulthood in which they will eventually be independent. In many

A student interviewee speaks

I feel the lecturers are quite detached. They rock up, do the lecture and leave, and that would be the end of your involvement with the lecturer. If you have someone who you only see for the lecture and then that's it, you sort of feel left out in the cold a little bit. I think the amount of warmth we'll need will decrease as we grow as students. So as ... the deeper we get into the course the less nurturing we'll need. And obviously this will be different for different people, as people are at different maturities. ... I think there needs to be a happy medium between holding your hand and complete "no support". The lecturers aren't detached from their subjects, but they're detached from the students – they're just numbers. There's not much involvement in the lectures. It's more, "This is the information you need, go and learn it!" You don't get an opportunity to challenge what you're being presented, and no one asks any questions. It's just dull. (Ben Wright)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

Western countries, undergraduate students move away from their homes to live in on-campus accommodation, the secular equivalent of a convent or monastery. In this "magico-religious" period, novices are supported physically and mentally until they are ready to move to the next stage of their lives: either into the religious order itself (the university) or into the adult professional world. In Perth, however, there has been no tradition of students choosing to move away from home to live in university accommodation; most undergraduates whose homes are in Perth remain living with their parents or in private accommodation. The liminal state is thus diluted by students moving backwards and forwards between their previous lives and their lives as students. The increasing diversity of students in tertiary institutions further dilutes this liminal state, with large numbers of mature-aged students, who have already passed into adulthood – many of whom are parents of young children – and part-time

Student interviewees speak

I like tutors who engage with us as students. My best tutor this semester is a down-to-earth guy. A lot of teachers have their ... I don't know ... they've got sort of a David Bowie thing where they'll have their in-class persona and they'll be a completely different person out of class. And it's easy to pick up on that, that they just ... It's probably not that they don't care, it's just that this is their working environment and it's just a bit stale for them. But my best tutor is more straight up and down – how he is in class is how he is as a person. (Larry David)

I think the postgrad students are quite good tutors because they're pretty at ease to talk to, because they're usually only a few years older than us. I think they understand where we're coming from in our questions maybe. If we don't get a certain thing, they can relate to that because maybe they had the same questions. Their manner is more casual. I mean, as much as the lecturers try to make the mood seem casual, it's always going to be more natural with the postgrad students. (Jordan Smith)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

students, who stay on campus for only the few hours of their classes each week, mingling with the teenage novices. This dilution of the sacred liminal period common for young undergraduates in the past is yet another aspect of the loss of a university community life bemoaned by many commentators (e.g., McInnis, James, and McNaught 1995).

Rites of passage and rituals

Van Gennep claims that transitions are disruptive, not just on the individuals in transition but on those around them and the community in general, and he advocates ceremonies or “rites of passage” to smooth the disruptions: “Such changes of condition do not occur without disturbing the life of society and the individual, and

The interviewees converse
(dialogue constructed from interviews)

I came from a country town and I find the roads in Perth really scary. It's hard just getting to campus.

Perth's always been my home, and even the campus is familiar to me – my father is a lecturer here, and some of my lecturers come regularly to my place for dinner. They're more like friends than teachers.

It's OK for you – I was no good at school, and I've already failed one course.

I'm a bit lost too – I'm older than you others and I'm worried my study habits won't be effective. It's difficult to make friends with the young ones.

I'm lucky because my friends from church are already studying here. They've been supporting me.

But I'm working lots of hours to support myself, so I don't have time to make friends outside class. *(continued on top of next page)*



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

it is the function of rites of passage to reduce their harmful effects" (Van Gennep 1960, 13). I concur with Turner (1967, 95), who prefers the term "ritual" to "ceremony" for non-religious transitions, and concludes "[r]itual is transformative; ceremony confirmatory." In Australia, formal school speech nights and school balls, once limited to private schools, have become common in all schools in the past decades, as socially sanctioned rituals to usher students out of their old worlds; and allow the teachers, administrators and parents to recognise and accept the students' transition. "Schoolies Weeks", when students descend on holiday resorts for days of drinking and partying after their matriculation examinations, are their own version of the rite of passage. The extremes of antisocial behaviour exhibited on some of these occasions may not seem to watching adults to "reduce the harmful effects" of the transition, but they are the

The interviewees converse

(cont. from previous page)

I chose to come to Curtin to be away from my friends. They all went to UWA, and I came here so that I wouldn't be in the same old world – I want to be out of my comfort zone.

Just being here is out of my comfort zone. No one in my family has studied at university, and they were all surprised when I said I wanted to come here.

Me too. And I'm worried about my family – my parents don't speak English and I'm their translator back home. I hope my little sister can cope without me.

That would be tough. Most of my family have university degrees – they know what it's like.

Friends and family might help, but in the end it all comes down to us. I always worked hard and succeeded at school so I'm relaxed about being here and doing well in my studies.



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

students' own rituals to distance themselves from the world in which parents and schools could control their behaviour.

Fewer official large-scale rituals mark the students' entry into the world of the university, and those that exist do not involve the parents or wider community. For example, on Orientation Day, in the week before semester starts, students are welcomed by senior administrators and addressed by their future teachers. Online enrolment has meant that fewer students now visit campus before Orientation Day. An increasing number also do not attend Orientation Day, and their first day on campus is the day of their first lecture, which generally begins without any form of

A student interviewee speaks

I don't have any family background in going to university. I looked forward to studying and felt I was in a good position to get into it. But I was overwhelmed with the pace in the first few weeks – it was very full on, very full on. We were told a lot in the orientations that I did attend about this office and that office and Counselling and things like that. But then I felt, I guess, on a day-to-day basis once you were there ... It felt at Orientation that there was an amazing amount of help for you, but then I guess once you were there and studying ... it was like, well OK, at what point do I go, "I need help now"? How long do I leave it before I would do that? So yeah, I guess on a day-to-day basis there wasn't constant help around you or anything like that. And I did just have to ... It wasn't a big deal, how to organise myself, but at first I was getting all confused. It was another age thing because I've obviously used computers in jobs and things like that extensively, but I haven't used all the interactive stuff ... My stress levels were over the top, just not knowing my way around. (Chantal Borel)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

ritual. For parents and the wider community, the next opportunity to participate in the students' passage into another stage of life is at their graduation after three or four years of study. It might be argued, therefore, that the entire undergraduate years are a period of liminality, with the ritual of graduation ushering the students' passage into the professional world. Within this, the first semester is a particularly distilled liminal period, while students await their first period of examinations, final marks and official statements of results.

During the interviews, I asked students whether they had received particular gifts to celebrate their matriculation (Noble and Walker 1997; Silver 1996), remembering back to my own undergraduate days when students were often given briefcases, study

Student interviewees speak

No, most of our lecturers don't know our names this year. Maybe they're waiting to see if we survive first year. Then they'll think it's worth putting some effort into us. It's like sink or swim – if we swim then they'll take us seriously next year. (James White)

In my other units the lecturers are good but it's more of a clinical approach – point to someone who's got their hand up but don't learn their names. I basically got to know quite a few people in my course through the Communications class. Our tutor had a good approach, a lot of groupwork, with an emphasis on group discussions. He made a point to know everyone's names himself and to address people by their names, which is good for me because I'm terrible with names [*laughs*]. (Larry David)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

desks and even second-hand cars to ritualise their passage out of childhood. (This was the 1970s, before the time of computers and laptops.) I was surprised to hear, however, that none of them had experienced this, and when I prompted them on possible gifts, all commented that they already had a laptop, a study desk and a car when they were in high school, and several of them had worked part-time jobs to buy such items for themselves. It seems that with the increasing consumerism over the past forty years, the greater diversity of students arriving at university, and the higher amount of money young people earn from part-time work, physical objects play a less ritualistic role in marking the transition into university.

Blinkered disorientation

International students are multiply disoriented, with language and cultural dislocations compounding their unfamiliarity. Curtin has a large proportion of international students, mainly from Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Those from mainland China,

Student interviewees speak

My nephew [the son of her younger sister, also a student at Curtin] is at daycare here. We don't have any other family in Perth, so I help out. My sister brings him in the morning and then goes home at 1 o'clock to study, clean the house and have a shower. I come in later, pick him up from daycare after classes and then take him home. (Marie Phillips)

I work on the wharves. You ring up each day at three o'clock to check if you're working the next day, and you can just press "accept" or not. Each week I book off Tuesday and Thursday in advance because I have uni, and if I can work the other days, I go. At the moment because it's a downturn I probably only work once a fortnight but it chops and changes. If it's busy you might work seven twelve-hour nightshifts in a row. The money's really good. (Sam Tucker)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

who have generally not developed as much familiarity with Western media as their fellow students, are often among the most dislocated.

Of course, the university provides support services for overseas students – the International Office, the mentor system, the Learning Centre, and so on – but bewildered, embarrassed students often fail to engage with this support. Some may not even see that it is available, despite being provided with many forms of written and spoken information about the services offered. My own experience helps me to recognise this blinkered confusion. Four years ago I was diagnosed with breast cancer. The specialist was clear and supportive, drew diagrams, provided me with booklets and websites, then handed me a piece of paper with a phone number on it. “When you get home today, you’ll probably remember only 10 per cent of what I’ve said because you’re in distress. Phone this number with any questions you have.” Some students are as frightened of their new world of tertiary studies as I was of the cancer world;

Journal, March 21

A young Chinese student arrives in class today (Thursday of Week 3) for the first time, very distressed and almost incoherent. He struggles to explain that he did not arrive in Perth until Week 2. (This year, Chinese New Year coincided with our first week of semester, and we're finding that many students have chosen to stay home to celebrate this with their families.) Then he came to campus every day of Week 2 without being able to find his classrooms and, disoriented and unsure who to ask for help, returned each night to his accommodation without attending one class. Now he is already two weeks behind the others, who have started to make connections, and his halting English will hamper him further. I worry about what I can do to help, but even walking him to the support services wouldn't guarantee he would go back. His department doesn't yet have mentors - something to discuss with the head of department ...



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

others are confident and excited. A large number of variables influences their response. It is neither possible nor valuable to quantify the degree of bewilderment one ought to feel in any new world.

Liminality as lack of order

Anthropologist Constance Perin focuses on the distress caused for those in the liminal state by lack of order, and contends that one's response to such disorder is visceral rather than cognitive, and thus impossible to reason oneself out of: "A major trope of liminal discourse is its opposition between 'order and disorder'. 'Order' is not a single entity in experience, I suggest, but a continuum embracing 'disorder'" (Perin 1988, 21).

Student interviewees speak

First semester I was very shy, like around the campus. You know what I mean? Very quiet, very meek, very aware of what other people were thinking of me, very concerned about what I wore to uni every day, how I looked. Very concerned everyone would be noting what I was doing, that kind of thing. Just wanted to fade away. You feel like a small fish in a big pond again ... I'd come from being a big fish ... (Rachel Fenwick)

I felt very insecure coming into the university, not knowing where to go, who to speak to, what I really needed to – I was coming empty-handed, with nothing to do... I felt like I was in isolation, noticing that most of the students had come pretty much straight from school, it was a bit ... I suppose a little bit intimidating. Because they felt comfortable around their peers and had lots of friends, and I felt a bit isolated. I sort of knew that I would eventually get the feeling of ... but it's important for me to try to grasp onto that, to find some security. I had a campus map and stuff, which helped, but I suppose it's the fear of the unknown really, coming into a new place. (Michael Foster)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

It might be argued that first-year students, particularly in their first semester, tend to live at the disordered end of the continuum just by virtue of their being in a new world, and can cope with few additional disruptions to their equilibrium. Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 160–61), in their philosophy of lines of flight and territoriality, emphasise this disruption, contending that one can't stay outside one's territory for too long at a time because it is deeply disturbing. Perin describes the impact of such disruption with two rich metaphors, losing one's anchor and slipping a spinal disc:

“When we are pulled “too far” away from the anchors of equilibrium, then there is that pain of helplessness and all that humans do when they experience it, including calling it chaos and disorder. (Perin 1988, 21)

A composite dialogue

Small meeting room on the ground floor of the Humanities building, furnished with one oval table surrounded by ten chairs. Coffee cups and plates of biscuits cover the table. In the centre of the table is a computer console and knot of cords and plugs, but none of the equipment is in use. One long wall is a window opening to a grassed area dotted with gum trees. Jane is discussing their first-semester experiences with four students: Greg, Monica, Liam and Sharon.

Greg: The young ones really don't get the best out of their time at uni – they haven't got any strong goals. Eight years in industry and all I want is to move up the chain ...

Monica: ... hey Greg, you sound ancient ...

Greg: ... no, only 24, but I feel like a different generation from the 18 year olds. They can't wait to get out of class and get to the Tav. Whenever I ask the tutor a question, I can hear them groaning behind me, and starting to pack up their bags. Why do they bother coming when they don't want to learn?
(cont. on top of next page)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

When spines of meaning slip a disc, our ability to act is impaired; in itself helplessness can make people distressed, fearful, and anxious. For fear is (or is born of) the inability to act and to predict the consequences of acting; anxiety is a conflict between possible ways of acting. (Perin 1988, 22)

The increasing diversity of students beginning university, who already lead complex lives, adds to the disorder. Large numbers of Curtin students are the first in their families to attend tertiary institutions; mature-aged parents combine studies with parenting; students on low incomes move between part-time and full-time studies, sometimes on campus, sometimes online, as they adopt and defer paid work according to their financial needs. The First Year Experience programs set up in many Western universities attempt to provide anchors for students in their periods of most intense

A composite dialogue
(cont. from top of previous page)

Liam: That's not fair, Greg – I know how they feel. Some of these lecturers are so boring ... not what I came for. There's so much exciting stuff out there, and important stuff too. For example, we should talk about ethics in science, like why we don't use the medical information gained by the Nazis in their experiments. It's very distasteful, but we should talk about it.

Sharon: Well, I don't know about ethics but I agree with Greg. What happened to respect? I'm only a few years older than these guys, but I know how to respect my lecturers. I'm here to learn from them.

Liam (muttering): Well, if they talked about something worth learning ...

Monica: I agree with Sharon there – I might only be 18 but I hate the way some students behave. And their dress ... we have two guys in our tute who turn up every week with board shorts and bare feet. It's disrespectful.

Sharon: If I was the tutor, I'd throw them out ...

(continued on top of next page)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

slippage. Teachers and student mentors contact and offer support to students identified as missing classes, failing to submit assignments, or struggling to cope in their classes; all students are invited to enrol in programs designed to orient them to the language of their new world. On the other hand, some senior academics avoid teaching first-year students, unwilling to work with them until they have demonstrated capacity to succeed in this world.

In addition, the university's drive to provide a fast-track education mitigates against support for first-year students. When students overload without needing to seek permission, combine full-time studies with full-time work, study a combination of

A composite dialogue
(cont. from top of previous page)

Greg: You can't do that, Sharon ... they can dress as they like. That's the beauty of uni. You wait till you get into industry and your boss can tell you what to wear, or what not to ... or worse, some of these offices where they're making you wear uniforms – ugghh!

Liam: And how stupid is it that people judge intelligence on your dress or your haircut. I like having long hair, and I want to be able to keep it like this.

Sharon: You wait till you get out into the workforce – there'll be places they won't let you work with hair half way down your back.

Liam: Well that's why I like being here – no one even looks at you twice.

Greg: But I bet you get hassled on the streets, looking like that ...

Liam: Yeah, sometimes – I don't go to nightclubs or wander round the streets of Northbridge after midnight – not my scene anyway, so I'm not missing much. I stay home and play on the computer, or watch DVDs with friends. But it's weird the people who do hassle you – not the ones you'd expect. And I know that there's lots judging me without saying it. (*Shrugs*) Who cares? It's not stopping me doing anything I want.



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

online and internal units in order to complete their degrees as quickly as possible, and are able to pass units by meeting outcomes without attending classes, teachers struggle to identify and communicate with those who are at risk in time to prevent them failing a significant number of units. Some students stop studying without withdrawing officially under the stress of their chaotic lives, and are difficult to contact. Even when they succeed in passing their units, their headlong rush through university prevents them from developing academic approaches and understandings valued by their teachers, such as critical reflective thinking and

A student interviewee speaks

The study doesn't bother me, it's the time commitment, because I have to balance it against the family, and that's where I struggle. And the children, they're old enough that they're a bit independent, you know, and they can go to school. But they're not babies, which means that they're not in sort of 9am to 6pm daycare, which I didn't want to do – they're in 9 to 3. And they're up in the northern suburbs and I'm down here and I'm not 9 to 3, so I need to ... You know the younger one is learning to read so I need to be there to hear his reading, do sight words, talk to his teachers. The older one is learning to do projects and being bullied at school, so he's just ... there's a whole lot of issues there that need my time. But then, you know, the course that we're doing is quite demanding and, as I said, I need to do well – I'm not going to start this and miss out. So I'm very conscious that I need to devote a lot of time ... So I'm juggling that, and I've got a husband who works away, and he's in and out ...

(cont. on top of next page)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

deep learning of their disciplinary concepts. I will explore the issues surrounding fast-track education in much more detail in the Sixth Movement. In this movement, I seek only to consider how it can exacerbate the feelings of disorientation for some students, impeding the efforts of Communications teachers to support their students.

Liminality as unclean

In many traditional cultures those in liminal states are regarded as unclean, hidden away or disguised in some way (Turner 1967). This can also be seen, though it is not as overtly visible, in contemporary Western societies. De Certeau's (1985) distinction between place and space, which I will discuss in the Fifth Movement, underlines the dangers of liminal spaces: place is *propre*, which means both "one's own" and "clean"

A student interviewee speaks

(Cont. from previous page)

I used to compare myself with a friend I met last year. We had similar timetables. And we had these lab reports that we had to do, and we both used to do really good, thorough jobs. I would spend easily eighteen or twenty hours working on my lab report to get it right. So on a Tuesday afternoon we would both go home. I would go home to a house full of children and everyone doing homework and having tea, get them bathed and put them to bed. So I would start at eight o'clock at night and I would work through to two o'clock in the morning – that's six hours. He would get home at three o'clock in the afternoon and he had a wife (*emphatically*) to do the dishes. His six hours finished at nine o'clock at night, my six hours finished at two in the morning. We were doing the same amount of work but my time was different.

... I don't know how to stop working so hard; I don't quite know which bits to leave out. It's not a skill I've developed (*pauses*) ... it's against everything I've been brought up to do, to work less hard. (Elizabeth Jones)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

in French; space is not. Thus, those in liminal states, outside of defined places, are both disordered and unclean.

BELLA: Aha! - they don't behave with *appropriate propriety*. No wonder older people are so perturbed by them! Searching for a safe, turbulence-free life, ha ha!

An interviewee speaks

I really love all that theory and stuff, but I think around Week 5 or 6 I just freaked out, because I started getting assignments due. Like, it's fine and I like learning about it but it's definitely difficult to apply to essays and stuff like that. So I kind of freaked out and didn't know what I was going to do, and I considered leaving because of the stress. Or maybe it was a form of ennui or something. I just couldn't get into it, didn't want to do it for some reason. I considered leaving before the deadline ... But I stayed on and just said "whatever happens, happens". It was just that I wouldn't be able to tell my dad that I'd left again – I couldn't do that. It was almost like too many people knew that I was going to uni now. It was just ... it was more of a temptation than anything else. *(cont. on top of next page)*



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

The Othering of those in liminal space

In Western Australia in the early twenty-first century, however, fewer young people than in previous decades are able to set up their own places due to a mining boom based on fly-in-fly-out workers, which has made rental properties both scarce and well beyond most budgets. Young people are forced to remain at home with their parents but live in liminal spaces, no longer in a child-parent relationship but unable to create their own places. Much of their social time they spend out of their homes, in appropriated spaces, which leads to their being highly visible in the media. While those who attend university might be seen as being at the responsible, orderly end of the teenage spectrum, older people are still likely to feel some ambivalence towards them, even fear of them. On the university campus, particularly in their first few weeks of study, they stand out starkly from the more mature fellow students.

BELLA: Stop there! You're lapsing into dualism – all this stuff about inside being clean and safe, while outside is dangerous. What about all the work by feminists who point out that

A student interviewee speaks
(Cont. from previous page)

It may be good that so many people knew, in that it pressured me to stay, but I like to keep a lot of things, you know, in a tight self, and I wish I didn't tell so many people ... because I might choose to leave now. I know you shouldn't let what other people think influence your decisions, but it kind of did, in a way ... But it was more because I wouldn't be able to tell my dad that I'd left. And I just felt like if I wanted to get anywhere, I wanted a degree. And because I like this course and I know I would just go back to it, if I deferred or whatever, I'd just go back next year. And it would just be like another year I could have had – I could have been in second year. I'd just tough it out. And it was a good idea. But coming to Week 14, the end of semester, I've got a lot of assignments due and I'm almost on the threshold of panicking again. I am almost freaking out, but I think I can pull myself through it ... (Michael Anderson)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

for women and children the home can be more dangerous than the street?⁴

JANE: Yes, you're right that dualism is unhelpful ...

BELLA: ... you're right there!

JANE: ...but I'm not claiming it's accurate, just that many people unconsciously hold this perception. And this impacts on the ways they respond to teenagers.

BELLA: Hmmm – well, I'm here to stop you falling into that trap ...

Judith Okely contends that British society views Gypsies as “the bizarre, the disorderly, or even the unclean” (1996, 98) and, in a powerful phrase, she claims that this allows them to reject Gypsies as “psychic refuse collectors”. This concept of sub-groups as targets for the fears of dominant groups in society could be equally applied to

Teacher interviewees speak

Students become moulded. You can see students from first to fifth year become more similar over the length of the course. The first-year students don't know what's hit them really. This can be a positive as long as we allow them to retain more diversity in their view of the world. That would be healthier than pushing them more towards that similarity. (Blossom Green)

First year is a time it's possible to really use well, because first years often don't have a very well-formed idea of what university is going to be, except they expect it's going to be different and more challenging. So therefore I think it's really important right at that point to actually capture them with more innovative teaching methods. (Marilyn McGee)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

teenagers in Western cultures, argues Perin (1988), particularly when they are seen to spend time together in large groups outside their homes. Such Othering lies at the heart of Bauman's (1991) writings on strangers, who exist outside the friends-enemies duality:

Against this cosy antagonism, this conflict-torn collusion of friends and enemies, the *stranger* rebels. The threat he carries is more horrifying than that which one can fear from the enemy. The stranger threatens the sociation itself -- the very possibility of sociation. He calls the bluff of the opposition between friends and enemies as the *compleat mappa mundi*, as the difference which consumes all differences and hence leaves nothing outside itself. As that opposition is the foundation on which rest all social life and all differences which patch it up and hold together, the stranger saps social life itself. And all this because the stranger is neither friend nor enemy; and because he may be both. And because we do not know, and have no way of knowing, which is the case. (Bauman 1991, 55)

A teacher interviewee speaks

To me it's a privilege to teach first-year students – I know a lot of our colleagues don't share that opinion, though. They arrive as babies, most of them, and by the end of the first semester they've moved into a different place. They make me think of that song from *To Sir With Love* – “How can you thank someone who has taken you from crayons to perfume?” I know it's corny, but ... and I'm not thinking about them thanking me, because we don't have that kind of impact, just seeing them three hours a week. But it's a really powerful image for what happens to our students in their first semester, crayons to perfume, and I guess I'm marvelling about that.

By second semester they've put away the crayons, and they're beginning to feel more settled. Maybe it's just the disorientation of arriving in a new place, but a lot of them feel like they grow up very quickly in that first semester. That's the ones who survive, of course – I wish we could connect more with the ones who pull out while they're still around ... (Sarah Jenkins)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

The liminal space, the space of strangers, is more dangerous than the friends-enemies relationship because its limits cannot be drawn: “[B]ecause [strangers] are nothing, they may be all.... They bring outside into the inside, and poison the comfort of order with suspicion of chaos” (Bauman 1991, 56). First-year students at Curtin begin their studies as strangers to those already in the institution. While Okely's “psychic refuse collectors” and Bauman's stranger who “poisons the comfort of order” may seem like extreme descriptions, there are echoes of such in the words of many of my colleagues, who paint first-year students as lacking discipline, unclean and certainly Other. Over coffees and in corridors, I hear their chorus building.

The staff members who agreed to be interviewed for my research, however, sang different notes: they spoke of the potential for learning among new groups of first

A teacher chorus

Can't believe these first years ...
They should know this stuff already
 be able to write
 be interested in this
 have learned how to draw
 calculate
 sit still and listen
 work together
 have opinions
 think critically
They don't do their readings
 turn up to class on time
 engage with ideas
They won't be here by next year

I don't let them out for a break
 they never come back
I don't ask questions in my lectures
 too many of them
They're out of control

(continued top of next page)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

years, and of their own approaches and strategies for supporting the students' learning.

BELLA: Ha! Another example of interviewees giving you what you want to hear. The teachers are doing it too – they know the rules of a formal interview. Painting themselves as committed teachers, interested in pedagogy – I bet some of them were the same people who speak in your teacher chorus ...

JANE: Yes, but ...

BELLA: I bet they see first years as out of control and lazy too – they just know how to talk the talk for your interviews.

JANE: That's not fair ...

BELLA: ... but true! AND they're trying to present a coherent view of the approaches to learning they've developed over years, and that are constantly changing.

A teacher chorus
(cont. from previous page)

We lose more students than other schools
but that's OK

we're more demanding
have higher standards
need the best students

If they can't cope, they need to move on
They need to learn from their mistakes
They need to take criticism
They need to learn from us
They need to stop talking in lectures
They need to stop playing on Facebook

... be more like we were as first years.



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

JANE: No! It's true that the same teachers speak both positively and critically, but both voices are real – they're committed and jaded, excited and cynical, all at once. It's the same messy chorus as all the others.

LANGUAGE AND CHAOS

First-year students' chaotic responses to written assignments can be attributed in part to the difficulties they experience in learning new academic languages. Writing researcher Peter Elbow (1998) sees chaos as the almost inevitable first stage of any writing process, but contends that this chaos can be constructive if we allow ourselves initially to write an unstructured, messy text that we can later shape to meet academic conventions. Sarah Haas (2009, 27) describes the oral and written versions of this process as "babbling and scribbling", which evokes the picture of all writers moving from childhood to adulthood in each piece they write. Anne Lamott's "shitty first drafts" (1994, 21) encapsulates a similar idea. Although all writers experience such chaos each time they start to write, the first-year students' bewilderment is much more intense than that of experienced writers, since they are required to master

Culture being recognised as an undisputable scientific theory is the intension of this essay. The acknowledgement of enlightenment and modernity sustaining the argument that culture has developed as a successful theory through the contention that it has replaced an existing theory and still representative of one at present, which enlightenment and modernity do retrospectively.... Research into the topic of disproving that scientific models are limited to physical and organic systems, is evident from the collective scholars who do offer the compromise that cultural theory is progressively changing, thus, its distinction from the majority of scientific theorems ... (Hannah Walter)



A student writes ... and rewrites

This essay states that culture is indisputably a scientific theory, and suggests that, through the enlightenment and modernity periods, culture has developed as a successful theory. It explains that the enlightenment has successfully replaced existing traditionalist theories and promoted the acceptance of modernity in our present culture.... It becomes evident from the research of various scholars discussed in this essay that a great deal of research has disproved the concept that scientific models are limited to physical and organic systems. These scholars acknowledge that cultural theory is different from the majority of scientific theorems because it is progressively changing ... (Hannah Walter) (Grellier and Goerke 2014, 161–62)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

a new language while floundering to shape their ideas and structures. Not only do they not yet understand the language of their disciplines, but their experience of this language is so limited that many of them cannot hear when their language use jars with the academic language they are encountering.

Curtin Cultural Studies student Hannah Walter was highly disturbed by what she saw as her overall lack of intelligence – she was receiving low marks for her written

Student interviewees speak

I like someone who's telling jokes, maybe, varying their tone, and talking about an intercontextual thing that might be relevant to the subject, making connections ... rather than just reading the dot points that might be there.

(Jordan Smith)

I think it will be easier in the second year because lecturers are going to know that we're pretty serious about ... We've done the first year, we're pretty serious. So maybe that's why after the first year everyone seems to be doing fine. There is a bit more cooperation. (Rob Jackson)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

assignments but felt helpless to remedy this situation. Her attempts to imitate academic language resulted in a chaotic and grammatically incorrect piece of writing. By taking time one-to-one with her tutor to discuss and focus directly on her language and ideas, she was able to clarify her thinking and adopt a language that was both appropriate for her and acceptable in an academic assignment.

Unfortunately, time pressures prevent most university teachers from allowing students to redraft their assignments, and from giving close one-to-one help to those who are floundering. They may agree that chaotic or “shitty” first drafts are inevitable – and, indeed, experience this regularly in their own writing – but they are constrained by time and workload pressures to require that first-year students submit assignments that are already polished. It is interesting that honours and postgraduate students, who have already mastered academic language, are not expected to meet the same exacting standards when writing theses: supervisors help them shape and redraft their writing many times before final submission. Elbow's suggestion that we encourage students to see their chaos as constructive and the inevitable first stage in the journey towards clarity and deep learning is likely to result in distress for many first-year students in the current university fast-track climate, particularly when their assignment

Student interviewees speak

I know lots of people who've been to university and everyone enjoys it. The freedom, comparatively to school, that's the major thing. I think, however, it's a little bit too easy for people who do need nurturing just to not come. And I fear that's why a lot of people don't do as well as they possibly could. And I think that the teachers, at the end of the semester, assess each student to see who needs more, but I think that if there were more structures in place earlier in the semester to pick out the students before they fail the unit, then perhaps more people would pass. But I guess in itself it's a lesson to the person who's failing that they should be mature enough ... or perhaps it's not the right course ... It's all a massive learning experience, just finding your lecture. (Ben Wright)

It's a turning point, like going from primary school to secondary school. A new stage in education. There's increased independence. You take charge of your learning yourself. You pay for it yourself (*laughs*). (Cadel Brown)



JANE SPEAKS AS ACADEMIC AND ETHNOGRAPHER

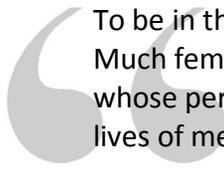
deadlines are approaching fast.

CONNECTED LEARNING

My contention throughout this performance is that connected knowing provides the strongest basis for deep, sustained learning. The more students can connect with their own emotional and physical selves as well as their intellect, and the more they can connect with others – academics, tutors and fellow students – the more their learning will be meaningful, nuanced and satisfying to them. (I will explore this further in the Fourth Movement.) Of course, students like Sharon and Neil are ever-present to remind me that I too need to be nuanced.

Third Movement, Theme 2: Margins, borders and boundaries

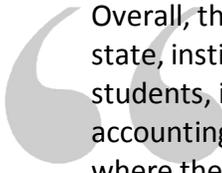
The students' voices have dwindled to silence in this theme. Since they lack the language to reflect on and critique their marginal position in the university (Becker 1991, 226), the stage is left to me to speak for them, alongside a range of academics working on issues of marginalisation.

 To be in the margin is to be part of the whole, but outside the main body. ... Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center, whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of men and women who live on the margin. (hooks 2000, xvi-xvii)

In this theme, when I consider first-year students' peripheral position in the university in the context of the writings on marginalisation of writers such as bell hooks and Stuart Hall, I do not equate the temporary marginalisation of first-year students with the permanent oppression suffered by people of colour, particularly women of colour. I am very aware of the searing criticism by bell hooks and others of white, middle-class feminists who dare to equate their oppression with that of their African-American sisters. For example, here is hooks' attack on the work of Betty Friedan: "Examined from a different perspective, it can also be seen as case study of narcissism, insensitivity, sentimentality, and self-indulgence" (hooks 2000, 3). Nor do I want to suggest that the marginalisation experienced by sessional tutors in general, and by those who teach academic literacy, including myself, is comparable to the all-encompassing, inexorable marginalisation of African-American and other Black peoples in Western societies. Rather, I refer to writers such as hooks and Hall because they provide valuable insights into the qualities of life in the margins, since their own marginalisation sits at the heart of their work.

