

Micropolitics of desire: participant self observation, critical autoethnography and the (re)turn to the baroque.

Cate Watson, The Stirling Institute of Education, Pathfoot Building, Stirling Institute of Education, University of Stirling, Stirling, FK9 4LA email cate.watson@stir.ac.uk

Abstract

Participant self observation is a form of critical autoethnography developed as a means to theorise institutional identifications and which seeks to unravel the question posed by Gilles Deleuze, ‘why do we desire what oppresses us?’ PSO is located within a baroque framework drawing on the ontology of the fold which entails a rejection of linearity and the embrace of complexity; and the epistemology of the *Wunderkammer*, created through the collection and artful display of textual, visual and kinaesthetic ‘research objects’. The paper presents a selection of these research objects showing how the analytical handling of these produces the fleetingly glimpsed objects of desire as points of identification.

Key words:

Autoethnography, baroque, Body without Organs, desire, Wunderkammer, fold, institutional identification, participant self observation, Research Assessment Exercise, academy.

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Critical autoethnography

Autoethnography, (mis)understood as the ethnographic study of oneself, is often dismissed as narcissism, a seductive indulgence in which the researcher fiddles with themselves while the Other burns. But participant self observation, as critical autoethnography, concerns more than a fascination with one's own navel. Rather it has to do with a somewhat different and less comfortable point of insertion which seeks to illuminate the dark places alluded to by Gilles Deleuze when he asks why do we desire what oppresses us? Indeed, how can we 'ferret out the fascism' that lurks within us and causes us to 'love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us' as Foucault says in the preface to the *Anti-oedipus* (Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1984]: xv). The representation of this apparent paradox forms the central aim of this paper.

The relationship between power, knowledge and discourse was, of course, Foucault's big thing, but Giorgio Agamben takes him to task in the opening chapter of his book *Homo sacer. Sovereign power and bare life* (1995) in which he says:

Foucault argues that the modern Western state has integrated techniques of subjective individualisation with procedures of objective totalisation to an unprecedented degree, and he speaks of a real "political double bind constituted by individualisation and the simultaneous totalisation of structures of modern

power” (Dits et ecrits, 4:229-32). Yet the point at which these two faces of power converge remains strangely unclear in Foucault’s work. (Agamben 1995: 5)

He goes on, ‘But what is the point at which the voluntary servitude of individuals comes into contact with objective power?’ (1995:.6). Where and how do the subjective technologies through which identities and selves are constituted, and political techniques ‘with which the state assumes and integrates the care of the natural lives of individuals into its very center’ intersect? This nexus, the point of insertion at which, as the ancient Greeks had it, ‘bare life’ becomes ‘political life’ (Agamben1995), constituting itself through its identifications and drawing on power as a productive force which ‘doesn’t only weigh on us as a force that says no’ (Foucault 1980: 119) constitutes the realm of participant self observation.

Participant self observation is a critical form of autoethnography offering an approach to the study of self as event, caught in the haecceity, that particularity which extends beyond the metaphysics of selfhood making use of ‘a transcendental form of empiricism which seeks to gain some sort of purchase on the “given”, the chaotic flux of the sensible’ with the aim of ‘rendering visible the forces that have captured life’ (Marks 1998: 30). It is an approach, located within a baroque frame, which is predicated on the belief that ‘our ability to resist control, or our submission to it, has to be assessed at the level of our every move’ (Deleuze 1995: 176).

Baroque

'Baroque' is an elusive concept, contradictory and disquieting, ubiquitous and meaningless (Hampton 1991: 2), impossible to pin down to a precise historical period or a particular artistic moment. Various described as florid, decadent, perverse, excessive, emotional etcetera . Distinctly feminine, notoriously lubricious, but characterised perhaps by a '*discordia concors*': 'One says: order, measure, reason, rule, and that is classicism. One says on the other hand: disorder, excess, imagination, freedom and that'll be baroque. Cosmos and chaos: balance and turbulence. It is true and it is false.' (Rousset 1954: 242, my translation). While Forkey (1959: 85) says, 'to the baroque mind the world is not conceived in logical Cartesian terms. To the contrary, it is full of contradictions. The baroque mind, moreover is acutely aware of the conflict between illusion and reality, and paradox and complexity are accepted as almost natural phenomena.' As such 'baroque' has affinities and sympathies with that other ubiquitous and meaningless sign of our times, 'postmodernism'. Indeed, Maggie MacLure (2006a: 225) conceives of the baroque as a recurrent event, a phenomenon that has returned throughout history. 'Perhaps then' she says, 'postmodernism is just one manifestation of the spectre that has stalked modernity as its *impensé*: the trace of its ineffable, uncanny, dark Other'. Other to those Enlightenment values that have provided a foundation for research - 'faith in progress, rationality, access to truth and the agency of the centred self' (MacLure, 2006a: 224). Why, she asks, should we not continue to profess these values and conduct research in accord with them - 'seeking to dispel illusion and illuminate the dark places of ignorance with the light of reason'? (MacLure, 2006a: 225). The answer she suggests lies in the need to disrupt the metaphysics of closure so prevalent in modernist policy discourses, to antagonise these discourses 'intent on the suppression of dissent, diversity, complexity and unpredictability' (MacLure, 2006a:224), 'to address the strange and fascinating ways

