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Deconstructing the Intercultural Learning of a Doctoral Group Undertaking Qualitative Research—Or How Not to Do a ‘White PhD’

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Abstract This article looks at the intellectual and linguistic dilemmas of an international doctoral group and juxtaposes these with some of the existential challenges the group faces. The intention is to offer a kind of ‘dialectical tacking’ between doctoral thinking and doctoral experiences more broadly. The overall aim of the piece is *to think in front of each other* while developing a sense of ‘equality’ in relation to group contributions. Each of the excursions into research in this article enacts different approaches to research thinking – comparative, inductive, deductive, dialectical and deconstructive. In this piece, the voices of the tutors (Stronach and Frankham) are mostly dominant, but further publication will shift that balance significantly towards the voice of the doctoral student. We begin with an empirical detail that highlights the nature of some of the problems of cultural and linguistic translation.

Keywords: doctoral study, international students, intercultural learning, UK higher education

Miss-translations, and the Life of ‘Thi’

Dung explained how ‘Thi’ in a Vietnamese name indicated ‘woman’. It appeared in the middle of the name. Thus, in contemporary usage: ‘family name, “Thi”, middle name, first name’. So how would we go about translating ‘Thi’ into English, just to kick off our consideration of intercultural difficulties? English language markers of ‘woman’ in a name depend mainly on prefixes such as ‘Miss’, ‘Mrs’, or more recently ‘Ms’. But there’s a politics behind these female markers. ‘Miss’ can mean ‘young’, but

sometimes 'old' as in an unmarried spinster. Either way, there's usually something belittling, literally or metaphorically, about the use. I say 'usually' because male senior consultants in a UK hospital are not called 'doctor' but 'Mr', a mark of higher status. I learned recently that their female equivalent can be 'Miss'. So 'Miss' is a bit of a semantic wanderer. High status, low status, no status. OK, so how about something more definite like 'Mrs'? O dear, worse and worse. 'Mrs' marks the married status of a woman. Until the 1950s, or thereabouts, one of its uses was incredibly gendered – my mum would get letters addressed to 'Mrs Peter Stronach'. As a little kid, I remember puzzling over how she could possibly be called 'Peter' – we're in 'A boy called Sue' territory here (Cash, 1969). So what 'Mrs' meant was a married woman belonging to the man called whatever. Not a person, not part of a name like 'Thi', but a possession. This reflected a historical subordination of women to men in UK culture. Hence the coining of a new naming device in the 1960s and '70s: 'Ms', meaning a person in their own right, not to be labelled married/unmarried. 'Ms' is a feminist invention, an 'insurrectionary force' (Fraser, 2013, p. 1) against the patriarchy of female-naming in the UK and elsewhere.

So what's in a name? A whole hidden *politics of gender*, in the case of the English words for naming 'woman'. Now, Dung wasn't there to unpack 'Thi' for us – she'd just written something for us and headed off to do fieldwork in Vietnam – but we can see that the idea of a straightforward translation into an English word is impossible. Precise definition is not the solution, it is part of the problem.

When Dung returned she added to the mystery of 'translation' at our next meeting: 'Thi' meant female and could apply to any age or marital state. There was no equivalent male marker, so 'Thi' in a name meant woman as a presence, just as its absence from a name implied a male. We wondered if that was also connected to notions of patriarchy. Woman was the exception that had to be named, perhaps a little like the kind of patriarchy that used to obtain in English where 'man' meant male but also all of humankind, including women.¹ What became apparent was that Vietnamese had a great number of age- and status-type prefixes. They meant things like 'Sister', 'Aunt', 'Grandfather' and so on. Nasra also added to this, saying the Mr/Mrs/Ms boxes on UK government forms were culturally strange. They had no such gender labels to prefix names in Oman.