While being confined to the margins creates temporary distress and unease for most first-year students and can hamper their learning, for a significant group it leads to more permanent distress. These are the students who leave university within their first year, or who struggle on for several years, failing units each semester and eventually being 'terminated', with an enormous financial debt, a dent to their self-confidence,

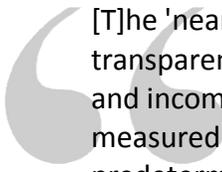
and a loss of their potential as learners and professionals. In Australian universities more students drop out within their first year than in the following years, as indicated in 2014 by Sally Kift, Deputy Vice Chancellor of James Cook University:



Overall, the rate of attrition [of first-year students], which varies from state to state, institution to institution and between domestic and international students, is high – almost double that for second year. This is so even after accounting for “positive attrition”, where students leave after discovering where their true interests lie. (Kift 2014)

The voices I hear in my work demonstrate that we cannot make firm judgments about who is likely to complete their studies, and that those who are confident and enthusiastic at one moment may be negative and hesitant at another. Nevertheless, these figures demonstrate that many more first-year students than those in later years drop out of university, and it would seem that disorientation and unease play some part in this drop-out rate, since these student voices chorus loudly through my interviews and daily experience as a teacher and coordinator. Whatever teachers can do to reduce this unease can only be helpful, both to students and to the university.

Zygmunt Bauman (1999) offers insights into students’ varying responses to the first semester in his description of wild “aliens” as those who existed, untamed, furthest away on pre-modern European peoples’ popular maps of the world, while family and neighbours occupied the closer, tamed places: “To find oneself in a 'far away' space is an unnerving experience; venturing 'far away' means being beyond one's ken, out of place and out of one's element, inviting trouble and fearing harm” (Bauman 1999, 174). This was a matter of degree of familiarity rather than physical distance:



[T]he 'near-far' opposition stands for the difference between what is transparent through and through and totally familiar, and that which is opaque and incomprehensible; this difference may correlate with the distance measured in miles or kilometres, but the correlation is not inevitable or predetermined. ... What is transparent for some can be opaque for some others. Where some make their way without the slightest difficulty, others may feel disoriented and lost. (Bauman 1999, 175)

Bauman goes on to discuss the connections between opacity and power. Working with the ideas of Michel Crozier and Michel Foucault, he contends that those in positions of power in modern organisations maintain this power by being transparent for themselves but opaque to the large number of people they control (Bauman 1999, 176). For students in their first semester, the institution is at its most opaque, and they are most likely, therefore, to feel not just disoriented but powerless.

Researchers have conducted much work on the issues of what helps students persist in their studies, and I do not intend to revisit their conclusions in any detail here. Many contend, for example, that those who make personal connections with friends and teachers will be most resilient (e.g., Case 2007; Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Tinto 1993) while others focus on the value of having strong personal goals for study (e.g., Kinnear et al. 2008). My work over the past years has demonstrated that while conclusions such as these are valuable, and students can benefit from the advice generated by such research, there will always be students who surprise us – the messiness is ever-present.

This research project began with the aim of improving my practice in the Communications units that work in the margins with first-year students, and this remains one of my central aims. I began the research considering Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger's (1991) term "legitimate peripheral participation", which describes how all humans learn to become members of new communities by sitting in the margins until they have learned how to be in those worlds. The anticipated end to the period of marginality is that the travellers will settle in their new world. One day they will feel they have arrived, have learned the language and are able to live alongside the other inhabitants without being identified as Other. Could this be helpful, I wondered in the early days of my research, in my work to shape the Communications units, particularly in their focus on the languages of the university and of individual disciplines? This would involve increasingly close collaboration with academics in the disciplines serviced by the unit, in order to create a coherent approach to supporting

students' language development. Since this project centred on reflexivity, I worked with a range of academics to promote reflective practice about their disciplinary language among their students (Grellier and Mackintosh 2012; Maresse, McKay and Grellier 2012).

The postmodern worlds of Hall, Deleuze and Guattari, hooks and many others, however, soon began to impinge on my work. "You cannot be sure of anything," these voices said to me; "human beings are human becomings, always in a state of transition, their identities never fixed." Hall, for example, in responding to a question about how displacement can become belonging, responds tentatively, seeing belonging as a becoming-state rather than a finite one:



I think this is a complicated question because I don't know that they ever turn completely into narratives of belonging, which is why I said earlier that fragmentation is also a question of pain. The question is whether the narratives of displacement are used as a way, either materially or symbolically, of trying to reverse the dispersal of histories, or whether they simply remain one of the elements in which some sense of belongingness can be constructed, but never completed. (Hall and Terry 1995, 61)

We might respond to this by arguing that Hall is talking as an Jamaican-British migrant in England, a victim of centuries of displacement; his pain at always being fragmented does not apply to those who belong to less oppressed groups. Hall himself would reject this, however, seeing the state of being incomplete as the human condition. In "Minimal Selves" (1996), for example, he welcomes dominant white middle-class people to the postmodern experience of living in the margins, which he has always inhabited as a Jamaican migrant, of being "*recently migrated*, if I can coin that phrase" (Hall 1996, 115; italics in the original). Postmodern theorists such as Hall remind me that, however much I strive to help students develop their sense of belonging in the academic world, they will always be human becomings, along with all other members of the university.

Alongside this growing sense of postmodern unsettlement, the work of

autoethnographers began to impinge on my thinking. How could I think about students being confined to the margins, they asked, without acknowledging my own position in their world?

Communications teaching in the margins

In the university I am a boundary crosser, an in-betweenner, positioned in a series of spaces whose boundaries I cross and recross in both directions: the space between the schools I teach in and my own home school in which I do no teaching; the space between the academic researchers and the learning support staff of the university; and – while I am involved in PhD studies – the space between teacher-researchers and postgraduate students. In addition, the postmodern autoethnography I am choosing to write consolidates that marginal position. Humanities researchers in general feel marginalised at Curtin, with creative and qualitative research attracting lower financial rewards and recognition than scientific and quantitative research. My multivoiced, messy narrative and my insistence on incorporating the voices of students and sessional tutors place me on the far edges of this marginalised position.

Writer Drusilla Modjeska, musing on memoir writing, suggests that Australian writers more easily occupy the “space between” grand biography and personal, intimate autobiography than writers from more established Western cultures, in which grand biographies had a stronger hold in past eras: “We don’t have that weight pressing on us; we don’t have to have arguments about who deserves what” (Modjeska 2002, 174). Her view places me less in the margins of Australian writing than I would be in other cultures, but I am still on the outside of the university structure because of its focus on traditional research. Even if it were possible for me to move more towards the centre of this structure, the price I would have to pay for this is likely to be very high (Fitzpatrick 2012; Moreira 2008; Moreira and Diversi 2010): “Can a janitor become a scholar without having to bury experiences under layers of theory and other technologies of justification?” (Moreira and Diversi 2010, 457).

BELLA (from the wings): You'd have to write a lot more traditionally than you are doing right now, Jane. Can't see you being willing to do that ...

JANE: No, I can't, not now I've found out how much more satisfying and authentic it feels to write these messy, multivoiced constructions. But a lot of highly respected – and highly published – authors write in this space – Lather, Ellis, Bochner, Denzin. Surely if it works for them ...

BELLA: That's not going to work at Curtin – even if you could be published alongside authors like these (and you've had a go at that before and fallen flat), that won't hold weight with the power bases of Curtin.

JANE: Yeah, you're right – I guess I'll have to stay in the margins ...

BELLA: Ruth Behar contends that even if you do cross the borders, that doesn't eradicate them for you – they will always hold a physical place in you.⁵

JANE: OK, so I'm an in-between, and always will be!

In addition, coordinating between twenty and thirty sessional tutors in most semesters, and experiencing the dedication of many of them to teaching, while viewing the various ways in which the university ignores and marginalises them, persuades me to give voice to these tutors alongside the students in my work.

Reflective Journal, September 26

Last week I walked into the tutors' room to find two very angry and distressed sessional tutors. Both of them have worked for the university for more than five years, and both pick up a range of units each semester – wherever the spaces exist. One of them has even filled in as a unit coordinator several times when people have been on leave, and then returned to her temporary position when she is no longer

needed. The tutors' room is large - a dozen desks with computers, assorted cupboards, and a printer - and these two have set up their own spaces within this open area, surrounding themselves with bookshelves in a search for privacy, pinning cards with their names above their chosen desks, and gathering books and electronic materials around them. Overnight and without warning the cupboards and shelves had all been removed, the computers unplugged but left strewn on desks, and their books and materials scattered throughout the room. No one was in sight; they could find no one to tell them what was happening. They scabbled to gather their papers, plugged in two computers and sat down to work, displaced and shaken. Yesterday the room was remodelled as a "hot-desk" area. Tutors will no longer be allowed to set up their own spaces but must clear all materials when they leave each day.

When I see the two tutors again today, they are deflated. As distressed and disorientated as they were by this dislocation, their anger now centres on their feelings of being invisible and discounted:

"We had no idea what was happening."

"Why didn't anyone bother to tell us?"

"Couldn't they even have put up a notice?"

“That’s how unimportant we are to them – as long as we keep teaching hundreds of students …”

So one of my aims in this work is to give sessional tutors their voices, to listen to and share their responses to teaching and to the impact of the university structures and values on their lives. In this way I seek to break down some of the forces that silence them and keep them within the margins of the institution.

I celebrate the commitment and engagement of these sessional tutors in the Communications units by exploring some of the student evaluations of the units. While the evaluations are never universally positive, as I shall show, the quality of teaching in the Communications units always tops the item scores. My interest in exploring the student comments lies in what they suggest about the qualities the students almost universally value in the Communications tutors: their friendliness, approachability and enthusiasm; their detailed feedback on assignments, which leads to improved writing in all units; and their motivation and support for students in all areas of their university life. There are many factors that lead to this strong approval (for example, the careful recruitment of staff, the emphasis on building a team ethos, the small group structure of all teaching, the focus on time for redrafting); however, the marginal position the tutors share with their students holds a dominant place. This is most likely to foster students’ connected learning, in which they see learning as encompassing much more than the intellectual realm, and connect with their tutors and each other in their learning. Sharon’s voice, with which I began the introduction, which calls for separate, intellectual knowing driven by senior academics, is in the minority among the students we teach.

Student evaluations on Communications units

My lecturer is absolutely lovely, knowledgeable, approachable and helpful. She made it clear that she was there to help us in any possible way.

My tutor was amazing at providing helpful feedback for assessments in a timely manner which made completing future assessments more

successful.

My teacher's comments on the assignments were very helpful in making improvements for the next assignments and future subjects being studied.

I wouldn't recommend the teachers in this unit to teach a dog!

My tutor gave quality feedback, was motivating in class and helped me with any issues I had in terms of assessments and confusion.

My tutor was passionate which made me more engaged in my studies.

Out of all my units, this one provided the best level of teaching and support.

Borders and boundaries



“A boundary is more like a membrane than a wall.” (Conquergood 2002, 145)

Rather than thinking of impermeable borders that confine first-year students, sessional tutors and academic literacy teachers in general to the margins of the university world, as I have done so far in this movement, it is productive to think in terms of boundaries. US philosopher Edward Casey (2007, 508) distinguishes between boundary and border: the boundary is “pliable and porous”, facilitating movement in both directions across it, and can be defined both spatially and temporally; the border is rigid, designed to keep people in and out, and purely spatial. Conquergood (1991, 184) agrees that boundaries are porous, especially in postmodern times: “Instead of dividing lines to be patrolled or transgressed, boundaries are now understood as criss-crossing sites inside the postmodern subject.” In this context, the theories of rhizomes of Deleuze and Guattari are illuminating. The rhizome is “always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end” (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 21), and its focus is on movement, betweenness and connections rather than position. A rhizomatic system is dynamic (Leander and Rowe 2006). All people on university campuses, from the most senior administrator to the newly arrived student, are part of this postmodern world in which people move back and forward moment by moment across porous boundaries,

sometimes being on the edges and sometimes moving into the centre, always on the move and always linked to other people through series of ever-changing connections. While first-year students spend more time than most in the boundaries of the institution, this position does not need to paralyse them. A wide range of commentators sing of the power and creativity that lives in the margins or boundaries. Casey (2007, 509) claims that “*boundaries are where places happen*” (emphasis in the original). Bakhtin (1986, 2) affirms that “the most intense and productive life of culture takes place on the boundaries”. De Certeau (1984, 30) concurs with both of them when he celebrates North African migrants in France living in the margins but “making do” with a finely honed creativity that allows them to prosper in oppressive situations. My early research with a colleague in the Department of Architecture (Grellier and Mackintosh 2012) suggests some of this richness: in considering the reflective writing of first-year and third-year Architecture students, we concluded that the first years write with more freedom, critical thought and energy, while the third years are more limited and more likely to avoid risks. This research is ongoing, but we currently understand this situation as a result of the first years’ peripheral position in the university. Their vulnerability, sensory overload and position as apprentices in the institution prime them to view their world creatively, and license them to experiment, while the third years have become blind to their world, and feel pressured by impending graduation to demonstrate their knowledge (Grellier and Mackintosh 2012).

Feminists understand the oppression and the seeds of power that grow within a marginalised position. French feminists Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément express the extremes, the “sometimes privileged madness fostered by marginalization, or the wilderness out of which silenced women must finally find ways to cry, shriek, scream, and dance in impassioned dances of desire” (Gilbert 1986, xi). While our first-year students are certainly less vocal than this, they have the potential for rich, engaged, connected and connecting learning – a potential the Communications tutors seek to fan in their teaching.

The marginal position of academic literacy staff has been examined by many researchers (e.g., Chanock 2007). While it creates difficulties for me and for the sessional tutors as Communications specialists, it also provides us with interesting opportunities to establish strong teaching-learning relationships with students. They become aware quickly that we are not members of their departments, and have no power over their marks in disciplinary units. They may therefore feel freer to take risks in exploring their perplexities with us than they do with the lecturers in their department (Grellier and Mackintosh 2012). In addition, as oral history researcher Alessandro Portelli (1997, 63) argues, our position on the margins of the university power structures may lead students to be more trusting and open with us. African-American feminist Patricia Collins (1986) highlights another positive aspect of the “outsider within” – the African-American female academic, who is doubly marginalised through her colour and gender. She suggests that her marginalisation and oppression can be tools for research and praxis in issues of selfhood, identity and creativity. Such issues have been central for me, and continue to be, throughout this performance.

For those sessional tutors who value close mentoring and support roles with students, the Communications units provide them with satisfying contexts for their teaching, as well as developing their sense of themselves and their creativity, by requiring them to work in large and supportive teams of teachers who apply their understandings of language to a range of contexts that are not their primary expertise. I am frequently overwhelmed by their dedication, energy and commitment, despite their marginalisation. In both their learning and their teaching, connected knowing lies at the heart of what they do.

Reflective Journal, May 27

Yesterday Jill asked my permission to phone one of her students – she wasn't sure the university policy about contacting students on their personal mobile phones. The

student Amy had not come to Jill's class, and had sent a message through another student that she was going to withdraw from her entire course. That student explained that Amy had received extremely negative feedback on a project in her disciplinary unit, had lost her confidence in the course and had decided not to complete the first semester. Jill wanted to urge Amy to at least complete the Communications unit, which is transportable into most other courses she might move into. "She's such a good student, and really hard-working-- she deserves to have at least one unit to take with her."

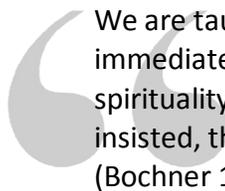
Today Jill pops into my office to celebrate. Amy had been overwhelmed that Jill had cared enough to phone her at home, and agreed to finish and submit the final Communications assignment so she could pass the unit. She emphasised how different Jill was from her other teachers - less concerned about imparting the discipline, and the only one who engaged with her students' emotions and talked about life outside university. Jill is thrilled that she could help Amy salvage something from a very distressing semester.

Janet Finch's (1984) interviews with clergy wives and playgroup mothers alerted her to both the value and the dangers of a shared marginal position: while she found that both groups of women confided more easily in her as a woman than they would in a male researcher, and that this led to emotional as well as intellectual bonds between them, she was concerned about the ethical issues that arose because of these connections; in particular the issue of her "undermining the interests of women in general by [her] use of the material given to [her] by [her] interviewees" (1984, 85). She was aware of the power differences among the participants and concerned not to exploit her relative powerfulness in comparison with the playgroup mothers. In

addition, as a feminist, she struggled to ensure that her representations of the women would not lead to generalisations being made by other commentators about women being satisfied to live their lives through their more powerful husbands, or about working-class playgroup mothers running educationally inferior playgroups to their middle-class counterparts. This latter concern is a warning not just to me, but to the five sessional tutors currently basing their research in their teaching of the Communications units, or considering doing this in future years.

Connected learning in the margins

My own research and classroom experience endorse the view being expressed by a growing number of academics (for example, Bochner 1997; Frenzt 2008; Garrison 2009; Tompkins 1996) of a destructive gap between the controlled, cerebral world of the universities and more spontaneous emotional, artistic and spiritual worlds that exist outside the university:



We are taught to master methods that exclude the capriciousness of immediate experience. When we do, we find ourselves in a world devoid of spirituality, emotion, and poetry – a scientific world in which, as Galileo insisted, there is no place for human feelings, motives, or consciousness. (Bochner 1997, 422)

Those who are not able to work in the scientific world of the university are confined to the margins; some of them, however, find these margins productive and life-enhancing: only teachers who learn to live in the margins are able to help their students develop tactics and approaches that may enable them to learn in fully connected ways (Frenzt 2008; Garrison 2009; Tompkins 1996), so that they can pass backwards and forwards across the porous boundaries between restrictive academic worlds and their own multi-layered worlds of “human feelings, motives, or consciousness”.

However limited the opportunities in the classroom setting, those teachers who are able to relate to students as more than learning machines help the students begin to

see each other as multiple, complex and ever-shifting. Michelle Fine's (1994) story of her niece Jackie's prosecution for shoplifting accentuates starkly the concept of the multiplicity of identities. Her niece, Latina by birth, was adopted into a middle-class Jewish family and in her late teens went to live with her boyfriend and their baby. When caught shoplifting, Jackie identified herself by her Latina name, ashamed to face her adoptive family, and in that identity she was intimidated and sexually abused by the store security guard. Her Jewish family later supported her to conduct and win a court case against the guard and the store. Concerned that in the courtroom Jackie would have to deny her Latina origins in order to adopt her Jewish middle-class identity, Fine ended the day feeling overwhelmed by her niece's ability to maintain multiple identities "with integrity, style, and passion":

With a smile and a tear, she resisted their, and she resisted our, Othering.... In her deposition she dismantled the very categories I so worried we had constructed as sedimented pillars around her, and she wandered among them, pivoting her identity, her self-representations, and, therefore, her audiences. She became neither the Other nor the Same. Not even zippered. Her mobile positioning of contradictions could too easily be written off to the inconsistencies of adolescence.... But she would better be viewed as an honest narrator of multiple poststructural selves speaking among themselves, in front of an audience searching relentlessly for pigeonholes. (1994, 71)

Here Jackie demonstrates the "neither-both" characteristics of the Trickster (Kamberelis 2003) and the "and ... and ... and" of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizomes.

Educational researcher Jim Garrison (2009) suggests that the Trickster teacher persona can help students find life and creativity within rigid, stultifying educational structures. Teachers who embody the Trickster refuse the easy pigeonholing of identities, find cracks within the tight structures of their institution, and hold these cracks open for students to slip through into more enhancing learning spaces. While the Trickster teacher persona itself is not reflective, claims Garrison, teachers who can integrate this persona with the critically reflective persona can combine the best of both to enhance their students' learning.

Third Movement, Theme 3: A Teaching Reflection

This theme is a monologue, where Jane reflects on the voices – of students, tutors, teachers, scholars and herself – she has heard throughout this movement.

Who crosses the borders?

 We now ask: For whom is the border a friction-free zone of entitled access, a frontier of possibility? Who travels confidently across borders, and who gets questioned, detained, interrogated, and strip-searched at the border? (Conquergood 2002, 145)

I ponder on what makes the difference with first years – what can we do to help beginning students “travel confidently” across the borders into the world of the university? Is it possible to describe those for whom transition to university is a “friction-free zone of entitled access”? With the provisos that students’ responses change from moment to moment, and that most of them speak to me in the voices they think I wish to hear, I make some tentative reflections.

First, Conquergood’s use of the word “entitled” seems apt. Those who are middle-class, from families with extensive university experience – that is, with academic and cultural capital – are most likely to have felt entitled to education since pre-primary school. Among this group, those for whom the Curtin campus itself is familiar are most likely to slip onto the campus without friction. Several interviewees had parents working on campus, and others had siblings or close friends already studying there, and they were among the most relaxed and settled of my interviewees. Even family and friends’ stories of university life in general can serve to create mind-pictures for some students about what their life may be like. In addition, those who are able to remain living at home during their first semester of studies are likely to feel more relaxed, as only one aspect of their environment is unsettled.

The corollary is that those who lack cultural capital and familiarity with the environment – those for whom the campus, Perth itself, Western countries in general, or the university experience is foreign – are most likely to feel harassed at the border.

They are the ones whose appearance, behaviour and demeanour jar against the expectations of their largely middle-class teachers. More and more students each year in my classes are the first in their families to undertake tertiary studies. Some of their families actively discourage their studies, while others are unfamiliar with the languages of the university, and thus helpless to support them. I vividly remember Alan Grove arriving in my class – a highly intelligent student from a low socio-economic, single parent, remote rural home, the first in his family to attend university. I often struggled myself with what was for me his unpredictable and erratic responses to classroom situations but at the same time found his questioning exhilarating. Living alone off campus, he looked unkempt; he antagonised teachers by questioning them in a tone they considered disrespectful; and when he met obstacles to his learning, he did not have the range of middle-class negotiation strategies of many of his peers. His appearance and behaviour frequently led to his being detained and interrogated at borders. In addition, when he found himself disappointed with his studies, he had no previous life experience that encouraged him to persist: all his models suggested to him that he could lead his life without a university degree. In contrast, I think of the significant number of middle-class students each year who claim in the first Communications class that they are at university merely because they can think of no alternative at that time.

The issue of confidence is a second crucial one in the smooth transition. Those who were highly successful at school are more likely to talk about their excitement in new challenges. The expectation of success encourages a sense of entitlement; while fear of failure provokes fear of being questioned, harassed and emotionally “strip searched” in studies. Many mature-aged students initially express heightened distress, fearing that their school experiences are out of date, that they will not be able to master the new technologies, and that their brains will be slower to develop new understandings. Of course, their life experience enriches their studies, but their initial responses are often of extreme dislocation and anxiety.

While I have always believed confidence is central for most students’ resilience, I

cannot ignore the role of personality in the issue of persistence. I realise now that it's dangerous to assume a correlation between overt confidence and persistence. I look back at an early page of my reflective journal where I reflect on my encounter with one of the least confident students I have met:

Reflective Journal, April 23

Gavin is sitting in my office looking awkward. Just being in his presence makes me nervous – he's very ill at ease! I wonder how he is coping if he feels so uneasy. As we talk I realise he's not come to discuss this issue, but a simple practical issue with the technology for the unit; I've answered his question in two minutes and he's ready to leave. "How are you settling in?" I ask as he stands up. He shrugs. "Are you finding your way round? Are you starting to make friends?" He shrugs again. Then quietly he starts to speak. "I'm not getting lost much – the phone app helps." I'd heard that Curtin has introduced an app that helps students find their way round campus – I'm glad it's useful to some students. "I haven't made any friends – I'm Ok on my own." When he sees me looking quizzical he rushes on. "It's easier for me – I don't expect to make friends. Sean from my school was here for four weeks. He had lots of friends at school – everything was easy for him. Then when he came here he couldn't stand not having friends, so he left."

For Gavin, university studies did not involve a friction-free, confident arrival in a new place; but he was so accustomed to being "questioned, detained, interrogated, and strip-searched at the border" that he was able to survive in the new world despite his awkwardness, while his more outwardly confident friend found too much friction at the university border and turned away.

Implications for the Communications units

Throughout this work, I see learning as complex and multifaceted. For first-year students, a central part of their learning involves their orientation – orientation to the physical campus (or, in the case of online students, to the electronic portal through which they do their learning), and to what anthropologist Clifford Geertz calls “ways of being in the world” (1999, 14). The Communications units at Curtin address the orientation experience head on in their work with students, and the insights I gain from this research help me shape the units to be more responsive to the students’ learning. The gradual orientation experience is most important for those who are connected learners, who seek an engagement that goes beyond the intellectual, and who will come to connect to other individuals, campus life and disciplinary ways of being. A growing critical reflexivity enables them to understand their contexts more fully, and little by little to participate in the learning communities they are joining. I think of Casey’s comments on the oppression of minorities in Western culture:

“... [allow philosophers] to look for, identify, and promote the boundaries” in the sense of open-ended, porous structures. Boundaries are not to be found in a given historical moment (or even, mystically, *ever* in the West since Aristotle), I would say that we must endeavor to find ways to *create* them. (Casey 2014, 724, emphasis in the original)

What can we do in Communications units to make the structures more porous, in Casey’s terms – to find ways to create paths and gaps that will help students find their ways across boundaries? Part of this is information – if the oppressed find systems opaque, how can we help students deal with this opacity? This is especially difficult for Communications teachers because as in-betweeners ourselves we too find many of the university and departmental structures opaque. I suspect this is not limited to Communications teachers, however – many of my disciplinary colleagues who have not yet had experience in executive positions or as members of university committees and systems report feeling alienated from information and structures of power.

At times of chaos, the Communications units try to provide anchors against slippage for the students – to allow them to start seeing order within the chaos and to predict the consequences of their actions. Much of this relates directly to communication – they need to learn the processes of the university (how and when to apply for extensions, how to contact lecturers, and so on) and the ways in which they are expected to address their teachers. For overseas students, this usually involves their adopting a less formal register than is their custom. For example, I regularly receive emails from Middle Eastern students beginning “Dear Honoured Madam”. Local students, on the other hand, tend to adopt too informal a register, with many students initially addressing their tutors with “Hey” and no name, failing to sign off the emails, and adopting much text language in both vocabulary and spelling. Within the Communications units we can address such issues head on.

The following extracts from student evaluations on the units suggest some of the ways in which Communications tutors are able to provide anchors and supports to their students: they create strong classroom environments in which students support each other in emotional as well as intellectual ways; and they build students’ confidence in academic writing and speaking by focusing on these areas and providing detailed ongoing feedback that students see as relevant to all their units. Of course, there are always some students who find the units unhelpful and a waste of time, particularly because of their focus on processes rather than content.

Student evaluations on Communications units

The most helpful aspect of this unit was the students being forced to interact in order to understand what was expected of them throughout this unit. This created a strong class dynamic and peer support.

This subject while intense at times, was completely relevant and has provided me with the ability and confidence to continue on with my studies.

The class discussions are wonderful and teach us that we are both a diverse yet similar group.

Spending time on how to properly write essays is going to be helpful across all my units at university.

I found this class to be a waste of my precious time, I overloaded my units this semester and did not have time to be covering non-existent content.

Small classes and individual feedback both helped me immensely in this unit.

I found the discussions in the tutorials very helpful as they were informative and welcoming. I was able to contribute openly to them and engage with other students and the tutor.

The focus in the Communications units on redrafting with extensive teacher feedback plays a major role in helping students learn to write academically. This places strong pressure on sessional tutors, since it is both onerous and time-consuming. It also raises several issues for me as a coordinator: how do I ensure that the tutors employed in the unit understand and appreciate the value of this process? How can I compensate them for the extra time they take in giving feedback to students, perhaps by providing additional teaching materials and other supports to make their preparation and teaching easier? My first goal is to resist regular pressure coming from the university executive on the one hand and the students on the other to reduce both students' workloads and tutors' marking loads. To this end I seek to create radical spaces in plain view – not an easy task in this current era of accountability. (I will explore this further in the Sixth Movement.)

My final area for critical reflection is the position of educational philosopher John Dewey, who was strongly critical of the view of education as a preparatory stage, a view that places students on a waiting list for adult life. Instead, he saw education as a “continuous process of growth” (Dewey 1916, 63). He claimed that if the view of education as a transition were promoted, young people would lack drive and motivation, indulging in “shillyshallying and procrastination”, and that it was so destructive that it was “impossible to overestimate the loss” of learning that resulted from it (1916, 63-64). Can we Communications teachers find a productive middle space between recognising on one hand that first-year university students are in transition and need some support, allowance and patience, and maintaining on the other hand that their learning must continue unabated from secondary school through to university graduation? Can we create and teach units that are

both supportive and challenging, that focus on helping students develop their language processes in a new world, while coaxing them to think at ever deeper and more critical levels? And what roles might connected learning have in this middle space? By viewing learning as incorporating all parts of the human being – mind, body, emotions and spirit – and by advocating that learning happens best in a collaborative environment, can we promote supported but challenging learning for first-year students?

All is liminal

This is a performance without centre, where voices on the borders change, slip and meld but can still be heard more loudly than those in any possible centre. The students' liminality mirrors my own in the institution, as well as the liminal structure of this performance. While the multivoiced, heteroglossic nature of the performance is clearly liminal, so are the personal narrative elements:

“Two or three things I know for sure, and one of them is that personal narrative is liminal. A limen is a threshold, a border, a margin, a transitional space, a site of negotiation and struggle. (Langellier 2003, 456)

The negotiation and struggle that Langellier identifies in the limen are key to the interrelationships that I create throughout the performance. In the very moments when I feel I have understood a performer, that I can place her centre stage, then she slips away from my sight or shape-changes and I must re-position myself to work with her; in the very moments when I feel I have grasped an insight, or can hold on to something I have always known, then it turns on its head, somersaults into something else, and I must approach it from a new direction; in the very moments when the first-year students start to feel comfortable about their learning, then new challenges, disturbances and doubts plague them, and they must reassess their approaches and goals. Telling our stories helps us all embody our negotiations and struggles, connecting with ourselves and others within the narratives.

¹ This is, as closely as I can recall, an actual conversation I overheard and then wrote down when I arrived on campus. I did not know the students, but was able to learn of their situation from their conversation.

² For example, Wolff-Michael Roth (2008) describes learning science as learning a second language:

“Learning a second language means not merely understanding the translation between one code and another but in fact a different way of seeing and describing the world—living in a different world” (Roth 2008, 902).

³ While all interviews are performances, this word, which seemed old-fashioned and inappropriate for this particular student, might suggest that the student was absorbed in the performative nature of the experience.

⁴ For example, Professor of Social Psychology at the City University of New York Michelle Fine (1994, 72) contends that this dichotomy arises from the helplessness white working-class, heterosexual people feel under the oppression of capitalism, which they externalise and project onto people of other races and sexualities.

⁵ Behar 2003, 320.

Fourth Movement: Learning

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 1: A STUDENT STRUGGLES

“Oh yes, I love semi-colons!”

I look up, stunned to hear this from David, of all students. I’ve been trying to coax him for weeks to give me a first draft of his essay – anything, so that I can give him some guidance before the final version is due at the end of semester. I returned everyone else’s draft two weeks ago, and still David is reluctant to show me anything.

The students’ first drafts have dispirited me, even though I remind myself that every year they look like this, and every year the improvement between first drafts and final versions astonishes me. This year their sentence structure seems more out of control than ever – more run-ons, more sentence fragments. All the tutors are commenting on it with their students, and, in what seems like a desperate attempt to shore ourselves up, are reminding each other of what we all know: that all writers’ sentence structure crumbles when we are striving for new and complex ideas.¹ So in workshops I get students to think again about their arguments, trying to clarify them in their own minds and to each other. But I’ve also decided to conduct a mini-lesson on sentence structure, where I’ll try to give the students some basic grammatical concepts that might help them edit their own writing in future semesters, when they are no longer doing a Communications unit. I don’t usually do this with a whole class, but I assure myself that even the few students whose sentence structure was competent on the first draft can benefit from being able to manipulate sentences for effect.²

I don’t like teaching grammar to large groups of students. I’ve found it makes little difference to their overall writing, and they’re usually disengaged, however interactive I try to make it. I prefer to explain grammatical points in one-to-one re-drafting sessions, when we can focus on the particular mistakes each student has made. But this semester we’re running out of time, and so many of them

seem to need help that I push on with a general lesson. As I'm getting the students to build their own sentences, adding phrases and clauses, I write them on the whiteboard and we talk about how they might be punctuated. I mention the semi-colon and I urge them to have a go at using it, to look at the examples in the textbook, and see if they can pattern their sentences on them. I explain the term "patch-writing".³ which I have recently discovered, and which is revolutionising my teaching about academic writing. I talk about seams, in quilts and in language, and how in the early months of their learning to write in this new academic language, as they work ideas, structures and phrases together into whole essays or reports, they should expect the seams to bulge, to gape and to be highly visible. I tell them about my past experience of teaching the semi-colon, and some of them laugh when I describe how I always brace myself for a flood of semi-colons in the next few pieces the students write. I say again that this is fine; this is how we learn to write.