in which that true real is produced' and represented (MacLure, 2006a: 225). The production of this 'true real' is the paradoxical triumph of dominant socio-cultural discourses, a sleight of hand giving rise to linguistic and material practices which appear to us to be utterly natural. In a topsy-turvy world what seems to be solidly real is illusion, while what attempts to unveil this is dismissed as unreason.

The epistemological emblem that underlies this approach to research is provided by the *Wunderkammer*, the baroque cabinet of curiosities, a fantastical collection of objects, juxtaposed in an apparently chaotic manner. In the *Wunderkammer*, Westerhoff says (2001: 643), 'works of art find a place next to precious stones, unicorn horns, clocks and automata, antique statues next to renaissance medals, stuffed crocodiles, coconut shells and monstrous births'. In this system, knowledge arises in the juxtaposition and connection of things, and is intimately connected to wonder. 'The juxtapositional syntax of the cabinet of curiosities is designed to spark connections in the viewer/user. Operating by seduction rather than argument, it invites them in to handle the "exhibits" rather than just to look at them – to forge their own connections.' (MacLure, 2006b: 737). And MacLure suggests 'qualitative method could risk working with the lively disappointments of wonder, and for a while at least, play with the cabinet of curiosities as a figure for analysis and representation' (MacLure, 2006b: 737). Participant self observation arose as a response to the call to play, offering a methodology for a form of research located within the *Wunderkammer*, 'where our constant task is to struggle against the very rules of reason and practice inscribed in the effects of power of the social sciences' (Lather, 2007: 73).

If the epistemology of the baroque is represented in the *Wunderkammer*, then its ontology is, as Deleuze (2006 [1993]) tells us, caught up in the fold – the complicated enfolding of space and time which entails a rejection of linearity and the embrace of complexity. Baroque architecture is characterised by a complicated enfolding of space, baroque art by sensuous curves and drapery, billowing clouds breaking out of the frame, giving rise, Wölfflin (1964) says, to an illusion of movement. Folds create compartments and secrecy but also, paradoxically, represent a continuous surface, producing in this ceaseless movement juxtaposition and contiguity. Wölfflin developed five principles which define the baroque in artistic terms. When applied to texts these can be summarised as a pictorial rather than a linear development; convergence in time which brings together the complexity of subplots; an open and wide ranging form; a unity underlying the disparate themes; and a relative unclearness in the working through of these themes. But Forkey (1959) suggests that these five principles can be brought together to give an ‘essence’ of the baroque ‘that could very well be reduced to one and expressed by the formula “unifying disunity”’ - a satisfyingly ambiguous term meaning both the denouement in which disunity is finally undone and/or a disunity which in its very lack of oneness is unifying. There is in the baroque a gathering of disparate elements in a complicated, enfolded convergence which however resists a unity of closure. The ‘unifying disunity’ ravel the threads – a paradoxical word meaning both to clarify by separating and to complicate by tangling.

Baroque style represents the fold. A fold separates but juxtaposes an exterior and an interior, mediating between an outside and an inside. On the outside an excessive vulgarity of style, on the inside the interesting intellectual basis that is paradoxically

productive of and borne up by this excess; but also, in its very enfoldedness creating an oppositional tension between rational, classical, linearity and the complexity of the baroque world. The ontological uncertainty that haunts the baroque gives rise to a contest between illusion and reality that in the arts produces the *trompe l'oeil* and in literature theatricality and paradox, in both cases simultaneously fooling yet gratifying the senses.

