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Running Amok

The Diary of an Hysteric:
business education, the Self, & other oxymorons

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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One day I will find the right words, and they will be simple.
- Jack Kerouac

Abstract

This thesis is a work of fiction and falls under the genre of hysterical realism.¹ Hysterical realism seeks to subvert, disrupt, and resist the status quo by blending actual events with absurdist fiction.^{2 3 4} I am, therefore, making a conscious decision to write differently – and not present my doctoral thesis in the normal, accepted manner.⁵ The book that follows is presented as a reflective journal, an exercise in narrative therapy,⁶ being read to a therapist. The purpose of these diaries, or chapters, is to shine a spotlight directly on what I perceive are serious deficiencies within business education and, in particular, the MBA. I have constructed this narrative in the only way I know: using humour, integrating popular culture, and providing my own unique take on the world.⁷ And, yes,

1 Holmes, 2013; Marcus, 2013; Yates, 2014; Lisetçi, 2015.

2 Gabriel, 2000; Rhodes & Brown, 2005; Elmes & Barry, 2017.

3 According to Lacan, “...truth only speaks through the staged prosopopoeia of fiction” (cited in Rabaté, 2003, p. 3).

4 For examples of absurdist fiction, see *The Castle* (1926) by Franz Kafka, *The Stranger* (1942) by Albert Camus, & *Catch-22* (1953) by Joseph Heller.

5 Grey & Sinclair, 2006; Gilmore, Harding, Helin, & Pullen, 2019; Rhodes, 2019; Weatherall, 2019. Writing differently is best summed up by Grey & Sinclair (2006): “The writing we like doesn’t just tell people things in a didactic way, it opens a door for an experience to be had by the reader. Good writing is suggestive and pungent, it evokes feelings—relief, recognition, drama, disdain, horror—and bodily responses—the flush of recognition and the sharp intake of breath, the tingle as we feel that this might be showing us something we hadn’t thought or experienced before. Good writing is often unpredictable—shocking in its terseness or economy, audacious in its sudden sweep or the intimacy of a confidence. Our concern is that very little writing in our field has these qualities” (p. 452).

6 Bruner, 1991; 2003; & 2004; Angus & McLeod, 2004; Carrey, 2007; Brown, 2007; Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007; Lewis, 2011.

7 In other words, it will incorporate autotheory (see: Nelson, 2015; Ruti, 2018) as a tool to push aside conventional academic understanding and seek new discoveries. According to Kaufmann (2005), autotheory occurs when “...the author plays with the dialectical relationship between theory and autobiography” (p. 576). Kaufmann goes on to suggest that “...theory is constructed through the autobiography of the researcher and interpreted and rewritten through the autobiography of the reader” (p. 577).

I am writing as the hysteric.⁸ I have done this, not because I am a fanboy of Lacan,⁹ but because I don't actually have a choice - the truth is: I *am* the hysteric. Within this text, the narrator will meet and converse with a number of individuals. These minor characters should be read for what they are: twisted versions of me.¹⁰ They are Lacanian mirrors, placed at intervals, in which I pause to see if I can glimpse some shadow of truth/Self in the dysmorphic reflections.¹¹ The story begins, is punctuated at intervals by, and ends with conversations between the narrator (me) and his therapist (myself). These have been included to provide a mirror (the analyst's discourse) for his hysterical discourse. This allows me to view myself as a text (a mirror through which I can better understand not only business education but the Self).¹² I have also included numerous footnotes, which also operate as a mirror (the discourse of the university), providing the requisite, and inescapable, academic ballast that keeps this thesis afloat. It is through considering these various looking glasses and smashing each in turn, that I hope to see the real reflected back in the multitude of sharp splinters that will, through the construction of this book, be reassembled into a far more palatable whole.¹³

8 Rogerson, Morgan, & Coombes, 2018: As Dickson & Holland (2017) state: "...hysterical inquiry with its focus on desire can provide a way forward for radical qualitative research, a way out of the binds of institutionalized ethical commandments that threaten the radical potential of qualitative research" (p. 133). Additionally, the benefits and advantages of appropriating and applying the hysterical discourse, of writing as the hysteric and, ultimately, producing an hysterical thesis, are succinctly summed by Gherovici (2015), who states: "This idea of a "discourse of the hysteric" is a theoretical innovation that allows [us] to address the relationship between jouissance and desire; to conceive of desire as a desire for an unsatisfied desire; to talk about the hysteric as the one "who makes the man" (or the Master); to see the hysteric as the one who manufactures the man animated by a desire for knowledge; and, ultimately, to think of the analytic cure as a hysterization of discourse."