The workshop is over and the students straggle out, stopping to ask me a few brief questions, make plans with each other and call out goodbyes – it's the last class of the week, and they're thinking about the weekend. David is hanging back with a few others. When I turn to him, he moves behind another student, muttering that his request will take a while to answer. Soon everyone else has gone, and he slumps down opposite me at the front student's desk, pulls back the velcro on his bag and takes out some typed pages. One glance tells me this is his essay, a second glance shows that he's written about half of the two-thousand word requirement, but the third glance jolts me. Here is a sophisticated piece of writing, perfectly structured, and with semi-colons used judiciously throughout. I point open-mouthed at the first paragraph, and he realises that I'm pointing at one of the semi-colons. "Oh, yes, I love semi-colons!"

In the next five minutes I have one of those all-too-regular experiences – I completely change my impression of a student. After so many years, surely I

should realise how often this happens and stop being surprised, but it catches my breath every time. I have assumed that the reason David is hesitant to show me his writing – indeed to write anything at all, as he has admitted to me over the previous two weeks – is that he is a struggling writer, with a history of failure. I have been ready to help, and I believe that the students feel safe and supported to bring me their drafts, however patchy. But here is a highly skilled writer who hasn't been able to write anything. "What's been happening?" I ask. I wonder if he's been short of information, or unclear about his argument, but it's none of those. He mumbles it hesitantly, and with a lot of shrugs and headshakes: in a preparatory exercise marked very early in the semester, designed just to get students started with their research and worth only 10 per cent of the final mark in the unit, David misunderstood the instructions and received a mark of 40 per cent. On returning the assignment, I checked with him that he understood his mistake, and knew how to fix it for the next assignment, then thought no further about it. This mark to me was a minor issue – an indication of a small misunderstanding that would have no lasting consequence. But David's reaction tells me that it was much more significant to him. I check with him about his past experience of writing, and he tells me that he's always got distinctions in English subjects and enjoys writing, both at school and in his leisure time. I express surprise that this small glitch in his results could have had such a major effect on his confidence but he has no answer – just shrugs and looks down at the papers, then shuffles them together and puts them in his bag, muttering that he will send me his draft electronically when he gets home that night.

I find this vignette difficult to finish, because it has no miracle ending. David did not suddenly find his voice, and gain a high distinction in his essay, going on to top his year – the kind of dramatic success that happens only in American college football films. I did not have a life-changing realisation, promising myself that I would never again categorise a student, or that I would always ensure that low marks do not destroy

students' confidence. David did submit the final version of his essay on time (though he never managed to send me the draft), and it was well written – coherent, clearly expressed, and studded with well-placed semi-colons. It was not the superb piece it could have been had he submitted a first draft for comment along with all the other students, but it was enough for him to pass the unit well. He remained unwilling, or unable, to articulate further what had happened during the semester to shatter his confidence. And, sadly, he did not return to studies the following semester, and did not reply to several emails I sent concerned for his welfare. When I looked at his final results in his other units that semester, he had completed none of them, and I realised that his story was much bigger than his setback in one early communications assignment.

My suggestions that confidence plays a major part in students' success – and the corollary that lack of success leads to loss of confidence and alienation – are supported by much research.⁴ Confidence is especially relevant in process-based subjects, like languages and design, where students cannot measure their mastery by the amount of information they have learned. The link between confidence and success is highly complex, shifting, tenuous and shaped by individual personality, experience, and Sojcher's "element of chance introduced by circumstance" (De Certeau 1984, vi). Most students who survive their first semester do this by holding their confidence in limbo until they have received their first set of unit results. High attrition rates within the first year attest to the fact that some students cannot do this, and rapidly become alienated. Even many of those who have been highly successful at school lack confidence that they will be able to perform well in their university studies. David's confidence based on his success in high-school English evaporated in the face of the first few weeks of a Communications unit in which he could have been a top student.

BELLA: Huh, don't know about confidence! Maybe he just didn't find the topic interesting. Maybe other things were happening in his life. Maybe he knew he could write the essay without a first draft. Who knows? It's easier to shift the blame to you for marking him

too low – better than grappling with his own role in it all ...

JANE: No, it didn't feel like he was doing that ... I didn't sense him blaming me. He spoke hesitantly – hesitant and halting, not accusing.

BELLA: Ah, so he wasn't able to hug his confidence to his chest like other first years do, while he was waiting for his overall results in the unit? Too bad for him!

JANE: It seems not! It's something I need to bear in mind for future students – how I help

1972, blames loss of confidence at university for her alienation from the institution and from tertiary learning at that time. She pinpoints an experience in her first days at the university as destroying this confidence:

Early on, as part of being welcomed, I met the Dean for a chat. He told me that just because I had two As and a B at A Level, it did not mean that I would be a successful student. I was crushed. ... Although I cannot attribute the rest of my experience at university to this one remark, it is certainly the case that I lost academic confidence at this point. I seemed to be moving in a mysterious space that was quite “other” to me. (Mann 2008, 7)

Since the students who volunteered to participate in my research are likely to be among the most engaged students of each semester, the voices of the alienated and unsuccessful remain almost silenced. Stories like Sarah Mann's, like David's, and like Alan's (see page 125), provide brief chances for their voices to join the chorus. But Mann's voice speaks in retrospect, from her position of power as Head of the Academic Development Unit of the University of Glasgow, so David's and Alan's hesitant, incomplete and mumbling voices must take the stage alone to speak for these students:

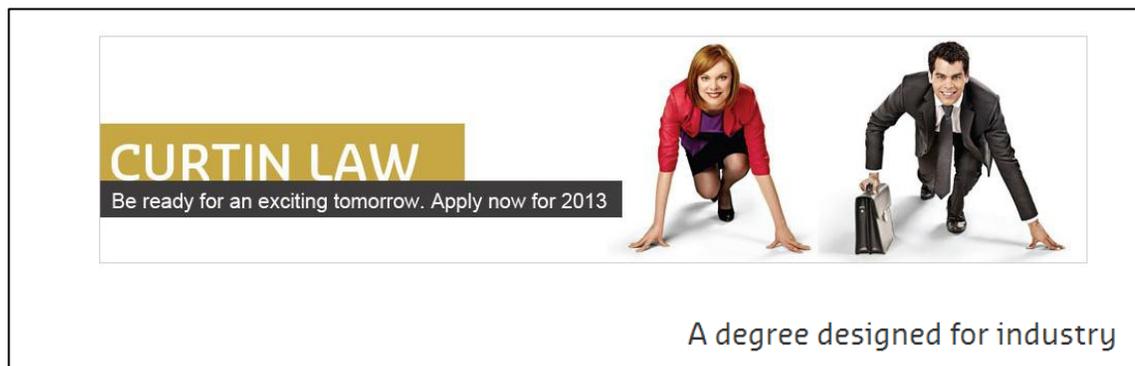
A student chorus

I don't know why
I just can't
I thought I'd like it here
I thought I'd learn things
Some things excited me at school
I thought this would be better than school

But it's boring
It's useless
I'm useless.
I started off excited ...
I AM interested in things ...
Just not this
I like semi-colons
I like science
I like writing
I like learning about the universe.
But I can't do this
I'm bored
I'm wasting my time
It's all a waste.
I'm disappointed
I'm hopeless
But I can't do this
I JUST CAN'T!

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 2: CONFIDENT STUDENTS

The following image appeared as a web banner on the Curtin homepage during late 2012 to promote Curtin's new Bachelor of Laws degree, and was reproduced in newspapers, on Perth bus shelters and in magazines in an advertising campaign throughout 2012.



The image in this banner is important for the metaphors it portrays and the stories it tells. Mary and Kenneth Gergen contend that “rhetorical tropes such as metaphor and narrative ... are significant to participants in centring the meaning of the organization”

(Gergen and Gergen 2007, 136). The two tropes of metaphor evident here are Curtin University as an institution preparing students for the 'real world', and the value for the student of a fast-tracked education. I will consider these metaphors throughout this thesis, culminating in an exploration in the Sixth Movement of how Curtin administration attempts to build such metaphors to create shared meanings in the institution.

The banner's narrative is of a very particular group of students, eager, confident and keen to meet their lecturers' gaze with a full face. They are well groomed, already successful, and ready to throw themselves into the race for a professional qualification. How different are David and Alan from the two students in the image! Indeed, these two students bear little resemblance in their clothing, grooming and bearing to any first years I teach. The text beneath the heading, "A degree designed for industry", emphasises possible study combinations with the resources industry, one of Curtin's major degree focuses; the image and the banner, juxtaposed with the students' appearance, play strongly on the metaphor of learning as preparing students for a confident and successful professional life. As with this new Law degree, Curtin's overall marketing represents learning as a preparation for the 'real world' and the workplace, reflecting its origins as an institute of technology, and its need to position itself as distinct from its older, more traditional rival, the University of Western Australia (UWA):

We are widely recognised for the practical and applied nature of our courses, which equip graduates with essential skills through exposure to industry and business, and our research, which focuses on solving real world problems. This combination enables our graduates to be effective in the workplace immediately upon graduation. (Curtin "Who We Are" webpage 2012)

We have close links with corporate business, industry, government and the community and our courses have a strong practical focus, with most involving vocational or work experience components. As a result, Curtin graduates are job-ready and prepared, with skills that enable them to make a genuine and positive influence in a continuously changing world. (Curtin "What We Do" webpage 2012)

The fact that the two students in the banner are mature aged and formally dressed suggests a target audience of those who are already working in industry or law, who are seeking a professional qualification to enhance their professional prospects. This focus on attracting mature-age students, particularly those already in the workforce, runs throughout Curtin marketing:

Are you ready to move ahead in your career, or take it in a totally new direction? Or perhaps you just like the challenge of learning. Whatever your goals, a Curtin University degree can help you achieve them. (Curtin “Mature-Aged Information Sessions” webpage video 2012)

While making the decision to begin university study is a big one, it's a decision that will bring life-long benefits. A degree will not only provide you with a competitive edge against fellow job applicants; it will equip you with the transferrable skills of teamwork, negotiation, communication and problem solving, which are a part of every Curtin course. (Curtin “Non school leavers” [i.e. mature aged students] webpage 2012)

These emphases on career, work benefits, applied and workplace learning, and generic skills represent learning as a vocational instrument, designed to meet the needs of both students (by giving them a “competitive edge” in the job market) and employers (by creating adaptable and highly skilled graduates).

BELLA: Ha! It's all about students and employers. What the university executive aren't admitting is what the university gets out of this fast track stuff! Fast track to where? Flat-tack fast track! More real-world budgets than real-world problems!

JANE: Yes, but it's not all one way. Lots of the students want this type of education. Last Christmas I had a student in my online unit who had enrolled in four units over the Christmas break so that he could come back to campus the following semester ahead of the crowd. Two units is considered a full-time load in online learning, so he was doing a double load, AND he was working full time, AND it was Christmas, AND he had a family. He scraped through the unit, but only just – and with very little engagement with other students. I wouldn't say his educational experience was as good as the others had.

BELLA: Well I guess that wasn't what he was looking for ... probably didn't have time to wonder whether he was getting a good educational experience!

Vocationally oriented courses were dominant among the participants I interviewed during my research project: nineteen of the twenty were enrolled in vocational courses. Almost all of them valued the practical, applied nature of their course, and commented that it had been offered at Curtin or its predecessor WAIT for many years. Several compared their course favourably to the same course offered by the older and more prestigious UWA, which they saw as being more theoretical; they also saw the UWA venture into vocational courses as more recent and less well proven.

I came to study at Curtin simply because no one's graduated from the Planning course at UWA yet. I could have easily gone to UWA, but I just didn't want to. No one knows yet what UWA's course is like – the course hasn't been accredited yet, and apparently the accreditation takes a long time. Curtin's been teaching it for forty years ... the course started here, so it's just the experience thing. (Cadel Brown)

Several had chosen Curtin, however, merely because the campus was closer to home or to their workplace.

The two law students in the advertising banner are 'on their blocks' and "ready" at the start of a race, which represents learning as competitive: they are competing with each other, and with fellow students, to win the race to a high-status position. They are also racing to complete their degree quickly – "tomorrow" – and move into the professional lives for which they are already dressed. The appended sample course structures demonstrate how a "special trimester format" allows students to fast-track their four-year course into three years. For students paying high fees and with particular professional goals in mind, such fast-track courses are highly desirable. Theirs is the approach that saddens commentators like McInnis, James and McNaught (1995) and Krause et al. (2005) in Australia, and Michael Moffatt (1989), the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990) and Rebekah Nathan (2005) in the US, all of whom regret that students are less committed to campus life than they were before the 1980s.

In some [Australian] courses, the presence of many [de facto part-time students] can reduce the shared view of university experience to a process of acquiring technical knowledge (even in the humanities) with a bare minimum of on-campus contact. (McInnis, James and McNaught 1995, 112)

Many students, we discovered [in a study of 382 US College and University Presidents and 355 Chief Student Affairs Officers in 1989], are spending little time pursuing intellectual interests beyond the classroom. The goal of many is getting a credential, and while undergraduates worry about good grades, their commitment to the academic life is often shallow. Thus, it became increasingly apparent during our study that the quality of campus life has been declining, at least in part, because the commitment to teaching and learning is diminishing. (The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching 1990, 2-3)

In future themes of this movement, I will explore two aspects of learning raised by this marketing banner for the Bachelor of Laws degree: competitiveness and engagement. First, however, I will consider a key issue from David's vignette: how students learn academic languages.

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 3: LEARNING THE LANGUAGES OF ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

I felt like a janitor at a gallery opening, silent, intimidated, little flecks of knowledge—Bagehot, Stendhal, baroque ideology—sticking to the fiber of my broom. (Rose 1989, 181)

Echoing the third-year student mentors I quote at the beginning of the Third Movement, Researcher in Education Professor Mike Rose is more eloquent but no more powerful in his evocation of the messy life of a first-year student. While the mentors remembered their first-year lives as “shit”, he describes himself as a janitor in the academic world: not only pushed to the dusty margins, but less valuable, less intelligent, less visible even, than those in the centre. Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of learning as “legitimate peripheral participation” encapsulates some of this idea, but without the mentors' distress and the stigma and invisibility Rose attaches to

being a novice. In their first year, students are in a position of relative powerlessness, an apprenticeship or novitiate, in which they are learning from more experienced people around them. As I described in the Third Movement, some of my informants echoed Rose in their descriptions of feeling disoriented and blinkered, while others described feelings of excitement, anticipation and support more in keeping with Lave and Wenger's concept of learning.

This sense of students as novices is distilled when we consider how they learn (and do not learn) the languages of their disciplines. For me, "language" means much more than words and sentences; it is the "discourse" of psycholinguistics researcher James Gee (1990; 1999) and many others: much more than writing and speaking, but also holding particular perspectives and values, Geertz's "ways of being in the world" (1999, 14).

Unfortunately for some student writers, awkwardness in the surface features of language (sentence structure, punctuation, spelling and so on) is much more visible than ideas, attitudes and beliefs. It can distract readers from their ideas, and can lead readers to defining students as less literate – and therefore less intelligent – than they should be as university entrants. In a powerful argument, Joseph Williams (1981), a senior academic in language studies at the University of Chicago, contends that when readers anticipate errors as they read, they are more likely to find them. To demonstrate his argument, he finishes his paper with the statement that he has deliberately inserted about a hundred errors in the paper, and challenges the readers to identify the errors without going back to read specifically for them. Of course, few readers will have noticed these errors because, unlike when reading student papers, they were reading with the assumption that an academic writes in correct formal English.



BELLA: Hey-ho, university's full of error peckers, pecking away at students' writing mistakes like busy hens seeking out grains and insects.

JANE: Great image – I'll remember that one. I wonder if there are equally powerful visual images for other responses to writing, responses that encourage experimentation, language play and risk-taking. Maybe our tutors' team can come up with some vivid ones.

BELLA: Glad to help with some ideas ...



This incident from my reflective journal, which describes a common interaction with a disciplinary lecturer, depicts a lively, vigorous error pecker:

Reflective Journal, 13 August

Have just had another of those too-frequent and too-depressing phone calls from a colleague complaining about her first-year students' written English. What did we do in the first semester Communications unit if the students are still writing so badly? Don't we teach correct sentence structure? (And here I could substitute use of apostrophes, relative pronouns, or any other grammatical convention the lecturer feels is essential – each teacher has her own obsession.) I explain that our language can suffer when we struggle with ideas, and that the particular feature she names is only one aspect of making meaning in writing. I ask her to think back about how confident she was in academic writing in her own first-year studies; I assure her that, yes, we do pay attention to language when we work with students on their essay

drafts; and I encourage her to remind students how important language is to her and to her colleagues. Hopefully then they'll take more care when they edit future assignments (if they leave themselves enough time for editing!). But I don't say what I'd really like to say – that she is finding hundreds of errors because she's looking for them; and that lots of her colleagues make similar mistakes in their writing too. It's very depressing! No wonder we communications specialists are marginalised – everyone thinks they can teach language, and everyone sees signs in students' assignments that we're not doing our job properly.

Lecturers like this one are not trained in developing language processes, and language specialists cannot expect that they will understand that surface features of language suffer when one struggles with new and complex ideas, particularly in a new discipline (Rose 1989; Weaver 1982). As I showed in David's vignette, even Communications tutors, experienced in and committed to language development, are often overwhelmed by students' problems with surface features in their first drafts. As a team, we focus on helping students to understand language processes – to develop the metacognitive awareness of their processes – and to think through their ideas more deeply so that their writing becomes clearer and more correct in their final versions. We also work on specific surface feature problems, usually in one-to-one sessions, but sometimes also in mini-lessons to groups and whole classes (Weaver 1982).

The increase in non-traditional students now attending university has focused attention on students' language backgrounds. Students in previous decades tended to come from middle-class backgrounds, spoke English as their first (and often only) language, had some family history of university study, and had often been exposed to complex ways of thinking and involved in conversations with adults from a young age.

In the past twenty years, however, students from a broader range of language backgrounds have been enrolling in universities. The proportion of non-traditional students varies across universities and across disciplines within each university; nevertheless, significant increases are occurring in the proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds, those who are first in their families to undertake tertiary study, and those for whom English is an additional language (McInnis, James and McNaught 1995). However, this focus on poor student literacy is not just a factor of the greater diversity of students in twenty-first century universities, as demonstrated in this passage from 1941:

It is certainly easy to demonstrate that the English written on examinations and even in senior honors theses in the English department is often disgracefully shoddy in the fundamentals of language, abusing everything from spelling to grammar, syntax, and proper usage. But police duty is a shallow conception of the task, and when composition teaching restricts itself to correcting external errors of form, it does not, according to my observation, meet with success. It does not even open the important questions or touch the student's difficulties on the quick. (Morrison 1941, 786)⁵

Whether policing grammar mistakes or pecking at errors, many disciplinary lecturers continue to focus on surface features in desperate attempts to help students learn language. Few can remember their own early clumsiness in language, and many from middle-class English-speaking backgrounds have little understanding of the social gulf between their everyday language and that of many of their students. And, unfortunately for teachers of academic literacies, some disciplinary lecturers believe they are also experts in teaching English, as seen in this vignette from my first year as Communications Coordinator at Curtin:

I am summoned to the office of an academic in the School of Science. While I am still standing in his doorway, he informs me he has heard from a colleague about grammar problems in their first-year students' written assignments. Reaching over his desk, he hands me a single page. "This is the Ten Tips for Correct Writing I compiled last year for my postgraduate students. You'll find it

helpful for the first years. It always works perfectly for my Masters students, so if you give it to the students in your first-year Communications unit, I'm sure we'll have no more problems from now on." Before I can take a breath, I am dismissed with a nod and a smile that doesn't reach his eyes. As I leave, the first item catches my eye: SUBJECT MUST AGREE WITH VERB IN EVERY SENTENCE. I wonder what my first-years would make of it.

BELLA: What a jerk! Is he typical of the people you deal with here? Why do you put up with it? Self-opinionated, self-satisfied, self-congratulating, self-deluded, stale-smelling, slavering, slobbering stoat. Why didn't you let me speak to him? I'd have ...

JANE: Yes, that's why I wouldn't – we might not be service-teaching much longer. We need to find non-violent ways of working with our disciplinary partners!

BELLA: When I finished with him, at least he'd remember you. You wouldn't be some nameless minion on the margins. I hope you at least offered him your one-page "Ten Tips for Doing Science"!

A very brief overview of language learning across three countries⁶ demonstrates that concepts of learning are neither universal nor fixed: they are socially situated, based on current research, and messy.⁷ An interesting paper by Associate Professor Sue Starfield (2002) from the University of New South Wales in the academic literacies tradition compares marked essays on the same topic written by two male South African students – one a middle-class, mature-aged, native English speaker, and the other a young, indigenous student for whom English was a third language. She contends that the first student received high marks from his teacher because of his language fluency, despite having not met all the assignment requirements, while the second student failed and was accused of plagiarism because of his genuine attempts to imitate the academic English he was beginning to encounter. Middle-class language sophistication, such as evidenced by the first student, is seductive, even for teachers who are aware and committed to inclusivity; it is familiar and effortless to read. As the vignette of David with which I began this movement suggests, I too am readily

impressed by well-placed semi-colons and sophisticated sentence structure, and need to be on guard against the unthinking assumption that they indicate the writer's superior intelligence. By contrast, the second student's situation was further aggravated by his shyness and inability to approach the lecturer to discuss his situation. To describe how he begins to learn academic language, Starfield coins the phrase "patch writing", a phrase I have found evocative and extremely valuable in my own teaching. Some of my students find that the image of sewing a patch-work quilt portrays for them a useful picture of how they can go about learning to write academically, and gives them permission to approximate the language required in essays without feeling they need to perfect it.



BELLA: Okay, so what can you do? Most teachers are middle-class, and you're all bewitched by a well-placed semi-colon. So what hope is there?

JANE: Yes it's difficult. Students take fewer risks when their writing is to be read by language police and error peckers alert for their every fault.

BELLA: But even if you're not language police and error peckers, the students assume you are – just because of your position in the university. And many of them see university studies as a transaction. They're not out to be provoked.

JANE: You're right. Last week when I challenged my online students to take more exciting, risky approaches to their writing, one of them replied, "I didn't think exciting was one of the criteria we were looking for – I could have taken the base-jumping course or creative writing course instead!" What hope is there for those of us who want to provoke our students to think creatively?

BELLA: OK, try this! Instead of seeing learning as the pursuit of perfection, start it by valuing difference. What is perfection anyway? It's ill-defined, homogeneous and by definition unattainable, so why bother?⁸ Start to recognise and value the students' different contexts, interests and strengths. It's Deleuze's "heterogeneity" – look it up, that's not my job!

JANE: Haha! I just happen to have the book here on my shelf. (*Jane takes down the book, flicks through and finds the page she seeks.*) Here's the bit (*reading aloud*):

“We learn nothing from those who say: 'Do as I do'. Our only teachers are those who tell us to 'do with me', and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce. (Deleuze 1994, 23)

Interesting! I know that many writers like Conquergood and Roth claim that, not only is perfection impossible, but difference is the “very essence of *being*”.⁹ Conquergood supports his contention with a powerful quote from Trinh Minh-ha: “Despite our desperate, eternal attempt to separate, contain, and mend, categories always leak”.¹⁰ As well as being the more authentic approach to enhancing students’ learning, promoting difference helps generate a rich and diverse classroom community in which all students are more likely to take risks and to learn.

BELLA: Right – so there’s another image of perfectionists to add to the language police and error peckers: Trinh’s organisers and shapers of liquids.

JANE: But so many students embrace the pursuit of perfection, strive to ...

BELLA: Time to go! Off to squash a bit more perfection, to shred and pulp, tear and pound, neutralise and cauterise ... (*Bella’s voice diminishes as she moves further into the distance.*)

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 4: COMPETITIVE OR COLLABORATIVE?

I’m not one of those students at all, and I’ve seen it already – people don’t want to give you their notes, don’t want to tell you where they got information. And I don’t understand that – I mean, I do understand that in a way we’re all competing against each other, but (*pause*) I think it’s petty. (Rob Jackson)

Students arrive in their first year having succeeded in a highly competitive secondary school system, at the end of which differences of less than half a per cent in overall marks can control whether they are accepted into their chosen tertiary courses. Their tertiary courses vary in their balance between competitiveness and collaboration. By collaboration, I do not just mean group activities, where students are required to work as a team and assessed on that basis; I also mean activities that encourage sharing of ideas, information and resources that enhance individual understandings. This is connected learning. These understandings may then form the basis of assignments that are assessed individually, and therefore contain some level of competition. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suggest that units with a high proportion of examinations, tests and quizzes are more likely to promote views of learning as

individual and competitive, while units with more focus on team activities, projects and assignment work represent learning as collaborative.

In an informal review of unit outlines for first-year internal units in the Faculties of Humanities, and Science and Engineering for Semester 1, 2012, I was able to view thirty-nine Humanities units and twenty-three Science and Engineering units.¹¹ Of the thirty-nine Humanities units, twenty-two had no examinations or in-class tests: all marks were awarded to assignments, portfolios and projects, whether individual or team. Of the remaining seventeen units, fourteen had exams, tests and quizzes worth between 10 and 40 per cent, while in the only three language units I was able to survey, between 70 and 80 per cent of the marks was awarded on in-class tests and examinations. This suggests that current approaches to language learning at Curtin differ significantly from the approaches to learning in most other Humanities units, and are founded more on competition than on collaboration. Indeed, approaches to assessment in the language units bear more resemblance to those in the Science and Engineering units, of which only one of the twenty-three units had no examination, tests or quizzes: in this unit all marks were awarded on student assignments. In the other twenty-two, formal examinations worth between 40 and 60 per cent were set in the exam period at the end of the semester, and additional in-class and online tests, quizzes and exercises made up between 20 and 50 per cent of the remaining marks. In six of these twenty-two units, the marks for exams and tests totalled 100 per cent.

Of course, these documents do not take into account individual students' responses to their studies. Even the most highly collaborative group project can become a competitive experience if students are anxious to gain higher marks than their fellow students, refuse to discuss and share ideas and resources, and are judgemental and impatient with each other. Rob Jackson's words that opened this theme, echoed by the student voices collected by Mann (2008, 39), bemoan the competitive, disconnected and aggressive stance of some students.

In the sciences, lecturers are trying to make sure we know the information we should; in the social sciences, they're trying to make sure that we are able to think. (Marie Phillips, who had studied one year in each faculty)

Marie Phillips' sense of the different approaches to learning in the sciences and the social sciences, as well as my brief informal survey of first-year units in sciences and engineering, and humanities, are supported by Steven Brint, Allison M. Cantwell and Robert A. Hanneman (2008), who apply University of California's 2006 Undergraduate Experience Survey (UCUES) data from more than six thousand students studying at its eight large campuses. Their conclusions are that two different cultures exist, with their own strengths and weaknesses (2008, 398). The humanities/social sciences culture promotes interaction among and between teachers and students that challenges students to think and engage with ideas. On the other hand, it can reward students who "are verbally adept but sail along on the surface of their studies without working very hard" (2008, 398). This echoes Starfield's contention that the mature-aged, middle-class South African student was rewarded for language sophistication although he had not met the assignment requirements. The natural sciences/engineering culture, according to Brint, Cantwell and Hanneman, promotes "hard work, collaborative study, and technically competent performances", but can reward students who work hard but lack imagination and initiative. The authors also comment that lecturers in this second culture interact little with their students, and students are overly focused on gaining certification for future employment (Brint, Cantwell and Hanneman 2008, 398). Several issues arise from this distinction between the two cultures. First, the suggestion that natural sciences/engineering students focus on future employment implies that humanities/social science students do not. This has not been my impression from the Curtin students I have interviewed and taught: the latter group of students are as likely as the former to have this focus. This is perhaps due partly to the fact that many of the Humanities/Social Sciences students at Curtin are enrolled in vocational courses: architecture, urban and regional planning, construction management, film and television, journalism, professional writing, and so on. I interviewed only one student from a non-vocational course, Cultural Studies. (The

University of California authors do not list the courses covered under the general titles of Humanities and Social Sciences.) The second issue of interest in Brint, Cantwell and Hanneman's paper is the contention that Sciences/Engineering students are encouraged to work collaboratively. I have not found this in my brief review of unit outlines, nor in my informal discussion with first- year students. However, the Brint, Cantwell and Hanneman research encompassed students from all undergraduate years, and it is likely that Curtin Science and Engineering students will undertake more collaborative projects in the second and subsequent years as they become familiar with these disciplines.

BELLA: So what are you trying to argue, Jane? That Humanities teachers value cooperative learning while Science and Engineering teachers promote competition? Very superficial! You can't analyse academics' views of learning on the basis of official unit documents ...

JANE: You're right there! When we write those documents, we tend to ape the views of learning promoted in our faculty and discipline, and in the university itself. And some teachers organise their classes despite the unit outlines they are supposed to follow, not in line with them ...

BELLA: Don't let the powers-that-be hear that! Too busy putting in strategies to stop this happening!

JANE (*ignoring Bella's interruption*): I've spoken to enough teachers who hate the learning structures that are forced on them, but they're stuck – time constraints, space and student numbers get in the way. A guy from Science was telling me last week that he had to replace an annual site visit with an in-class quiz because student numbers had increased so much. Some of my Communications colleagues have been forced to reduce the amount of feedback they give students on their essays because they have too little time and too many students – even though we all believe that students learn academic writing best by redrafting on the basis of significant feedback and modelling. A few have even had to replace a two-step writing process with a one-off final submission.

BELLA: That's incredibly depressing ... universities should promote learning!

JANE: Well, they claim they do, but maybe not so much for large groups of first-year students ...

A richer and more complex representation of academics' views of student learning than is found in official documents emerges from interviews with teachers, although,

as Bella reminded me in the Third Movement, these interviewees are trying to present a coherent view in semi-formal interview situations of theories of learning they have developed 'on the job' over many years, and that are constantly in flux. Many of my teacher interviewees associated learning in the twenty-first century with lifelong learning and adapting to change. All of them emphasised that, rather than acquiring information, learning involved applying ideas in some way – to change or deepen one's understanding, to appreciate one's own emotional responses to the world, to problem solve and discriminate. None of them valued competition over collaboration. As with the student volunteers, those who agreed to talk to me were clearly interested in issues of teaching and learning, and I was aware during the interviews of their representing themselves to me as thoughtful practitioners, concerned to support student learning.

Learning is a lot about development for change, getting the skills and information and knowledge that allows you to shift your current position, or develop it, to accommodate what is only ever going to be changing around you anyway. You can't just dig your feet in the sand and refuse to move – you'll just get buried. (Sally Brown)

Learning is about gaining new knowledge and skills, and readdressing old ones. For scientists it's also about an appreciation of how things are done, about appreciating, storing and using emotions, skills and just useful facts that will help in the long run, in a job and in life. (Fred Plunt)

It's to do with questioning beyond your everyday view of the world. It's about saying, "This is how I understand the world," and then coming to understand with greater breadth and depth. Some people stop learning – just by doing something over and over again doesn't mean you keep learning. (Blossom Green)

Learning is being introduced to a body of knowledge. (I'm talking about learning in the context of being in a formal program, because life is learning

too.) ... The content is the 'stuff', and I think learning is how you manage that stuff. What's incredibly important about a good-quality learning program is developing the generic abilities of your students – the ability to think, to problem solve, to discriminate, to work out how to apply ideas. Particularly in today's world when things are changing so quickly, if they miss a bit of content it doesn't matter. But if you've taught them how to learn ... I truly believe in the idea of developing independent learners. (Marilyn McGee)

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 5: GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES AND STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Marilyn McGee's valuing of generic abilities echoes a move in tertiary institutions in Australia in recent years away from competitive norm-referenced assessment systems, in which students are ranked against each other, towards criterion-referenced systems, in which they are assessed in terms of how well they have met pre-set learning outcomes. In the latter system, it would be theoretically possible for an entire class of students to gain distinctions in a unit, if they have all met the learning outcomes at a high standard, and therefore it is more likely that students will approach learning collaboratively. In the early 2000s, Curtin University senior executive took active steps to be part of an Australian-wide move to criterion referencing. They set up the Office of Teaching and Learning [OTL], one of whose roles was to conduct a central review and restructure of all courses and units. First, the OTL created nine graduate attributes, which they defined by reference to an Australian national research project:

[Graduate attributes are] the qualities, skills and understandings a university committee [*sic*]¹² agrees its students should develop during their time with the institution. These attributes include, but go beyond, the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents for social good in an unknown future. (Bowden et al 2000, quoted in Curtin University Graduate Attributes Policy)

The graduate attributes that Curtin's OTL created reflect this emphasis:

1. Apply discipline knowledge, principles and concepts;
2. Think critically, creatively and reflectively;
3. Access, evaluate and synthesise information;
4. Communicate effectively;
5. Use technologies appropriately;
6. Utilise lifelong learning skills;
7. Recognise and apply international perspectives;
8. Demonstrate cultural awareness and understanding; and
9. Apply professional skills.