To the classical mind harmony, a sense of proportion, decorum, is everything. Rhetoric as a means to uncover truth demands that figurative language obey the principle of 'suitability' in order to preserve the greatest similarity between the trope and its referent. In this way, 'suitability' becomes an ideological constraint appealed to by the discourse of reason. The baroque transgresses this principle, producing an excess designed to bring about 'sensations of heightened awareness which grasp the object in an ingenious fashion' and in so doing produces an epistemological shift such that the baroque artist 'compulsively views similarity as dissimilarity, harmony as disharmony' (Spieker, 1995: 277). Spieker goes on, 'By representing the similar as that which is also dissimilar, the harmonious as that which is disharmonious, and the beautiful as that which is also ugly, the baroque calls into question formerly self-evident correspondences'. This 'crisis of similarity' is represented in and through literature in the rhetorical figures of paradox, antithesis, oxymoron, hyperbole etc, producing (Dr Johnson, from the life of Cowley in *The lives of the poets*, 1781, 'a kind of "*discordia concors*"; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike.' Offending, as Lessenich (1999) says, against 'the most basic neoclassical rules of reason, the rule of clarity and the rule of decorum'. But this is not something that can be dismissed as a frivolous snoop

cocking exercise but has the serious purpose (one might say, in paraphrasing Borges (1998: 4) that all ‘humorous labor’ is inherently serious) of disrupting the received wisdoms and sedimented practices associated with hegemonic discourses, which incline us towards premature closure of ideas and understandings.

This paper then presents a research narrative conceived within a baroque framework (Watson, 2008) which attempts, with a proper sense of irony, to unveil the ‘true real’ and ferret out the micropolitics of desire. It presents a reflexive examination of self-as-subject constituted within and by the institution called ‘the academy’, while recognising, as Adams (2000: 227) says, that ‘every self portrait, even the simplest and least staged is the portrait of another’. In fact, any representation of presence always highlights its opposite, absence. Representation is ‘never there where it is represented, in those words, in those letters which restore only a simulacrum, a fiction of it’ (Mathieu-Castellani, 1991: .32). In this way, the research acknowledges the ultimate impossibility of representation – as a critique of research itself and as an antidote to the modernist assumptions underlying the reflexive examination of self as a being fully rational and cognisant to itself.

Participant self observation

I called my own particular brand of autoethnography ‘Participant self observation’ – partly in homage to Malinowski, but mainly because while I was certainly engaged in participant observation, what I was most concerned to do was to observe myself in relation in relation to the institution I was part of – the university and in a wider sense, the academy. Participant self observation developed as a means to theorise institutional identifications and is located within a poststructural understanding of the

linguistic basis of subjectivity and a post-Marxist conceptualisation of discourse as set out in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), from which narrative is theorised as the material link between self and discourse which constitutes identification (Watson, 2006). Methodologically, participant self observation is concerned with a reflexive analysis of self-as-subject situated within discourse. It is located in the ontology of the fold and the epistemology of the *Wunderkammer* in looking for global institutional discourses as constituted and enacted within local personal narratives. As representation it seeks a baroque realism, a 'unifying disunity' (a unity of disunity) in the complexly connected and 'chaotic' enfolding and juxtaposition of texts as objects of research. The metaphor of position makes use of a topographical construct of space and its relation to place. While de Certeau (1988: 117) defines a place as a distribution of elements in coexistence within a distinct location 'a space exists when one takes into consideration vectors of direction, velocities and time variables'. A space is therefore an actualisation of a place, 'a practiced place'. Participant self observation is concerned to open up to scrutiny the discursively actualised spaces of the University as an institution as these are practiced both in and for itself and in relation to the wider academy. In this way it aims to go beyond the purely personal to provide a critical account of subjectivisation.

The examination of self-as-subject is achieved through the creation of research objects which constitute 'data', though this is a necessarily provisional category. As Elizabeth St Pierre (1997: 179) writes, 'When we put a signifier like data under erasure, the entire structure that includes it begins to fall apart and clarity becomes impossible.' Data is always already plural (as any pedant will quickly tell you); always already analysed. The idea of empirical data then, has to be regarded with

some irony. But in the same way that Patti Lather (2007: 118) retains the term validity ‘in order both to circulate and break with the signs that code it’ I refuse to ditch the words data and empirical, knowing that by doing so, I add a frisson of *Différance*, a relative unclarity to these signifiers.

Participant self observation, as an empirical process, makes use of texts from multiple sources from which the ‘research objects’ are created and then drawn on to analyse subject positions within discourses. Research objects, which are not limited to written texts, are constructed from institutional documents: policies, emails, memos, newsletters etc; personally generated texts such as journal/diary entries, notes taken at meetings, photographs and other types of images; and texts produced as part of the performance of identity within the institution. This last, for me working in a university, largely meant texts generated while doing research – primarily research papers.

