

**MATERIALITY OF TEXT AS A MOVING COMPOSITION: AN  
ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR LEARNING**

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**THE MATERIALITY OF TEXT AS A MOVING COMPOSITION :**  
**AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR LEARNING**

Abstract:

The pedagogy of our student-teacher interaction is encapsulated in the resulting intersections of our different sensibilities and modes of knowing, fueling powerful understanding of ourselves. Our pedagogical device is to examine writings and letters, (as suggested by our reading of Deleuze and Guattari), in relation to intersections between our production of concepts.

Our exchange of letters and writings may be considered as “works” expressing “thought” that arises from two individual, fluctuating subjectivities. The “in-between,” characterizes the dynamics of any activity, or even feeling, as an ongoing process of creation and of becoming .

We experience these intersections as movement, whereby we purposefully re-define ourselves, drawing from and leading into an array of domains and a multiplicity of perspectives, from film to art to technoculture.

Key words: Intertextuality, imagination, meaning and significance, creativity, pedagogy

## THE MATERIALITY OF TEXT AS A MOVING COMPOSITION : AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR LEARNING

*Pensee a deux, “two-fold thought”: thinking, reflection accomplished between “two” individuals, yet something more than a mere duality. As Deleuze remarked pointedly to Michel Cressole about his work with Guattari, “Since each of us, like anyone else, is already various people, it gets rather crowded.” It is quite understandable, then, that as they commenced their final collaborative work, “What is Philosophy?,” Deleuze and Guattari would turn to l’ami, the “friend,” as a generative concept, but of course, in their own particular way. For they situate the “friend” in terms of “conceptual personae”, affirming and yet questioning the signification of “friend” among the Greeks. These authors apparently understood this concept as “a presence that is intrinsic to thought, a condition of possibility of thought itself, a living category, a transcendental lived reality [un vecu transcendental].*

(Stivale, Charles J., 1998)

### *Introduction*

The pedagogy of our student-teacher interaction is encapsulated in the resulting intersections of our different sensibilities and modes of knowing (Stivale, 1998), fueling powerful understanding of ourselves. Our pedagogical device is to examine writings and letters, (as suggested by our reading of Deleuze and Guattari), in relation to intersections between our production of concepts.

Our exchange of letters and writings may be considered as “works” expressing “thought” that arises from two individual, fluctuating subjectivities (Dugal, 1999). These works seek to produce a dispersed articulation of concepts within intermezzo (Harju, 1999), that is, “in-between” the two sites of critical articulation. Moreover, evoking “the end” at the start of these intersections raises the fundamental question of even “beginning,” a problem posed implicitly by Deleuze and Guattari themselves (Stivale, 1998). For their concept of intermezzo, the “in-between,” characterizes the dynamics of any activity, or even feeling, as an ongoing process of creation and of becoming (Harju, 1999).

A

B

Intermezzo

\*fluctuating subjectivities

\*fluctuating subjectivities

\*critical articulation

\*critical articulation

“thought”

dispersed articulation of concepts

We experience these intersections as movement, whereby we purposefully re-define ourselves, drawing from and leading into an array of domains and a multiplicity of perspectives, from film to art to technoculture.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part are letters , each of which are situation specific. The second part is insight into materiality of text as a moving composition. The third part is our experience, together and apart, in managing the production of a teacher-student relationship.

## **PART I: EXCHANGE**

*Situation: Destiny*  
Feb/21/99

Sardar,

On Friday, at the end of our conversation (you, the dean, and I) in front of the multicultural center, I felt as if we were explorers and just lands and mental landscapes. So it goes, the Viking (e.g. Leif Eriksson) and Sikh head out to sea “to see.” They possess a common destiny but no plan.

We were three kids joking and conspiring, basically, just having a good time. You and I are destined to be intellectuals – the consciousness of people in power. We are “individuals endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public (Said, 1994, 11).” We are on a journey of freedom and knowledge.