In this way, Curtin urges academics to see teaching as much more than the transmission of disciplinary knowledge, or what Marilyn McGee called the “stuff”. This urging has been given further force in the review of courses and units, by the university requiring that student learning outcomes are articulated in all unit outlines, that these are linked back to the graduate attributes, and that they underpin student activities and assessments. Of course, none of this can control what happens in a classroom. Nevertheless, Curtin, like most other Australian universities, represents learning as enabling students to develop “qualities, skills and understandings” that “go beyond” expertise in and knowledge of a discipline.

As tertiary learning researchers John Biggs and Catherine Tang (2011, 10–11) argue, graduate attributes that are not deeply embedded within students’ discipline are more likely to be reified as personality characteristics rather than leading to improved learning. Deleuze evokes the complexity of learning by describing the learner as an Egyptologist learning to read hieroglyphs:

Learning is essentially concerned with signs. Signs are the object of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an abstract knowledge. To learn is first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if it emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted. There is no apprentice who is not “the Egyptologist” of something. One becomes a carpenter only by becoming sensitive to the signs of wood, a physician by becoming sensitive to the signs of disease. Vocation is always predestination with regard to signs. Everything that teaches us something emits signs; every act of learning is an interpretation of signs or hieroglyphs. (Deleuze 2000, 4)

To become sensitive to the signs of disciplinary content requires a long and deep immersion in that discipline. Yi Fu Tuan's (1997, 183–4) description of learning to be in a place can be applied to all learning: one must do it slowly, "in one's muscles and bones"¹³ My own concepts of learning align with the ideas of Biggs, Tang, Deleuze and Tuan – the opposite of the fast-track view of education I mentioned earlier and will explore in the Sixth Movement.

Unfortunately, while university executives promote graduate attributes and learning outcomes as broadening the scope of learning beyond the speedy acquisition of information, several significant problems have been identified in recent years in this approach to learning. First, some educational researchers claim that learning outcomes and graduate attributes in fact narrow the focus of learning to a limited range of outcomes (e.g., Peseta 2007, quoted in Mann 2008, 2). Much of the discussion about this approach to learning has been hijacked by the managerialists in the tertiary system, with talk of "stakeholders", "policy changes" and "agendas" drowning perspectives like those of my teacher informants above; and with central university bodies such as Curtin's OTL being given the task of instituting the system within universities (Green, Hammer and Star 2009). Anecdotally I hear that, in several Australian institutions, line managers' key performance indicators (KPI's) involve ensuring that attributes and outcomes are incorporated into their courses and units, with rewards being given to the managers for the teachers meeting these KPI's speedily. Individual teachers may comply with such initiatives in their documents, but this does not ensure changing teaching practices behind classroom doors. In responding to university demands for increased paperwork and uniformity in documents, some academics become angry and resistant, as I hear regularly in corridors and campus coffee shops.

At the classroom level, other problems occur: continuous assessment has allowed some students to 'cruise'. Students keep a tally of the marks they have gained as the semester progresses, and complete only activities that attract marks: that is, they adopt what Mann calls a "*strategic approach*" (2001, 7, emphasis in the original).

Rather than engaging their whole being in a connected, intrinsic search for learning, they limit their learning in response to the external stimulus of marks. They expect assessment to be consistent, and the majority accept (and indeed welcome) the authority of the university:

After the first semester things have almost become “same old”. It’s a good thing. My learning has been helped by knowing the course structure, with unit outlines online, so you know what’s coming. There’s no real surprises. (Cadel Brown)

Mann describes students as having been “disciplined into docility” (2001, 14) by the invisible power of the university underpinning the assessment procedures, a focus I will discuss in more detail in the Sixth Movement.

The continuous assessment system has also created a clear distinction between those students who are aiming for high marks throughout their course, such as Cadel Brown above, and those who are satisfied with bare passes, because it gives students an early idea of their progress in many units, and allows them to adjust their efforts to suit their goals. Lecturers report having to rewrite their unit outlines to ensure that students make an effort on all assignments:

Some students didn’t bother to submit the major written assignment in my unit, which is worth 30 marks and is due in the last week of semester. Or they did a really rough job with it. If they already had enough marks on previous assignments, they could afford to just let it go. So now I’ve had to change the unit outline to say that students must attempt all assignments in order to pass the unit. But then I have problems at the Board of Examiners because some of my colleagues are uncomfortable with failing a student who has got more than 50%. (Elizabeth Ross, first-year lecturer in Humanities)

Thus, while advocates of student learning outcomes claim that they encourage a broad view of learning, and engage students in ongoing learning activities rather than in cramming for tests and exams, for some students they can promote adaptive

behaviour, in which they limit their efforts to achieve bare passes. Nathan (2005, 113) describes such students as “taming [their] professors”. In the Sixth Movement, I will discuss the place of learning outcomes within systems that promote fast-track approaches to education.

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 6: STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Reflective Journal, 13 May

Today I received an email from a student explaining why he was withdrawing from [an online unit I coordinate]. Although he's reached Week Ten of the twelve-week semester, he feels he can't continue because he's been doing minimal work during the semester, and now it's catching up with him. He explained that he's studying five units [two is a full-time online load] while holding down a full-time job. Whose responsibility is this? The university has set up an online version of the course to enable students working week days to study in their free time, and complete their degrees as quickly as possible. Is there a duty of care to make sure students don't overload to this extent? Or is the university providing a service to help students graduate as quickly as possible, and to support industries that need new graduates? In this mining boom, is the university exercising entrepreneurship in meeting the demands of workers and employers? A proportion of students - more in some courses than in others - are overloaded, and have little choice but to treat university studies as a vehicle for certification, making only enough effort as is required to pass. A significant number

of these students withdraw from some units very late in semester in order to pass the others, forfeiting all fees for the abandoned units.

Such lack of engagement is a significant danger of the fast-track approach to education. At the most fundamental level, it is a question of time on campus: students in Australia, the US and the UK are spending more time each week working and less time studying and socialising than they were in the 1970s and 80s (McInnis, James, and McNaught 1995; Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005; Yorke 1999).¹⁴

In addition, some commentators suggest that even when students spend large amounts of time on campus, they do not engage deeply with educational ideas. US anthropologist Rebekah Nathan (2005), claims that in the year she spent living undercover as a first year in a college dorm, she heard no evidence of residential students discussing any educational ideas. She estimates only 5 per cent of conversations in her hearing were about university issues, and these were more about organisational issues and personalities than ideas raised in classes (Nathan 2005, 98). She contends that the majority of senior students she spoke to during her research stated that studying a course in a particular subject had not increased their interest in that subject; while an additional 19 per cent stated that studying a course actually lessened their interest in the subject (Nathan 2005, 174, note 22).

To counteract this disengagement, concerned teachers seek approaches that will involve students in deep learning. The most cited research work in this area is Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" (1989), all of which emphasise the importance of interrelationships between students and teachers to promote learning.¹⁵ Mann (2008, 5), however, synthesises a range of studies from various countries that conclude that a large proportion of university students are engaged in surface learning.

In my teaching and in regular conversations with colleagues, I am aware of a significant group of undergraduate students whose learning performance is one of active resistance. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz (1987) traces this attitude back to nineteenth-

century American universities, where the dominant group of middle-class and wealthy young men treated university studies as a leisure pursuit, rebelled against their teachers, and looked down on the Outsider students who worked hard for success. At Curtin, the students' disengagement generally does not take the form of active aggression but of passive resistance, as this excerpt from my reflective journal suggests:

Reflective Journal, 5 March

We've been lucky that Helen [a highly experienced teacher, also involved in research into teaching and learning] has agreed to teach a group of Engineering students in the Communications unit. Luckily she's also resilient and has a sense of humour after this morning! She's just been into my office to laugh about her first class with these twenty-five young men. Helen had spent hours preparing a great lesson, and described how she was "firing on all cylinders" throughout the class. Sure the students were engaged and fascinated by her content, she was beginning to wrap up after the two hours. "OK, everyone," she concluded with enthusiasm, "any final questions?" A hand shot up in the back row. ("Ah great, she thought to herself, so I was right - they ARE engaged!") "Yes?" enthusiastically she invited the student to speak. The response came back with equal energy: "Can we GO now?"

US anthropologist Michael Moffatt conducted field research living in a student dorm at Rutgers University in the 1980s, and published his findings in the seminal work *Coming of Age in New Jersey: College and American Culture* (1989). He describes attending the first presentation of the new semester, where college administrators outlined what they would do to support the students. Some students were encouraged by this,

[b]ut for the more typical freshman listener, the presentations were soon amalgamated into undergraduate cynicism, into the idea of bureaucratic Rutgers as a set of complex rules and regulations just waiting to catch you off your guard – into Rutgers as “The Rutgers Screw”. (Moffatt 1989, 13)

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 7: ENGAGING LEARNERS

The student voices are gathering now, to sing of what engages them – and what doesn't. While Jane is on the stage with them, Bella remains in the wings. The voices sometimes complement each other, but as often jostle and jar against each other in a messy polyvocal chorus.

This specific lecturer is the biggest “reader-off-the-slide” guy I’ve ever met. Which is kind of scary. And he’ll just read straight off them. And even at the end of class he goes, “Alright, so how quick was that?” And it’s like “What? Is this a competition or something?” And it’s like “I got that done in half an hour”. And I’m thinking, “Oh man, come on! I don’t think that’s very professional!” I’d never dob him into anyone. I’m not going to whinge about it. But this guy’s been a professional for thirty years – surely he’d be able to give us some personal details. And simple things like that, making the class more involved. Because his class is the least attended, and I’ve got it this afternoon and I’ve read the lecture, yeah, I’ve given myself (*emphasised*) the lecture. And I just think anything to have us not just sit there and have us look at you like this (*stares blankly and with glassy eyes*), because ... I just think you could find something, visual aids, anything, and I’m sure that no matter what the topic you could always find something, rather than just read the chapter of a book. Anyway, it’s not entertaining stuff, it’s learning stuff, so why not show us what we’re learning? (Rob Jackson)

First semester was hard, a culture shock. None of the administrative things were clear. I didn’t know where to find things. In second semester I’m more passionate about what I’m doing, more driven. I feel like I have more control

over what I'm doing. I now go out of my way to have conversations about what I want. (Peter Primrose)

In my lecturers, I like the sense that they might have a bit of passion for what they're talking about. You can sense it when they focus on a particular issue that they feel passionate about, and if I feel it too I perk up and listen more. If someone's really passionate about something you tend to listen a bit more because you know there's a reason behind it and they want you to really listen. (Michael Foster)

One of the things that's most appealing is a lecturer actually explaining what makes them passionate about a subject. To know that, you begin to ask yourself as a student, "Wow, would that be something that would make me passionate about it as well?" And you think to yourself, "I'd like to look into it." I've found myself many times going home from a lecture and just going and visiting that particular thing. And you click onto it and read. And I'd come back to the next lecture looking for it again, and even ask questions about it. (Gabriel Morelli)

A good teacher doesn't necessarily have to be a friend, but I need to be able to go up to them and talk at their level. If they treat you as an equal then you feel more like you're in a discussion with them. If they seem excited about a subject, then I'll be more excited about it. Even if they're not teaching as well, I'll be more likely to be excited about a subject if they are. (Marie Phillips)

This lecturer has a good way of teaching: he involves you and he's relaxed. I find him very easy to engage with - he's very approachable I find. Because there's less of an age gap [he's a mature-aged student] there's more common ground between us. (Dave Robertson)

Here we're learning communication, to participate. There's no point in coming here for four years and having all this knowledge and then not being

able to take this knowledge and use it in a social environment, in interaction with other people. (Rob Jackson)

My student informants spoke lucidly, and very assertively, about what engaged them in lectures and tutorials. One of the most common voices in this chorus was the need for passion from their lecturers – they wanted to sense their lecturers’ emotional connectedness both with them as students and with their subject.

Students also commented on appreciating lecturers showing their personal qualities. Two of the most successful lecturers I observed in my visits to lectures and classrooms used self-deprecating humour to engage the students; both acknowledged in later conversations that they did this consciously because they had found that it encouraged the students to respond positively to their subject. One of them spent several minutes setting up a computer and data projector, with one or two minor missteps in the process, and then mopped his brow dramatically and announced to the students, “Oh, I’m such a computer klutz!” The second lecturer led students through a very basic, slightly tedious, laboratory exercise, then looked around conspiratorially and whispered, “Not all science is as exciting as this subject you know!” In both situations, the students enjoyed the humour, and seemed to engage more positively in the classes afterwards. Informal conversations with students regularly draw positive comments about both of these lecturers, usually centred on their feeling that they care about students, and make an effort to engage them in their classes. A significant majority of students attributed successful learning to lecturers who care about students and their subject, rather than just going through the motions of teaching a class.

Peter Primrose, who was in his second semester when we talked, commented that the first semester was the most challenging for students. He described feeling much more engaged in his studies in this second semester than he had in the first. He attributed this change to his increasing familiarity with administrative procedures and systems,

suggesting that his disorientation in the first semester had blunted his passion for the sciences, and that he was enjoying rediscovering them.

Despite the importance of student engagement with their teachers, none of the five informants in my research who had withdrawn from previous courses attributed their withdrawal to the teaching styles of their lecturers: all of them blamed lack of interest in their previous discipline. Even Alan Grove, whom I will discuss in more detail below, attributed his decision to leave his science course after one semester to the science itself being dull, rather than to the style of teaching.



BELLA: Come on, Jane – this isn't surprising! They're not going to criticise your colleagues directly to you – you're part of the institution in their eyes. Just one amorphous mass ...

JANE: Hmm, maybe, but I don't think that's the reason for this. Those who were persisting in their studies were very blunt in their criticisms of the styles of particular teachers – like Rob Jackson complaining about the lecturer who read off the slides. It's more like those who have changed courses are hunting for reasons why their previous courses didn't suit them. All but Alan Grove had started new courses, so they wanted to start off feeling positive about their choice.

BELLA: But they're only going to talk to you about the positive stuff. They're constructing views of themselves as successful students, potentially successful. They're performing the interviews. Your chorus at the beginning of this movement expresses a very different voice – I JUST CAN'T! It's as valid as these voices – and as loud, even if it's incoherent.



Rather than my interviewees being hesitant to express criticisms to me, it is more likely that they have been “disciplined into docility” (Mann 2001, 14) by educational systems over their school years, and accept that they will encounter teaching styles that do not engage them. This will be a major focus of the Sixth Movement.

Some mature-aged informants reported engaging critically with their lecturers while on campus, asking questions after lectures, sending emails or calling in to their offices.

Nevertheless, they were in the minority: my experience and the comments of my colleagues suggest that very few students contact lecturers with more than superficial, transactional questions such as “Where do I submit my assignment? or “May I have an extension for the assignment due today?”¹⁶

Several of the mature-aged informants distinguished between themselves and their younger counterparts in their approaches to learning. Rob Jackson, for example, followed his comment above about the “reading-off-the-slide lecturer” by saying that many of the younger students liked the fact that this person finished his lectures quickly so that they had more time to “go to the Tav”. The older students generally linked their passion with the fact that they had chosen to begin their studies, while some of the younger students had been pushed into studies by their families.

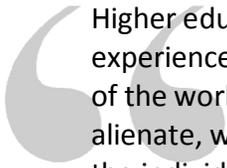
FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 8: CRITICAL REFLECTIVE THINKING

A central aim of the Communications units is to help first-year students begin to develop critical reflective thinking processes, which we define as challenging assumptions about themselves as learners, about their discipline and future profession, and about the role of the university in the community (Boyd and Fales 1983; Brookfield 1987; Mälkki 2010; Mezirow 1998). In this way they develop their thinking and begin the process of lifelong learning. As Freire (1993, 50) contends, communication is central to this process. As early as 1941, Theodore Morrison saw the quality of students’ thinking as much more significant than grammatical correctness:

“The real need on which required freshman English rests is the need for training in language as an instrument of reading, thinking, and writing. ... [The student] should, in short, do as much as he can of the work of an intelligent reflective mind. He should know, feel, and judge, and he should give orderly expression to the upshot of his knowledge, his feeling, his judgment. (Morrison 1941, 787)

While we recognise that most of our students will achieve critical reflexivity at only a rudimentary level in their first year (Grellier and Mackintosh 2012), we also recognise that the processes develop cumulatively, and need to be fostered throughout formal education, particularly during the undergraduate years (King and Kitchener 1994). I see this focus on critical reflective thinking as the main distinction between, on the one hand, the fast-track view of learning espoused by some of my colleagues and

promoted in the university marketing and, on the other hand, the deep, engaged view of learning that is the traditional core of the university. Mann (2008, 11) recognises this dichotomy when she distinguishes learning from studying: learning involves processes that lead to changing conceptions and understandings, studying involves practices such as note-making and writing. Learning is debased when institutions confuse it with studying, and represent these transactional study techniques to students as if they constitute learning (Mann 2008):



Higher education thus has the potential to enable a rich and engaged learning experience which leads to personal transformation, an enlarged understanding of the world and a capacity to act in it in positive and reflexive ways. It can also alienate, waste opportunity and limit potential. It can undermine or diminish the individual, is implicated in issues of social inequality, and can reinforce or create in the student an approach to learning which seeks to satisfy and survive curricular requirements. (Mann 2008, 5)

The wasted opportunity and limited potential Mann describes here echo the cruising and adaptive behaviour I discussed earlier: they are the results of students committing themselves just enough to their studies in order to graduate, a response tacitly encouraged by marketing that focuses on vocational accreditation. The alienation can be the result of students not learning what they had anticipated learning when they enrolled in their courses. Unfortunately, the voices of the students who experience alienation in this way are generally silent: they leave university without officially withdrawing, and usually without even expressing their dissatisfaction to senior people in their departments. They are the voices of David and Alan that I represented at the start of this movement. Because Communications tutors perform in the margins of their departments and concern ourselves with critical reflection, we are more likely to hear these voices than disciplinary academics.

Four students sit with Jane around a small table in a meeting room in the Humanities building. Their bags are on the floor, and the table is strewn with iPads, mobile phones and white earphones.

Steve: I don't see the point of all this reflexive writing. I'm going to be an urban planner – I don't need to learn how to reflect. I'm here to learn how to make plans and organise transport systems, not to think about all these weird ideas.

Sharon: I agree with Steve – it's a stupid waste of my time! And I can never think of anything to write about. Just tell me about things that are true and real, and stop messing me around.

Liam: I totally disagree. I began this course part-time last year, so this is my eighth unit. It's the first time I've done anything interesting in four semesters. Where can I find more units that make me think? I didn't come to uni to learn how to put pegs in holes – I came to think about the shape of the holes, AND whether they need pegs at all.

Greg: Well, I hadn't expected to, but I'm starting to agree with Liam. Though I'm not sure about questioning the shapes of holes – in Construction Management we can't change the ways things are built, or they might fall down. We have to learn about industry best practice.

Liam: I hate that language – “best practice”! It's just an excuse to keep things the way they've always been. Sounds like accountants! What about looking for new ways?

Sharon: Hang on! We don't know enough yet to think about new ways. We're here to learn from the experts. Maybe when we become managers we can look for different ways.

Steve: I don't care about new ways either. Just want to get through this degree as quickly as I can and get out to work. It's only a job! There's plenty of other things in life except work. And I don't want to talk about personal things with teachers – it's none of their business what I think about anything. I hate the ones who want us to introduce ourselves in class – just leave us alone and

get on with teaching us. Our best teacher lets us go half an hour early every week – doesn't mess around with getting us to talk to each other.

Greg: Well, I disagree with that. I know at work the people who really get on are able to talk to anyone – the bosses and the tradies and the labourers on the sites. It's good practice to talk to new people in our classes. It's making me a lot more relaxed with people at work. Maybe it's more difficult for you young kids, but I really appreciate our teachers talking to us personally and treating us like equals.

Sharon: Who're they kidding? We're not equals! We're only ...

Liam: What IS this? The nineteenth century? If they want us to think, they have to start talking to us as equals – expect us to have ideas about things, talk about complex things. I could have gone to TAFE if I wanted to draw plans.

Steve: I thought about going to TAFE but my cousin said I'd get a better job with a uni degree – get more money, more security. But at least the TAFE course is only two years!



BELLA: Ha ha, Jane! Who're you kidding? Waste of time ... as if these guys are going to be honest in front of YOU!



Campus coffee shop under the trees, with Jane and a group of tutors surrounded by papers and coffee cups. It's the week after the previous student conversation, and Jane has distributed a transcript of it so that they can discuss their responses to it.

James: Reading that transcript has got me thinking. Those resistant voices really surprised me – they were so negative! How do we engage those kind of students? Isn't developing their thinking the main reason we're here?

Meg: If we're not here to push the students to think, then I'm giving up. We've got to have some integrity. We've got to push them into thinking somehow.

Lesley: I totally agree, but what's the cost? The university is exploiting us enough already. We all know how to get kids to think – regular writing, detailed feedback – every week, or at least every second week. I'm already exhausted, and they're making us teach bigger and bigger groups.

Meg: Maybe there are other ways. What about peer feedback? Maybe we can use more of that.

James: Yeah, but it's hard in their first semester. I'm struggling to teach my lot to give detailed feedback to each other. I keep at it, but it's slow.

Brenda: I read a good article about how to get students to give each other feedback – lots of good ideas. I'll put it in the share folder.

Lesley: That's OK but I'm swamped with marking right now – don't have time to read articles. And Jane's on my back to get my marks in ...

Bill: Yeah, she's been on to me too ... Maybe we just need to find more provocative things to make them think. Did anyone watch the YouTube video Jude put into the folder last week? It worked brilliantly with my class yesterday – even Damon had something to say! Ha! Must be a record. Most of them disagreed with it, but that's OK – started a great conversation.

Henry Giroux, one of the leading critical theorists in the US, focuses on the lack of critical thinking he sees in his Education students, in a published conversation with unnamed colleagues at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where he had been a professor of education for most of the 1980s:

 Most of our students are very comfortable with defining themselves as technicians and clerks. For them to be all of a sudden exposed to a line of critical thinking that both calls their own experience into question and at the same time raises fundamental questions about what teaching should be and

what social purposes it might serve is very hard for them. They don't have a frame of reference or a vocabulary with which to articulate the centrality of what they do. They are caught up in market logic and bureaucratic jargon. (Giroux 1992, 16)

I join with the sessional tutors, with Mann and with Giroux in our joint concern about fast-track degrees, developed in response to market forces, which focus on superficial study techniques rather than deep and critical engagement with ideas, and which allow students to graduate from university content to be technicians and clerks rather than professionals. Students graduating with the “degree designed for industry” promoted in the Bachelor of Laws marketing I explored at the beginning of this movement are much more likely to fall into this category than those from full-length courses with a broader, less tailored scope. I will discuss this tension between fast-track teaching and reflective, critical learning in more detail in the Sixth Movement.

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 9: CONNECTED LEARNING

In this theme Paolo Freire, the seminal author and godfather of Critical Pedagogy, speaks briefly but powerfully of connected learning.

Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for his students, nor can he impose his thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about *reality*, does not take place in ivory-tower isolation, but only in communication. If it is true that thought has meaning only when generated by action upon the world, the subordination of students to teachers becomes impossible. (Freire 1972, 50, emphasis in the original)

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 10: THE TEACHERS REFLECT

Yet another coffee shop conversation, this one between Jane and two disciplinary lecturers. Coffee cups and a digital recorder are set out between them on the fixed metal table under the trees.

Sally Brown: In our later years, we don't encourage – we haven't really encouraged in the past – risk taking. So the students get overly concerned that they're not producing a piece of work that fits very neatly into a box that someone can put a label on it that says "Distinction" or whatever. And I think that sort of attitude might start in first year. And it's very difficult because the groups are very large, and encouraging risk taking possibly means a lot of work for us ...

Blossom Green: Yes, the students are quite fearful, resistant. The feedback we get on the unit is that things were not clearly spelled out, that it was too open, which is what we intended, but they don't know what we want. So they're given the opportunity to take risks, it was really open in many ways, this assignment, and they didn't like it because they said it wasn't clear what you wanted.

Sally: A lot students struggle with this – when you're doing something creative, there's no end point.

Blossom: And it's in the profession too, people want an end point. They get frustrated – teachers know the answer and they won't give it to me.

Sally: It's interesting because all the information we get from Teaching and Learning people tell us to stop lecturing, but some students complain that we're wasting their time every time we get them to talk to other students – they just want us to give them the answers. In our course, there are no answers and that becomes increasingly difficult. I want to say to them all the time, "Don't you wonder about this?" But there's no sense of wonder in the

students – there’s just a blind acceptance ... They’re becoming increasingly disconnected from diversity, people just want the same.

Blossom: I suspect there’s less link with natural processes, and more closed environment where you don’t have to question. You don’t have to touch, smell, see something for yourself.

Sally: We’re becoming increasingly disconnected from the things that change people in a daily – those sorts of things. It’s like a Bunnings store:¹⁷ every store is exactly the same as every other one, and people like it. I think that that diversity isn’t being encouraged – people just want the same, they want to pay for something they know.

Blossom: I think it’s something to do with time as well, that you don’t have time to smell the roses anymore. You just have a problem and want it fixed – I have a problem, and I want it fixed now, in as short a time as possible and I don’t have time to think about it.

Sally: That’s what’s missing from the first-year experience – no opportunity to stop and contemplate what’s happening. They do a project, meet at a certain point and then it’s on to the next one. I saw one of my student’s timetables – it was astounding – that it was just so full and there was very little opportunity to stop and contemplate.

Blossom: But I don’t think it’s the timetable – I think it’s because they also want to have a job that’s two days a week, they also want to have a full social life – education is no longer the thing that I’m doing.

Sally: Mmm ... it’s not their full-time job.

Blossom: It’s one of at least two or three things that are equally important ... that’s changed dramatically for this current generation. Wasn’t the case for us. You went to university and you did just that – that was your full-time job.

Sally: And you were supported by your family. And a lot of us had scholarships, so we didn't have to earn large amounts of money.

Blossom: Yeah, so there was time to think lots more about what you were doing.

FOURTH MOVEMENT, THEME 11: WHAT IS LEARNING?

BELLA: All too clean, Jane – SQUEAKY CLEAN AND SHINY! Those tutors sounded like they were giving lectures to their students! Talk about performing! Like they were in front of a camera! Too many dichotomies – collaboration/competition, engagement/alienation, applied/pure, information/thinking ... What about Deleuze and Guattari? What about both ... and? Too much either ... or for me! You're forgetting what you've been saying all along – learning's partial, hesitant and situated. There IS no truth and it's ALL true!

JANE: Not fair, Bella! I've emphasised that throughout the ...

BELLA: Well, not enough for me!

JANE: OK, maybe this last theme will help ... My own voices are becoming silent; the published authors and teachers are moving off stage, leaving it to the interviewee students. Their voices resonate, harmonise and clash with each other, some strong and determined, others awkward.

It's about being flexible, learning to do it your way. It's different from being in school – you had to do it the teachers' way. (Gabriel Morelli)

It's gaining information and applying that information to work and life. (Cadel Brown)

It's true, learning is partly about gaining information ... but if you can't participate in interactions with other people, learning is not worth anything. (Larry David)

It's a way to think, a pathway to unlock thinking. (Charles Carmichael)

The emotions are really fundamental to thinking but we can't understand and predict emotions easily. (Peter Primrose)

liberating not to have to conform to particular mindsets. (Ben Wright)

Learning is fixing your mistakes. It's taking something you know and making it better. It's believing one answer until you can find the next better one.

(Rachael Fenwick)

It's growing into more of what I want to be – it happens throughout our life.

At university we actively apply our life experience to what we learn. (Michael Foster)

Learning is wrapping your head around the concepts. Someone can't just give me an equation and say, "that's just the way it is." "But why? How do you apply that?" I need to know why I'm using that equation. (My Tien Dang)

There's much more to learning than happens at school. I find it exciting. I like knowing things and asking questions. Learning is satisfying the need to know.

(Rob Jackson)

It's about taking a risk. Conforming to mediocrity and taking the easy option is not challenging. A lot of people could get 80 per cent and tick all the boxes but I'd rather create new boxes that need to be ticked, and push it a bit. (Ben Wright)

It's about growing mentally. It's not just about building your knowledge database in your head – it's about shaping your personality. (Larry David)

It's clearing out our brains so that we understand what we already know.

Children learn from their life experience, and thus develop logic. The brain is like a computer that needs to be defragged. (Peter Primrose)

It's life; it's free; it's there for you for grabbing. It's whoever can grab that balloon of knowledge. (Gabriel Morelli)

University learning means getting basic information for the workplace – most of the learning actually happens there. (Chris Longley)

Learning lets us make a wave rather than just bob around. (Ben Wright)

¹ See Rose 1989; Weaver 1982.

² Weaver 1996.

³ Starfield 2002 – I will discuss this concept later in the movement.

⁴ For example, key US educational researcher Vincent Tinto (2012, Chapter 3) explores the value of students building their confidence within structured support groups, and argues that increased confidence can lead to first-year students maintaining their studies.

⁵ Rose (1989) expresses the counter position to this argument, focusing on the contexts in which the students write:

As writers move further away from familiar ways of expressing themselves, the strains on their cognitive and linguistic resources increase, and the number of mechanical and grammatical errors shoots up. Before we shake our heads at these errors, we should also consider the possibility that many such linguistic bumbles are signs of growth, a stretching beyond what college freshmen can comfortably do with written language. (Rose 1989, 188)

⁶ For decades researchers have explored what constitutes language learning, and how best to help tertiary students learn to write well; understandings of learning have varied significantly through these decades. In the first half of the twentieth century in many US universities, students from all disciplines learned to write in general Composition courses, which were taught by English teachers (Elbow 1991, 2000; Harris 1989). From the late sixties, growing research into genre and discourse throughout Western countries (e.g., Berkenkotter and Huckin 1995; Freedman and Medway 1994; Gee 1990, 1999; Herrington and Moran 2005; Swales 1990) recognised individual genre differences, which led to such general courses being questioned; they were gradually replaced by alternatives such as Writing Across the Curriculum courses, usually taught by disciplinary academics in collaboration with language specialists (Russell 1990). In the UK, the creation of the Open University brought a focus on supporting students from diverse backgrounds to be successful university writers. Along with the emphasis on discourse and genre permeating Western countries, this inclusivity underpins the academic literacies approach to language learning, which sees academic literacy not as just sets of skills, nor even as just an acculturation process, but, in addition, as the empowerment of students from all backgrounds to understand university cultures and to achieve the language processes valued in university communities. One of the major focuses of those who work in this area is to challenge the representation of “academic discourse” as one single and unchanging discourse that students need to master, and to expose the disagreements and discordances between and within disciplines (Haggis 2006; Johns 1995, 1997; Lea and Stierer 2000; Lea and Street 1998, 1999; Lillis and Turner 2001; Street 2004). Australian universities have also been strongly influenced by research into genre and discourse (Christie 1987), which has led to a major focus on embedding language learning in university disciplines (Chanock 1994, 2007; Clerehan 2003; de la Harpe and Radloff 2000). In all three countries, a sharp increase in international students has brought parallel emphases on English as a Second Language and English for Academic Purposes courses (Hyland 2006).