The *Wunderkammer* is created through the collection and artful display of the textual, visual and kinaesthetic objects of research, and the analytical handling of these which produces the fleetingly glimpsed objects of desire as points of identification. It offers a baroque analytic which aims to ‘preserve, and indeed intensify, the complexity of the specific’, looking ‘for ways of working with, and deeply within, the intricate entanglements of global and local, representation and reality, sensual and intellectual, particular and general, and so on.’ (MacLure 2006b: 733). I now present a selection of objects from the *Wunderkammer*. Often stylistically vulgar, with ‘occasional verbal infelicities’ (as an anonymous reviewer once said of my writing), these objects nonetheless have been fashioned as a means of explicating institutional identification

through revelation of the objects of desire. They focus on the experiencing self in relation to the institution as the object of research, in which the familiar is made strange through the uncanny doubling and return of the self as text.

The pieces displayed below aim to represent self as event, drawing on the haecceities, the particularities from which identification is constructed. As such, in research terms, they combine ‘interpretation, data, analysis – all embedded in the tale’ (Lather 2007: 41). These particular pieces relate to my ultimate desire in the academy – what I refer to as the ‘contrefaitkugel’¹ of the *Wunderkammer*, making use in theoretical terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s (2004 [1984]) notions of desire and the hugely useful construct of the ‘Body without Organs’.

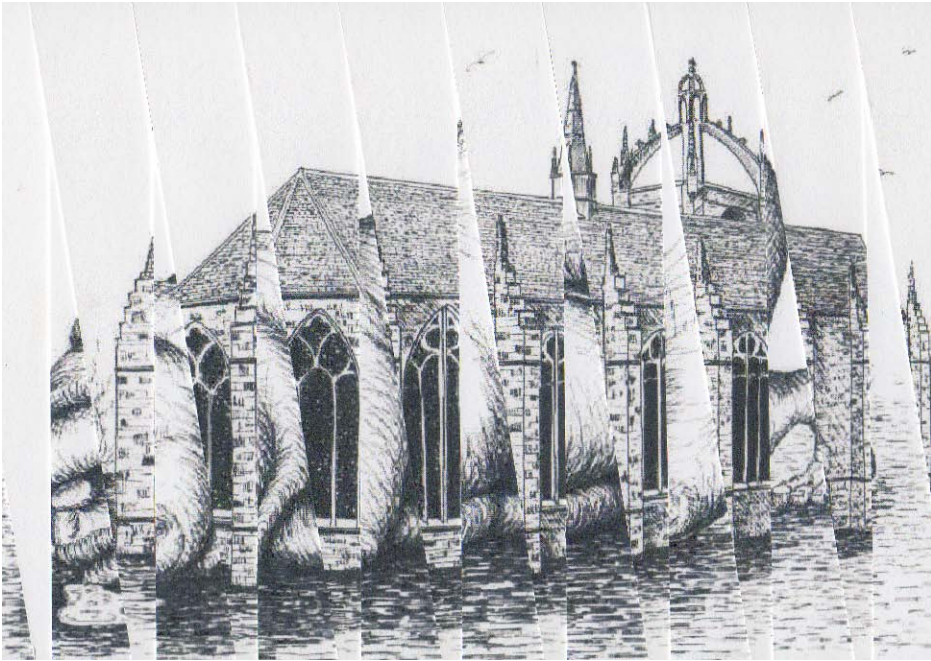
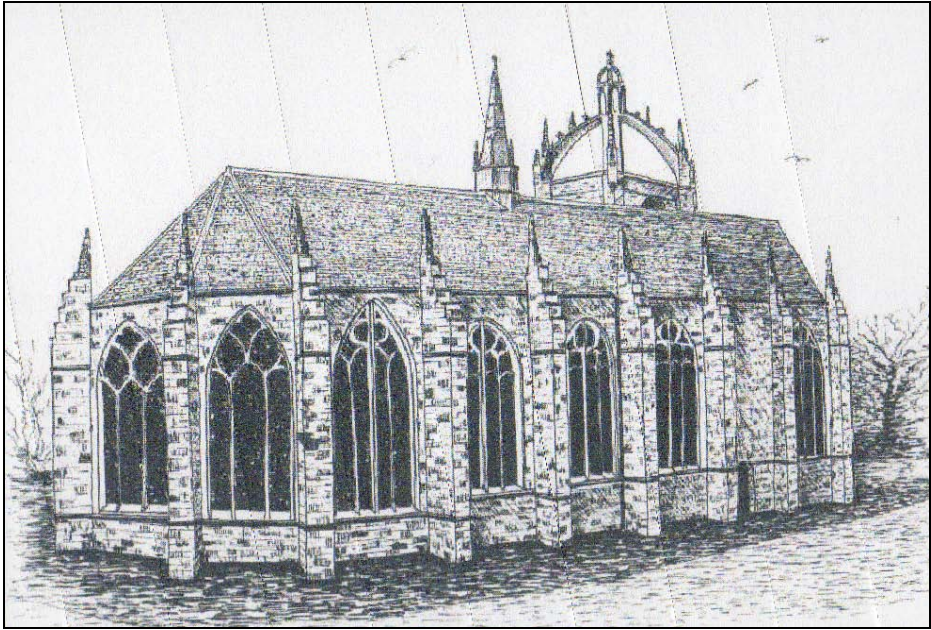
Some objects from the Wunderkammer