9 Jacques Marie Émile Lacan (1901–1981) is a French psychoanalyst.

10 As Freud (1956) suggests, "...we all have a company of players in our heads vying for that moment in the spotlight – and combined they make up the casting sheet of our Self" (cited in Bruner, 2004, p. 12).

11 As Hunt (1989) points out: "...we discover the self via the detour of the other" (cited in Proudfoot, 2015).

12 As Brooke (1987) states: "The important relationship, then, is largely within the divided person, since it involves a relationship between her conscious self and her projection or current understanding of the knowledge and purpose of the knowing authority. The real dialogue between people is less important for psychic growth than the internal dialogue with the person who supposedly knows" (p. 681).

13 Bruner, 2003, p. 14.

*I got some questions in my mind
That definitely need some answers, right now
Cause I gotta know
Got all the pieces to the puzzle
But can't seem to make it fit, so I'm lost
Tell me where to go
- Gin Wigmore*

The Method's in the Madness

I exited the cul-de-sac and jogged down towards the university campus. This was a clear, straight stretch of footpath. It was less broken. There were fewer obstacles. The pedestrians dissipated the farther I moved from the shops. The opposite side of the road was bordered with native bush and an empty cycleway. It was during this peaceful stretch of my journey that I started to germinate an idea for this explanation chapter. The gorgons at the university had been badgering me about it for months. Perhaps from day one. I didn't want to do it at all if I'm honest. It felt wrong and completely unnecessary. I turned my music up and jogged past a string of young mums pushing prams. I focused on my cadence, on my gait, on my breathing. Any work I produced, I realised, needed to reflect who I am.¹⁴ And the bullshit, antiknowledge the business school was pushing didn't fall into that category. I wouldn't, I decided, give them what they wanted. Instead, I'd give them what they needed.¹⁵ And what they needed wasn't more boring academic shit. What they needed was the hysteric's preamble. The method, I realised, was in the madness. And that's why the text that follows is so schizophrenic in nature. It has to be. It proudly suffers from what we now refer to as a dissociative identity disorder (DID) – simultaneously purporting to exhibit the dual personalities of a rigorously researched doctoral thesis while also being an enjoyable work of fiction.¹⁶ I

¹⁴ I realise that this is an impossible task. Perhaps, it would be better to say: "who I think I am" or "who I want to be".

¹⁵ The Rolling Stones (1969) *You Can't Always Get What You Want*. What they need, of course, is to be shocked out of their steady-as-she-goes-slumber.

¹⁶ Leadership scholar, Amanda Sinclair, in a 2009 interview, explains it this way: "I now want to write in a different way – more personally, relying on both research and experience, and with an explicit intention of engaging a wider range of readers

did this so I could combine my love of literature and decades of creative writing,¹⁷ with the thirty years of academic drudgery I'd inflicted upon myself. It is, I believe, the whole of me laid bare. It is, I believe, what an hysterical thesis should look like.

To create this hysterical thesis, I decided to use the genre of hysterical realism¹⁸ as a research method.¹⁹ Hysterical realism (as defined by James Wood), combines absurdist fiction²⁰ (Camus' *The Stranger*;²¹ Kafka's *The Trial*²²), absurd realism²³ (DeLillo's *White Noise*;²⁴ Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*²⁵), and real life events or people (DeLillo's *Libra*;²⁶ Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*²⁷). All of these genres are then mixed together until they are indistinguishable from each other. In hysterical realism, then, not only is the protagonist trapped in a meaningless, somewhat cyclical existence (like me in the university), but the world they inhabit, the characters they meet, and the things they say, are also patently absurd (again, just like the business school and all the people within it).²⁸ The real magic ingredient, though, is not the absurdity of the world created, but the inclusion of strands of truth (real people, places, and events) that run through the very fabric of the story. The real-life element I incorporate is a fictionalised version of my Self, including my personal history, experiences, and so on. Thus, the realism experienced

who are doing leadership work, but would normally not consider reading a leadership book" (Sheridan, Pringle, & Strachan, 2009, p. 551).