⁷ Anna Sfard (1998) encapsulates this in her article on the two dominant metaphors of learning, the acquisition of knowledge metaphor and the participation or engagement metaphor, in which she concludes that we must not adhere to one simplistic position but rather accept that learning is best seen as a messy patchwork:

A realistic thinker knows he or she has to give up the hope that the little patches of coherence will eventually combine into a consistent global theory. It seems that the sooner we accept the thought that our work is bound to produce a patchwork of metaphors rather than a unified, homogeneous theory of learning, the better for us and for those whose lives are likely to be affected by our work. (Sfard 1998, 12)

⁸ Deleuze (1994) and Roth (2008) explore the value of difference in learning. The concept of perfection is particularly problematic when one considers the academic literacies focus on the fact that academic discourse is not one homogeneous entity.

⁹ Conquergood 1991; Roth 2008, 894. The quote is from Roth, emphasis in the original.

¹⁰ Trinh 1989, quoted in Conquergood 1991, 184.

¹¹ I have chosen to blend multiple and partial qualitative and quantitative data through this thesis as a rhizomatic analysis and in the spirit of Dan Rose (see page 20). I have called this an informal review because I was not able to view all unit outlines; this survey is indicative rather than conclusive.

¹² It is interesting that the original read “community” but that this Curtin policy has been published online since 2006 without anyone recognising the typographic error. This might suggest that few staff read the policy documents, or that those who have read this document find the concept of a university committee making such decisions on their behalf unsurprising.

¹³ I will discuss the learning of place in more detail in the Fifth Movement.

¹⁴ It is not my intention in this thesis to study concepts of engagement in depth. Rather, I seek to give some sense of the breath and focus of the major studies into engagement in the US, Australia and the UK. The number of these studies has increased exponentially in the past decade, due in no small way to the National Survey of Student Engagement conducted in the US annually since 2000, which provides quantitative data and open-ended comments from undergraduate students in hundreds of US and Canadian tertiary institutions. This has given rise to many hundreds of papers that apply the data to individual universities and to concepts of learning. The great majority of these studies consider issues of engagement as it applies to successful student learning and persistence (that is, students completing their courses). For example, Kuh et al. (2008) consider success and persistence in eighteen colleges and universities who participated in NSSE at least once between 2000 and 2003. Parallel work has been done in Australia, in response to the Australian equivalent of the NSSE: the annual Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) instituted in 2007. Significant Australian studies include Krause and Coates (2008) and Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010), both of which argue that student engagement in learning is a highly complex issue, and that tertiary institutions, teachers and students all have roles to play in promoting deeper engagement. Mantz Yorke’s work in Britain (e.g., 1999) endorses this view of the complex relationships that underpin student engagement in learning.

¹⁵ Chickering and Gamson’s Seven Principles:

1. Good practice encourages contacts between students and faculty
2. Good practice develops reciprocity and cooperation among students
3. Good practice uses active learning techniques
4. Good practice gives prompt feedback
5. Good practice emphasizes time on task
6. Good practice communicates high expectations
7. Good practice respects diverse talents and ways of learning.

¹⁶ This is of concern when one considers the US research of Vincent Tinto (1993, 1997), who argues that those students who engage most closely with their lecturers both inside the classroom and after classes are most likely to persist and to succeed in their studies.

¹⁷ Bunnings is an Australian hardware company, with many large stores in all States.

Fifth Movement: Making a place

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 1: TURNING SPACE INTO PLACE

Meeting room in the Start Building for first-year students, where Jane is interviewing Marie Phillips for the first time. Coffee cups, an open packet of TimTams, a digital recorder and Jane's notebook lie scattered across the table. Otherwise the room is bare and characterless. Three walls are temporary grey partitions and the fourth is glass, blocked off from a large open area by closed white venetian blinds.

How long does it take us students to feel that you know the campus? It probably depends, maybe the first year. I was part-time before, so I really only came in two or three days a week, for a few hours at a time. But this year I have a full class load, so I have to be here for the full days ... You're forced to find places where you wouldn't want to eat, or little patches of grass where you're meant to eat ... My friends who have started this year, they're starting to ... they seem to know what's going on and to know their place in it. It is about studying full time. If you're part-time, you're not as motivated ... I think within the first six months, or equivalent ... it took me a year. (Marie Phillips)

Marie's hesitant and incomplete phrases in this part of our conversation were atypical – elsewhere she was lucid and fluent. Her tentativeness echoes the tone of some of the academic discussion of space and place: for example, Casey calls the question of place “this elusive subject” (2001, 225). Much academic writing agrees, however, on the general distinction between the two. Space is open, bare and undefined; when people inhabit a space to the extent that they know it “in their muscles and bones” (Tuan 1997, 184), they transform it into a place: “[I]f we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place” (Tuan 1997, 6). Perhaps some of Marie Phillips's hesitancy comes from a sense that ‘knowing’ a place is not a distinct experience, but can range from familiarity at one end of a scale to embodied inhabiting at the other. In

this movement, I will explore this scale in the context of first-year students' and sessional tutors' sense of place on the Curtin campus, reflecting on how this relates to learning for both groups. Because the other students I interviewed, teach and coordinate are as incoherent in their understandings of space and place as Marie Phillips, vignettes and constructed choruses will play a stronger role in this movement of the performance than direct student voices – I will seek to speak with and for the students where they cannot yet speak for themselves, basing my developing understandings in the writings of de Certeau, Conquergood, and two seminal theorists of space and place, US-Chinese geographer Yi-Fu Tuan, and US philosopher Edward Casey.

To those who find themselves in space, it is at once full of potential and dangerous: they are free to create of it whatever they wish, but they are also exposed and vulnerable. In contrast, place is safe and confined, but its characteristics are already defined and therefore limiting. Inhabitants of places can become familiar with them, learn how to live in them, but cannot create them (Tuan 1997). De Certeau distinguishes *place* from *space* with the French word *propre*, which means both 'one's own' and 'clean'. Place is *propre*, space is not. Place is defined, ordered and "implies an indication of stability" (1984, 117); space is open and uncontrolled, with borders constantly changing and defined only by those who are occupying it at any time: "*space is a practiced place*" (1984, 117; emphasis in the original). The dichotomy between space and place underpins the students' responses to their first semester of studies explored in the Third Movement: their fusion of excitement and bewilderment can be understood when we consider that in their first semester they are experiencing the campus as space, and have not yet paused long enough to transform it into place. The balance of bewilderment and excitement varies with individual students.

Mapping with/in and out

Casey's (2005, 2007) concept of earth-mapping is central to my thinking in this movement. He describes earth-mapping as "place-making" (2007), and distinguishes three stages in the way people map their places: taking in, existing with/in and

mapping out (2005). The first stage occurs when one is first in a location, when it is still space; the middle stage is the engagement stage, when one inhabits, appropriates and embodies the space, transforming it into place; the third stage happens when one is familiar enough with it that one can “map it out” for others. My aim in this movement is to explore how first-year students take in the tertiary learning spaces of Curtin, then come to exist with/in them, amassing their own experiences and transforming the campus spaces into their places, “showing how it feels and looks to be on or in the land, being part of it, groping through it” (Casey 2005, xvi). I seek to work with first-year students, through their voices and stories, to map how they transform the Curtin campus in the suburb of Bentley (and, later in the movement, the classroom itself) from shapeless spaces into learning places at this time in history, to suggest how it might feel and look to these first-year students to be in these spaces and places in the years 2008 to 2014. This will be a map rather than a tracing, as described by Deleuze and Guattari (1987, 12): maps are open, flexible and adaptable, with unlimited points of entry, while tracings are linear and limited to an original pattern. Map-making is a performance, with performers choosing their own points of entry and exit, and creating shapes and narratives within each map; while tracings are about competence, with tracers replicating original patterns laid down by others (Deleuze and Guattari 1987). I will start by exploring the general experience of being on campus, and then move into the more specific experience of being in classrooms.

Reflective Journal, September 23

As I write this Fifth Movement, the processes of creating place from space - of earth-mapping - resonate with me: I realise it is the same performative process as writing. This movement has involved more struggle than most; I have worked and re-worked, kneaded the sections like dough, pulled them into my body so I can feel where they work best, moved sections, sentences, single words, from one part to

another, operating two screens heatedly. I've converted ideas into lists and outlines, and then back into full paragraphs. I've written messages to myself and my supervisors in brackets, endnotes and comments. I've cut sections out and moved them into other movements. I've brought entire sections from other movements into this one. I've repeated quotes and stories that I have included elsewhere, and written myself warnings about not doubling up in the final version. I've colour-coded sections, indented others, typed in capital letters, added comment boxes. In short, I am learning by connecting with the blank space. I recognise my students' intermingling of excitement and distress in this blank space, and share both their relief and their sadness as I start to inhabit it. While the amorphous, unformed mass of words and ideas is frightening, it also has potential. As I shape and re-shape it, I sense that soon I will no longer be able to feel the space that existed when I began: I am limiting as I build.

I think of de Certeau's contention that we can appropriate a place but never own it - in his very evocative image we can read a place but not write it. In what ways is my writing more than appropriating or earth-mapping? With my belief that the reader makes meanings in writerly ways, and vice versa, I equate appropriation, earth-mapping, reading and writing with each other as comparable creative performances.

With my previous experiences of writing, I am confident that, although I might struggle, I will at some time succeed in inhabiting my place. In contrast, I reflect that some of my students have arrived on campus

with very little experience of being able to create their own learning places, and I suspect that their fear may overwhelm their excitement and sense of potential. Much of my work in communications centres on trying to help these students learn to map themselves into their learning places.

Students keep a reflective journal in the Communications unit, writing each week. While the requirement for this journal is that they start to recognise and challenge their own assumptions about their discipline and about themselves as learners, in their first few entries students write narratives and descriptions, seeking to situate themselves in their new physical and social environments, as portrayed in this composite student chorus:

I chose this course because I liked it at school.
It's a good course because it's easy
 to get a job
 to earn lots of money
 to travel
 to meet men
I've always wanted to be an X – my dad is one.
Everything's new and confusing
We're learning nothing new, just reviewing school work.
This place is very big
 and I keep getting lost
 and I stick to our home building
 and I haven't found the library yet
 and it's not like my school
I can't understand how Blackboard works
I can't find my class lists
My timetable is a mess
The lectures are hard already
 because I can't concentrate for so long
 because I don't know what to write down
 because they're boring
 because the lecturer reads off the slides

I came here for a Science camp in Year 11
My sister studies here so I have lunch with her

My church friends have shown me where to buy food
so I don't feel lost like the others
so that's why I chose to come here
It was good to do Orientation so I could see
the lecturers
the rooms
the other students

All my friends went to different universities
so I'm feeling alone.

Later in the semester, students begin to reflect and critically challenge their own thinking in their reflective journals, but in the early weeks many do little more than tell and retell the stories of their arrival and settling in, an invaluable process in helping them begin to map themselves into their new contexts. The chorus voices above underline the different starting positions in this process. Those who are already familiar with the campus, who have family members or friends studying here or who have attended holiday courses during their school years, are less likely to explore problems of physical orientation, or to write day-by-day diary entries plotting their moves around campus. Those who admit they lack confidence in themselves as students, or who are unsure about their chosen courses, are more likely to write about difficulties in finding their way around the campus and through the online resources.

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 2: EMBODIMENT AS 'HANGING OUT'



Ethnography is an *embodied practice*; it is an intensely sensuous way of knowing. (Conquergood 1991, 180, emphasis in the original)

In this movement I argue that embodiment is central not only to help me learn what it feels and looks like to inhabit tertiary learning places (that is, as Conquergood employs the term “embodied practice”, to be an ethnographer of tertiary learning), but also to help all students and teachers come to inhabit these places. It is through embodying a learning place that we become active, engaged learners and teachers. This is

connected learning: I connect to the students, teachers and learning environment, as well as to my own understandings and responses; students connect to the campus as well as to different parts of themselves and to each other.



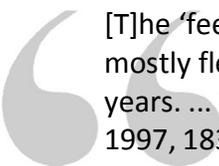
BELLA: Pie in the sky, Jane, apple pie or pumpkin pie or ... whatever pie you like, but it's still just pie! Students don't give a fig OR an apple OR a pumpkin OR any other kind of pie for your connected learning. Get their piece of paper and get out of here – that's all!

JANE: But ...

BELLA (*she's on a roll, not hearing interruptions*): You're out of date! (Or is that fig?) Like Greg warned you in the Third Movement, you gotta keep up!



As Marie Phillips said, students do not feel they “know the campus and ... their place in it” for some time. This takes time, not specific activities: just being there, pausing, ‘hanging out’, delineating spaces in which they will conduct particular practices:



[T]he ‘feel’ of a place takes longer to acquire. It is made up of experiences, mostly fleeting and undramatic, repeated day after day and over the span of years. ... The feel of a place is registered in one’s muscles and bones. (Tuan 1997, 183–84)

Casey’s description of the earth-map supports this sense of slow accretion. He emphasises that the map has neither beginning nor end and “consists in a great deal of overlapping and outright merging. It is a matter of experiential amassment” (Casey 2005, 167). This sense of an amorphous and gradual embodiment goes some way to explaining the hesitancy in the voices of students and teachers when they discuss how they come to know a place.

Students from their first day experience the typical human need to fit in and feel familiar, which leads many of them initially to limit the extent of the area they need to get to know, and only gradually to venturing further:

I'm standing in a classroom in front of twenty-five young people, all but two of them male, on the first day of semester. The two females have paired up, but everyone else is quiet and sitting apart – no connections made yet. Because their class is full, I've had to open another one in the same building on the floor below, a class that has only twelve enrolments. Before the tutor for this class introduces himself I invite volunteers to move classes, but the heads all shake. "But that class is smaller, you'll get more individual attention." But still the heads shake. So I turn to an older man in the front row, perhaps in his thirties, who meets my eye and looks friendly. "Would you like to go?" "No thanks, I've found my way here now, so I'll just stay." "But it's only one floor down. I can show you the room." "No thanks. I'm happy here." I'm bemused – they haven't met the tutor of this class yet, they don't know each other, yet they've already started to try to inhabit this space and this group.

Students quickly understand lecture theatres and classrooms, because such spaces are familiar to them: "place has built into it a set of conventions that can be recognised and understood" (Tuan 1997, 54). However, it takes longer for them to understand other spaces on campus mentally, because they are not yet familiar with the conventions attached to these places – "places where you wouldn't want to eat, or little patches of grass where you're meant to eat" in Marie Phillips's terms. They come to embody these places even more slowly, from accumulated experiences in these spaces.

Jane's office in the Humanities building, Week 6 of the semester. There's a tentative knock at the open door and a young woman pops her head into the space.

Student: I need some help... my timetable isn't working for me. I need to move some classes. I've got gaps in between lectures. It's hopeless ...

Jane: That's when you can go to the library, or the coffee shop, or spend time with other students in your course.

Student (agitated, not listening): I drive home after the lecture on Tuesdays but I only have an hour's break between classes and I've just arrived home when I have to turn round and drive back. It's not working for me!

This was not a typical conversation. This student stood out as someone who understood only teaching spaces; she was slower than the other first years to begin to inhabit the university campus. For most students, the early weeks are times of very gradual embodiment. Each time their bodies exist, act or engage with other bodies in particular places, doing familiar things such as walking down paths, queuing in coffee shops, sitting in classrooms, or parking their cars, they lay down another tiny layer of familiarity. The sensory experiences – the feel of the backpack on their shoulder, the sound of the badly hinged door of their Monday afternoon lecture theatre banging as they let it go, the smell of air conditioning in one particularly musty classroom, the taste of coffee in the campus cafe they rush into every Tuesday morning before their 8am lecture, the touch of their drawing board as they set up for their weekly studio class – cultivate their sense of knowing their place. Ethiopian film-maker, Teshome Gabriel, encapsulates the pervasive but hidden, involuntary nature of sensory experiences, which cannot be deliberately summoned:

[O]n the one hand, we have memory which is voluntary and habitual. This kind of memory, which we characterize as retrospective or recollective memory, can be recalled and narrativized. On the other hand, there is memory which is involuntary and spontaneous. This is a memory that we perceive through the language of the sense rather than the language of thought. In this instance, memory is triggered by smell, touch, sound, silence and sight. This kind of memory is not recallable at will and it cannot be narrativized. It is not available to re-telling. How we came to acquire language, knowledge, and our being a subject is not available to consciousness. These are deep fundamental experiences but are not narratable – not available to consciousness. How paradoxical! (Gabriel 1989, n.p.)

Gabriel's comments about how we lay down memories can equally be applied to learning to know a place: while sense experiences are powerful, they are elusive. Sparkes (2009) contends that while all the senses play their role, in Western cultures

people are socialised into focusing more on sight than other senses; other sensory experiences, all inherent in embodied knowing, accumulate unconsciously, and are often difficult to understand and articulate. Many of my interviewees commented that Orientation Day, during the week before semester starts, was most valuable to them because it allowed them to see their classrooms and their teachers – not to spend time in the classrooms or meet their teachers personally, just to see what they looked like – so that these aspects of the first teaching week would look familiar to them. None of them mentioned other sensory experiences. At the time I was conducting the interviews I did not consider probing them on these senses, but from the perspectives of Gabriel and Sparkes it is unlikely that they would be able to consciously recall this wide range of powerful sensations. Nevertheless, these sensations would play a very important part in laying down the campus in students' muscles and bones.

Students' first goal is to orient themselves physically and emotionally on campus:

It's the first day and I'm late for class. I'm pushing through the crowds of students blocking the pathways between buildings. It's the changeover between lectures and there's no space to move. Hundreds more students are on campus this year, or is it just that I'm struggling to find a way through them? They're clearly first-years because they're looking lost, huddled in little groups with maps, turning them round and pointing in different directions, or standing alone trying to pretend they know where they're going, with surreptitious glances to where the crowds seem to be moving. A young man (they're looking younger than ever, as I try to skirt the clumps) spends long minutes pulling something out of his bag, a stocky older man consults his watch with concentration, four individuals check their phones – all keen to do something to look busy, less lost. A few of the young women are over-dressed – it's not just that stiletto heels stand out among the torn jeans, bare-midriff T-shirts and sandals; they're also highly impractical for this hilly campus, with its ten-minute walk from south to north, including two sets of steps and a sharp incline from my office to the top part of campus where many of the classrooms are situated.

I'm hot and tired already, even though I don't have to deal with disorientation. I feel particularly sorry for these overdressed students, especially in today's glaring heat. By next semester they'll be indistinguishable from the others. I smile with the memory of the forty-something-year-old student last year who phoned me two weeks before classes started to ask how she should dress so that she wouldn't stand out. But, of course, she did stand out – the only student to stay behind after the Orientation lecture to ask clarifying questions, clutching the unit text book, bought before it was mentioned in the lecture, and a complete set of new folders, already neatly labelled.

When I reflect on this experience, focusing consciously on sensory memories, I remember the touch – taste almost – of the hot sun on my head, the feel of dusty sweat in my sandals, the slightly subdued sound of voices in the heavy heat (or did the blood pulsing in my temples muffle the sounds?), the smell of an array of body odours amplified and pulsating in the heat. I reflect on the fact that the academic year in Perth starts in early March, the hottest time of the year, when the temperatures can reach forty degrees, and that the Curtin campus is large and very hilly. During their first weeks of moving around campus, first-year students are likely to have all their senses assailed as I did on that day, and even though they do not recall this consciously, the sensations play their part – varying depending on their responses to extreme heat – along with other orientation experiences in influencing their sense of place on the campus. They are the tastes of strawberries or abandonment of Sojcher. I recall that in 2011, when Perth experienced record-breaking heat through March and most of April, the team of Communications tutors struggled to maintain their normally positive responses to teaching, particularly for the afternoon classes, when the classrooms and the entire campus had heated to their maximum.

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 3: CURTIN TOWN

Most Curtin first-year students have come directly from schools that consisted for them in little more than classrooms, a library and a canteen, and they struggle to embody a very large campus. In contrast, the university executive seeks to extend the space. The *2011 Curtin Annual Report* outlines their plans to transform the Bentley campus into an embryonic “town”, registered officially with the Western Australian Planning Commission, “the centrepiece of a major node of activity with its own identity, life and vitality”, not just self-contained but contributing to the state’s “economy and social fabric”. The report goes on to list seven objectives of this town, of which first-year students would be likely to relate only to the final two, which interpret the town as a physical place. The first five relate to the town’s structure, culture, influence and identity, and seek to place Curtin within a global space that extends far beyond the physical. This is the world of the mass university I will explore in the Sixth Movement:

The ‘Curtin-Bentley Specialised Activity Centre Plan’ was lodged with the Western Australian Planning Commission (WAPC). The vision supporting this master planning of the Curtin University Bentley Campus represents a significant milestone in the history of Curtin. The plan sets out the University’s vision to develop a university town, integrating the existing academic core with the remaining landholdings of the Bentley Campus. The vision for ‘Curtin Town’, if successful, will transform the University from an isolated and poorly connected suburban campus into the centrepiece of a major node of activity with its own identity, life and vitality. Curtin Town aspires to deliver on seven key objectives:

1. Governance: a collaborative governance structure that seeks to build research and development capacity to enhance the reputation of Curtin University
2. Knowledge: research and teaching – a culture facilitating partnerships between industry, business, government and research specialists
3. Global influence: providing an environment to grow economic benefits for the university, state and nation
4. Innovation: a place where innovation and creativity are championed

5. Identity: an international university town with world-class facilities and a culture of lifelong learning and innovation
6. City experience: a vibrant, safe, productive and enjoyable '24/7' city
7. Student life: a complete experience encompassing learning and living.

By lodging its vision with the WAPC, Curtin has created an opportunity for both government and the public to assess the merits of the proposals and participate in shaping Curtin University and its ongoing contribution to the economy and social fabric of Western Australia. (Curtin University 2011, 21)

Even ignoring, for the moment, the global space suggested in Objectives 1 to 5, we are still in a nebulous space in Objectives 6 and 7: the space of "experience" and "life". Curtin portrays its city as much more than the sum of its buildings and facilities: it advertises a complete lifestyle to its students.¹

On the other hand, the Curtin executive has responded to students' time constraints by making it easier for students to limit their time on the campus. In one of the departments I work with, for example, a decision has been taken to timetable first-year classes into a maximum of three days a week in order to allow full-time students to work on two weekdays. In the early 2000s, an edict was circulated from the university executive forbidding staff from awarding marks for student attendance, as had been common until then. Student participation was to be assessed only in terms of whether students met the unit learning outcomes. Approaches such as these cause significant struggle between the executive and teaching staff, which I will explore in the Sixth Movement. Academics' protest grew in 2013, and involved many students, when parking charges changed from an annual fee to an hourly charge. Parking areas were designated as four-hour and all-day areas, with the all-day areas being further away from most teaching buildings and filling up early each day. Some students who had previously stayed on campus after lectures, congregating in coffee shops, the Tavern and the library, then began to leave immediately after their last class in order to limit their parking costs.

A classroom in the Humanities building, mid-afternoon, towards the end of the first semester. The students are taking a break in class and most have

wandered to the café to buy food and drinks. Jane stays behind and starts an informal conversation with two young male students, one sitting on a chair and the other on the desk next to him.

Geoff: I feel like people don't want us students on campus. It's like they don't have space for us all. They keep telling us about iLectures, online research, then they start charging us for parking.

Tony: Yeah, they'd prefer us not to come at all ...

Jane: But I want you in class, I keep reminding you ...

Geoff: Yeah, but you're not the bosses – they don't want us here. They've filled up the campus and now they don't have room for us all.

Tony: They make it easier for us not to come.

Geoff: The library's always full and noisy anyway, so it's easier to do assignments at home.

Tony: Yeah, I study at home.

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 4: POSTMODERN SPACES

The concept of place as the space that we make our own, in our bones and muscles, is challenged by postmodernism. Conquergood (2002) contends that place is no longer fixed and bounded in the postcolonial world, due to the enormous migration, exile and displacement happening in many countries:

“In order to keep pace with such a world, we now think of “place” as a heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange, instead of a circumscribed territory. (Conquergood 2002, 145)

This is much closer to the view suggested in the *Curtin Annual Report* in words such as “experience” and “lifestyle” and in the concept of the Curtin Engineering Pavilion, introduced in the First Movement. Place is the location in which one has particular

experiences, one's path intersects with the paths of others, or one chooses to perform particular actions before moving elsewhere. Marie Phillips picked up this concept of intersecting paths in her struggle to describe her growing familiarity with the Curtin campus. She distinguished the geographic familiarity of knowing where buildings are from the slightly deeper familiarity that she felt when her path crossed the paths of people she recognised, and both of those from the still deeper familiarity of having someone to spend her break with:

Yeah, getting to know campus is about more than geographical familiarity. You probably just get to feel more like you know it better ... Or you know more people. At the beginning, I'd feel like I didn't know anyone, I'd walk around (*pause*) Now even if I'm not spending my break with anyone, I'll say 'hi' to six people – I'll know six people walking around. (Marie Phillips)

As in Marie Phillips' comment that opened this movement, many students notice that they start to feel comfortable on the campus during their second full semester. This increasing familiarity does not equate, however, with experiencing the place in their muscles and bones, and they may never do so, at least during their undergraduate years. They are renters (de Certeau 1984) or nomads (Casey 2005), appropriating spaces for brief moments in order to conduct particular practices and interrelate with other renters or nomads, and then, as in Conquergood's version, moving on.

Boundaries are permeable and movable. Curtin students know they are on campus for only a few years, and although they all have a home building, this might house little more than their department administration; many students move all around campus to their classrooms, studio spaces, laboratories and lecture theatres. One group of students in my research differs from the others, however: the Built Environment students' home building houses not just most of their classrooms, but a resource centre, design studios, staff offices, and a large open display place that is constantly full of exhibitions of student work. Several of the Built Environment students reported feeling so comfortable in their own building that they never ventured elsewhere on

campus. Some even hesitated to go to the library, which they found intimidating, preferring to research in their one-room resource centre.

In de Certeau's (1984) terms, teachers and students alike are renters of place on campuses, and they develop tactics in which they appropriate places but never own them. At Curtin, space is limited, as student numbers increase and the executive seeks to use its available space more efficiently. While, in the past, academics could reserve particular times and days for research, professional work and community projects, now those activities need to fit around their teaching timetables. Teachers are required to be available from eight o'clock in the morning to six o'clock in the evening (and later in certain circumstances) so that timetables can be constructed for maximum use of rooms, and they are often unhappy with the times and spaces they are given for particular classes. Teachers are forced to work with students to find ways to appropriate rented spaces so that they become effective places of learning.

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 5: STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF CAMPUS

An abundance of research demonstrates that tertiary students have been spending less time on campuses in the past two decades than they did in previous eras (e.g., McInnis, James and McNaught 1995; Moffatt 1989; Nathan 2005; NSSE 2012), as I explored in the Fourth Movement. This has enormous implications for students' capacity to embody learning places. Since they are less often on campus than their predecessors, they have less opportunity to lay down the layers of repeated experiences that would lead to this embodiment. Studies of student engagement and retention (e.g., Pascarella and Terenzini 2005; Tinto 1997) highlight the role of making friends and engaging with particular tertiary environments in increasing student persistence in their studies. This brief excerpt from a narrative of my own undergraduate years in the 1970s paints a contrasting picture:

“In the evenings, tired of the too-silent library, I used to work in the Arts Common Room, a plain square room with white painted brick walls and low-slung wooden-armed chairs padded in red vinyl. The chairs were arranged in

four parallel rows of about eight chairs each – two rows facing each other against the side walls and two lined up back to back down the centre of the room. It was a mind-numbing physical environment, but the company compensated for that. People studied spasmodically, with lots of chat and movement, people going in and out constantly. The same students would come in regularly – all of us had long hair, both males and females, and all wore jeans; in winter many wore the second-hand army greatcoats popular at that time. One student would bring his guitar – I remember him singing only one song, Arlo Guthrie’s “Alice’s Restaurant”, over and over again. (Grellier 2014, 535)

BELLA: Those hippie-yippies kept the campuses interesting in those days – no colourless mobs of Real Lifers around then! At least the Powers-that-Were had to sit up and listen to those students!

More worrying to some commentators than the lack of time spent on campus, students are also spending less time on study in general. The US National Survey of Student Engagement of 2003 found that 41 per cent of students spent ten or fewer hours a week preparing for their classes, while only 13 per cent spent twenty-five hours a week or more (NSSE 2003, quoted in Nathan 2005, 33). This challenges the advice that I and my Humanities colleagues give students at the beginning of every semester: since four units represent a full-time study load, students should be spending about ten hours on each unit; since most units include just three or four hours of teaching a week, then full-time students should spend at least six hours per unit, or twenty-four hours a week, studying outside class times.

BELLA: Outside ... aboutside ... full of shouts and clouts ... What does this say about your students studying outside class, Jane? Can you compare your students with the NSSE figures? How many of your students spend twenty-five hours on study?

JANE: It’s difficult to gauge. My volunteers probably studied more than the average because they were all so keen and committed, but even some of them did a lot of paid work.

BELLA: Did you gather any figures?

JANE: No, I thought about asking students to fill in a diary of their study times. But I agreed in my ethics application not to demand too much time from my volunteers, so I

shelved that idea. When I talk to students in the classroom, a lot of them won't admit to studying long hours if they fear they're being overheard ...

BELLA: So they're normal teenagers ...

JANE: And it depends on the context too - if they're complaining about excessive assignments, I sense they overestimate the time they've spent.

BELLA: That's normal too!

JANE (*ignoring the interruptions*): But when we're talking informally, they talk more about working and socialising, not about studying. They trickle study times within the spaces between work, sports and social life, different proportions for different students. Their study times aren't regular, most of them.

BELLA: Well, look at the latest advertising campaign for Curtin: "Fit your studies around your lifestyle. Awesome awaits."² Haha! - I definitely prefer the hippies listening to Arlo Guthrie!



NSSE 2003 (quoted in Nathan 2005, 34) reported an increase in students working, with two-thirds of all students, including 54 per cent of first years, working an average of ten hours a week. Among my students (interviewees and those I teach) the percentage is much higher. I ask every class about paid work, both as a whole class and individuals during breaks, and I seldom find a student who does not work during the semester.

Many current students need to work a significant number of hours a week in order to support themselves and to pay fees, since undergraduate scholarships are now almost non-existent. Time demands are particularly complex for the mature-age students. In addition to working in order to survive, some of these students support partners and children, and many run their own households.³

I'm working sixteen hours a week. I'm driving a forklift at the moment. I've got "Working in High-Risk Areas" tickets and qualifications, and I'm just trying to get the biggest hourly rate I can, and retail doesn't do that. (Rob Jackson)

I work on the wharf and it's casual. You book your days off in advance so each week I book off two days for lectures. At the moment because it's a downturn I probably only work one shift a fortnight, but it chops and changes. When it's

busy, it's really busy, and I could work seven twelve-hour night shifts in a row.
The money's great. (Sam Tucker)

Even when students study, many of them choose to do this at home rather than in university libraries and study rooms. All of the mature-aged students I interviewed studied at home, while some of the younger ones studied in the library.

The university community – a fun campus life?

Universities promote embodiment, as it ensures that students develop a sense of belonging to their university and are therefore less likely to move to other institutions. The following article from the Curtin newspaper describes an advertising campaign that was run on television in June 2008. It was a series of separate thirty-second ads for each faculty, with hundreds of fast-cut shots of scenes from around the world (from Times Square to rainforests) intercut with shots of groups of students on Curtin campus, with electronic background music and a female voice-over, all culminating in the same slow, strongly emphasised phrase, “You belong at Curtin”.

Curtin's Bentley campus was transformed into a movie set recently with the filming of the University's new television advertising campaign *Why You Belong at Curtin*.

Curtin marketing consultant Vicki-Lee Pride said that the new ads were different from recent advertising campaigns in their approach.

'The new advertisements present Curtin in a holistic manner by showcasing the University's teaching, learning, research and development capabilities across Curtin Business School, Health Sciences, Humanities and Science and Engineering.' (“Curtin’s New TV Campaign” 2008)

The *Campus News* item represents even the filming of the adverts as opportunities for students to belong and have fun, as the campus is “transformed into a movie set”.