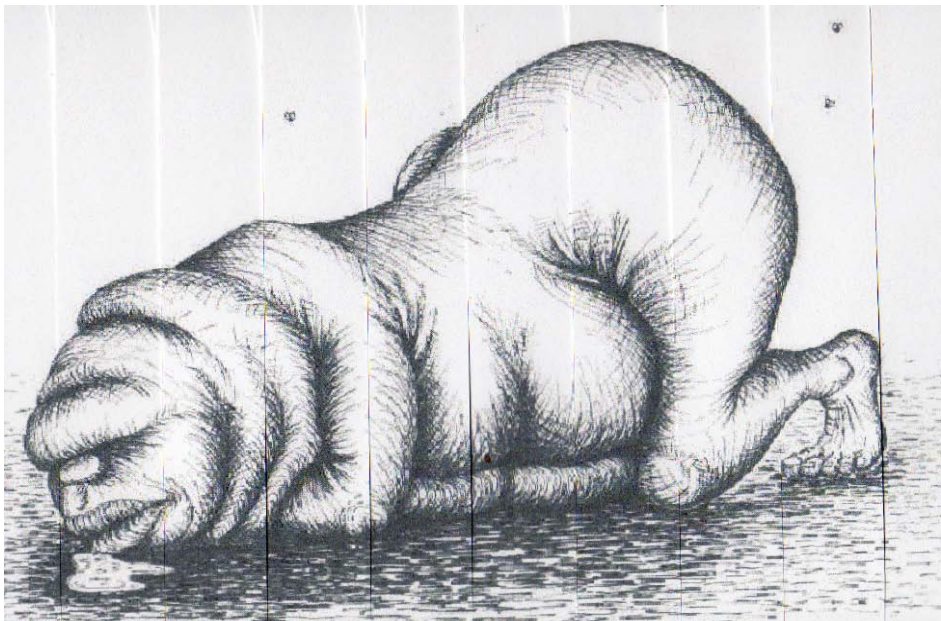
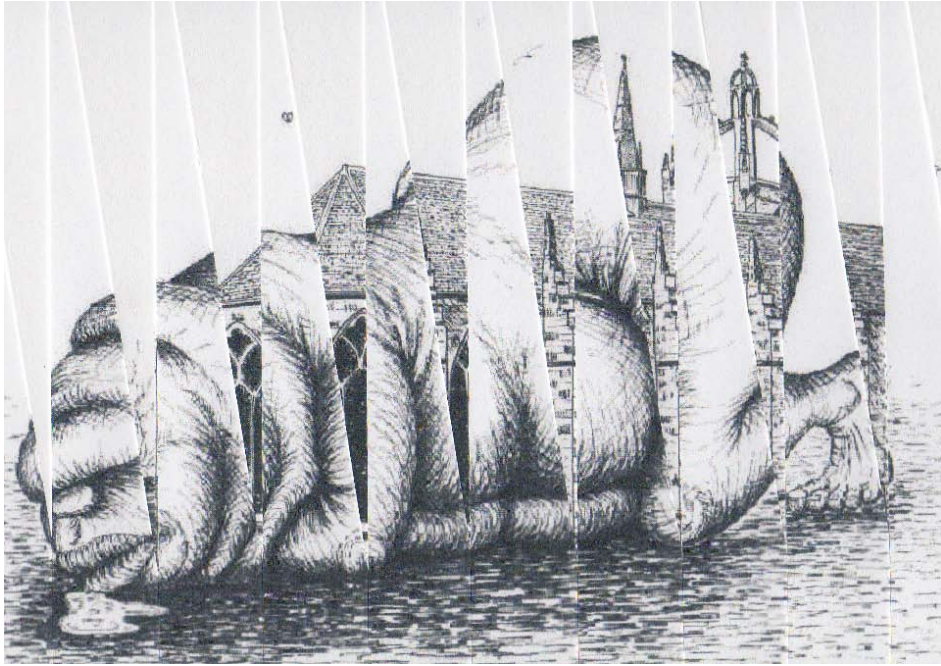
The University at the time of the RAE - Desiring Machines and the Body Without Organs

For Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1984]) desire is a productive force, produced by desiring machines. Each desiring machine connected to another which interrupts it and then stimulates the flow of desire. To identify is to desire. The institution is productive of my desire. It acts as a limiting device, recording and channelling all the flows resulting from all the couplings of all the desiring-machines in the institution, organ-ising the patterns of desire, controlling the flows that pass over its surface.