17 I have not only been writing it, but also reading and watching it. That's why this thesis is saturated with pop and high culture references – because they are central to who I am. Like most of Generation X, I was brought up by the television during the 1970s & 1980s. I had my early consciousness shaped by idiots such as Gilligan (*Gilligan's Island*) and evil doers such as Dr Smith (*Lost in Space*). When I look back on the shows that we were watching, I am struck by a constant theme: the inability to escape your situation. Many of these shows were cyclical - presenting characters perpetually trapped in a place they continuously attempted to escape from but couldn't. Normally because of their own stupidity or the stupidity of others. By including these references, I am showing how fiction has the power to not only to shape us, but to also offer a window through which to glimpse the truth. Finally, I am also aware that fiction is simply a collection, or reworking (or mosaic if you prefer), of what has gone before. This is nothing new - Picasso and Tarantino have both stated that they use the work of others to inform their work – they appropriate it, blend it with themselves and many other works of art, and produce something new. So, yes, my work is informed and appropriates, uses, and blends many elements of popular and high culture in order to create something that is intensely personal and, hopefully, fresh and new. As Malson (2004) states, "Texts are analysed, not as a means of revealing the 'truth'...[but] to explicate the culturally specific discursive resources that have been drawn upon in order to produce a particular account of 'reality'" (p. 153).

18 Wood, 2000a; Wood, 2000b. Wood is credited for coining this term. However, it should be noted, that he is scathing about the books that he feels fall within its parameters.

19 Actually, let's be honest here, I didn't so much as choose hysterical realism as it chose me. I was just writing, was just making words come out of the cursor. I wasn't seeking to fit those words into a box. It was only later, once I had finished, that I had to find a box to put them in. And that's when I found hysterical realism.

20 Absurdist Fiction according to Henderson & Brown (1997) is "A philosophical attitude pervading much of modern drama and fiction, which underlines the isolation and alienation that human beings experience, having been thrown into...a godless universe devoid of any religious, spiritual, or metaphysical meaning. Conspicuous in its lack of logic, consistency, coherence, intelligibility, and realism, the literature of the absurd depicts the anguish, forlornness, and despair inherent in the human condition. Counter to the rationalist assumptions of traditional humanism, absurdism denies the existence of universal truth or value."

21 Camus, A. (1942). *The Stranger*. Paris: Gallimard.

22 Kafka, F. (1926). *The Trial*. Berlin: Verlag Die Schmiede.

23 According to Babalola, T. (2013) "Absurd realist works...swing between the absurd, the fantastic, the satirical, and the realistic..." (p. 11)

24 DeLillo, D. (1985). *White Noise*. Viking Adult.

25 Vonnegut, K. (1969) *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Delacorte.

26 DeLillo, D. (1988). *Libra*. Viking Press.

27 Pynchon, T. (1997). *Mason & Dixon*. Henry Holt and Co.

28 I am using absurd here in terms of its literary definition as discussed above.

within the text is achieved via autobiographical fiction (Bukowski's *Post Office*;²⁹ Kerouac's *On the Road*³⁰) rather than the usual garden-variety realist fiction. If successful, it should be virtually impossible to distinguish fact from fiction. And this is precisely what you need to do in order to produce a kind of truth effect³¹ in the reader - to spark those lightbulb moments when a splinter of truth flashes brightly from within the dark recesses of the fictional narrative. As I do this, I will also endeavour to shake the reader from their long-held beliefs in the fact/fiction divide by inserting, at intervals, obviously fictional moments and devices (such as mechanical dogs). In this way, I will bounce the reader between fact and fiction, consciously going out of my way to blur the lines between these two, supposedly, diametrically opposed points - pointing out, as I do so, that this artificial dichotomy is the biggest fiction of all.