At any rate, it seemed that 'Thi' was untranslatable, and the six different ethnicities in the meeting agreed that was the case for them all. Each word-marker in each language was a mini-ideology of cultural difference. Thinking in another language was like walking through a minefield: Small things had big consequences. A further point of relevance. This section could not have been written by any single member of

the group. We had to pool our information about Mr/Mrs/Ms/Thi to compare and analyse the different cultural and language translations. Knowledge of these differences was the only possible basis for a common understanding. There was a certain dependence on each other and a necessary *equality* in that process of exchange – a theme we will return to. That was difficult, but it had the bonus that we could get further together than we could apart. It was an inversion of the notion of ‘together apart’ (Derrida, 1991). All group members were ‘apart together’. Jointly, as Rancière (1991) puts it, ‘the problem is to reveal an intelligence to itself’ (p. 28). And that ‘singular’ intelligence turns out to be necessarily collective.

We now shift from that illustration of the semantic dilemmas of translation to a more experiential aspect of intercultural dilemmas.

Being Friendly, or Very Rude: Mark My Words!

At another of the doctoral group meetings, a student responds to an early draft of this paper: ‘One more thing, in Vietnam, saying out the name of an older people or name of teachers, professors . . . is rude. I am not allowed to say “Mark”, instead, saying “Professor”’. That’s very important. We saw a whole politics hiding within apparently everyday labels for women, in English and in Vietnamese, and now we can see (or begin to suspect) more overtly *a politics of learning*. Behind the ‘Mr’ or the ‘Professor’ is a whole range of understandings and feelings. On the one hand, we saw from an Asian perspective notions such as respect, love, maybe a kind of Confucian ‘filial piety’, as someone else wrote. Or the ‘priority’ for ‘modesty and politeness’. And also the imperative to be ‘respectful’. On the other – more Western – reading, these virtues may translate into deference, hierarchy, an acknowledgement of inferiority, dependence. There are two very different ‘learners’ in the room! I (Ian Stronach)² can only pick up the Western thread of this (if ‘Western’ is a sensible generalisation – but it’ll do as shorthand for the moment). Notions of ‘emancipation’ in education are part of the European Enlightenment, at least in the more progressive versions of that inheritance. So the initial pedagogy is already very differently politicised. On the one hand, the expectation of an autonomous and independent learner, facilitated by a kind of learning that is based on dialogue, discussion and difference. ‘Education’ rather than instruction. On the other hand, a search for definition, certainty, procedures, authority. Of course, ‘on the one hand’/‘on the other hand’ sets up too definite a distinction: Things never divide that neatly, but we’ll shortly take one extreme and explore a theory of educational relationship that Rancière argues (Davis, 2010, p. 25–35). It relates to our data.

Only the Lonely

These were some common feelings amongst the international students in the group:

- 'I enjoy the modern life but sometimes I feel so lonely'
- 'I still need more local friends to help me to get to know the country better'
- 'being lonely without my family and friends'
- 'being a lone mother'
- 'finding friends to discuss things'

Loneliness was a nested experience. First there was the core loneliness of doing a PhD – a long, hard, difficult, solo performance. Adding to that sense of isolation is the perceived uncertainty of success. Surrounding that core loneliness is the isolation of the 'doctoral silo': you get to know very few other staff in the faculty. Then there was the feeling of not understanding how everyday things worked in the UK, such as the need for a TV licence. Opinion was divided on whether Liverpool was a friendly place. Another form of loneliness. Some found their compatriots (Malaysian, Chinese) for company and also for what was called a 'cycle assistance' (cycle of assistance) whereby those who had been here a while could explain housing, car purchase, driving in England, visa requirements, the weather, etc., to the newcomers. A final form of loneliness was created by a British government and university bureaucracy which seemed continuously suspicious and required reassurance that you really were a proper student by asking for confirmation with paranoid regularity.³

Not all of the group agreed with the lonely theme – for themselves, that is. Irish and Scottish agreed that Liverpool was 'the easiest of all the cities I have ever lived to fit in', and loneliness for the international students (most of whom were female) also meant an important new experience of independence. Like all expatriates, they learned to look at their identity in different ways, partly by recognising 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) and partly by redefining themselves across their new identities and experiences. They had to cope, catch buses, order taxis, shop, work – all without the familiar supports of an extended family. One student felt that she would come out of the experience glad to get home but also stronger for the experience. An article on being an American father in Norway, with a Norwegian wife and kids, pointed out at least the hope that, following Nietzsche (1882), the children would of course become Norwegian in terms of their identity but still able to look at being Norwegian from an outside perspective as well. Nietzsche called this a 'suspecting glance' (Miller, 2013).