¹ The contrefaitkugel represented the pinnacle of achievement of the baroque lathe turner’s art , ‘ivory hollowed out in fantastic spirals or reduced to elfin thinness, or shaped into concentric hollow globes’, ‘inside of which one might find a well-turned urn, a fleur-de-lys, or a many-pointed star’ (Connors 1990, p.223).

Looking closer, something starts to happen. The university is becoming undifferentiated, crown, chapel, library, laboratories, all dissolving, divesting themselves of their outward appearance, for the institution is turning into the body without organs (BwO).





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The Body without Organs

[Aside: This is an example of a kinaesthetic object – a type of paper engineering technically, a woven dissolve (Birmingham, 2003) in which on pulling a tab, a

picture underneath the top one is gradually revealed. Unfortunately, it cannot be reproduced here in that form. However, if desired, the reader may cut out the pictures and staple them together to make a flick book to create, in proper Wölfflin style, an illusion of movement in keeping with the baroque.]

The BwO is not itself productive. It is anti-production. It halts the flow of desire in order to organ-ise it, to enable new connections and other forms of production, new patterns of desire to be established between the desiring-machines that attach to it. It is, paradoxically, the locus of repression and the potential for freedom (Holland1999: 31), the contested site from which complicity and resistance emerge. The BwO controls the flow of my desire. I am coupled to the BwO experiencing the flow as a 'miraculating' attraction of desire and simultaneously as a paranoid negative repulsion. The BwO simultaneously causes the flow of my desire and frustrates that desire – repelling my flows and my desire to identify completely with the institution. I discover that I am not the agent of my desire, but an after effect of it.

The body without organs attracts, appropriates for itself, desiring machines, which then seem to emanate from it, organ-ising my desire. What seems like my desire is in fact the desire of the BwO. What seems like my agency is in fact the emergence of my subjectivity in this process. The BwO describes the interpellatory space within which my narrative of self finds its identification. In the present context, the patterns of desire demand identification with the university at the time of the RAE. The Research Assessment Exercise. The most intricate, most wonderful, most terrible object of the Wunderkammer, the justly

famed and celebrated Contrefaitkugel, the ultimate object of my desire, what I identify most completely with, desire above all else is...Returnability in the RAE.



Contrefaitkugel

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Interpellated into the discourse of the University at the time of the RAE

At first I was a

Possible (returnable)

Then I was a

Probable (returnable)

But finally I achieved full

Returnability

(Ah, sweet mystery of life at last I've found thee!)

The Research Assessment Exercise

The university at the time of the RAE attracts desiring machines for the production of knowledge through research. Desire lying, not so much in knowledge per se but in its measurement, the voluptuous weight of it.

'Research for the purpose of the RAE is to be understood as original investigation undertaken in order to gain knowledge and understanding. It includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention of ideas, images, performances...

The process is one of 'expert review' (not, note, peer review).

'Sub-panel members will exercise their knowledge, judgement and expertise to reach a collective view on the quality profile of research described in each submission, that is the proportion of work in each submission that is judged to reach each of five quality levels from 4 to Unclassified. The definition of each level relies on a conception of quality (world leading) which is the absolute standard of quality in each Unit of*

*Assessment.’ (RAE2008, Panel Criteria and working methods, Panel K,
p.9).*

Four star

*Quality that is world-leading in terms of
originality, significance and...*

Rigour

Three star

*Quality that is Internationally Excellent in terms of originality,
significance and*

Rigour but which

nonetheless

Falls short

Of the very highest

standards of ‘Excellence’

Two star

Quality that is recognised internationally

In terms of

Originality Significance and Rigour

One star

Quality that is recognised nationally in terms of

Originality significance and Rigour

Unclassified...

[whereof we cannot speak]

The RAE emerges as part of a larger current social discourse – the game. The articulation of the discursive field is disposed as one giant board game in which competition is key and we are all under scrutiny in the Big Brother household. Identification within the academy in the current historical episteme involves an understanding of the game, and with it the moves in the game. One of the basic moves in the game of the academy is ‘publish or perish’ (Spender 1981: 190). ‘In a very fundamental sense’, Spender says, ‘research which is not in print does not exist’.