But the one ingredient that Wood inexplicitly left out of his definition of hysterical realism is the hysteric. It seems pretty clear to me that Wood either meant the hysteric to be considered as a matter of course (otherwise why refer to it as hysterical realism?) or that he has no knowledge of psychoanalysis and is completely oblivious to the fact that hysterical narrative fiction³² is already a thing (which seems highly unlikely), and is simply equating hysterical to, well, attempted humour (and his misreading of absurdist fiction). But seeing as the majority of the protagonists in the aforementioned novels (some of which he also mentions) are hysterics, I am going to suggest that it really doesn't matter a fuck what was going on in Wood's head (most of what he has to say about this genre is intensely negative anyway) - because, at the end of the day, he created something that others have built on, fixed, (AKA: Yates) and have applied as it should have been. This is why the updated and improved iteration of hysterical realism includes our favourite caped crusader - the hysteric.³³ My narrative, the novel that follows, is firmly grounded in the hysteric's discourse. It's smack-bang at its centre. It's the crazy, through which the truth and fiction are combined and filtered. It's the discursal glue that binds all the elements of this hysterical thesis together.

29 Bukowski, C. (1971). *Post Office*. Black Sparrow Press.

30 Kerouac, J. (1957). *On the Road*. Viking Press.

31 Or what Singer (1998) refers to as "...the shock of recognition..." (p. 141).

32 Showalter (1993) defines hysterical narrative fiction as "...the busy crossroad where psychoanalytic theory, narratology, feminist criticism, and the history of medicine intersect..." (p. 24). The novels I discuss below, when I investigate the depiction of hysterical female characters in literature, fall into this category. See also: Showalter, 1997; Kennedy, 2012.

33 Yates (2014) presents, and repurposes, hysterical realism as a combination of Lacanian psychoanalysis (what it should have been in the first place) and realism. To achieve this, he subsumes the hysterical half of the equation with the discourse of the hysteric - hysterical realism *becomes* the hysteric's reality. Thus, the fiction produced by (or about) the hysteric (AKA: Showalter's hysterical narrative fiction) becomes their truth. Interestingly, Yates (2014) points out that "...hysterical realism is more inclined to make use of its inherent instability to pick up and bring out the gaps, incoherences, contradictions and disavowed repressions of discourses presumed to be legitimate" (pp. 11-12).

The hysteric is inherently curious, yet completely misunderstood. He is always seeking answers via a constant string of incessant questions.³⁴ He wants to know who he is and where he fits in the world. And he wants to know *now*.³⁵ While the hysteric's questions are posed to all the discourses, they are mainly (as illustrated above) directed at the university – his eternal archenemy.³⁶ Unfortunately, the university is completely useless at helping the hysteric with his problems – and the real kicker, here, is that the hysteric is fully aware of this, but keeps banging on anyway like a broken record.³⁸ While the hysteric clearly sees and enjoys pointing to the lack in the university, this enjoyment is tainted by the realisation that his own lack is reflected back in the mirror the university provides.³⁹ It is this endless, pointless cycling that forms the basis of his hysteria. The hysteric's fundamental mistake is, of course, expecting to find palatable answers to his kind of questions in the external world – these questions need to be directed inward (more on this below when I discuss narrative therapy and the discourse of the analyst).

We can't really discuss the hysteric without also addressing sex and gender and, in particular, mine.⁴⁰ I'm stuck in a predominantly masculine department – Management. Yet, I'm consciously rejecting the cold and dead (masculine) writing of the business school, and instead opting for rich, and alive with emotion, fictional (feminine) prose. And, even though my dick is still attached and I'm a heterosexual male, I'm nevertheless writing from the feminine position of the hysteric. To understand why the hysteric is positioned as feminine we have to pile in the DeLorean⁴¹ and take a trip back in time.

34 Contu, Driver, & Jones, 2010.

35 As Fink (2018) sums up, "Knowledge is perhaps eroticized to a greater extent in the hysteric's discourse than elsewhere. In the master's discourse, knowledge is prized only insofar as it can produce something else, only so long as it can be put to work for the master; yet knowledge itself remains inaccessible to the master. In the university discourse, knowledge is not so much an end in itself as that which justifies the academic's very existence and activity" (p. 35).