But I think I may have lived out my Danish side, that of a Viking, in my younger years. Now I find myself attracted to the French philosophers. A Viking has a heart and sole of a young man. As did Vikings, in college I drank for more beer than any other kind of liquid. Vikings’ lives focused on the external world. Although I still retain the respect for women that the Vikings possessed (e.g., contrary to other part of Europe, Viking women were able to own property and to divorce their husbands).

But now I am ready to become French. I want to thank you for allowing me to see this side of me and it’s strength. My journey is now an internal one. One of consciousness and transcendence. I see it as a journey whose outcome is to become the type of intellectual described by Said.

I feel like Bazarov from Turgenev’s book “Father and Sons, “...He has severed his ties with his own parents, seems less a son than a sort of self-produced character, challenging routine, assailing mediocrity and cliches, asserting new scientific and unsentimental values that appear to be rational and progressive (Said, 1994, 14-15). I believe this statement also holds true for you.

As we have discovered, and as lesson for others, from forgiveness comes growth, understanding and feeling. There exists a powerful spirit between us that makes others uncomfortable and jealous. It is not something that can be justly described through words. As history tells us, individuals will attempt to destroy or pervert it. We must respect and protect it and use it to assist the underrepresented and disadvantaged. When we connive anything seems possible and if it does not pan out, oh well. There is no stronger force than truth, laughter and joy.

To destiny,  
Mattheu

*Situation: Viking-Sikh*  
2.21.99

Dear Lief Erikson the Viking,

One's position within a relationship, like, Viking-Sikh, has to do with intersubjective interpretation, in other words, position is determined by our past (shared memory), our present (interpretation), and, our future (imagination).

The activities representing the past, present, and future, are overlapping in the new millennium to the extent of becoming indistinguishable. We're experiencing confusion, loss of control, etc. In such a situation, how do I determine my sense of self?

To do so, I reveal a structure, or deconstruct one, or imaginatively construct one...here's mine, for the moment:

"I was sent to these Arabs as a stranger, unable to think their thoughts or subscribe their beliefs, but charged by duty to lead them forward and to develop to the highest any movement of theirs profitable to England in her war. If I could not assume their character, I could at least conceal my own, and pass among them without evident friction, neither a discord nor a critic but an unnoticed influence. Since I was their fellow I will not be their apologist or advocate. Today in my old garments, I could play the bystander, obedient to the sensibilities of our theatre...but it is more honest to record that these ideas and actions then passed naturally. What now looks wanton or sadic seemed in the field inevitable or just unimportant routine." (T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, 1926)

What is our intersubjective interpretation of the above text with regard to us, as Viking-Sikh?

Yours truly,  
Sardar Bahadur Dewan Singh

*Situation: Letters To A Young Poet*  
2.19.99

Dear Mr. Kappus,

Thank you for expressing feelings so eloquently through the mouth of Mr. Kappus. You are Mr. Kappus.

When reading your letters, it is evident that one's authentic self is indeed problematic in a situation where one can be anything one wants. Through this labyrinth lies the inward journey of the subjective self.

I find your words, "Even when overcome by feelings of hate, I still knew that our relationship was a source of great knowledge and understanding" to be most telling of our universal condition, because the central problem is not an abstract one, but one of contingency: what we lack is certainty, confidence, sense of purpose to break paradoxical situations like feelings of hate/ and feelings of great understanding. That is, the more I hate, the more I understand, and the more I understand, the more I hate.

If we had more access to our own past, to memory, to inter-textuality and inter-subjectivity, our sense of purpose would be immensely augmented. Hesse's *Steppenwolf* expressed this sense of meaning due to re-possession of the past:

"For moments together my heart stood still between delight and sorrow to find how rich was the gallery of my life, and how thronged the soul of the wretched steppenwolf with high eternal stars and constellations... the kernel of this life of mine was noble. It came of high descent and turned, not on trifles, but on the stars..." (*Steppenwolf*, Hesse).