Interestingly, as the date of Spender’s comment indicates, this is not a very recent form of play – not the result of the RAE a version of which was first held in 1986 (though perhaps achieving its apotheosis in the current era, at the point at which it is to be scrapped to make way for a system of ‘metrics’ to measure performance quantitatively). But rather, the RAE itself developed as a move in the game, naïvely thought by some to be about university funding and research performance (see, for example, Williams 1998), rather than about ‘making university research more responsive, rhetorically and substantively to commercial and political agendas’ (Willmott 2003:129). The RAE is part of the ‘Audit society’ ‘deeply internalised as a form of self surveillance within the academy’ (Nowotny, Scott and Gibbons, 2003:184). The history (mythology perhaps) of the RAE is shrouded in confusion (see, for example contradictory accounts given by Bence and Oppenheim 2004, Elton 2000; and Willmott 2003).

The official hagiography (DfES 2006) is that the RAE has developed and been refined progressively since the first selective funding exercises in the 1980s, and has brought about increases in the quality of research in the UK, but is now capable of performing the same function in a much simplified manner through a system of, as yet, unspecified 'metrics'.

What is clear is that the RAE has had a significant impact on academic writing and publishing practices within the UK. For the first true RAE in 1992 the number of refereed articles provided the main measure (while only two publications were nominated per researcher, 'information on all publications was required under a range of headings', Bence and Oppenheim 2004: 57). Subversion of this was fairly straightforward with the predictable response of a proliferation of journals and the development of creative practices involving the re-badging of essentially the same paper for publication in a number of different journals (Elton2000). The counter move in the next RAE (1996) was to restrict researchers to four papers, and this time a league table of results was published. For 2008 again, four papers were put forward per research active (returnable) member of staff. However, the setting in motion of a research publication juggernaut has resulted in numbers of publications remaining an important indicator of status, and a key aspect of professional identification. While the RAE can be seen as a panoptic form of self surveillance within the academy, it can also be read as the subversion of government intentions. An Aristophanes-like satire on academics' complicity/resistance, manifest within the whole RAE narrative. Since the first Selective Public Funding exercise was held in 1986, the rules have become progressively more complex supposedly

allowing for a more nuanced assessment in the development of a staggeringly arcane process, costing millions and becoming a focus for research in its own right. The RAE, both in itself and as a move in the game, has a beauty and intricacy that can only be gasped at, like the Contrefaitkugel itself. It arouses in me shock and awe. It shows the academy at its very best. It is the ultimate parody, the ultimate expression of irony, the most perfect response to government attempts to impose managerialist control. I salute it. More than that, I prostrate myself before it and feel no end aggrieved when it is reduced to the brute question of money, like shouting 'get 'em off' during the dance of the seven veils.

Address to the School of Education

Reputation and prestige accrue from the RAE

Getting a 5 is quite nice

Because you get the reflected glory of being part of a unit that has done well

But mostly because you get money

Which is nice

Twenty per cent is made up of the 'research environment':

External funding

Great news

Brings in a lot of money in itself (nice)

While research students are an MVI

(minor volume indicator in RAE speak)

they also bring in money

That is quite nice too

Not a lot is expected of the School of Education at the next RAE, they don't expect miracles. They have 'sympathy for our problems' (not quite sure what is meant by this, but suddenly start to feel my age – which is menopausal). We are encouraged to go for external funding though – it doesn't have to be blue skies (well, no, not with our problem I suppose). It can be practical (now you're talking!).

They want to support us. Money for three things (there's that narrative trebling again):

Probationers

Seed corn

Conference attendance (which is, I think, quite nice).

(But mind you are giving a paper with RAE value, or it will all disappear at midnight).

June 2006

The RAE is in full swing – well, not so much for us, we are behind hand with the process. Then again, we are in a diffic- different position (yes, we know, we have a problem). Our main task is to make a mark. In some schools, strategically, one-star researchers aren't being returned, affects the prestige. Affects kudos. That isn't the case for Education. No question of not returning one-star researchers.

RAE rage 1.

The RAE threatens to divide friends, come between colleagues, open up suppressed resentments, expose rivalries, produce RAE rage (the emotional state entered into when your co-writers suggest that your contribution to the paper is, in percentage terms, insultingly small).

RAE rage 2

External assessor's report on what I think is my best paper.

Ranking: one star (possibly)

'At times degenerates into whimsy'.