Attempts such as this to seduce students to engage in campus life feel increasingly hollow and desperate, however. On the one hand, campus administrations worldwide spend millions of dollars and educationalists write millions of words advocating the value of student engagement, either on particular campuses or in student life in

general. Release of the annual NSSE data in the US has spawned an industry of quantitative researchers studying student engagement. Just a few examples suffice to demonstrate the emphases of this work. Senior research academic George Kuh and his colleagues, examining 2000 to 2003 NSSE data of eighteen colleges and universities, conclude that “student engagement in educationally purposeful activities is positively related to academic outcomes as represented by first-year student grades and by persistence between the first and second year of college” (Kuh et al. 2008, 555). Brown and Burdsall (2012), working with the NSSE data of nearly four thousand students at Wichita State University, conclude that by participating in formal extracurricular activities, students enhance both their learning and their commitment to the institution. The Carnegie Foundation sponsored a study of three hundred and eighty-two College and University Presidents and three hundred and fifty-five Chief Student Affairs Officers in the US in 1989, asking questions about campus life. Respondents agreed strongly on the value of the university student community, and saw their role in promoting this as vital. However, when asked about student participation in campus events, almost half of the respondents felt the level had stayed consistent over the previous five years.⁴

On the other hand, Curtin students increasingly fill up their lives with off-campus pursuits, and the physical facilities discourage lengthy periods on campus. With limited space on the Curtin campus, and limited time for study within students’ complex lives, the traditional European and American image of campuses as central to tertiary students’ lives is becoming increasingly tenuous. The first-year students I interviewed, as well as those I observe in my daily teaching, have little sense of a campus beyond their classrooms. For example, Marie Phillips was the only one of my twenty interviewees who had joined a club by the end of their first semester; and she was in her second year, and perhaps therefore more settled on campus. It is interesting, however, that she explained her decision not as a search for a vibrant social life, but to increase her employability on graduation:

My thing about why I want to do this is for the opportunities, not social opportunities, but more the networking opportunities for a career and building up my resume. Because if you only go through uni and only have your degree, you don't have any experience and no extra things, you won't be looked at. I like to give back too, but this helps me. (Marie Phillips)

All other informants had not yet joined clubs, and several made comments that they were still connected with school friends but imagined that they might become more involved in university life in future years.⁵

Despite the larger number of students living on US university campuses, Nathan still bemoans the fact that the “national cries for ‘community’ in the American college go unanswered” (2005, 38). She describes students as feeling deeply ambivalent about student community life: pulled into a sense of belonging, but resistant to demands made on their time. While the students she interviewed said that they felt committed to the university, Nathan suggests it was to small groups of likeminded students: “Rather than being located in its shared symbols, meetings, activities, and rituals, the university for an undergraduate was more accurately a world of self-selected people and events” (Nathan 2005, 54). My research suggests first-year Curtin students are a further step removed from university, however: for the majority who live off campus, their self-selected friends and events have little connection with Curtin.

Physical place cannot be separated from context. Sarah Mann, Head of the Academic Development Unit of the University of Glasgow, distinguishes a wide range of dimensions that impinge on her academic work: time, space, materials and available technologies; personal contexts, including family and friendship influences as well as personal desires and beliefs; and social contexts, including the attitudes, world views, and discursive practices that are valued or restricted in her place (Mann 2008). She speaks as an academic engaging in writing about tertiary learning, but her words are equally apt for first-year students. In starting to talk about space and place for the first year students, I have thus unavoidably moved from issues of time and available materials into personal, family, social and institutional influences on their responses to

the campus as a place. In the Sixth Movement, I will explore more thoroughly the ways the technologies, world views and discursive practices fostered in the university impact also on their sense of place. It is a very complex issue.



If the lived world is a complex place, then the lived world of school is a complex place squared. (Kincheloe 2012, 10)

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 6: COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND APPRENTICESHIP

Swiss-US educational theorist Etienne Wenger (1998) sees learning as incorporating both situated experience and the social structure of the community of practice in which this experience exists. He argues that participants can come, over time, both to mirror and to transform their communities. This echoes the work of French anthropologist and educational philosopher Pierre Bourdieu in his 1977 study of how young Kabyle people from North Africa learn “insensibly and unconsciously” (1977, 88) to embody their place and culture. Through the apprenticeship of daily participation and observation, the young people amass their learning and “integrat[e] the body space within cosmic space” (1977, 91).

As young apprentices, first-year students at Curtin are in very early stages of such embodiment. Their sensory and mental circuits are so overloaded with new experiences that some of them need to shut down parts temporarily in order to survive – they exist as if blinkered. Peter Primrose realised he was more passionate about learning science in second semester when he was more familiar with administrative systems; Marie Phillips became aware in her second year of dozens of posters around campus advertising learning support services, which had been visible for several years but to which she had been blind in her first year as a part-time student:

I’m not sure what Curtin should do to make me feel more a part of the Curtin community. I think there’s a lot of things already in place, and the more you’re here, the more you find out about different things ... There’s flyers all

over the place, and you never realise they're there until one day you *aren't* rushing off to a class, and you actually look and go 'oh, there's a flyer for something.' (Marie Phillips)

The increasing role of formal mentoring programs can be considered in the context of students' apprenticeship. During the period of this research, from 2008 to 2014, the mentoring program at Curtin was becoming more formal and widespread. From an informal project trialled by a few schools in 2008, it has grown to a campus-wide program in which all first-year students are assigned a more senior undergraduate student within their discipline as a mentor. The success of this program deserves evaluation, but its embedded and widespread nature provides the potential to support first-year students' apprenticeship in the university and in their particular disciplines. In contrast, US Composition teacher Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater questioned the efficacy of mentoring programs in 1987–88, in an interesting study of two undergraduate students at the University of New Hampshire, Anna, an Art History student, and Nick, a Political Science student:

Instead of the university or its departments mentoring either of these students, it merely held them while they nourished themselves on their own. In fact, Anna and Nick can be considered as literate [in the discourse of their academy communities] in spite of, not because of, their contact with the academy. (Chiseri-Strater 1991, 143)

Chiseri-Strater goes on to claim that the concept of discourse communities has little relevance for undergraduate students, relates mainly to how academics communicate with each other, and is concerned with cross-institutional networks. The academics make little effort to initiate students into their world: "[T]he literacy norms within most fields – the reading, writing, talking and thinking patterns of the discipline – most often remain powerfully invisible, not offering ready access for them to earn membership of a discourse community" (Chiseri-Strater 1991, 144). I would argue that for first-year students this invisibility is even more pronounced than for later years. My research suggested that none of them felt they were yet taking their place in their discourse

community. When I asked the interviewees what groups at Curtin they identified with, a few replied “with the first years in my course”, some Built Environment students said “with our Built Environment building”, and a few said “as a Curtin student”, but none of them – even when prompted – mentioned their discipline or future professional body. This may be changing gradually at Curtin, as the mentor system becomes more widespread and formal, but I found no evidence of it in my research. On the other hand, Chiseri-Strater’s claim that no undergraduates in her institution in the 1980s related to the discourse communities in which they were studying might suggest that even the mentors themselves do not feel they belong to their discourse communities, and therefore cannot support their mentees in this. The Curtin website devoted to the mentoring program in 2014 includes a video showing mentors helping first-year students find their way around campus, deal with parking and timetable problems, manage study loads, develop contacts within their department, and build a social life. The two academic support services shown offer help in learning how to reference academically and suggestions for approaches to study. There is no sense that mentors are encouraged to delve into deeper areas of disciplinary concepts and “ways of being in the world” (Geertz 1999, 14).

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 7: SKETCHING THE CLASSROOM SPACE

Ruth Jones, a first-year, mature-aged Humanities student, has bumped into Jane in the coffee shop at the end of the year, and stopped to tell her how she’s progressed during the year.

Ruth: I only went to one Communications class, because then I got exemption from the unit – you remember!

Jane: Yes, I signed your form. That’s when we met.

Ruth: But now I’m looking back at the end of the year I realise that the friends I made in that one class I took with me to all my other units all year.

Jane: That's amazing – just one class! Why?

Ruth: The tutor asked us to introduce ourselves in a group of four students, and say something about ourselves and our hopes and fears for the course.

Jane: That simple?

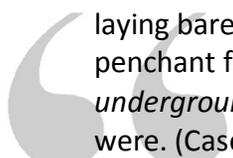
Ruth: Yes, simple! But I felt that I knew the three others a bit, so I felt safe and comfortable. It didn't happen in the other units, so I just kept with the three people I'd already met. We support each other.

The classroom is just one part of the whole campus and increasingly part of a Curtin world that reaches out globally, and that exists as much in non-physical spaces as in physical rooms. Nevertheless, particularly when researching with first-year students who are struggling to become familiar with their environment, it is valuable to explore how they learn to inhabit the classroom space, coming to embody it and turning it into a place of learning. There are so many different responses to this issue that it could warrant a research project in itself. My particular interest, however, is in how Communications specialists, together with the students, can create effective places for learning in their classrooms, in what can be a rich collaborative performance. In the words of one of the Communications tutors, Sandra Adams, who is also a practising artist: "It's about sketching the space with the students."

Communications classes are currently structured as small-group interactive workshops in order to engage students in their language processes. As indicated in Ruth Jones's words above, tutors place initial emphasis on helping students to get to know each other. Although she was enrolled in a Humanities course, which are generally considered to involve more interpersonal engagement than courses in science and other faculties, she contended that such a "getting to know you" focus was not common in her other units. In the context of research into student persistence I cited earlier in this movement, which demonstrates that students who engage in formal and informal networks on campuses are most likely to persist in their studies, such a focus

would seem to be a valuable first step in sketching the classroom as a learning community.

Chiseri-Strater (1991, 158) suggests that other lecturers would consider what we do in Communications (she labels them Composition courses) as “foreign”. But she contends that the two participants in her research, Anna and Nick, valued the Composition world over their own discipline worlds because of the curriculum and classroom strengths of the Composition teacher who “saw her role as one of encouraging cooperation in her classroom by getting all students to contribute, to assume responsibility for learning, and to improve as readers, writers and thinkers” (1991, 159). Such responsibility is central in helping students move from superficial to deep thinking (Biggs and Tang 2011). At a still deeper level, one of the roles of teachers of academic learning processes is to help students understand and reflect on the conventions of learning they meet at university, in order that they develop effective habits and strategies for learning. The classroom space needs to be one of self-reflection and metacognition. Tutors try to make visible, with their students, the invisible conventions of learning. This demands that they, as a team of teachers and researchers, interrogate their own assumptions about conventions and strategies of learning, to separate those that are valuable from those that are tired, or need deeper consideration, what Tuan (1997, 146) calls “shopworn ideas”. Teachers need to interrogate their own experiences and positionalities to avoid becoming institutionalised. Tutors who challenge themselves and their students to examine how they learn, and what learning feels and looks like, embody Casey’s description of earth-mapping:



laying bare what Heidegger calls the ‘self-secludingness’ of the earth – its penchant for self-enclosed obscurity: for taking itself (quite literally) *underground* and then *turning itself inside out*, putting itself on display, as it were. (Casey 2005, xv, emphasis in original)

The classroom needs to become a place where teachers challenge students to lay bare their language and learning processes, taken for granted and obscure, in order to exist with/in them and then map them out for themselves and others. As I advocated for

myself as ethnographer earlier in this movement, both students and teachers must create maps rather than tracings (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 12), when they map out the learning places, because maps are open-ended and limitless, and engage the map-maker in creating their own place, while tracings limit students' potential and do not allow for risk-taking. At their most superficial, these tracings could include teachers listing rules of classroom behaviour, even if they engage students in developing these lists (often a response from inexperienced teachers who seek to impose order on groups they fear will be uncontrolled). A less superficial but equally limiting response is to prescribe in very narrow ways the forms in which students may express their learning.

BELLA: But you do that in Communications units – you teach students how to write acceptable academic essays according to a formula.

JANE: Yes, and I struggle with that. The process of giving students a recipe is problematic – it definitely limits students' learning, and the recipes are certainly tracings rather than maps. The best essays go way beyond the recipes. But I'm also aware that we only have twelve weeks, and we're trying to give every student a sound basis for future essay writing. In this era of diversity, we want to give all students, whatever their academic backgrounds, opportunities to succeed, and we want to help them develop useful processes our colleagues can build on.

BELLA: Process ... success ... OPPRESS! Gotta be better ways!

JANE: I wish there were, but I don't know any at the moment. And we've improved on it over the years by building in redrafting processes, so students can learn through editing their own writing. We're also managing to challenge the top students to write thoughtful, sophisticated essays – some that even graduate students would be proud of – so we must be giving them some space to develop.

Inexperienced students often pressure teachers and unit coordinators to lay down tracings for them, but teachers need to resist such pressures. For example, in Communications we give students open assignment topics, and invite and support them to shape their own aspects of these topics according to their interests. A significant number of students ask each semester, "Why can't you just give us a topic and tell us to write on it? This is too hard." Some tutors ask the same question, as they

struggle to support their students' mapping, as Mike Rose found in his early tertiary teaching career:

It was a maverick curriculum, and I admired its ambition, but a lot of men I tutored were simply perplexed by it. The other tutors relied on more traditional curricula: a handbook of rules of grammar, lectures on subordination and parallelism, papers requiring students to narrate and describe. (Rose 1989, 136)

BELLA: So what can you do about this? It's a depressing view of education.

JANE: As a team of tutors we need to keep talking about how best to support student learning, with an ongoing commitment to self-reflection, to laying bare our own language and learning processes. Kember and his colleagues label this "critical reflection", which they describe as a level of reflection that results in "a change in perspective over a fundamental belief or the understanding of a key concept or phenomenon".⁶

BELLA: So how often do you achieve this? Do you have enough time to do it well?

JANE: As often as we can, and we never have enough time. That's why it's good when we have coffees and lunches together as well as formal meetings. It takes time. Laying bare happens over years, with lots of talking around it.

BELLA: But most of your sessional tutors only stay around for a few years – they're on a path to somewhere else in their lives.

JANE: Yes, and that's difficult too – the tutors often don't have time to come to embody their learning places. A lot of them are parents of young children – that's why they seek sessional work – and of course teaching fits around child-minding demands.

The collaborative, connected learning spaces that Communications teachers and students sketch together stretch well beyond the physical classrooms. For example, students are required to work in groups to create oral presentations and other group assignments, and spend a significant amount of time meeting outside classrooms, in both physical and online spaces, to develop their ideas. International students, in particular, comment on the value of these out-of-class collaborations, some claiming they provide their first opportunity at university to build connections with local students. The structure of the group assignments themselves, the make-up of the

groups, and the teachers' approaches to monitoring and supporting these groups are all significant aspects of sketching the learning spaces.

The ultimate example of these out-of-classroom learning spaces is in the fully online units that are proliferating at Curtin. From having no online courses when I began this research project in 2008, I moved in 2014 to a situation where over half my students were studying online and living all around Australia and overseas. Sketching the spaces for online students is elusive and can be frustrating – teaching online students is not just like herding cats, but like herding blind and deaf cats, as a significant proportion of students do not appear to read announcements and emails, and do not communicate on discussion boards. Online units are particularly challenging for Communications teachers, in their attempts to instil connected learning among their students. Much research needs to go into how teachers can build cyberspaces for learning, which will engage and connect students. We are just beginning to explore this issue in the Communications units; it is a topic for future publications.

FIFTH MOVEMENT, THEME 8: DEVELOPING TEACHER PLACES

The first week of semester, a classroom in the large Built Environment building. Jane has popped into the classroom because the tutor Brenda is new – one of seven out of twelve tutors in this unit who have not taught in the program before, and one of four who has not taught at university before.

Jane (speaking quietly to Brenda): How're you feeling? Everything going smoothly? Looks like you've managed to get into the room and get settled – first hurdle jumped!

Brenda: Yes, everything smooth so far. The students seem lovely – though they're so quiet at the moment – I feel I should be engaging them more ...

Jane: No, that's normal at this stage – they'll warm up.

Brenda: I feel like all the other tutors know what they're doing and I don't. I just don't want to let my students down.

Jane: That's a normal fear for new tutors as well – you'll warm up too!

Teachers, too, need to come to embody places if they are to help their students to learn well. New tutors are often as overwhelmed as the students, disoriented by having to find their way around campus, sort out contracts so that they'll be paid, learn how to use the technology, and know who to call if it breaks down. Many of them report that when they come to teach the unit for the second time they are much more comfortable, and can relax and enjoy their teaching more fully.

Teacher educators have worked for decades to describe the teacher qualities that make for effective student learning. Wolff-Michael Roth (2002), applying his German cultural background to teacher education in Canada, offers one of the most useful contributions to the discussion. He uses two German terms to describe aspects of what expert teachers (whom he calls also “master teachers”) can do: *Dasein*, the term used by Martin Heidegger to describe the state of “absorbed oneness”; and *Spielraum*, “the room to maneuver in the current situation in terms of the range of possibilities that he or she identifies without reflection” (2002, 61–62), that is, without stopping to reflect. In the context of classroom teaching, Roth relates these terms to being experienced enough that one can forget oneself and the processes of teaching and become absorbed in the classroom environment as it develops, responding spontaneously to events, and leaving room for the situation to change fluidly. Master teachers experience “*embodied knowing*” (his emphasis), in that their body responds without premeditation in the world of the classroom, while inexperienced teachers are still likely to be distracted by the processes of teaching (and, I would add in the context of Curtin University and most current universities, by administrative hurdles) so do not yet have these qualities (Roth 2002).

As teachers, our experience is one of being in this classroom to teach this subject matter to these children. The classroom is not some removed entity that can be given in terms of its objective (shared) properties but an

experienced world in which we act by investing ourselves and introducing possibilities. (Roth 2002, 61)

In Roth's view of teaching, teachers as well as students need time before the feel of the learning place (specific place, as well as general classroom context) can be "registered in [their] muscles and bones" (Tuan 1997, 184), or in Roth's terms, before their knowing becomes embodied.

Reflective Journal, June 20

It's the end of my second semester of teaching this particular Communications unit, and I'm reflecting on being "in the flow". This semester has felt very different from the previous one - I felt that I wasn't in my head as much this time because I had a teacherly sense of where the unit was going. I wasn't stepping out of myself as often to negotiate the next part of the class. It's strange because I wrote this unit myself, and I coordinated it for two years while other tutors were teaching it. We talked every week - sometimes every day - about how the unit was going, adapted, adjusted, altered as we went, so I should have known it intimately. But I realise now that nothing puts us in the flow of teaching other than teaching itself - and it has to be this unit, to this group of students, not just teaching in general. Thirty years' experience, and I did it OK the first time. But this time has been different - more moments in the flow, more embodied thinking. And the exciting thing is that my being in the flow transfers to the students. There were more moments this semester where I watched students become completely caught in an activity and lose the sense of

who and where they were - that's where transformation happens!

That's what brings a smile to my face and a prickling down my spine.

And the final demonstration of the difference, if I needed one, was in

the unit evaluations. While last semester they were OK, this semester

they've been great, despite the occasional negative comment:

- Her enthusiasm rubbed off on everyone, getting everyone involved without much hesitation. Her ability to draw on everyone's strengths and weaknesses and harness these is really helpful when it comes to assignments and group work, etc.*
- Jane was very passionate in giving us the best opportunity to develop. This was visible in her body language which helped me feel more enthusiastic about achieving the best possible outcomes.*
- Jane's strengths reflect directly on my personal analysis where I have improved and the new skills that I have learnt from her.*
- This was one of the most boring units I've ever studied - Jane could have taught us more in half the time.*
- I feel as if I have learned a life time of education in one semester*
- It was the most interactive unit and taught me all the tips i could take very far with me in life*

I am feeling awkward about including these evaluative comments here, and rush to insist that I do not seek to 'blow my own trumpet', but to open up an exploration of the teacherly place. Four voices in particular resonate for me in these evaluations. The first is found in the labels "enthusiastic" and "passionate". I wonder if this is how students articulate their sense of the teacher being in the flow, out of her head: Roth's

embodied teacher. The second student makes a direct connection between passion and the body by seeing evidence of my passion in my body language. The second voice I hear relates my teaching to an improvement in the students' own learning (more enthusiasm for learning, more capacity for self-analysis, new skills). While the somewhat vague and generalised description of what they have gained is typical of the language of student evaluations, the students concur in seeing a causal connection between embodied teaching and their learning. The third voice speaks in the first and last comments: the sense of student involvement and interaction that develops with an embodied teacher. When students interact with each other rather than channelling all responses through the teacher, then valuable learning is more likely to happen. The last resonating voice is in the final two comments: the feeling that embodied teaching can help establish lifelong approaches to learning. And then, of course, there is a fifth voice, one that won't be pushed aside – coming from students who do not engage, who do not feel they have learned anything useful. For the student in this evaluation, I have been able to create no place for learning – the unit has been a waste of time and boring. It is difficult to infer from such a small comment, but the fact that he complains that the content could have been covered in a much shorter leads me to wonder if he has resented the time spent in activities designed to engage students in their learning: that like Sharon in the Prelude, he would prefer a teacher to give him information and leave him to absorb this in his own time. Perhaps, like Sharon, he is a separate rather than a connected learner. In contrast, the other evaluative comments suggest connected learners, valuing their – and my – emotional knowing, along with connections they could see developing among classmates, across other units and into their future.

As with Sharon's voice in the Prelude, this dissenting voice is as valid as the others, and must have a place in the multivoiced chorus.

¹ This emphasis on the student experience is very common in current discussion of tertiary campuses, as for example, by Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney (2005), US professionals specialising in the design and planning of universities and other large-scale projects:

Places set aside for automobiles are almost never a part of the learning campus. But beautiful outdoor spaces framed by buildings often are. So are noisy, bustling, crowded public places – cafés, coffee shops, public computer terminals, perhaps even the mail room ...Every part of the campus must be thought of as part of the student learning experience. (Kenney, Dumont, and Kenney 2005, 40–41)

² This campaign was launched in late 2014.

³ This paragraph and the two student quotes that follow were originally published in Grellier (2014, 532-33).

⁴ 71 per cent of Presidents (Table A-4) and 77 per cent of Chief Student Affairs Officers (Table B-11) listed as very important “a greater effort to build a stronger overall sense of community”. 97 per cent of Presidents agreed with statement “Administrators should make a greater effort to strengthen common purposes and shared experiences at their institutions” (Table A-7). Only 29 per cent of Chief Student Affairs Officers said lack of student participation was a greater problem in past five years, while 47 per cent said it was about the same. 15 per cent said it was less and 9 per cent said it was not a problem (Table B-5) (Carnegie Foundation 1990).

⁵ Nathan recognises the growing phenomenon of “targeted volunteerism” in her US study:

A 2004 government report found that increases in tuition and fees during the preceding decade had outpaced both inflation and the growth of the median family income. The result has been debt – a huge amount of debt that college students are incurring for the sake of their education – and a sharp rise in the percentage of borrowers among full-time undergraduates. It is no wonder that students are increasingly attracted to majors with clearly associated job titles, that most students need to work while going to school, and that undergraduates’ priorities include getting good grades and positioning themselves for the labour force through internships and targeted volunteerism. (Nathan 2005, 150–51)

In contrast to students at Curtin, she found that half the students she researched at AnyU belonged to university clubs (Nathan 2005, 34).

⁶ Kember et al. 2008, 379.

Sixth Movement: Critiquing

SIXTH MOVEMENT, THEME 1: A TEACHER CHORUS¹

No one has my back
Given twenty years to this place
 to the students
Now I'm going
 before my time
Loved working here
My colleagues are great
Best bunch of people
 the most fun
 committed
 creative

The most goodwill

Now there's no respect
 No care
Teaching's not important
All about money saving
 penny pinching
 avoiding risk
 checking up
 screwing down
No creativity
No joy
No care for us
 For the students

Courses put online
They don't want students here
Seventeen year olds miss out
 on the best years of their lives
Hanging out
Learning slowly
Gradually
Making friends
Just being

Each day more executives
 Fewer teachers

New positions

Corporate Services Manager
Marketing Officer
Client Services Officer
Complaint Management Consultant

Fewer teachers

Faceless people

Not available to us
to me

Can't talk to them

No phone numbers
office doors

Where's the goodwill?

More office suites
executive space
meeting rooms

Fewer classrooms

Goodwill's gone

More online courses

testing
quizzes

Less writing

thinking
time

to meditate
cogitate
fertilise

More fast-tracking

accountability
productivity
frameworks
efficiency
panels
committees
policies
safeguards

Fewer teachers

My goodwill's gone

I'm tired
retired
before my time

No goodwill

Today's
tertiary education
"thinned

and merchandised

and f l u n g

into

hyperspace"²

In this final movement, I revisit ideas I have opened up in previous movements, in order to reflect critically on Curtin University's current responses to first-year students' learning. While Curtin is the obvious target of my critique, it is only one target of many for the commentators: a crescendo of dismayed voices is echoing through the tertiary education world, encapsulated in the words of Clifford Geertz above. Geertz, who describes himself as "shy of polemic" (1999, 15), was nevertheless impelled to join the large number of academics critical of the increasing managerial controls over tertiary education in recent decades.

My interest is in the managerial forces that dominate Curtin, and most universities, at the beginning of the twenty-first century; in the tactics of resistance that some teachers and students adopt within the system; and in how these impact on what learning feels and looks like for first-year students in the institution. I am not claiming that first-year students or teachers are the most oppressed groups in society: I accept bell hooks's (2000, 5) assertion that commentators need to acknowledge different degrees of oppression in order to devote their energies to those who most need advocacy. I can speak most strongly, however, for those I know best, and I choose to construct my performance within the growing voices critiquing mass, managerial universities. The forces of critique are wide ranging. Educational researchers, particularly critical pedagogy theorists such as Michael Apple (2004), Henry Giroux

(2001; 2011), bell hooks (1994), Joe Kincheloe (2012) and Peter McLaren (1995), whose work grows out of the ground breaking philosophies of Paolo Freire (1993), are joined by my colleagues at Curtin, senior professors and junior sessional tutors alike, in this critical chorus. Several 'uppity' students add their voices to the chorus too, although first-year students are generally absent from this debate: the majority of these students focus on day-to-day issues such as assignments, deadlines and time management, rather than on the influence on their studies of curriculum, senior academics and executives in the university.³

The teaching machine

My concern is double-edged. On the one hand, Curtin teachers, including sessional teachers, bemoan the impact on their careers and on their emotional and physical health of moves to rationalise assessment, to make teachers more efficient and more accountable, and to restructure the academic workforce in general. They feel unsupported, unappreciated and untrusted. On the other hand, Curtin teachers worry about the impact on student learning of the accelerating growth of fast-track degree programs, particularly in combination with moves to accept ever-increasing numbers of non-traditional students through alternative entry methods. This Sixth Movement will demonstrate that Curtin teachers are not alone in any of these concerns.

University teachers sit at the fulcrum of a bizarre machine. On one shaft, administrators drive for efficiency, tightening the screws on teaching; they "thin and merchandize" courses, limiting the depth and variety of teaching offered, and squeezing both time and passion out of teachers. On the opposite shaft, students drive for certification, seeking ways they can achieve their educational goals while maintaining increasingly complex lives outside university; they "tame" their lecturers (Nathan 2005, 113), attempting to limit their teachers' demands and expectations in order to make their own studies manageable. At the fulcrum of this machine, teachers feel the ratchets tighten. They strive to get students to think critically and reflectively, to write sound academic papers, to solve problems, to test hypotheses – and first of all to attend classes; but increasingly they despair of the force growing in both shafts of

this machine, and they turn to resistance tactics. Both their striving and their resistance are encapsulated in the following conversation between three sessional teachers in Communications:

Table under trees at an outdoor coffee shop on campus. Jane is talking with sessional tutors in Communications and Social Sciences, Sandra Adams, James Barclay and Joy Scott⁴

James: I think the university is quite exploitative, too, and we need to recognise that. It's kind of a fee-seeking corporate body and we kind of mediate it, to draw on traditions of learning that can then be modified and sold to the students. We play a fundamental mediation role between them just buying the accreditation and ... students expect to buy accreditation, they're quite cynical, and then you're presenting low-quality iLectures, crappy rooms ...

Sandra: Lecturers who don't show up ...

James: Lecturers who don't show up. "I just want to buy my accreditation", and then you've got us, who're in there asking them to work. It's probably a whole day for every two-hour unit, to do it properly, and we're asking them to work hard for a whole day, and they're kind of in the mode of just buying their accreditation. It's quite a big role we play, to say, "OK you're paying for it, but this is ... you have to get something out of this. This is about what you can get from it."

Joy: I also think this reflects on your own professional practice as well, and having some integrity about how you fit into this machine.

James: Yes ...

Joy: It's not necessarily believing in it – you need to have some personal worth in there as well, the sense that you're doing the right thing by yourself and them.

Sandra: Well if you don't, it makes coming in to work difficult.

Joy: Yes, so there's duty of care both ways there, isn't there, for yourself and the students?

James: I think it's about teaching. If we can teach them skills to think and be critically aware, then that helps them to play the game of university and the game of career and work at the same time. And that's essentially what I'm ... as I say, What am I trying to teach? To teach them how to play the game ...

Sandra: How to think.

James: Yes, how to think.

Joy: How to think above everything else.

Critical pedagogy theorist Henry Giroux lines up alongside these teachers, both on the vital role of critical thinking and on the detrimental impact of the managerial university on student learning:

Within this framework of simply giving students what they want, the notion of effective teaching as that which challenges commonsense assumptions and provokes independent, critical thought in ways that might be unsettling for some students as well as requiring from them hard work and introspection is completely undermined. (Giroux 2011, 148)

SIXTH MOVEMENT, THEME 2: INTRODUCING THE MANAGERIAL UNIVERSITY

Our primary hypothesis is that the dominant university model in Australia — a broad-based teaching and research institution, supported by a large asset base and a large, predominantly in-house back office — will prove unviable in all but a few cases over the next 10–15 years. At a minimum, incumbent universities will need to significantly streamline their operations and asset base, at the same time as incorporating new teaching and learning delivery mechanisms, a diffusion of channels to market, and stakeholder expectations for increased impact. (Ernst & Young 2012, 4)

International management and finance company Ernst & Young represent much of the position that academics at Curtin and elsewhere resist. The resistance is not only

against the spirit of Ernst & Young's drive for streamlining and improved efficiency, but also against the fact that a global finance company feels entitled to make judgments on the "delivery mechanisms" of teaching and learning and on the place of universities in society. The language of managerialism, such as is found in Ernst & Young's analysis, provokes distaste, if not fury. Phrases like "delivery mechanisms", with their sense of learning as pre-packaged and delivered to clients, are particularly galling.



BELLA: Delivery? DELIVERY? So what is education? A parcel ordered online? A baby popping ready-made out of the womb? A political speech? (Hope they've listened to the lobbyists and crafted that one for a victory!) A pizza? Yes, that's right – a pizza, with toppings to meet the customer's order. Better give teachers heated sacks to keep the deliveries warm!



The Age newspaper, October 26, 2011, reported on a speech by the former Australian finance minister Lindsay Tanner in which he warned universities that if they did not respond to consumers' demands for new ways of learning they would "lose students and die" (Harrison 2011). This provoked an avalanche of anonymous comments such as the following, which were printed under the news article:

What twaddle. Who are the "consumers"? The students? The fact that we see and treat students as customers and try to cater to their "wants and needs" has already led to a decline in teaching and learning standards at universities. Further competition for funding and students will simply see further pandering and erosion of standards.

Rubbish! Educating is not the same as entertaining or even communicating. Quick and dirty and pandering to every taste is not how one educates and it is not how one learns. Learning is a contemplative endeavour requiring time, attention and engagement. Sometimes it is tedious and boring, sometimes stimulating and inspiring. But you have to deliver and take the good with the bad if that is what the subject matter and learning require.

Rather disconcertingly vague. What does "changing the pedagogy" actually mean? Excuse me for being cynical, but when politicians want educators to "embrace technology" that is typically code for "cut costs". Regardless of how "content" is "delivered" at some point the student, sorry "consumer", has to

actually think, reflect, synthesise and do the hard work needed to acquire knowledge. I'm sorry, technology isn't going to change that. In fact, technology can actually mitigate against this, with its characteristics of distraction, gratification and quick-fire reaction.

The fact it was a former federal *finance* minister commenting about universities says it all to begin with. Pure excellence in teaching and research ... where's the money in that?!