36 The university is clearly the hysteric's archenemy and is, therefore, trapped in a co-dependant, cyclic, utterly dysfunctional relationship with the hysteric (like Holmes and Moriarty (Doyle, 1893)). I would also argue that the master is the hysteric's nemesis within this weird love-triangle. It should also be noted that Nemesis was the goddess of revenge in Ovid's (8 AD) *Metamorphoses*. Nemesis made Narcissus fall in love with himself because he rejected Echo. In some ways, therefore, my rejection of the business school (Echo) and the torment I have suffered at the hands of industry, has led to my inward focus – I am seeking answers, not from external sources, but from fixating on my own fragmented/fragmenting reflection. The hysteric is, therefore, somewhat narcissistic (believing they have the answers) in their search for knowledge.

37 It could also be argued that the hysteric is, in some ways, the university's muse – that the university fixates on, eroticises, while simultaneously abhorring and fearing the hysteric (Dickson & Holland, 2017). In this way, the university is fascinated with the hysteric but also terrified of its own fascination. If we look at Lacan, for example, we can see that he was dismissed and banished from the university, yet his work still gained importance – perhaps more so, because he had been labelled dangerous (like Socrates). Interestingly, his ideas have now been accepted by the university and are widely read in many disciplines. Perhaps, if the university hadn't tried to silence him, he might have simply been absorbed and lost amongst the acres of work produced.

38 Here we see the hysteric's *jouissance* in action – getting pleasure from seeking (and continuing to seek) the unattainable (*objet petit a*). Revelling, perhaps, in the knowledge that the whole task he has taken up is painfully futile. This is probably summed up best by the Divinyls in the chorus to their 1985 hit song *Pleasure and Pain* "It's a fine line between pleasure and pain / You've done it once, you could do it again / Whatever you done, don't try to explain / It's a fine, fine line between pleasure and pain."

39 As Contu, Driver, & Jones (2010) point out: "We are constituted by lack...but let us not think that the Other is magically complete."

40 Gherovici, 2011.

41 Zemeckis, R. (Director). (1985). *Back to the Future* [Motion Picture]. Universal Pictures.

Hysteria⁴² was historically viewed as a female problem – it was rarely (never) viewed as a bloke problem.⁴³ And here’s why. This skewed conclusion was arrived at because, back in the day, all the doctors and psychoanalysts and psychologists were, for the most part, moustachioed men and their patients were women.⁴⁴ Women were sent to these learned gentlemen by another man (husband or father) to be fixed, because they were considered defective - they would not bow or bend or respect their authoritah.⁴⁵ In other words, they were strong women who weren’t complying with societal norms and were, as a result, inflicted with a kind of mental mind-fucking that they didn’t sign up for. And let’s just think about the holy trinity of these mind-fuckers for a moment. Freud,⁴⁶ for all his brilliance, was a cokehead. Jung,⁴⁷ also brilliant, was a misogynistic sex addict. Lacan, the king of the obscure, was a salad-talking fucking weirdo. Hmmm. I’m thinking maybe there might have been, and I’m just guessing here, a sampling error. A giant fucking blunder. Perhaps, if they stopped Siggy Baby from snorting his powdered pick-me-up, or smoking his cigars, and refused to let him work in his clinic, or participate in education and, instead, insisted that he wear nice dresses, be subservient, pop out a baby every other year, spend his days organising dinner parties for a bunch of academic bores, and then sing and play the pianoforte while looking pretty for hours on end to entertain them, he might have been, and I am also guessing here, a little frustrated. Perhaps, if they insisted that Jung keep his pecker dry, that he stop poking it into his patients, that he inflict his own arsehole with that recently invented vibrator⁴⁸ to quell his unusual resistance to doing as he was told, he might have flipped-the-fuck-out. And, just perhaps, if they insisted that Lacan must conform to the conventions of accepted sentence structure, and they interrupted him continuously when he deviated from appropriate diction and demanded he started over, that they hired a team of nice Parisian tutors to sort out his inability to write and speak properly, that they had a brace of linguistic experts study him constantly to try and understand his unusual deviation from the mean, that we’d most likely also see him, as well as the other two, stretched out on these couches they all loved, getting diagnosed with hysteria. Those women weren’t suffering

42 I am well aware that the hysteric, in Lacanian terms, and hysteria are two different, yet interconnected, things. As Gherovici (2015) puts it, “The question that remains to be answered is whether Lacan is really talking about hysteria when he talks about the discourse of the hysteric.” However, the fact remains, you can’t take the hysteria out of the hysteric. Thus, I felt a brief discussion on the late Victorian/Freudian understanding of hysteria was in order.