Footnote to the RAE

The rules of the RAE say that submitted papers must be published by the end of 2007. My complicity/Resistance emerges in my decision to substitute one of my entered papers (a jointly written piece in fact) with another, a single-authored paper which is, however, not due out until December 2007. This unintentional brinkmanship on my part evidently occasions anxiety in some quarters and I am frequently asked for assurances – Any news about your paper? Have you had the proofs yet?

Do you know the page numbers?

Do you know the page numbers?

Do you know the bloody page numbers yet?

Strangely, considering returnability in the RAE constituted for me the Contrefaitkugel of my identification, I am rather unconcerned. Complicitly resistant I even start to enjoy the discomfiture I have unwittingly created.

Denouement

Research in the baroque is concerned with ‘the juxtapositional syntax of the cabinet of curiosities’ which is ‘designed to spark connections’(MacLure, 2006a: 737).

Participant self observation proceeds by connection on a number of levels:

identifications revealed in the subjective critique of self within discourse; the ideological positions exposed through an analysis of genres of texts produced in the performance of identity; and the enfolded connections between these texts which critique the nature of research itself (Watson 2007). The autoethnographic texts constitute the objects of the *Wunderkammer* . As portraits of subjection they reveal glimpses of the objects of desire – the objects which are productive of my desire and give rise to identification. In this narrative the Contrefaitkugel is materialised as Returnability in the RAE, the objectification of my desire that drives me to ‘produce’ research as a commodity, to connect with other desiring machines in the production and consumption of knowledge as represented in and by the research paper. But this desire, organ-ised for me by the academy as the BwO is not without its ambivalence. I am complicit with but I am simultaneously resistant to the discourses that subject me. No discourse can impose total closure on a potentially open system. Discourses are therefore forced to occupy contested sites and it is from these sites of conflict that ambivalence emerges.

All the research objects function to promote connection and/or juxtaposition, to create an enfolded and deeply implicated text which, through successive layers of analysis, evokes a self-as-subject within the academy, analyses the nature of this subjection, and constitutes a critique of research. Style has therefore a theoretical as well as an aesthetic function. Style becomes an enactment of theory which ‘sketches the reign of the signifier’ (Barthes, 1994 [1977]: 76). In this way, the stylistic traits serve to construct a form which can be described as baroque realism, a form of realism built on the paradoxical notion of reality as illusion, which does not attempt ‘naturalism’ but instead is allegorical. The texts generated in participant self observation aim through connection and juxtaposition to evoke the fragile and fragmented nature of a self-as-subject interpellated into multiple discourses. In this respect they are intended to be performative, not producing coherence, but recalling the relative unclarity from which we seek to impose meanings on our lives, to impose a closure which is ultimately unachievable.

As such, participant self observation offers a critical methodology. For Deleuze and Guattari (2004 [1984]) a theoretical construct is useful only as far as it provides a conceptual tool. Participant self observation is a conceptual tool-box for thinking about self in relation to the discursive structures that constitute social reality, for reflexively examining one’s position within discourses. It offers that most practical of things, a manual for making your own Body without Organs recognising this bizarre construct as the paradoxical locus of repression and the potential for freedom (Holland 1999: 31). We have moved on from the Disciplinary society with its emphasis on technologies of confinement to the control society operating through ‘continuous control and instant communication’ (Deleuze 1995:174): ‘The key thing

may be to create vacuoles of noncommunication, circuit breakers, so we can elude control' (Deleuze 1995:175). Participant self observation offers a way to uncover the pattern of the zones of intensity distributed on the surface of the BwO that organ-ise our desires, holding out the possibility for reorgan-ising those patterns; for discerning the points of weakness and the lines of flight along which travel might be possible; for creating the conditions necessary for the fleeting appearance of Deleuze and Guattari's autonomous nomad. It is, in short a liberatory manual (or at least a manual for understanding why such liberation is impossible).

Finally

All theories (including this one) are ways of enclosing the world, constructing a reality which then allows us to intervene in particular ways to achieve certain outcomes. The activity called research constitutes the exploration, elaboration and refinement of these closures (Lawson 2001). The baroque concept, paradoxically, offers a theory of, if not exactly openness then of non-closure, a way of holding open through the ontology of the fold and its continuous, unfolding, infinite, deferral of closure, the possibility of openness. In this way the ontology of the fold creates a reality understood as provisional and contingent, keeping open the possibility for critical intervention. Participant self observation offers a methodology which is consonant with this theoretisation of non-closure. It is a form of research which recognises the ultimate impossibility of research not as a nihilistic response, but as a means of keeping open the closure of necessarily contingent truths.

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