Several criticisms of the managerial university are expressed or inherent in these comments. First, commentators criticise the view of universities as businesses, with teachers employed to dispense education as a commodity. They equate this focus on economics with reduced budgets in general: governments are reducing the overall finances they provide to the universities, while university executives are changing their budget balances, giving more funds to administration and infrastructure at the expense of teaching and research (Nathan 2005, 149). Because students are consumers and education a commodity, these commentators contend, courses are being simplified and popularised in order to make them more palatable: “thinned and merchandized”, in the words of Geertz. Moves to offer fast-track courses and increased online delivery are seen as part of this pandering to consumer-students, to the detriment of deep, connected learning. As I argued throughout the Fifth Movement, such deep learning requires time and willingness to struggle with challenges, which many students do not accept as part of their educational purchase.

Increases in administration are doing more than taking money from teaching and research, however. A growing chorus of academic voices complain that they are being swamped with administrative requirements that reduce the time they can devote to teaching and research, as well as stultifying their creativity and passion:

My practice as an academic includes my location in a university not only as a professor engaging (differently) with graduate and undergraduate students, but – often more saliently – as subject to a complex and often tedious, unrewarding, and ultimately (but generally non-intentionally) duplicitous administrative environment that favours the construction of virtual realities by means of elaborate memos, planning exercises, and reviews. (Lambek 2005, 236)

Such administrative tasks create mountains of information that allow the university executive to watch over academics in ways that were not possible in previous decades. This increases academics' sense of not being trusted, and intensifies the power of the executive. I will explore this more fully below, but a recent example will suffice here to demonstrate the administrative monitoring. Curtin University subscribes to the text-matching software Turnitin and the online learning management system Blackboard, as do many universities. When students submit their written assignments through Blackboard, these assignments are also automatically submitted through Turnitin. Teachers are then required to check students' Turnitin reports and to identify students who have paraphrased incorrectly. For first-year students, this is presented as a learning experience, with students required to rewrite offending sections and resubmit assignments without penalty. While this can indeed be a very valuable learning experience for students who are just beginning to master academic language, the system has developed an unforeseen offshoot (unforeseen to teachers, at least): statistics are kept on the numbers of official plagiarism reports being made in each unit, and coordinators are required to justify their practice when their reporting numbers fall below undefined averages. Teachers are therefore pitted against each other in a blind competition to report an appropriate number of students each semester. In addition to their resentment about the extra time required of them to police the Turnitin system, teachers feel untrusted and under surveillance by administrators, who pass down instructions to colleagues at faculty level about teachers they have identified as not performing at appropriate levels.

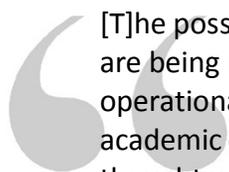


BELLA: That's right – faceless and voiceless administrators. Zombies! Bloodless zombies – the world's becoming beige as all you teachers perform identically. No place for colour or flavour – YOU'RE ALL VANILLA!



Lambek (2005, 235–36) labels such administrators “soft managers”, and contends that much of their surveillance work is designed to consolidate their own position in the organisation rather than to improve education.

This concern relates to another, deeper criticism of mass tertiary education: the utilitarian and critically unaware practices that are being modelled to students. Alison Phipps, Director of Graduate Development at the University of Glasgow, bemoans the fact that when we speak the “unpoetic language” of managerialism “we help whole new generations to construct the world in these terms” (2007, n.p.). Wendy Brown (2015) fears that neoliberal focuses on increasing capital beyond all other goals are eroding democracy in Western societies: not only are economic policies transformed by these focuses, but the very ideologies that underpin societies. Brown claims that the impact is strong on US public universities, in which students, as consumers seeking a profit for their investment in education, are preferring vocational training over liberal arts education (2015, 194). Ronald Barnett, Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at University College London, contends that critical thought is vital to learning but that it flourishes only when people are given time, space and encouragement “to take advantage of it rather than to fear it” (1997, 22). Such critical thought develops only in collaborative learning situations in which power is not being imposed from outside the learner. In his judgment, the drive to “operational competence” in the mass university is detrimental to such critical thought:



[T]he possibilities for critical thought – its conception, its practice, its forms – are being limited. Whether we are seeing a shift from academic competence to operational competence, or whether operational competence is additive to academic competence, the effect is the same: limited opportunities for critical thought when it is needed more than ever, when we should be giving it a greater significance than ever, and when we should be practising a wider range of forms of critical thought than ever. (Barnett 1997, 40–41)

The strictures of operational competence described by Barnett impact on sessional teachers as much as on students, since these teachers are both overwhelmed by

administration and discouraged from risk-taking thought in order to protect their positions.

Critics of the managerial university claim that in driving for efficiency the executive forces all courses to fit a particular model, destroying the diversity of the academic community, and measuring disparate disciplines inappropriately against each other (Lankshear and Knobel 2004, 5). Humanities teachers at Curtin are particularly vocal about the impact of such efficiency templates, seeing their courses denuded of individual perspective and focus by being squeezed into moulds applied also to Business, Science, Engineering and Health Science courses. Curriculum developers are thwarted, for example, by being required to limit their units to four learning outcomes and three assignments, whatever the learning contexts they are trying to foster. Online unit templates require them to label the types of assignments their students must complete, but the list of possible types is not appropriate for Humanities assignments, and they have no option to use alternative wording.

Choruses of protest

I finish this introduction to the managerial university by listening to the protest voices massing from around the academic world and within my own university:

Overall government cuts to universities, the tying of scarce available funds to particular policy directives, and the increasing demand to cater to students as clients, or consumers, has not been an unmitigated good. Indeed, some of these policies unthinkingly reify the logic of the late capitalist marketplace and modes of political thinking that re-engage objectifying and utilitarian practices. (Meneley and Young [University of Toronto] 2005, 2)

[T]he new environment of constant accounting and monitoring creates a troubled relation of surveillance and appeasement between the researcher and the 'powers-that-be', along with a sense of being always visible but not being able to show what is really being done. (Elizabeth and Grant [University of Auckland] 2013, 132)

At my most bleak, I feel like a milking cow: required to 'produce' certifiable product at reliably regular intervals. This feeling, ultimately, cannot help but reverberate at the deepest level of embodiment. (Barcan [University of Sydney] 2016, 91)

How are we to respond to students who have become consumers and treat our lectures and personal attention as commodities for which they expect the right to their money's worth? (Lambek [University of Toronto] 2005, 235)

What is new about the current threat to higher education is the increasing pace of the corporatisation and militarisation of the university, the squelching of academic freedom, the rise of an ever-increasing contingent of part-time faculty, and the view that students are basically consumers and faculty providers of a saleable commodity such as a credential or a set of workplace skills. (Giroux [McMaster University, Ontario] 2011, 151)

What dominate are money and managerialism. Don't get me wrong, these are not necessarily bad in and of themselves, but in their current guise, in the field of modern languages, they are catastrophic. So, when I talk with my colleagues in the field the dominant sound is not that of higher education research and what it can do to safeguard, strengthen and reshape, the dominant sound is that of fear for the future, of having been pinpointed, of being already under attack. (Phipps [University of Glasgow] 2007)

A Curtin teacher chorus

Units keep being amalgamated – we're all becoming one soupy mess. What about diversity?

I've just won a research-only position. I've lost heart for teaching. I'm tired of students not coming to class, or coming unprepared.

I love my students and they love me. I share my passion for learning with them, and they go the extra step with me.

My unit doesn't fit the structures imposed by the managers – it's been working well, but now I have to change it.

We've just had a restructure to make our department more efficient. There aren't enough teachers left to teach the classes. Now some people who were hired as researchers are going to have to teach.

There's no incentive for taking risks. If we try something new, the managers

won't give it time to grow – it has to fit the efficiency models before it's even off the ground.

The new online learning units are working really well. Some of the mature-aged students are committed and passionate, and it's great to teach them.

We teachers are constantly being shown as resistant – it's us against them.

We're being seen as enemies in our own institution.

I'm tired of managerialism – it sucks all the passion out of learning.

Nobody values teaching around here.

We can't get permission to put on more teaching staff to replace those who have retired, but the university keeps creating high-level administrative positions with huge salaries.

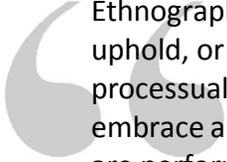
It's important to me to receive good evaluations for my teaching – it shows I'm doing a good job.

I spend more time filling in online surveys and forms than I do teaching.

Managers keep telling me to “let go” – as if I'm old-fashioned and resistant. I'm holding the university back – huh!

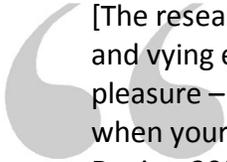
I understand why we all need to work more efficiently – this university does need to be careful how money is spent. But I just wish managers would treat me with more respect.

These voices underline the complexity of the issues involved in university teaching, and the multiple, complex responses of teachers throughout an institution. I regularly hear a range of apparently contradictory voices from individuals (including myself) as we seek to make sense of our own competing responses in a fast-changing environment. Conquergood's (1989; 1991) focus on culture as performance helps suggest some of this complexity. If we see the culture of teaching in a university as something we perform, rather than something we experience, inhabit or have imposed on us by an external entity, then our responses to powerful managerial forces are very complex, and can even include our accommodating them from time to time:

A decorative graphic element consisting of a light gray, stylized shape resembling a speech bubble or a drop, positioned to the left of the text.

Ethnographers are now asking, How does performance reproduce, legitimate, uphold, or challenge, critique, and subvert ideology? And with the influence of processualism, they are more and more phrasing their questions so that they embrace a both/and complexity, instead of an either/or polarization; viz., How are performances situated between forces of accommodation and resistance? And how do they simultaneously reproduce and struggle against hegemony? What are the performative resources for interrupting master scripts? (Conquergood 1989, 84)

The issue of whether the powerless might try to resist is complicated in a university setting. Powerless students and sessional tutors not only might have trouble finding their voices but might choose not to speak since their success depends on their accepting the status quo. If they succeed in the system, they graduate as students or gain full employment as teachers, and join the powerful. As Conquergood claims, the performance of community is a complex and ever-changing mix of resistance and accommodation. Similarly, in studying the responses of their research colleagues to the managerial university, Auckland University's Vivienne Elizabeth and Barbara Grant discovered a range of responses that echo the motif of messiness throughout this performance. The voices they heard were reinforced by their extensive research of published papers worldwide:

A decorative graphic element consisting of a light gray, stylized shape resembling a speech bubble or a drop, positioned to the left of the text.

[The researchers' response] is marked by a messy palette of often contradictory and vying emotions, such as anxiety, doubt, guilt, shame, envy, pride and pleasure – including the fraught pleasure of competing and 'making it' even when your colleagues haven't (Hey, 2004; see also Ball, 2003; Black, 2005; Davies, 2003, 2005; Chandler et al., 2002; Harley, 2002; Middleton, 2005; Morley, 2001; Reay, 2005; Sparkes, 2007). (Elizabeth and Grant 2013, 133)

SIXTH MOVEMENT, THEME 3: A FAST-TRACK EDUCATION

Right from primary school I learned that getting good marks was what my parents (and later potential employers) were most interested in and I worked out how to get them while putting in as little effort as possible. By university I could coast through. That idea of coasting even became the biggest consideration in choosing electives – I chose units with 100 per cent exams or as close to that as I could find, did the minimum work during the semester and then crammed the night before the exam. Focussing on the result meant I ignored what else I could gain from the experience, and the way I went about it meant I gained very little that I could carry with me. When I started working I found that if you learn a semester's worth of knowledge in one night and dump it all in an exam the following day, you don't retain much of it. You also miss out on learning the value of knowledge, and learning. Importantly I think you have no relationship with the material other than as a means to an end. At the time that didn't bother me, since it hadn't really interested me in the first place. I was only doing the degrees to get the career - that's what I thought the whole point of uni was. (Tristan Durie)

This is a vivid portrayal of fast-track education from Curtin Open University Humanities student Tristan Durie,⁵ who was working and studying online from Holland in 2014. As a 35-year-old student, he was taking a Communications unit to prepare himself to embark on a Masters degree. Atypical of the vast majority of beginning students in Communications units, in that he had broad experience of university learning, he was one of the few students who spoke in resistance to fast-track education.

In contrast, many voices of students seeking fast-track education have sounded through this performance – harmonious, discordant, hesitant and booming, they are not one single voice. Sharon, who resonated through the prelude and many of the early movements, was interested in ideas, provided they were presented to her by an authority and she did not have to engage with other students who would slow down

her progress. Greg, who joined Sharon several times in student choruses, had surprised himself by becoming excited by ideas. He wanted to explore and question more fully, including engaging in conversations with his fellow students and tutor, and writing reflectively about the ideas he was encountering; nevertheless, his major focus was to complete a degree before he turned thirty and “get off the tools”. Steve, who joined Sharon and Greg in the Fourth Movement, wanted to pass with the minimum effort and was resentful about any requirement that he engage or question, which he saw as wasting his time. He valued teachers who gave short lectures focused on information he would need to pass tests and exams.

Resistance to deep learning

Many researchers have explored students’ resistance to deep learning (e.g., hooks 1994; Horowitz 1987; Lather 1992; Richardson 1992; Rose 1989), particularly learning that challenges their own attitudes and values, and that moves the focus from the teacher to the students. For example, bell hooks (1994, 146) contends that “fundamentally, [students] don’t want to be participants,” and concludes, “how deeply ingrained is the student perception that professors can be and should be dictators” (hooks 1994, 147).

BELLA: Huh! If university teachers can’t be idiosyncratic, what hope do we all have? You should be rattling and rolling those students, prodding and perplexing them. Not making them comfortable. NOT asking them how they would like you to structure their courses to “fit around their lifestyles”.⁶ Take a lead from Judith Fetterley – “the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader, and by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcizing the male mind that has been implanted in us.”⁷ Of course she’s not just talking about reading – let’s all become connected learners. Connected livers – and connected hearts and bodies too!

Rebekah Nathan (2005) identified a group of resistant students in her undercover research at AnyU University. She polled students about whether, if the university offered them an immediate degree without their needing to do any more study (though they had to pay their fees for the units they would be granted), they would take the offer. Eleven out of thirty-eight respondents said they would. The

other twenty-seven said they would reject the offer. Their reasons were varied: some needed to know more to get a good job; others felt uncomfortable because this arrangement would be dishonest; only five of the thirty-eight reported wanting to continue learning for the sake of learning (2005, 101–02). Nathan insists that resistance is not personal against individual teachers but is characteristic of students in the twenty-first century. Other commentators would argue that it has been common for a much longer time; indeed, Professor Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz's (1987) research traces it back more than one hundred years.

Teacher taming

It is Week 8 of a twelve-week semester and one of our tutors is unable to continue teaching the unit. Panic as we rejig the schedules and look for someone to take her place! I accompany the volunteer tutor into the class on the first day to apologise to the students, and negotiate how we will reschedule assignments so that they aren't disadvantaged. "Any concerns?" I ask. "Everyone happy?" and everyone nods, instantly thrilled to have a week's extension on the major assignment. But as I leave one of the students accompanies me into the corridor. He's slightly older than the rest of the students and I had noticed as I entered the room that he was already set up for the class before most of the others had arrived.

"I'm not complaining," he starts. "I know things like this happen and I think you've all handled it as well as you could. But I need you to know that this has seriously disadvantaged me. I put a lot of effort into getting to know my tutors personally – figure that if I make connections with them it might improve my results, and it might even help me with future employment – the Perth workforce is small enough for people to know people! Now I've wasted that effort in this unit and I have to start again – and I only have four weeks left."

I realise I am staring at him speechlessly, and I make a non-committal comment before we part – he back to the classroom, me to my office, where I sit quietly for a few moments thinking back on the conversation. My reaction is

a combination of shock that he sees the learning-teaching relationship in such transactional terms and yet a strange respect that he is so open and clear about his motivations as a student. At no point in the conversation did I feel he wanted to make a complaint, or to push me to apologise; he was merely describing what he saw as the ideal student-teacher relationship.

Uppity voices



... uppity voices of informants and researchers who speak against structures, representations, and practices of domination. (Fine 1994, 78)

Michelle Fine's phrase "uppity voices" encapsulates the image of the critical reflective thinker; among students, the uppity voices are those of students within the managerial university who perform as deep, engaged, connected learners. In an early paper arising from my interviews (Grellier 2014, 540–542), I identified as uppity voices two of the twenty volunteers from my research and one additional student who withdrew from the university before I could interview him because "I have discovered that I find maths and science to be incredibly uninteresting as a university subject, with all the wonder and excitement totally drained out of it and now I think that four years of equations and numbers sounds more like hell". These three students spoke out against the structures of their courses; against the competitive and separate attitudes to learning of their fellow students; and against the impact of administrative burdens they saw being placed on their teachers. They were a mere 10 per cent of my volunteer group, who were themselves not representative of the general student body since they were willing to participate in the research. Nevertheless, they demonstrate that some students do indeed seek to be excited and challenged by their learning.

Tertiary education researchers John Biggs and Catherine Tang (2011), in their analysis of "the Susan and Robert problem", encapsulate these uppity students in the person of Susan, the student who is bright, motivated, intrinsically interested in education and actively engaged in classes, and who already has a broad cultural context from which to deepen her learning. They distinguish her from Robert, who seeks only to complete

his degree as quickly as possible. The problem for teachers in the opinion of Biggs and Tang is that these students attend the same classes and teachers need to be able to communicate with both of them (2011, 5). This is a problem far beyond the scope of this performance, and underlines yet again the messiness that lies at the heart of teaching. Here I can celebrate that uppity students and Susans do exist. They are the students that Lambek identifies at the University of Toronto:

“... undergraduates who write on their course evaluation forms, “This course has changed my life” and, more compellingly, the students who hand in essays that show it and then who ask for more. (Lambek 2005, 236)

SIXTH MOVEMENT, VARIATION: A PANOPTIC INTERLUDE

It's June 2013, the end of Semester 1. Sue, a colleague, has stopped by my open office doorway to say hello. She's clutching a large bundle of marking, smiling, but her eyes look tired. Not an unusual sight for this time of semester, I reflect, but soon to be obsolete – the university has mandated online marking and, although members of my school have been resisting, the edict will be enforced from next semester, so no more bundles of papers.

The conversation soon moves to the email staff have just received requiring us to fill in an online survey for each unit we coordinate, describing how we have assessed and moderated the unit this semester. We've been assured that this will take only five minutes for each unit, but for Sue this is one demand too many. Taking a few steps into the office, she drops her papers on my desk, shrugs her shoulders, and sits down heavily in the vacant chair. “You know, I've had it! I've been here twenty years, doing my best for the students, and they don't trust me. It feels like we're all assumed to be guilty unless we can prove we're innocent. They just keep checking on me and demanding more STUPID things.”⁸

This incident was significant in several ways. First, the email was forwarded by Judith, the School's Director of Teaching and Learning, a peer at the same level as both Sue

and me, who had accepted this position several years earlier when it involved peer support, professional development in teaching and learning, and representing the concerns of teaching staff to line managers. By 2013 her role had mutated into one of monitoring her colleagues' compliance with assessment procedures, and passing edicts from senior managers down to the teaching staff. When some colleagues resisted this latest mandate by refusing to fill in the online survey, pressure was placed on Judith, who was accountable for the compliance of her school. Although she empathised with many of her colleagues' complaints, she understood that she needed to temper her resistance to the initiatives in order to retain her position so that she could continue to advocate for these colleagues. The position would continue, whether Judith retained it or was replaced by someone less sensitive to the frustrations of teachers. She could attempt to "hold open the cracks" (Garrison 2009) as often as possible to help her colleagues slip through smoothly. Most people understood this and did not blame her, but she was an easy target for their anger. Those who had completed the survey reported that, as usual with the many surveys staff were being required to complete, it took much longer than had been suggested, and they could identify neither the author of the survey nor any phone number or email address they could contact. Impotent to identify their oppressors, they directed their frustration at Judith.

This incident can be valuably explored through the lens of Foucault's 'panopticism' (1979). I do not claim that Curtin has been unique in its creation of panopticism, but treat Curtin here as a case study of administrative measures being adopted in tertiary institutions nationally and internationally. Foucault compares two forms of traditional punishment – the exclusion of the leper from 'proper society', and the control of those who dwelt in towns in which the black plague erupted in the seventeenth century. In the former approach, sufferers were aggressively driven out of societies; while in the latter, prospective sufferers were required to stay indoors, on pain of death, and underwent moment-by-moment surveillance and control to ensure that they did not catch and transmit the disease to others. Each street was monitored by a "syndic", who locked house doors from the outside and was answerable for the confinement of his neighbours; "intendants" were appointed in each district to monitor the syndics; and

all of these were backed up by guards at key defensive posts. All of these people reported on the success of each watch period to those on the level above them (Foucault 1979, 196).

Foucault claims that these two approaches have combined in mechanisms adopted since the nineteenth century to control and punish a wide range of groups, including prisoners, inmates of mental hospitals, school children and workers in factories. These groups are doubly punished: they are internally ostracised as 'Other', with the social oppression that this brings; and their daily lives are controlled by vast but generally invisible surveillance mechanisms. In order to analyse these mechanisms, Foucault uses Bentham's eighteenth-century image of the panopticon, the circular prison constructed around a central guard tower, with individual cells radiating in a ring around this tower. Control is maintained by the cells being constantly lit and visible, while the guard tower is dark and shielded, so that prisoners are unable to discern at any moment whether they are being watched, so fear at every moment that they are. The prisoners can neither see nor communicate with each other, and their only communication is with their guards as controllers. The power of this system lies in the facts that the guards can be replaced at any time, and that they can conduct their role with any purpose – neither of these aspects impacts on the prisoners' sense of undergoing constant surveillance (Foucault 1979).

Foucault claims that the panoptic mechanism has both positive and negative results. On one hand, people are monitored, controlled and silenced by a system that they cannot see and thus cannot resist. They feel oppressed and helpless because they are divided from each other and unable to identify their oppressors. On the other hand, the system functions effectively, people are not physically brutalised, and desired outcomes are achieved most easily. Those who are not performing as required can be identified easily and reformed. In educational institutions, students achieve set goals more effectively; in workplaces, workers meet the organisation's requirements more closely, with more equal and comparable achievements (Foucault 1979).

BELLA: “Desired outcomes”, “set goals”, “organisation’s requirements” ... this is sounding depressingly familiar ... *(But Jane is barely listening – her thoughts are rushing.)*

Curtin’s panopticism

Viewed as a panoptic system, Curtin University’s assessment procedures in 2013–2015 can be seen to have both negative and positive features. On the negative side, teaching staff like Sue, who might have worked at Curtin for many years but were not in senior positions, felt disempowered and distrusted. Like those in Foucault’s description of the plague towns, they were in a “segmented, immobile, frozen space” (1979, 195). They were divided from other people on the same level of the organisation by the power structures that analysed and controlled them, as much as they were controlled by the structures imposed by senior management. On the positive side, all courses in the university were standardised, as explained by the Director of Curtin’s Curriculum 2010, Professor Beverley Oliver, and teachers were accountable for their assessment processes, so students could be sure that degree programs were “excellent and sustainable” (2013, 450), whatever course they enrolled in.

BELLA: Garbage and gobbledegook, Jane – can’t believe you’re speaking like this! You lived through the impacts of this on your colleagues! How many lost their jobs when the cookie-cutter clan got chopping! How many resigned when they were swamped under mountains of mass teaching – soullessly stultifying, unendingly unedifying! Can anyone blame them for retiring early? So much passion and goodwill lost. **DON’T** you start talking about positive impacts! *(But, in her attempts to be even-handed, Jane is not listening.)*

The political and social contexts in which these changes were occurring impacted significantly. On the political front, the Australian Government’s Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) had been established in 2011, and increased the compliance requirements on Australian universities. TEQSA required that universities demonstrate their measures to “identify and assess risk” in three areas: “risks to

students, risk of provider collapse, and risk to sector reputation for quality” (TEQSA 2012). On a local level, Curtin identified a serious risk both to students and to sector reputation at the end of 2012, when a lecturer was charged with accepting bribes to raise students’ marks on assignments, and to ignore instances of plagiarism. The speed with which measures to monitor teachers’ marking were introduced can be seen in both of these contexts. Indeed, the measures might play their part in preventing the third risk, “risk of provider collapse”, since the institution needed to protect its student numbers by satisfying present and future students that it was tightening its assessment procedures. In addition, Curtin relied on international enrolments for a large proportion of its income,⁹ and the bribery and plagiarism case had involved a number of international students. In the context of the high value of the Australian dollar, which increased fees for international students and was putting pressure on all Australian tertiary institutions (Gomes 2014),¹⁰ Curtin could not afford that prospective overseas students and their families lose confidence in the education they would receive. For almost a decade, Curtin’s major focus in teaching and learning had been on achieving “better institutional performance in internal, national and international quality measures and rankings” (Oliver 2013, 450); and this focus became increasingly concentrated on assessment measures during 2013.

BELLA: An apologist for the system? Never thought I’d hear it from you, Jane! Between TEQSA and Ernst & Young, what hope do teachers of passion have? AND students who strive to think deeply? If you teachers don’t resist, there’s no hope of joy and risk-taking in learning. We might as well all be flung into hyperspace with Clifford Geertz!

By the beginning of 2013, teachers had been required to use the learning management system Blackboard for several years, but some had used it only to give students access to unit outlines, assignment documents and student resource materials. Gradually more and more staff had students submit their assignments through Blackboard – and many liked the practicality this system provided – but this was not mandated until 2013. Some teachers complained about this, claiming that having to mark long written

assignments on a computer monitor created health and safety problems, but the person who would previously have taken their concerns to senior management – Judith as Director of Teaching and Learning – was by then responsible for ensuring that they complied.

Unit coordinators had previously had complete control of their unit Blackboard sites, to the extent that if other staff wished to have access to a particular site they had to seek permission from and be logged on by the unit coordinator. In 2013, coordinators began to notice other names appearing on the lists of staff who had access to their Blackboard sites – names of people they did not know, but whom they discovered were central administrative staff members. When they mentioned this over coffee and in corridors to colleagues, they realised that they had all made the same discovery, and they shared their resentment about the silent surveillance.



BELLA: Surely you asked your line managers about this? You didn't just accept it and moan about it in the background?

JANE: Yes, it does sound pathetic in retrospect, doesn't it? But our experience was that academic line managers were as unaware of online systems as we were, and we'd got out of the habit of asking them these sorts of questions. If it was possible to find someone to ask, these people were always the technologists and could only give us technological answers. And then, of course, there was Judith, who was swamped with complaints and questions, and struggling to work with the system in ways that would support her colleagues.

BELLA: So your academic line managers were being disempowered?

JANE: Exactly! And caught up in endless hours of administration themselves. They were gradually being sidelined from the main lines of managerial control.



Some schools took compliance of Blackboard sites particularly seriously, requiring all coordinators to email their line managers to assure them that they were complying with a checklist of demands. Then, at the end of semester, in June 2013, came the

email that caused Sue's distress – while coordinators were rushing to compile final marks for their units in time for Boards of Examiners, they were given yet another online task, a survey with no author and no contact person. Indeed, the deadline for completing the survey was the Friday afternoon before the final deadline for marks submission on the following Monday, and coordinators were already anticipating long workdays over that weekend. In Barcan's words, they were "confused, resentful or exhausted" (2016, 12), if not all three together.

Two characteristics of the surveillance made it distressing to teaching staff. First, the guards of the system – not educators but technologists – were unknown to them, and could be monitoring them at any moment through their Blackboard site. One colleague, for example, was contacted by an IT specialist, who refused to grant her permission to use the assessment rubric she had already uploaded to the site. Although she had tailored it to a particular assignment, it did not meet centralised policies and had to be removed. Second, the teachers felt that lights had been shone on a much wider range of their actions and decisions than had happened before. Like the prisoners in their panoptic cells, they were in much more frequent light than previously, and all of their actions were visible to the C2010 group discussed in the Fourth Movement, which controlled learning outcomes and assessment structures of all units and courses. Many railed against the restrictions imposed by the C2010 mechanism, and the sense that managers dictated to disciplinary professionals how they could structure their courses.

As well as complaining, teachers employed a wide range of resistance tactics, typical of those described by de Certeau (which I will discuss further below). Some chose to ignore the C2010 decisions and continued to use previous unit structures. However, within a few years this tactic was blocked: coordinators were required to create their unit outlines in online templates, through the Unit Outline Builder or OUB, in which learning outcomes, assessment tasks, and assignment weightings, previously certified during the C2010 processes, were pre-entered and could not be altered. Those who wanted to make changes to any of these items needed to go through a six-month process of application forms and signatures at many levels. Staff received pre-printed versions of

their final outlines for their own information, but published unit outlines were visible only in a separate student section of the university website, unavailable to staff. Still some teachers employed resistance tactics, creating their own unit outlines, and publishing them on their unit Blackboard portals. Or they appeared to participate by completing the online version (after all, they could not be sure who was checking that they had complied) and then published separate versions on their Blackboard site. In 2013, however, their sense of surveillance was increased when staff began to be warned that their alternative unit outlines were being noted on Blackboard; they were instructed to remove them, so that the managers could ensure that only authorised unit outlines were available to students. One teacher was reminded that uploading an alternative unit outline on her Blackboard site was “a sackable offence”.

The requirement that students submit all assignments online, and that teachers mark these assignments and upload their marked copies, turned further beams of light on teachers, since it was theoretically possible for unidentified monitors to check the marks and feedback they had given to particular students. They were also required to ensure that all student written assignments be passed through the plagiarism checking site, Turnitin, which increased their workloads considerably, and which some claimed was an ineffective method of detecting plagiarism. Staff began to wonder and discuss who might choose to monitor their assessments, and for what reasons. In addition, the light was shone on unit coordinators, questioning the moderation mechanisms they had in place to ensure that marks were awarded fairly. This led to the online survey of moderation procedures that provoked Sue’s frustration. By the end of Semester 1, 2013, many of her colleagues shared her distress, while others were angry and resistant.



BELLA: I’m on their side – and back and front! Anything to fire up the passion. What’s the cost to academic freedom of all this? And to scholarship? AND to the drive to pursue learning just for itself? AND to creativity? Hope they keep fighting – even the most rigid system can be infiltrated with good resistance tactics.



Foucault stresses that panopticism's strength is to deal with the anathemas of well-controlled systems: disorder and disease, which he terms "mixtures". He describes the dangers of these mixtures as arising from their multifaceted, chaotic nature, against which the only solution is order: "Against the plague, which is a mixture, discipline brings into play its power, which is one of analysis" (Foucault 1979, 197). By identifying members of the workforce who are not achieving the standards required by management, measures can be introduced to improve their training and support, and the workforce can be ordered and therefore enhanced:

“If the inmates are ... workers, there are no disorders, no theft, no coalitions, none of the distractions that slow down the rate of work, make it less perfect or cause accidents. (Foucault 1979, 200–201)

Consistent learning outcomes are seen by many as positive for student learning, because they encourage teachers to shift their focus from what they are teaching to what their students are learning (e.g., Biggs and Tang 2011; Kuh and Ikenberry 2009). Likewise, the overseeing of assessment within all units might be seen as positive because it ensures that all units meet a minimum standard. No longer can students take units in which assessment is devoted totally to examinations, or to a large group assignment in which some students have not pulled their weight.

Of course, the difficulty with this approach is that some members of the workforce do not believe in the directions the executive has set, and do not wish to comply. The panoptic system seeks to identify these people, and to coerce or exclude them. The assessment measures at Curtin were accompanied by a strong emphasis on identifying common values and visions: staff were regularly urged to attend seminars and complete surveys on these issues. Over several years early retirement packages were offered to those staff who did not share the visions being portrayed; some staff were identified as appropriate candidates for these packages, interviewed by their line managers, and encouraged to apply for them. The exclusion processes were underway, and many staff resented this.

BELLA: Bah to minimum standards! Bah to common goals and shared values! Let's have more distractions, more inspiration, more sparks. Let's show those managers the role of insight, passion, moments of genius ... Humanities teachers want to open up options, to challenge, to critique ... not share the same values as everyone else. They want to challenge, and to encourage students to challenge.

JANE: Ha! That's what the executive doesn't want!