From your friend,  
Rainer Maria Rilke

*Situation: Contingency*  
3.18.99

My Dear Siddhartha,

During our period of estrangement, our inward journey was around doubts as to "who I am" and, "what I stand for," i.e. who is the authentic self? Am I this, or, am I that?

Through thought alone, one transcends a situation (of this/that), and thus we transcended our situation, comprising of hurt and feelings of insult, by conceiving the fish-bowl. However, to act upon thought, (beginning with the memo allocating Matt's assistantship to Sanjiv), was a contingent act... to survive, to live, to be represented. Our contingent act was a gesture demarcating our representation. Gesture demarcates, and so we conceive of ourselves... The fish-bowl is a contingent act a gesture to exist.

The betrayal of ideas is a death to being. To open one's mind and one's mental routine to the world is to open one's heart.

From,  
Your very dear friend,  
Hermann Hesse.

*Situation: Faggots*

To: Seeker of the Holy Grail  
From: Knight of the Round Table  
Re: Felt-indignities  
Date: April 7, 1999  
C:Faculty

I'm sorry you had to suffer indignities which were really meant for me, and that too for the second time around. I'd like to take this experience and introduce you to the topic of framing discourse. I frame our discourse by suggesting that the felt-indignity constitutes the demons and dragons which exist within the subjective-self, and they stalk the corridors of our minds. We objectify these demons through interpretation. This objectification is what "framing" is about for me.

I realise my frame, my interpretation, my metaphor, through felt-experience. To understand oneself through felt-experience is our purpose in the fish-bowl. Consequently, I interpret my framework.

So, as we step onto the third floor Ballentine, we're accosted by a group of faculty who 'jingoistically' greet us with: "here come Laurel and Hardy."

Your interpretation, i.e. your framing of their behavior, is distinct from mine. One might say, interpretation or framing or metaphor is culture bound. The difference in our interpretations constitutes opportunity within "negotiated-space;" one of the phenomena being "viewed" in the fish-bowl. Framing in negotiated-space is akin to movie directing.

And WHO are YOU today?

*Situation: Of Fathers and Sons*

Dear Sanjiv,

...it seems to me like in the last few weeks

Matt has been trying to stand on his own and find his own space and identity within the landscape of ideas that you and he work in. I think he doesn't entirely trust his own ability to understand the material and to articulate it, when in fact he does and can. It appears that he needs to convince himself not only that he has an intellectual grasp of what you're

doing (not only Sanjiv stuff but theory stuff in general), that he can speak the vocabulary, that he can stand on his own in expressing it, and perhaps more importantly, that he even trusts it as valid, that he has confidence in what he says and writes. He also, like you recognized, has a feeling of running out of time and needing to get out. I can certainly relate to that with the MBA, although that's much different. And in that regard he feels that playing emotional "games" as you do sometimes is counterproductive. I'm sure you know all of this already.

My sense of the situation is that right now your "games" and criticisms are pushing him away (as is their purpose, but of course their real purpose is to test his loyalty -- like the lover who pushes the other away with the real purpose of wanting the other to resist being pushed, to hold on, and thus confirm their love for the pusher). I would say, though, as the Second Coming of Freud, that you should try not to feel threatened. Matt loves you, but you have to give him space while at the same time giving him support and "nurturing" him (your word). Don't hold on to him so tightly right now. He's like the teenager, and you have to try not to be the controlling parent. He needs to prove himself to himself now, without Dad interfering or telling him he has to be home at a certain time. And don't be afraid of losing him. You won't -- at least I don't think so. You're obviously extremely important to him. I remember something you said to me in your office when you were commenting on the 681 presentation done by R and S's group. You were saying how they were protecting J and taking care of him, but that that was a relationship of inequality, and thus there could be no real passion in it. You and Matt are still unequal too, because no matter how you redefine the student teacher relationship, it still exists. Help him get out of that formal structure so that the "passion" between you can grow; don't try to keep him dependent on you.

