

"De educationis"

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ἐρμήκεια

Twenty-first century collegiate factories are breeding grounds of discontent. I am always amazed, though by now I really shouldn't be, of the institutionalized stupor with which students strive to echo the hallowed clichés and sacred chants espoused contemptuously by gilded fools. Unworthy of anything more than what they are graciously given by their purported betters, they are happy to parrot the official lines of a sterile institution rather than question the validity of their tenets and search for alternatives to life.

Berated into submissive globs of consenting flesh by their mentors, this new generation is led to believe that all is allowed as long as they get what they want. This is mostly conveyed by pseudo-humanists who pander shamelessly to the butt-cracked aromas of megalomaniac economic crazed bores, uppity patrons so full of themselves that any semblance of decor are masked by the turgid self flatteries of grandeur. These pretentious grand masters of fame and fortune, who hovel openly in our midst, are guided not by the convictions of human honor and virtue but by virtue of material wealth and personal power. The soliloquious banter profusely offered to others of the need for accountability fall deaf when confronted with the reality that these masters worry only of accounting for their personal finances.

In general, we are victims of ancient marketing ploys. Strategic whitewashings of questionable sorts create content-less structures, frilly methodological wonders that cover fears of ineptitude and mediocrity with simpleminded drooling of pedagogical pabulum. We roll out loads of musty doldrums, refried entrails of retread mediocrity encased in shiny syllabi filled with fangled-dangled words of promise and progress. It is no more than the old bait-and switch game of clichéd nonsense with catchy titles and fun totting phrases, new packages for the same old products touting better and

improved offers but delivering more of the same. It comes down to marketing, to the repackaging of retired ideals, fanciful half thoughts, the sickly sweet meanderings of non-sensical uppityness. So new, so exotic, so Other. From strange lands, exotic venues with promises of salvation, yet filled by damnation they come. We feign to ask and wonder about these foreign marvels with their offerings of invisible coats, esoteric mutations of an exoteric nature. Complicated fixation of Babel's legacy.

'Tis a new age, a new era. But not necessarily a better one. It is a world defined by appearances, by virtual promises made up of empty shells. It is all about posturing. Believing that it is even when it isn't. It is a world of bull whipping charlatans, with greasy hands and sweaty brows lusting feverishly at the vigor of fountains of youth. It is about shamelessly airing musty sheepskins in the wind like flags of white adorned with treasures of old. It is the slapping of each other's back in silent glee as they ponder on their proverbial pulling of the wool over their charges' eyes. It is about soulless beings of economic wont, lusting bodies of lustered innocence. It is about lies and cheats squandered moments in lieu of free will. It is about doing what one must to win, to get ahead, to seize power and fortune. To be, whatever one may be, empty rants of fake appeal.

Knowledge is offered as a prêt-à-porter prattle of non-caloric answers in lieu of substantive responses of any real measure. Students are pre-conditioned to quick-fire short yet empty babblings that they rattle without any notions of content or context. It is no more than a quick fix by which to garner points. It belies as a non-sustaining lack of eloquence derived to score quickly and retreat into intellectual slumber. They warrant not a look for connections, for a reason to perdure and transcend the moment. They propel no-where, for it comes from no-where. It is there, inconsequentially triumphant of its unassuming glory in an unannounced competition.

As a prêt-à-porter, knowledge is no more than a prelude to academic complacency. It fits all for it pretends to know all yet it knows not why. It silences for it does not question. It is no more for it does not want. It becomes its own reason and desires only itself. It speaks nothing for it has nothing to say. It is not.

'Tis a new age, indeed. We hype and marvel surrounded by glinting promises of future morrows. Yet we are served the same gruel of old. It is

all product of the flashy desires to mediate. The mediated self is a salacious and titillating yet empty proposition. It is nothing more than a shiny bauble of no real consequence or merit. It offers no real value, for it is all show but no substance. It implies reality yet has no true essence. Truth is overrated and devalued. It loses coherence in the flickering snow, flaunting existence without being. We lend our selves to become no more than a mediated media. It is no wonder we are amazed and awed by the simple yet empty tricks of the charlatans. And in the morrow we awaken to wonder ... Do you remember? ... What? ... Exactly. ... And so we saunter off shaking our heads in wondered amusement not knowing what it was all about.

μέθοδος

What is the value of multiple choices and fill in the blank mentalities? Where is the novelty of stifled minds of Truth and False? Whence may the future surface in the limited realms defined by ticked-off items of context-less knowing? Contents treated as knick-knack and brick-bracks of useless minutiae that brings us no closer to the true exploration of Being and of the Self that embodies it. Truth, if said commodities be possible, impressed upon us as rigid structures of oppression and repression, submissive imprecisions lacking the active reality between One and Other, between the Self and its own self.