Towards a Theory of 'Rude'

Generally, the group felt a heightened sense of personal responsibility across both living and learning. 'I have responsibility to do everything', 'I have to accept whatever obstacles', 'I have to survive'. When we discussed this theme, someone said that one of the very difficult things was reading and reading again – maybe 10 times, and still not understanding. As Dung wrote:

Though I got IETLS 7.0 [test score for English as Additional Language] I didn't understand anything after days of reading a book. I kept reading. The more I read, the more I felt upset and just wanted to quit. I didn't think I was clever enough to keep moving toward.

This reminded me of something I had recently been reading. Rancière discusses the work of Joseph Jacotot, who spoke only French, yet taught students who spoke only Flemish. This was at the University of Leuven in 1818. Jacotot made them recite the opening lines of a book written in French and 'when they had reached the middle of the first book, he made them repeat what they had read over and over again and then read the rest of the volume' (Davis, 2010, p. 25). Jacotot was 'astonished' to find that when required later to write about what they had read, they did so better than native French speakers. He concluded that 'explanation' stood in the way of learning, a theme Rancière develops. Ordinary pedagogy installs a permanent dependence on the learner, an 'intellectual inequality of teacher and student' (p. 12). As Davis notes, 'Far better results could be obtained by presupposing from the outset that the students were the intellectual equals of each other and their teacher' (p. 26). Rancière calls this 'radical equality' and takes it to be a 'presupposition' of real learning. The student becomes autonomous from the beginning, rather than working towards it. The institution in its very structures is condemned to be hierarchical and oppressive: It generates the dependence that guarantees its professed aims of 'equality' or even 'autonomy' will be endlessly deferred. Now, it's only a theory, and the question is how convincingly can we connect the theory to our empirical references? Let's try to do that just to see how we can develop such links and also begin to see what a theory looks like and can and can't do – addressing this concern: 'In Vietnam, in my research area, there is no "theory" like that. I was very confused about that'.

What are the connections for us, in this group, in these (for most) early stages of our doctoral work? First there is the empirical parallel: reading and reading and reading, not understanding, and then – finally and hopefully – understanding. It's not so far away from Jacotot's 'reciting'. Second there is the parallel in language.

Knowing English but not well enough to feel competent at doctoral-level intellectual tasks; there is a flavour of the French/Flemish incomprehension there. Third, there is the remedy of a sort of 'radical equality': The doctoral group is, I think, the only one in the country (in education at least) where the group publishes before its members complete their doctorates (Frankham et al., 2014; Stronach et al., 2013) and which acts together as a thinking group, rather than stays in its 'doctoral silo'. Fourth, there is an attempt at breaking the hierarchies of institutionalised knowledge that Jacotot and Rancière criticised, which takes us back to the business of calling the 'Professor', 'Mark'. And so learning to be 'rude'!

The analytic memo for this part of our work ended like this: 'Conclusion: You can only start at the end'.

Deconstructing Research Pedagogy in Qualitative Research

We proposed at the start of this article that we would attempt a 'dialectical tacking' between the intellectual problems of intercultural understanding in a doctoral context and some experiential dilemmas. We further address in this section the intellectual problems of understanding the unfamiliar. As Bull (2011) notes, 'reading like a loser means assimilating a text in such a way that it is incompatible with one's self' (p. 36). I want to pick up on Jacotot's weird pedagogical suggestion – that we can somehow understand through endless repetition, even when we don't understand the language of instruction. Rancière called it, you may recall, a 'radical pedagogy' (as cited in Blanchot, 1982, p. 25), and I tried to use that kind of theorising as a way of making sense of our problems in understanding across language, gender, culture, religion and age. To add to what was earlier written on Rancière's thinking, he argues that what conventional pedagogy does is to offer a kind of stultification (= a making stupid) of the learner's intelligence. Learners are constantly reminded of the expert's superior knowledge, so what is 'learned' is a perpetual dependency and inferiority. Yet, he claims, we share the same intelligence, noting 'intellectual emancipation is the verification of the equality of intelligence' (Rancière, 2009, p. 10). That intelligence can be foregrounded and mobilised by the learner as a 'poetic labour of translation' (p. 10). He addresses the traditional 'myth of pedagogy' (Davis, 2010, p. 26) with an 'anarchist scepticism' (p. 25). What must be eroded is the learner as passive, inactive, distant from the learning, waiting to be instructed out of his or her ignorance:

These oppositions – viewing/knowing, appearance/reality, activity/passivity – are quite different from logical oppositions between clearly defined terms. They

specifically define a distribution of the sensible, an *a priori* distribution of the positions, and capacities and incapacities attached to these positions. They are embodied allegories of inequality. (Rancière, 2009, p. 12)

But what about writing itself? What kind of a difference does the act of writing, of narrating, make to our (mis)understandings? Again, we used the following extract in order to deconstruct some of its possibilities, *thinking in front of the group*.

Blanchot (1982) writes about this most peculiar of difficulties. You will feel like one of Jacotot's students when you first read this paragraph, but let's hope that a 'radical pedagogy' can come to our rescue! Here's what Blanchot had to say about this sort of problem, which he calls one of 'narrative voice':

I write – or say – the sentence: 'Life energy is not inexhaustible'. In doing so I am thinking of something quite simple, of the feeling of exhaustion which constantly reminds us of the fact that life is limited: we walk a few steps down the road, eight, nine, and we collapse. The limits set by exhaustion limit our lives. The significance of life is in turn limited by this limit – the limited significance of a limited life. But a reversal occurs which can be perceived in various ways. Language alters the situation. The words I speak tend to draw into life the limits that ought to contain it. To say that life is limited does not make the limit disappear; but language gives it the possibly limitless meaning it is supposed to limit; the meaning of limit by stating it contradicts the limitation of the meaning or at least displaces it. But in this way the knowledge of limit understood as limitation of meaning may be lost. How then can we talk of limit (convey its meaning) without the meaning un-limiting it? Here it would be opportune to employ a different kind of language and, first of all, admit that the sentence: 'Life energy, etc' is not, as such, entirely legitimate. (p. 213)

Here is some of the thinking (out loud) that we did with each other about this passage:

1. I have a feeling (of growing exhaustion). I name it with words that I hope *represent* that feeling, honestly, accurately and completely. So I say: 'Life energy is not inexhaustible'. But 'life energy' is a *concept*, not at all like the reporting of a 'few steps'. I might have said 'vitality' or 'fitness' or perhaps I could have avoided using the negative route of 'not in'. I might have said it positively, 'Life energy is exhaustible'. So every attempt at representation is an *interpretation*: it is never certain. Even a 'step' has conceptual limits – when is it not a shuffle, a totter or a jump? As I have written before,

'each . . . halting . . . print . . . of . . . individual . . . word . . . on . . . paper . . . inserts and withdraws meaning, giving a "one" (more or less) and taking away an "infinity" of not-said in the lop-sided arithmetic of writing' (Stronach, 2010, p. 162).