BELLA: Yes, it's like Michael Lambek says, "To be an academic of any sort (I don't count the business schools) these days is to be on guard."¹¹

A further advantage of this panoptic management is the pragmatic one: in the contexts of reduced Australian government financial support for universities and dwindling international student enrolments throughout Australia, Curtin needed to receive a positive report from its next TEQSA assessment in order to attract future students and ultimately to survive. Senior administration emphasised this focus in regular emails during 2013, and it was undoubtedly a factor in increased surveillance. Staff suspected, however, that it was equally important to management to avoid a future bribery case like the one that was playing out in the media during that semester, and they resented the suspicions being placed on themselves and their colleagues.

Jane's role as guard

As the coordinator of a large unit taught in 2013 by nine teachers, I was shocked to find myself turning the pressure onto those teaching in the unit as I strove to ensure that all parts of the Blackboard site would meet the requirements of the hidden monitors. I began to send emails pushing tutors to meet marking deadlines that in the past I had been unaware they had missed; I noticed missing assignments; I questioned marks week by week, when in previous semesters I would have been aware of them only at the end of the semester; I checked markers' averages and then double-checked the marking of those who were out of alignment. My discomfort in catching myself doing this increased when I realised that the senior administration viewed this kind of behaviour positively (indeed, it was the kind of behaviour being encouraged in Sue's online survey), and that the panoptic system was channelling me in this direction.



BELLA: So you found yourself doing things you didn't believe in. Why not just refuse?

JANE: It took a while to realise what I was doing ...

BELLA: That's no excuse ...

JANE: No, you're right. And I feel awkward to realise that I reacted in this way, a way I would have said was against my educational and personal beliefs. I chose the tutors myself because I knew they were all dedicated and highly effective teachers. They get brilliant results, and students consistently appreciate them in formal evaluations. And yes, maybe sometimes one of them falls behind in marking, or gives an extra mark because a piece of writing moves her deeply rather than because it meets assessment criteria. But I would always argue that their qualities as teachers surpass everything else.

BELLA: So why did you become a surveillor?

JANE: I'm still reflecting on that. It's an uncomfortable feeling – definitely Pillow's "reflexivity of discomfort" (see page 65). One reason is the sense of not knowing when I was being watched, that at any moment someone might be noticing that one of my tutors was not meeting requirements, and that I was responsible for the lapse. That seems more threatening than being criticised face to face after a process is complete. Maybe it was exacerbated because the system had not been used before, and I didn't know how it would work. When a system is untried, it's easy to endow it with greater powers and more punitive responses than are possible in reality. It's uncomfortable to recognise that I didn't question what the repercussions might be if one of the tutors was identified as less than perfect – I just strove to avoid it happening.

BELLA: Hmmm! So the surveilled became the surveillor! That sheds a different light on the surveillance system!

JANE: Well, it certainly makes me more understanding of the monitors at each level who do their jobs with great diligence – Foucault's syndics and intendants. I might not admire or respect them, but I understand them. I'm also coming to realise how powerful and self-perpetuating the panoptic system is.

BELLA: So you think that most people could become surveillors in certain circumstances?

JANE: Yes, I do! But I also think I'm particularly prone in the Curtin assessment circumstances, and I need to keep guard over myself. I'm an extreme perfectionist, the one colleagues approach to edit their reference lists because I home in on every comma, every unnecessary space. I take no pride in this – it's a very low-level capacity and brings me as much distress as satisfaction. But it means I'm particularly susceptible in the world of online assessment because every group of marks missing at the deadline and every tutor's average that sits slightly out of the general field is visible to me at a mouse click, and I struggle to make it all perfect. I'd be the dream surveillance spoke in the panoptic wheel, if only my ethical and educational voices could be silenced. And I choose to prevent this silencing by surrounding myself with a team of tutors who refuse to be tamed, and who frequently challenge my priorities.

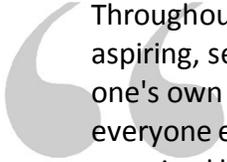
BELLA: So, like everyone else, you are a paradox. It's strawberries or abandonment again. The Curtin approach to assessment seems to have disturbed you at a deep level.

JANE: And many other people too, if I think about the people I chat with in corridors and coffee shops. The change has been gradual but the last leap came very quickly, and many people were distressed by it.



Teachers had been questioning during Semester 1, 2013 who would have time to monitor their Blackboard sites, and they wondered whether they were being tricked into completing the intricate details unnecessarily – that the hidden guard tower would indeed be empty in this instance. At the end of the semester, however, the process became clear: Assessment Quality Panels were established in each school, and colleagues were co-opted into monitoring each other, then passing their conclusions to Directors of Teaching and Learning, then heads of school and from there to senior management. This was yet another tool in the partitioning of staff, pitting one against another, and ensuring that staff were continually reminded of the vertical line of control from senior management to classroom teachers, while masking individuals in the higher levels from the lower levels. The uncertainties about this monitoring exacerbated teachers' stress and sense of not being trusted by senior management (and of not trusting them in return).

In universities in which struggles for power are playing out, the transparency-opacity scale is of deep significance. Zygmunt Bauman's analysis of bureaucratic power highlights issues of great concern for university teachers:

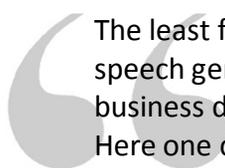


Throughout the world of modern bureaucracies, the strategy of every, extant or aspiring, sector consists invariably and consistently in the attempts to untie one's own hands while imposing strict and stringent rules on the conduct of everyone else within the organization. ... In other words, most power is exercised by the unit closest to the sources of other units' uncertainty. The manipulation of uncertainty is essential; it is the primary stake in the struggle for power and influence inside every structured totality – first and foremost in its most radical form of modern bureaucratic organization. (Bauman 1999, 176–177)

The more Curtin teachers are unable to identify and contact the people involved in their surveillance, the guards in the tower, the more uncertain and powerless they feel. This is exacerbated by the fact that those in their previous lines of management – their academic managers – are also uncertain about the ways the teaching and monitoring systems are being administered. When information is disseminated, it is spread through administrative systems and through Directors of Teaching and Learning, rather than through the traditional academic lines the teachers are accustomed to. The voices of those who speak for quality teaching and learning are being silenced.

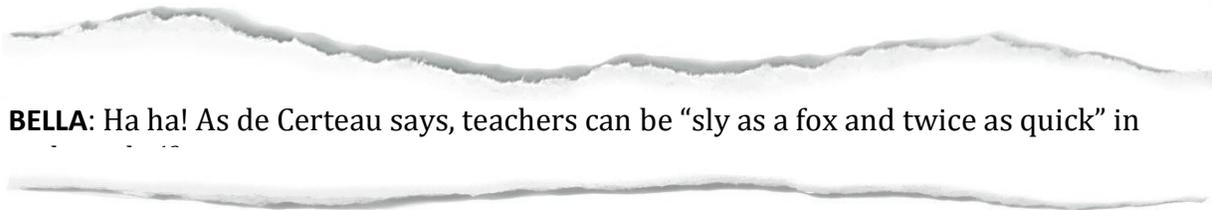
SIXTH MOVEMENT, THEME 4: BAKHTIN AND DE CERTEAU

It is also valuable to explore Curtin's teaching and learning through the lens of Bakhtin's theories of monologism. According to Bakhtin, dialogism is the mark of a democratic, open community, while monologism is the mark of an autocratic state. The more executive and managerial controls silence the voices of teachers in any university, the poorer and more limited is the teaching environment of the institution. Bakhtin identifies "standard form" documents, as one mark of a monologic system:

 The least favourable conditions for reflecting individuality in language obtain in speech genres that require a standard form, for example, many kinds of business documents, military commands, verbal signals in industry, and so on. Here one can reflect only the most superficial, almost biological aspects of individuality. (Bakhtin 1986, 63)

Teachers' arguments against unit outline templates, with restrictions on learning outcomes and rigid requirements about the number and type of assignments that can be set in each unit, resonate strongly in this context: the restrictions limit teachers and students alike into superficial learning. As Bakhtin contends, monological utterances can have no creativity in themselves, but can only be responses to existing communications (1986, 99).

Teachers' resistance against monologism can be considered through the lens of de Certeau's (1984) theories of resistance. He distinguishes between the broad strategies that underpin organisational power and the moment-by-moment tactics – the “making do” tricks (1984, 29–42) – used by those working within organisations in order to resist their impact.



BELLA: Ha ha! As de Certeau says, teachers can be “sly as a fox and twice as quick” in

As I argued in the Fifth Movement, de Certeau was most interested in how concepts such as learning, classrooms, and students are performed by practices rather than being pre-existing absolutes. In this context, the struggle between academics and managers of universities is vital for the ways these terms will be understood in future decades. While managers seek to lay down educational practices by articulating broad-brush strategic directions for their institutions, teachers can subvert these strategies only by short-term tactics. For these resistance tactics to succeed, teachers need to engage students to cooperate with them, for if the students in turn resist their teachers, then the teachers are trapped in the bizarre machine I described at the beginning of this movement, and the tactics lose force.

Foucault's exploration of the advantages of panopticism in the workplace focuses on workplaces such as factories, in which workers might not have strong personal stakes. Much of the resistance to panopticism at Curtin, however, arises from the qualities of its teaching staff. As professionals and academics, they rail against managers who impose general systems they see as inappropriate to their disciplines. Having had relative freedom in previous decades to structure their courses as they chose, they find themselves being controlled, with key degree programs and individual units closed or amalgamated due to the university's notion of acceptable minimum enrolments, and the desire to consolidate course offerings to reduce administrative costs. They also

resent the amount of time they are being forced to devote to completing online documents, particularly since the online sites are regularly introduced too quickly, before their glitches have been ironed out. Unlike factory workers on fixed wages, teaching staff are required to devote additional unpaid hours to making the systems work. Their resentment is exacerbated by the type of monitoring and data collection mechanisms being used, which they often feel are inappropriate to them; and by their sense of the hidden motives behind many of these mechanisms: “it’s just layer upon layer upon layer of ‘STUFF’!” one exasperated colleague bemoaned. In addition, staff are accustomed to academic freedom, and many resist the straightjacket of shared goals and values. Humanities staff are particularly resentful because they feel that the senior administration focus on sciences, technology and mining, and make financial decisions that favour those areas over Humanities. And as effective communicators and social critics, they protest vociferously.



BELLA: Resist ... persist ... desist ... maybe some people protested and resisted, but lots accepted and worked within the system.

JANE: Yes, you’re right. It’s Conquergood’s complex performance: resistance and accommodation interchanging and blending moment by moment.¹³ Early academics need to build a career, and sometimes fear being identified as non-compliant. Some people are cynical about the value of protest, and just want to do their job ...

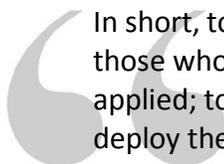
BELLA: And I imagine some are just too busy ...

JANE: That’s true too – some are caught up with research and have neither time nor headspace for teaching issues. And then there’s the ones who are angry with inefficient, dishonest or incompetent colleagues, and are happy to think that the system might control them. I’m increasingly aware of the many forces working to promote Curtin’s panoptic systems, both directly and indirectly. And I understand why I hear the same voice each week from among my older colleagues: “I’m just glad I’m close to retirement, and I may go earlier than I had planned.”



Possibilities for resistance

While some Curtin academics choose early retirement as a means of escape from the oppressive environment, others seek ways to resist it. Foucault varied in his conclusions about the possibilities for resistance. On the one hand, he was pessimistic about the possibilities because of the widespread influence of the panoptic system: he coined the term “panopticism” (1979, 216) to depict an entire society imbued with an administrative focus. Rather than coming into open conflict with multiplicities, panoptic mechanisms neutralise and strangle the power of individuals by objectifying and analysing them through “hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification” – the work of Lambek’s “soft managers” quoted above:



In short, to substitute for a power that is manifested through the brilliance of those who exercise it, a power that insidiously objectifies those on whom it is applied; to form a body of knowledge about these individuals, rather than to deploy the ostentatious signs of sovereignty. (Foucault 1979, 200)

Curtin teachers distrust and fear the quiet surveillance that builds knowledge insidiously about them. Those people who struggle to resist nevertheless feel the impact of working within the system. Whether their performances are of open resistance, or attempts to avoid engagement, the impact is evident.

At the time of my writing this movement, the resistance to Curtin’s managerial assessment structures continues; it will be interesting to view its progress in future semesters. One minor impact, however, is already clear to me in this analysis: my passion for clear, crisp written expression has shaped my writing over many years, leading me to avoid nominalisation and passive tenses as much as possible. As I edited and re-edited the panoptic interlude, I found it impossible to write as concisely as I would choose. The lack of identifiable sources of control in the panoptic system and the proliferation of objectification have indeed neutralised and strangled the power of

my writing, leaving me feeling frustrated and heavy – one small image of the effects of panopticism.

On the other hand, in an interview conducted in 1978, Foucault (2000, 294–295) gave advice to those oppressed in relations of power. It was possible to resist and thus transform one's life in thousands of ways, he argued, and his work was dedicated to helping people explore these ways. It was necessary first to understand the mechanisms of power, which he committed himself to elucidating.

Other researchers offer a range of different approaches to resisting oppression, all of which are connected and embodied responses. Okely's (1996) analysis of her student days in an English boarding school describes how girls used humour and trivial joint acts of misbehaviour to build their cohesion and resist the domination of their teachers, which was maintained through an almost overpowering "focus on minutiae" (1996, 159), as is the managerial world of Curtin.

Deleuze (1995, 19) argues for the vital role of desire in shaking systems. For some Curtin teachers, passion for their students and for teaching itself is one motivation that prevents them from retiring. Tutors Sandra Adams, James Barclay and Joy Scott chorused loudly at the beginning of this movement about the personal satisfaction of helping students learn to think. St. Pierre (1997 282) advocates gossip as a rhizomatic, playful and creative means of breaking up power structures within an institution. As I have sought to show throughout this performance, much of the energy of Curtin teachers comes from conversations in corridors and coffee shops, which serve not only to share information in order to counteract the opacity of the system, but also to foster resistance tactics and to build emotional support among teachers.

Alison Phipps (2007) employs an image from poet Seamus Heaney in her suggestion for resistance: "up end the rain stick", which she sees as turning the world upside down to listen to the surprising new sounds emanating in this position. She calls for enchantment:

In order to change the patterns of the air we learn, in the way we have always done, from those who enchant, who change the sound, who work with the malleable textures of perception ... poets, translators, magicians, teachers, languagers, story-tellers. We become enchanters. We work with what we've got. (Phipps 2007, n.p.)

Phipps claims that it is the very act of turning the world upside down that leads to the enchantment, not any specific new world we might create. In my performance, Bella's role is one attempt to up end the rain stick – her love of words and her provocative challenging have forced my academic ears to hear new sounds – as are the composite choruses, vignettes and poems. Phipps's suggested methods for 'up ending' the world resonate strongly within this performance: relationships between people, memories, confessions, laughter and shared stories of grief and hope (Phipps 2007). Like de Certeau, she advocates "work[ing] with what we've got".

Bakhtin focuses on the carnivalesque that can subvert and upturn hierarchies. He values the carnivalesque in Dostoevsky's work, and defines it as "*syncretic pageantry* of a ritualistic sort ... life turned inside out" (1984, 122, emphasis in original), in which laws, hierarchies and etiquettes of everyday life are suspended. Participants do not perform carnival: they live it. The significance of Bakhtin's carnival for my performance lies in his understanding of its role:

Carnival is the place for working out, in a concretely sensuous, half-real and half-play-acted form, a *new mode of interrelationship between individuals*, counterposed to the all-powerful socio-hierarchical relationships of noncarnival life. ... Carnival brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the low, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid. (Bakhtin 1984, 123)

SIXTH MOVEMENT, VARIATION: THE CURTIN CARNIVAL

Bella has come out of the wings and is standing at the top of Henderson Court, in the middle of the Bentley campus. She is wearing an academic gown made of multi-coloured silk panels and a white mortarboard studded with gold stars, and she's shouting into a large megaphone.

Bella: Roll up, roll up, roll up, and welcome to the first ever Curtin Carnival. Welcome students, welcome teachers, welcome office staff, welcome members of the executive.

Today, I bring you, for your delight and delectation, a world-shattering, a mind-blowing, a body-storming experience! Prepare yourselves to be pricked and kicked, coaxed and challenged, delighted and dismayed **AS YOU HAVE NEVER BEEN BEFORE!** Surrender to the carnival. Today, the least powerful of you will become the most powerful, and you fat-cats, top-dogs, force-fields, wielders-of-influence and error peckers will give up your power. “WHY?” I hear you shout. Why? To up end you, of course, to bouleverse you, to turn you out and to shake you down. Your senses will be renewed. You will hear the world differently. You will see the world differently. You will even TASTE the world differently ...

Roll up for the ride of a lifetime. Feel the excitement rumbling – grumbling – in your belly as you step into MY world. For today I have elected the youngest female student and the youngest male student as our Curtin Queen and Curtin King for the day. They will have power over all – except me of course, their magician, their Merlin, their Circe, their Rasputin. Cheer their departure on their royal campus parade in the Curtin shuttle bus, leaving in fifteen minutes from the bottom of Henderson Court. Walk in their cortege as they process around campus.

Teachers and executive members: you are summoned by your new queen and king to attend a mass lecture they will give back here on Henderson Court at noon. It will not be available as an i-lecture. Be ready. Have your wits with you, or somewhere about your person. DO NOT be late. Students will monitor your attendance and confiscate any mobile phones they see. After the lecture you will sit a test. If you do not pass, you will become Conditional and risk being Terminated – Pro-terminated – Ex-terminated. So be ready, be alert.

“What will the test be about?” you ask. “How will it be marked?” You will be told these things at the lecture (*shouts of protest; Bella raises her voice above them*). We promise you will be able to do it quickly. You will not need to think or question

– just tick boxes. “But whose boxes?” AH WELL ... we’ve made the boxes, your queen and king and I.

So students and teachers, office staff and executives, enjoy the sights, sounds and tastes of MY campus, and be back here at noon. There are so many exhibits to delight you this morning. Visit the Fast-track Pavilion, where you will see the new Curtin system to help students complete their four-year courses in one year, without ever setting foot on campus (*gasps all around*). Where students work at their own pace, and teachers are available online twenty-four hours a day (*jeers from the groups of teachers*).

If you are a student who does choose to work on campus (yes, there are a few of you!), see the video plans for the new Multitude Assembly Hall, which will seat ten thousand. The latest iris recognition technology will ensure only those who have paid their fees are admitted. What’s that question? Is the technology expensive? OF COURSE it’s expensive! (*teachers moan and mutter*). But it will be cost-effective because enrolments in large units will double – treble – SOAR exponentially. It will enable mass first-year units across all faculties, at HUGE cost savings. In this, Curtin is an International Game Changer (*cheers, jeers and applause*).

Do I hear a question from the students? Shouldn’t student fees be cheaper if more students are in shorter courses, fewer courses, with fewer teachers? No, why should they? You students will still get your certificates – you’ll still be work-ready! Ready for REAL LIFE, the REAL WORLD. Ready more quickly than you ever were before.

Or visit the Flexible Assessments Tent – students, you will enjoy this one! The new assessment systems will thrill and enchant you. If you pay your fees up-front, you can enrol without having matriculated (*students cheer*). You decide what types of assessment you want to complete (*another cheer*). No time for essays? That’s fine – choose multiple choice exams instead (*and another cheer*). Don’t like to speak in public? No problems – replace orals with short-answer scripts (*yet another cheer*).

Students, visit the New Delivery Mechanisms Arena. See the remarkable – the incomparable – new marking machine, purchased at HUGE expense from the US. Feed your assignment into it – for an extra fee, of course – and have it marked within one minute. Have it assessed against the marking criteria, then entered directly into your file on Blackboard – all without teacher intervention! (*teachers groan*). Problems with Turnitin? No problem! Pay an extra fee and the machine will fix them for you, in an instant – a bolt of magic, a surge of current, and they’ll exist no more.

Oh, and one more treat, one more enchantment –

Teachers and executive, while you have been massing here I have up ended my rain stick. Yes, I have cast my magic on the campus security system. You are now locked out of your offices for today (*howls of protest from the teachers*). Here is your chance. Visit unfamiliar parts of campus. See new sights. Hear new sounds. Taste new experiences. So many dark corners, so many black holes, for you to fall into! Become lost and explore new places. Today your offices are for students. Students, check your phone app to find out which office I have allocated you. And of course you have access to the staff lounges, staff bathrooms, staff meeting rooms. You too have new places to explore, new senses to awaken!

So enjoy the Curtin Carnival, everyone, and may it bring you new insights into learning. May you see everything with new eyes, realise with real eyes. Tomorrow things will be as they were yesterday ... or maybe ...

¹ This is a composite poem, crafted from conversations, interviews and words drifting down corridors. As I explained on page 16, I have selected words and phrases that have resonated with me, as well as those that challenged or surprised me.

² This phrase is part of a critique of universities by anthropologist Clifford Geertz: “Teaching loads are heavier; students are less well prepared; administrators, imagining themselves CEOs, are absorbed with efficiency and the bottom line. Scholarship is thinned and merchandized, and flung into hyperspace” (Geertz 1999, 8–9).

³ Rebekah Nathan (2005, 29) supports this assertion, contending that the senior administration had little place in AnyU University students’ lives unless they were in serious trouble.

⁴ This is a verbatim transcript of a recorded conversation. Sandra Adams and Joy Scott have requested that their real names be used, but James Barclay is a pseudonym. This conversation was originally published in Grellier (2013, 91).

⁵ This student has requested that I use his real name and age.

⁶ This phrase was central in a Curtin advertising campaign of 2015.

⁷ Fetterley 1978, xxii.

⁸ Sue's words are closely echoed by those heard by Alison Phipps at the University of Glasgow:
I don't know my colleague well, but she looks tired, we all do these days, and I ask how she is. She begins to tell me she is fine, but her eyes fill with tears and the real story breaks through. She can't do this any more. They have increased her hours, closed down her most successful course, taken away her dignity, told her that the language she speaks with such love and inspiration, is worthless here. And the room is full of the sound of weeping. (Phipps 2007, n.p.)

⁹ In 2014, international students made up 32.3% of Curtin's enrolment. Curtin had the second highest proportion of international students in Western Australia after the much smaller Murdoch University, and with a total of 15,598 international students had the third highest international enrolment numbers of any university in Australia (Australian Education Network 2015).

¹⁰ RMIT researcher Catherine Gomes (2014) argues that the combined impact of the high Australian dollar, publicity given to physical assaults on Indian students, and the rise of competitor nations led to a drop in international student numbers from a high in 2009.

¹¹ Lambek 2005, 232.

¹² de Certeau 1984, 29.

¹³ Conquergood 1989, 84.

Postlude

The performers

Most of the students I interviewed and worked with during the eight years of this project have now graduated.

Sharon attended all Communications classes for the rest of the semester, but continued to refuse to participate. She passed the Communications unit, though barely, on the strength of her written assignments, and went on to pass almost all her other units on her first attempt, gaining distinctions in some. She graduated in 2013.

Tom's performance has been more sporadic, in terms of university success, partly because of his connected approach to university studies and to life in general. He has taken several extended breaks from studies to deal with personal crises but has returned each time. He is the only student from this research who keeps occasional contact with me, through email and passing conversations in coffee shops on campus. He always focuses on his emotional responses to his studies, and he continues to emphasise how satisfying and important learning is to him.

David moved into another faculty after his disastrous semester and has clearly found a course that suits him well, since he is now scoring high distinctions in all units. His performance is yet one more reminder that isolated incidents and stages do not mark a 'truth' about a student, particularly a first-year student still in a liminal state.

Peter is the only other student still on campus, now enrolled in postgraduate studies. As his course progressed, his results improved to the extent that in his third and Honours years he scored high distinctions in all his units. It would seem that he has found studies that allow him to do far more than just putting pegs in holes – that he can question the shapes of holes and whether they need pegs at all, as he aspired to do in his first year.

First-year students

While some of my colleagues are highly critical of first-year students, I advocate that these students be viewed in the two contexts I explored in the Third Movement: that of their own vacillation on the order-disorder spectrum, typical of those in a liminal state; and that of the university's view of students as clients, who need to be serviced as efficiently as possible. In these contexts, negative behaviours – such as submitting assignments late, avoiding any additional activities, not following guidelines correctly, refusing to read set texts, coming to class either very late or not at all, and putting more energy into social events than studies – are more validly viewed as a product of their situation than as an indication that first-year students in general lack intelligence, are resistant or are lazy. Like Janet Finch (1984), I am loath to have my research used to generalise about the failures of the group to which my participants belong, but seek to shape it instead to explore and critique their contexts.

The Communications units

I began this study seeking to explore the Communications units I coordinate, considering how they could better meet the needs of first-year students. Belenky et al.'s (1986) concept of the Connected Teacher provides the most valuable insight here, both for the design of the units and for the professional development of sessional teachers. They assert that connected teachers are prepared to show their own doubts and processes to their students, so that in taking risks they do not represent learning as clean and complete. This empowers students – particularly first-year students – as they do not view learning as an unattainable world. Belenky and her colleagues use the image of teachers as midwives, helping to give birth and nurture learners. Focusing on the value of group work, they urge teachers to organise their students into groups and structures that will encourage them to nurture each other (Belenky et al. 1986, 214 – 229). Throughout their work, they emphasise collaboration and slow, deep learning:

 We have argued in this book that educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and

collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from first-hand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. (Belenky et al. 1986, 229)

By emphasising risk-taking and the value of difference in learning, Communications tutors can support first-year students, freeing these students from the need to achieve a notional 'perfection' in their academic communications. In this way they are likely to help them retain their confidence as they work through their first, liminal year of studies.

A few Communications teachers, like teachers in other disciplines in the university, are able to embody the qualities of the mythological Trickster character within managerial systems, embodied in part in this performance by Bella: they are outsiders, refusing to belong to any particular community, but flitting in and out at will; they change shape and change roles; they have enormous appetites; they challenge authority; they are irreverent, unpredictable, iconoclastic and transformative (Ballinger 1989; Kamberelis 2003; Marijam 2009). They "live sideways" (Ballinger 1989). They can hold open cracks within the institution so that students can slip through successfully (Garrison 2009). For example, they might refuse to accept the majority views of first-year students as lazy and uncommitted, and find ways to contact, speak for and support students who are struggling in their early months. Or they might create exciting, innovative courses that inspire large numbers of students, and preserve their own passion as teachers, despite the constrictions imposed by rigid systems.

Communications teachers can also play roles in breaking down power bases in universities, by helping students develop the critical literacy they require to begin to understand how disciplines and structures work (Lea and Street 1998, 1999). In offering opportunities for journal writing in addition to academic writing, these teachers can empower first-year students to express their understandings unimpeded by rigid academic writing conventions (Cartwright 1994). Of course, they must also help

students develop academic writing skills, in order to succeed at university, but first-year Communications teachers are generally able to allow students some leeway in their writing, on the basis that they are beginning writers. They can open cracks in the academy that allow beginning students to succeed.

Opportunities for resistance in universities are found beyond coffee shops, corridors and classrooms. Scholarly research privileges particular approaches and discourses that reinforce the power of the academy and are deeply patriarchal (Lewis and Simon 1986). Many Humanities teachers, however, resist the dominance not just of Curtin executive but also of mainstream research by engaging in creative practice projects, and by writing non-traditional research papers: by blending story, poetry, personal narratives and other voices and genres within the dominant scholarly voice. There is a constant struggle to be published in sources that are academically reputable, and to be fairly rewarded by the university on an equal basis with their colleagues who publish in more traditional forms. By exploring a range of non-academic forms, however, they open themselves and their ideas to an audience that is much broader than the traditional academic readership (Gergen and Gergen 2014, 220), a broadening that enhances the reputation of the university. For example, Curtin University is acknowledged as the institution in which celebrated Australian novelists Elizabeth Jolley, Tim Winton and Kim Scott have learned and taught, recognised by a broad range of people who know nothing of more traditional Curtin researchers or their research.

The university

The university's performance is also constantly changing. From the extremes of teacher dissatisfaction shown in the Sixth Movement, the pendulum is beginning to swing back. For example, Judith, the Director of Teaching and Learning, reported only a month ago that people in the central administration are beginning to hear that Humanities teachers cannot work well within their rigid templates. They have asked her for more appropriate labels for assessment tasks than the current ones, so that while teachers will still be required to fit their units within online templates, they will find the

templates better meet their needs. The external higher education context is also changing. Ironically, by 2015 TEQSA's government funding had been cut, and teachers began to speculate that the proposed assessment visits would never happen, thus reducing some of the pressure on the university.

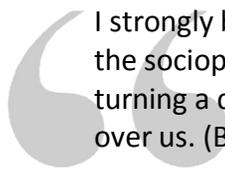
One major resistance tactic employed annually by teachers is to respond to the Barrett Values Survey. Curtin University, like many other Australian and overseas universities, has been participating over several years in this online survey system that allows members of an organisation to give anonymous feedback about their own values and the extent to which they feel committed to their organisation's values and approaches. In the past year Curtin executive has become very responsive to the survey results – they are published to all community members, however negative they are, and public and small-group meetings are conducted to discuss the implications. This can only result in positive changes to the university climate.

While these movements go some way to calming teachers' alarms, however, they are only small steps; many teachers are yet to be convinced that the changes will continue.

The performance continues

My performance in creating an autoethnography of the institution is in line with the work of many researchers. For example, Noy (2009, 103) argues that individuals can employ resistance tactics by documenting the ordinary things that happen to them every day, so the autoethnographer of the academy has this weapon of resistance.

Bochner echoes this position:



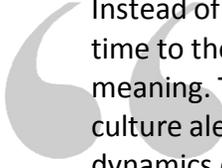
I strongly believe that we should not only be focusing our critical lens on the sociopolitical culture of the countries in which we live but also turning a critical eye to the institutions that have had so much influence over us. (Bochner in Ellis et al. 2008, p.273)

It is valuable to consider this autoethnographic performance in terms of Dwight Conquergood's (1989) exploration of the "performative turn" in anthropology. He suggests four keywords that describe how we construct ourselves and our society

through performance: poetics, play, process and power. Each of these keywords incorporates a range of interrelated and opposing words that hint at their complexity. For example, poetics incorporates narrative, metaphor and artifice; play incorporates reflection, irony and clowning; process incorporates the adjectives provisional, dynamic and destabilising, as well as “metaphors of motion and sound” like flow, chorus, and polyphony; while power incorporates domination, appropriation and resistance (Conquergood 1989, 83–84). These four keywords have been central to this performance, both my performance and those of my characters: poetics through the constructed narratives, poems and choruses; play through the character of Bella, whose provocative word puns and clowning lead both writer and readers to deeper critical reflection; process through my insistence on the messiness of all knowing, which highlights the unstable, contingent nature of experience; and power through the multidimensional intersections I create between the five participant groups in the performance: the first-year students, myself as a teacher/researcher, other teaching colleagues, the university executive and the institution itself.

Spry’s (2001) exploration of autoethnography is also valuable in providing a lens through which to view this performance. Quoting many central figures in autoethnographic research, she concludes that the success of an autoethnography should be assessed on four criteria: “the writing must be well crafted”; must be emotionally engaging and critically self-reflexive of one’s position and context; must “strive to use relational language and styles to create purposeful dialogue between the reader and the author”; and must be “a provocative weave of story and theory”, rather than merely a confessional tale (Spry 2001, 7). I have sought throughout this performance to bear these criteria in mind (and body).

My writing remains a struggle, as I search for ways to avoid the academic overlay in a work that is essentially academic. I seek to make a contribution to the field of the many current autoethnographers who are seeking new, liberatory structures:



Instead of pinning down concepts, researchers attempt to listen over time to the unfolding voices, nuances, and intonations of performed meaning. This process-centered way of thinking and talking about culture alerts ethnographers to the irreducible and evanescent dynamics of social life—all the forces that resist closure. (Conquergood 1989, 83)

And so I return to the taste of strawberries or abandonment. I began this work acknowledging that I will finish it by bringing nothing to a definite closure – and, indeed, I insist on and enjoy the sense of the world of this work “as multiple, as unknowable, as shifting” (Pillow 2012, 180). It is the connected “and ... and ... and” world of the rhizome rather than the separate “either/or” world of the tree.



BELLA: Hey, Jane – we agree at last! Your connected, polyvocal, messy performance continues ...

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