(Excerpt from a letter written by an MBA student who participated in the fish-bowl, spring 2000)

*Situation: Son to Father*

Bob,

I think about your life a great deal and imagine how it was for you to experience, especially as a young man. I believe although it was filled with many gifts from God -- most importantly your children, it was also stressful and challenging, loaded with attempts at fulfilling many of society's, in general, and, the Catholic church's, in particular, often unrealistic and unattainable structures, ideas and values - which I sure not many can hold a candle to how well you and Mary have done. It is hard for me to imagine the strength and courage both you and Mary have both shown throughout your lives. Along with this, I also know that no one is perfect or above reproach - I know I am not by any stretch of the imagination. We all, I included even at my younger age, wish we had done things differently or possibly even had lived different lives. But in the end, we only have one life and there should never be guilt about the past (as a French friend of mine said "guilt is a worthless emotion"). We can never change the past. WE CAN ONLY REINVENT OURSELVES IN THE FUTURE BASED ON WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED IN THE PAST.



"The basic practical-moral problem in life is not what to do but WHAT TO BE."

John Shotter (1993, 118)

I believe one's greatest hope (actually, the only way) in changing oneself and one's relationships is through dialogue/conversation - my experience says so. I also believe, we as men in America, have been conned into believing it is best not to talk or show/express feelings - to do so is seen as a sign of weakness. Rather, we are taught to be stoic.

Feelings are neither right or wrong - they just are!! We can separate them from behavior and examine them reflexively in conversation in the hope understanding their nature and cause. It is quite liberating to KNOW this. Without articulation of our thoughts and feelings, there is no hope for change. I respectfully encourage you as much as I can, knowing I am a younger man talking to an older and much wiser man, to engage in conversation, in whatever context, with the ones you love and imagine new and creative possibilities of interaction and engagement.

I would like to share the following passage Susan and I discovered together and which I stand guilty of

"Throughout the whole long drive from Heidelberg to Paris, Bennett said almost not a word to me. Silence is the bluntest of blunt instruments. It seems to hammer you into the ground. It drives you deeper and deeper into your own guilt. It makes the voices inside your head accuse you more viciously than any outside voices ever could."

- Erica Jong, *The Fear of Flying*, p 106

I will be there physically on Saturday with my love and support, but believe we are always connected through our spirits and, thus, I am always with you as you are with me. I think this materially best represented in our love; it may better be called an obsession.

Love,  
Matthew

*Situation: Aftermath*  
Sanjiv,

I went to the intervention yesterday in Connecticut. I was quite an interesting novel communication episode. I think it was a time of great pain for the family, but a space of great hope. I realized the fragility of people and how we all are alcoholic in one way or the other. We all contribute to the "situation" and no one is free of blame. And, in the end, it is about love trying to overcome past and its pain and imagining a new future based on love and mindfulness.

As you have said to me, regardless of what I verbalize to you, underneath it all lies a deep bond based on love. It seems we must fight our human nature that tries to pervert this powerful emotion and distort it by attempting to dress it in the Devil's clothing. I guess it is life challenge to not get fooled by "appearances" and constantly strip love of its deceitful clothing.

Love,

Matthew

## **PART II: INSIGHT**

### *Images*

As suggested by Fludernik (1993), the “script” in the preceding letter(s) supports the assertion that images (Crapanzano, 1992; Wright, 1992) form an arbitrary reality altogether different from “true” reality. It would be stretching the point to assume from this that the letters bring us into contact with an entirely new world, but it must be said that what it presents to our eyes is not (and never could be) an exact image of reality. It replaces continuous reality (or, more precisely, the homogenous reality of our continuous perception) with a series of discontinuous fragments. It selects the framing, the characters, the angle, and setups and arranges them according to their relative durations in time and space, giving them meanings outside the ‘global’ future time of the universe from which they have been taken.