2. But when I say 'life energy is not inexhaustible' I point to a double limit, the 'feeling' of limit, and also its 'significance' – which is not the same thing because significance indicates 'meaning' rather than 'feeling'. It is a different 'sense', in these two ways.
3. So the statement of 'feeling', given 'significance' to accompany it, becomes a kind of *generalisation*, a piece of cautionary wisdom, which may help explain why it is expressed through a double negative, that is, 'not inexhaustible'. For example, I may make sense of the 'exhaustion' thesis by expressing it to myself in terms I can relate to: make the act jogging, call it miles not steps, and I can see precisely and empirically how such a 'feeling' may come about. That would be a reflexive kind of 'making sense'. A particularisation rather than a generalisation would go like this: 'My life energy is not inexhaustible'. I can combine these two versions of the statement by arguing that if I am human, and all humans have energy which runs out in a similar way, then I can take my own *case*, with its merely singular claim to truth, and offer it as a *naturalistic generalisation*, a more or less universal truth.
4. Then Blanchot (1982) takes a *linguistic turn*: 'The words I speak tend to draw into life the limits that ought to contain it' (p. 214). What can he mean? Well, here's one possibility. Life is made up of events. Events are recorded in words. It seems thereby that the active is made passive, the temporary made permanent. We may take 'a few steps', but words can't. They sit still on the page. But Blanchot says otherwise: 'Language gives it [life] the possibly limitless meaning it is supposed to limit' (p. 379).
5. So Blanchot (1982) claims to have found a paradox about language in its very being, which he calls a kind of 'neutrality' later in the argument. Words are never limited to attempts at representation. They are also a *performance*. This performativity is active, part of the world, an unavoidable violation of the 'limits' of what words ought to be doing. A rather too simple illustration: Think of the difference between saying 'This ship is called Queen Mary' and 'I name this ship Queen Mary' (Austin, 1962). The first statement offers an empirical and contingent truth (which will be wrong if the ship is actually called Floppsie). The second makes something happen: It is the word as event.

6. Blanchot (1982) concludes by arguing that the statement 'life energy is not inexhaustible' is 'not, as such, entirely legitimate' (p. 184). 'Legitimate' means lawful, permitted, correct. In its original meaning, it means '(of a child) born of parents lawfully married to each other' (Concise Oxford). What narratives try to do is to marry off events to appropriate words and to give birth to legitimate 'children' of meaning and representation. But in Blanchot's view, the marriage never quite comes off, though the babies come thick and fast. And that's why writing is always a bit of a bastard.

We've looked at some of our intellectual challenges within the group and also at the experiences which accompany them, both in the group and as a 'foreign' student in Liverpool. We'll say more about experience in a later article, but meantime we want to turn back on our account and consider how it might be criticised.

Decolonising Metaphor and Value: An Asian Excursion Concerning 'White PhDs'

Thus far, we have looked at an aspect of *linguistic translation*, concluding that it is only by unearthing and thinking about differences that we can create a common understanding. In this instance, there is no 'master' relationship. We equally bring our knowledge of difference. These differences create a common understanding beyond the reach of any individual in the group. Our second move was to make the same attempt with a *politics of pedagogy*, constructing a reflexive understanding of what we variously take doctoral learning and teaching to be about. Thus we add helpful uncertainty within the disjunctions of difference. Then we located problems of language and pedagogy in a broader existential field, which we conceptualised as the nested 'loneliness' of the international student in a strange country. Alienation joined uncertainty and disjunction. We sought to redress those various forms of *estrangement* with Rancière's notion of 'radical equality' and 'intellectual emancipation' (Rancière, 1991), though we would want to temper that 'equality' in the manner suggested by Badiou (2012): 'The axiom of the equality of intelligences is far from constituting an axiom of the equality of opinions' (p. 16).

Now that may still seem a far too utopian ambition, one which disguises a fairly obvious *ventriloquising equality* as well as an unacknowledged Eurocentrism contained in the very rhetorics of equality and emancipation. Our defence would be that, as the 'Thi' example showed, we are trying in this exercise to *think in front of each other* so that the thinking, and the writing, become visible, shared and open to

challenge. In other words, experiential. Each of these differences, therefore, opens up the possibility of a common understanding.

If we were to criticise some of our earlier thinking about intercultural doctoral learning, what could we say? First of all, there are, as we noted, invocations of 'equality' that obscure obvious inequalities of experience, status and authorship. Are these gestures towards 'equality' anything better than a form of 'indirect rule'? Is the collaboration real or illusory? Then again, if we look at the apparent emphasis on 'equality', we can recognise a European Enlightenment theme, carried from the French Revolution by Jacotot, and then Rancière, and then the 'Western' lead authors of this piece (see also Badiou, 2012). Is it a *European* enlightenment dressed up as a universal value? If so, does it say to international students: 'Come and do a White PhD'? The ironic notion of a 'white PhD' was suggested by Vanessa and referred to how some of her peers in China responded to her doctoral ambitions in the UK. The concept carries with it, in unspoken conspiracy, notions of 'civilisation', 'order', 'progress'. It adds to that a kind of sovereign knowledge related to transcendental Truths (God or King), essentially, according to Rancière (1991), religious in its hierarchical appeal, 'the framework of a theocratic and sociocratic vision of intelligence' (p. 53).