Every class I offer is usually defined by a theme or an idea by which I may establish a narrative arc. This arc serves not only as the basis of the discussion in class, but allows me to guide progressively said discussion throughout the semester as a unified whole, instead of a mixed batch of disjointed fragments of pretty colors and sensuous texture of nothingness. It also allows me to slip and slide from time to time, after all knowledge is a slippery and somewhat treacherous thing in itself, yet have an escape hatch through which I can retreat if the discussion substantially veers off course. In essence it defines the parameters of class interaction without stifling the dynamics of the day by day occurrences. As such texts are chosen in relation to this narrative.

I loosely base a course on literature tradition on the idea of Reader Response. I assign a succession of short response papers (every one to two weeks, depending on the text and the progression of the discussion in class) where students reflect upon the positive and negative factors of the text assigned. In the case of literary texts, students usually have to argue the relevancy of said text to themselves and why it worked or it didn't work. In the case of theory courses students are asked to define the validity of the author's position and why it is valid or not as a whole. Once they are turned in I then take up the text in question and explore the ideas contained in class. By the end of the semester they are assigned one to two short to mid sized essays where they must use what has been discussed in class to analyze an external text usually picked by the student with my guidance. Usually the first essay is more of a proposal or a first attempt to analyze a text. This first essay is usually heavily commented and returned to the student with suggestions on how to redirect or better shape their arguments. The final is usually the same essay reworked and hopefully realized as a coherent and well argued analysis of the text in question.

I deal with seminar courses a slightly different. As they are usually heavy on theory and students do not necessarily have a sound background in theory, I tend to offer the course more as an open panel discussion group. Depending on size and theme I will start by doing an introductory phase by which I try to set the mindset of students toward a more collaborative discussion than a competitive environment. As such I use a Protocol system by which students are assigned certain dates on which they are responsible for taking notes for the class. This "note-taker" becomes the "official" register of that day's discussion. The student is then responsible of cleaning-up and organizing the ideas and major salient points of discussion and producing a Protocol, or day's report, which will be duplicated and a copy given to everybody in class. Next Class begins with the reading of the previous class' protocol, and an open discussion of all of said protocol to add, supplement and/or correct anything that the group deems necessary of said protocol. Then that day's discussion starts with the texts in question. At the end of the semester Students, as well as the professor (that is, *moi*) has a (more or less) full account of the semester's discussion on which one can always fall back for reference. Also by the end of the semester students have to turn in a short monograph on a subject determined in consultation with me.

Class discussions are usually guided toward having the student not only express what is in their minds, but to actually have a mind of their own. I see my function more as an academic rebel rouser, who tries to instigate intellectual inconformity in students. Thus I open the discussion by questioning their positions on the texts themselves. When a student answers they have to be able to say why they think the way they do. It makes no sense to declare a position without a basis for said position, so they are required to argue that what they understand is present (or not) in the text is actually present (or not) in the text. This is done by applying a socratic electric-shock to their sometimes slumbering brains. One needs to become a devil's advocate and query the students as far as possible so they see that they need to understand why they have the specific opinion they have. If I'm lucky this will eventually erupt in a class rebellion where I will be able to stand back, towel at the ready, and have the students argue their points between themselves. It is this chaotic revolt which eventually marks the success of a course given that students not only have argued a point but are willing to openly defend and question others on their respective points of view.

Depending on the course and the group's interaction I sometimes opt to substitute the final monograph with a somewhat more creative final project. It usually comprises of a term journal, one could say a semester diary, where students may re-create the occurrences of the past semester. This project lends to the more expressive side of students and usually allows for some pleasant surprises (though I must admit there are those semesters when it produces some whoppers of a dud). And it is not a project I recommend to everybody since if well orchestrated can lend to some very sticky wickets, especially if one is not of a tempered mind and spirit. Students can opt for a day by day recount/reconstruction —with running commentary— of the semester, or, as in some cases, they may fictionalize their experience by becoming a bit player of the text itself. Some of the more inventive have taken the initiative of rewriting the whole semester as a journey, somewhat of a fractured quest for truth (a la Don Quixote or The Little Prince), where they interact with the characters of the texts discussed, and some have exploited their graphic abilities to create a comic book of their experience in class. I give students carte blanche as to what they may or may not say in their final texts without the fear of any reprisal for their opinions, just as long as they base their arguments on substance and not just spite. Given

this freedom of expression without reprisals, most have had a confessional tone to them, whether real or imagined, of what the course has done (or not done) for them, though in some instances (back to the dud or two) they have found themselves lost to their frustration in understanding. Even so, it always reveals more than one expects and becomes a real measure not of content but of context, of what the texts, and the class itself, has (or has not) meant to them. It somewhat empowers them. It shakes their sense of lack of understanding, the tranquil sense of passing by, of sitting listlessly without recourse or hope, and, eventually, confronts them not with the professor or the institution but with him or her -self.

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