Obviously, continuity of time exists within a discontinuity of images, just as spatial unity exists within a dimensional variety of the fields of view. Nonetheless, the above letters image always a reconstruction, i.e., “another” space and “another” time.

Though these images fragment reality into various “frames,” manifest in the letters, it would be wrong to think of them in terms of fragments with no difference from reality than that of being arbitrarily selected. They are something else, another reality, which becomes a part of the context. According to Mieke Bal (1985,94) ‘the space in which the character is situated, or is precisely not situated, is regarded as the frame.’ We may say that each frame is, as it were, a "cell," a distinct space, and that when combined in a sequence, they form a homogenous space.

### *Moving Composition*

In the American Heritage Dictionary, a "composition" is defined as the combination of distinct parts or elements to form a whole. We’re examining our relationship as teacher/student, and its manifestations into distinct parts or elements to form intellectual property. Raymond Williams fieldwork found support for the contention that relationships of power, property and production are no more fundamental to a society than relationships in describing, learning, modifying, exchanging, and preserving experiences. These, latter, far from being secondary communications about some other primary reality, are a central and necessary part of who we are.

We define "movement" as changing one’s place or position with regard to each other within each framework in the context of our teacher-student relationship. This change in position is critical in developing the text of our relationship because the conditions under which the relationship exists are increasingly the product of our own actions and, conversely, our actions are increasingly oriented towards meeting the challenges we ourselves create (Giddens, 1991).

### *Materiality of Text*

We use the term "materiality of text" by using the distinction made by Barthes (1981) between text and work in his essay *Theory and Text*. Materiality, like work, is 'a finished object, something computable, which can occupy physical space.' The text is 'a methodological field' and, while 'the work is held in the hand, the text is held in language.'

The materiality of text is a frame that limits the represented space and defines the image through which and by which the world is presented to us: it creates, between the objects included in the frame, a series of relationships and associations not present in actual reality.

A Viking, a Sikh, a Frenchman, an Arab, a student, a father, a son, Laurel and Hardy, etc. are a whole complexity of relationships (place, position, and direction, etc.) come into existence as a written composition of various objects. From that moment these objects are literally 'cut out,' deprived of any direct association with the external world.

The consequence of this is that the image records a fragment of space whose representation, limited and circumscribed (by the frame), endows the represented objects with a series of "defining characteristics" which they do not have in actual reality. The space within the frame becomes its own "entity;" it forms an independent structure.

## **PART III: EXPERIENCE**

### *Meaning and Significance*

E.D. Hirsch (1967,8) in his book *Validity in Interpretation* defines the terms meaning and significance in ways that are matched and complementary: "*Meaning* is that which is represented by a text; it is what the author meant by his use of a particular sign sequence; it is what the signs represent. *Significance*, on the other hand, names a relationship between that meaning and a person, or a conception, or a situation, or indeed anything imaginable."

Meaning is of course situation-specific, and is generated within a context. We're looking at "context" as a composition, and then raising the question of movement. For example, it is no longer the 'Viking Saving Damsels in Distress' composition that is being scripted between us. After moving from that materiality of text, we moved into another one: Lawrence of Arabia and Sherif Ali.

In our experience this movement produces two contradictory forms of visual pleasure described in the work of Laura Mulvey (1975). First, there is scopophilia, the pleasure of being seen and the viewers' pleasure in looking. By making ourselves into objects of others' sight, we subject ourselves to their controlling gaze.

Second, each composition is a hermeneutically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of audience, nor seeking logical explanation.

### *Pedagogical Implications*

(1) Composition is the result of the intersection of a multiplicity of images, interpretations and reconstructions circulated without any 'central' coordination.

(2) The increase in possible information on the myriad forms of compositions makes it increasingly difficult to conceive of a single formulation of the teacher-student relationship.

(3) To experience growth as movement is to experience freedom as a continual oscillation between belonging and disorientation.

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