We turn now to a more adventurous attempt to reground our politics and practices of meaning elsewhere in an experimental recourse to the history and culture of Asia, where many of the group come from.

Junger (2010) reflects on the unruly nature of Afghanistan, both historically and in the present. As he puts it, 'it's no place for empires' (p. 99). It is a thesis that J. C. Scott (2009) develops at considerable length and extends to most of the uplands of Southeast Asia. J. C. Scott's thesis is original. He argues that we need a much more jaundiced view of 'Empire' – whether Han-Chinese, Burma, Thai, various European ones or Arab, Roman or Greek ones. They were mostly founded on slavery, or at least authoritarian subjection. In Asia they centred on 'wet-rice' cultivation and were lowland 'padi states' (p. 79). The people were enclosed, made sedentary, taxable and controllable. The state sought to homogenize them, 'to integrate and monetize the peoples, lands and resources of the periphery so that they become, to use the French term, *rentable* – auditable contributors to the gross national product and to foreign exchange' (p. 4). They were made 'legible', measurable and hence taxable. Such 'extractive' empires (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012, p. 124) envisaged themselves as models of 'civilisation', with 'progress' as their major conceit. The 'civilizational discourse' involved separating the 'cooked' from the 'raw' (as the Han-Chinese had it) and representing hill people as 'wild' (p. 116), primitive barbarians who belonged

to 'tribes' that reflected their inferior development. Such was the 'tunnel vision of the court-state view' (p. 36). J. C. Scott argues that this 'civilizational discourse' (p. 98) invented the nonstate peoples as 'archaic remnants' in order to justify attempts at 'enclosure' and incorporation in the state. The Han-Chinese had three categories of assimilation – 'min, cooked barbarian, raw barbarian' (p. 123). If we deploy this narrative as an analogous resource, we can ask different questions: As international students, is the implication that we're learning to be 'cooked barbarians'? Or, as a Chinese participant in this group put it, becoming 'bananas' (yellow on the outside, white underneath)?

According to J. C. Scott (2009), the historical and anthropological record can be read very differently. A 'wild' status often reflected a 'flight from the state'. Some became oral cultures when previously they had had writing. These were deliberate ploys to remain ungovernable, either through the altitude at which they lived or via their shifting patterns of cultivation or settlement. Their social processes involved 'shape-shifting, fissioning, disaggregation' (p. 219) while their identities were formed in something much more like a 'bricolage' (p. 233). They tended to have social goals that involved 'equality, autonomy, mobility' and this was reflected even in the cultivation of crops, as for example, cassava rather than rice. J. C. Scott refers to all such peoples/groups in Southeast Asia as belonging to a new term, 'Zomia', a nonstate space determined not by geographical boundaries so much as by altitude, remoteness, desert and disaffiliation. He notes that such contrasting dynamics could historically be found elsewhere – Arabs/Berbers, Scots/English,⁴ Albanian/Greek, Cossacks/Russian and so on.

Such a 'Zomic' analogy helps us to decolonise the imperial pretensions of this account, which draws too much on Enlightenment values (the rhetoric of empires) and to consider instead the insurgent and oppositional nature of these values as a set of practices outside imperial rule and rhetoric. Thus we can challenge one of the fantasies of the 'West' – that of a 'monopoly of the universal' (Debray, 2013, p. 32) part of its 'delusions of grandeur' (p. 37). A bit too much of a 'just-so' story, as J. C. Scott puts it (2009, p. 335). And there is a theoretical literature that develops such themes, such as the nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari (1986) and the 'Empire' of global capitalism identified by Hardt and Negri (2000). It is, incidentally, striking how close in his conceptualisations J.C. Scott comes to the language and concepts of such theorists – yet there is nothing in his references to indicate a direct link as opposed to a parallel kind of thinking about 'difference'.

Empire was also a matter of classification, definition, quantification and audit. It had its own distinctive and enclosing ways of thinking, measuring and recording. In

contrast, J. C. Scott (2009) posited a 'Zomia' that was open, fluid, indefinable, portable and oral.⁵ It takes only a little epistemological imagination to see in such an empire and its contradiction a paradigm conflict between a quantified social science and its more fugitive alternatives in qualitative inquiry. Current audit mania seeks to make the social entirely 'legible' in J. C. Scott's sense. That would take us to a happy ending in terms of a resistance to commodification, though it would be wrong not to note that J. C. Scott sees 'Zomia' as currently coming to an end. We are witnessing, he concludes, 'the world's last great enclosure' (p. 282). That is a political claim that is perhaps a little premature. There seems to be plenty 'wild' places left, if we take a more malign view of that condition – say Somalia, Congo, Afghanistan, Syria. But can we be sure – analogously – that it is also a premature epistemological claim? There is much in contemporary educational and social research in the 'West' to suggest just such a 'last great enclosure' (Stronach, Clarke, & Frankham, 2014). In which case we need to be clear: *We need more anarchy, not the chaos of more order.*

Postscript (But Not Really)

It would be deceptive to say that we have been *rehearsing* forms of research thinking and writing, since *performance precedes rehearsal*, after our musings on Jacotot and Rancière. Finally, we want to enact an end to this writing, again in front of itself, as an object for future thinking. This piece of course came out of the port of Liverpool, and we want it to *end* there while acknowledging that it can't 'end' anywhere. The problem is this: Narratives end in false closure (it is rude to stop in the middle of a sentence). Yet telling the 'story' of method (a form of enclosure) is always unravelled by the 'method' of story (a form of dis-closure). Calvino (2009) – in the surreal science of 'Solar Storm' – offers a narrative of galactic chaos in relation to Earthly conceits about cause and effect: The Sun mocks Earth's certainties, and yet we are compelled to end our self-storying with attempts to make ourselves 'safe from the maelstrom of chaotic elements whirling around us' (p. 350). In 'Solar Storm', the narrator travels home within science, on the good ship Halley, as a captain, a navigator, a predictor of positions in the surety of Earth's regularities. But he gets lost in magnetic storms generated by the Sun; they disrupt his communications, make his compass fail and his crew panic. As a doctoral group also sailing to and from Liverpool, the place of our estrangement, we can empathise with these metaphorical failures of direction and place. We have enacted getting lost – ethnically, experientially and even potentially, for the last future is the educational bit. Yet, with Calvino, our narrative defies the chaos and insists on a certain illusory closure:

Our route is certain, the sea is calm, tomorrow we will be in sight of the familiar Welsh coast, and in two days we will enter the tarry Mersey estuary, and cast anchor in the port of Liverpool, the end of our voyage. (p. 350)

Notes

1. Bellos (2012) notes that 'this problem does not arise in German where "man" is either "Mensch" (meaning humankind) or "Mann" (male)' (p. 206). J. C. Scott (2009) notes that 'interestingly, but not significantly, "man" apparently also turns up in Vietnamese, where it means "savage"!' (p. 100).
2. Throughout this article, all first-person references refer to the first author, Ian Stronach.
3. At Liverpool John Moores University, international student attendance/progress was monitored at six-week intervals. Such reporting involved the student and director of studies filling in and signing a form which went first to the university's central bureaucracy and thence to the UK Border Agency.
4. A more apposite contrast would be between Highland and Lowland Scots. Sir Walter Scott did much to romanticise what he called the 'wild people' (W. Scott, 1814/1985, p. 124).
5. J. C. Scott's thesis is controversial, as Hammond (2011) and others illustrate. Sadan (2013) would add charges of overgeneralisation and romanticisation of the 'wild' peoples. Indeed such romanticising of the upland peoples is a persistent literary effect, as Sir Walter Scott's construction/invention of the Scottish Highlander amply demonstrates (W. Scott, 1814/1985).

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