43 Micale, 2008; Dickson, 2015.

44 Maines (2001) points out that hysteria was defined by male doctors and that their patients, women, had little to no voice.

45 Parker, T., & Stone, M. (Creators). (1997-) *South Park* [Television Series]. Media Networks. “Respect my authoritah” is the catchphrase of one of the central characters, Eric Cartman.

46 Sigmund Freud (1856–1939) is an Austrian neurologist and the founder of psychoanalysis.

47 Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) is a Swiss psychiatrist and psychoanalyst.

48 Maines, 2001; Lieberman & Schatzberg (2018) suggest that they “...found no evidence...that physicians ever used electromechanical vibrators to induce orgasms in female patients as a medical treatment” (p. 24). In other words, their thesis suggests that the long-held belief that the invention and use of vibrators by Victorian physicians to treat hysteria is actually a myth.

from hysteria – hysteria is just shortcut, a made-up fucking word,⁴⁹ for utter boredom, for being repressed within the hierarchical structures of society, for being considered the property of men, and having little or no control over their lives. They were frustrated and angry as all hell with the way they were supposed to be and act and perform within the patriarchy - so they said fuck that shit and raised a defiant middle finger to society and the men who ran it. Fair play to them. If unmitigated fury at your subjugation and steadfast refusal to accept bullshit societal constraints is hysteria, then sign me up. I'm your man.

To gain a greater understanding of the historical situation surrounding hysteria and the plight of women at this time, I immersed myself in mid-nineteenth to early twentieth century hysterical narrative fiction that depicts strong, independent women, who reject society's desires and, instead, follow their own.^{50 51} What I discovered as I read through

49 Darabont, F. (Director). (1994). *The Shawshank Redemption* [Motion Picture]. Columbia Pictures. I am recalling Red's famous speech from the movie: "Rehabilitated? Well, now let me see. You know, I don't have any idea what that means...I know what you think it means, sonny. To me it's just a made-up word. A politician's word, so young fellas like yourself can wear a suit and a tie, and have a job. What do you really want to know? Am I sorry for what I did?...There's not a day goes by I don't feel regret. Not because I'm in here, or because you think I should. I look back on the way I was then: a young, stupid kid who committed that terrible crime. I want to talk to him. I want to try and talk some sense to him, tell him the way things are. But I can't. That kid's long gone and this old man is all that's left. I got to live with that. Rehabilitated? It's just a bullshit word. So you go on and stamp your form, sonny, and stop wasting my time. Because to tell you the truth, I don't give a shit." The word rehabilitated is really a placeholder for indoctrinated/conformity/commodified (eg, students being treated like any other commodity). During this book I will make many allusions and references to this movie. In some ways, the prison represents the university/society – it is all about rules and conformity. There is, on the surface, no escape. You have to do your time, get your parole (diploma), and get a shitty job. But Andy refuses to bend and maintains his sense of Self within the system. Perhaps this is due to the intelligence and knowledge he brings with him – thus, it is far harder to convince him that the bullshit they are selling is the truth. Andy is the (silent) hysteric – undermining authority by *seeming* to conform. They demand and expect his conformity and are not, therefore, prepared for anything less. His actions clearly model to Red that in order to escape the mental prison, let alone the actual prison, you have to be true to yourself. This can be seen when Red gives his speech, he doesn't attempt to give them what he believes they desire – repentance and subservience – but what they actually desire: authenticity and the truth. He holds true to himself and is, finally, released. Perhaps, his non-conformity required him to be 'cut from the herd' and 'banished', so that he was unable to infect any of the other prisoners.

50 Showalter (1997) contends that hysterical literature and medically defined hysteria has co-evolved and shares much of the same narrative DNA. She argues that 19th century French doctors were influenced by, and in turn influenced, literature.

Showalter points out, for example, that Flaubert's (*Madam Bovary*) father was a doctor and, as such, he "...constructed his portrait of Emma Bovary from the medical literature..." (p. 82). This is mirrored, she suggests, by Freud's admission that his case notes on hysterical patients have the narrative structure of short stories.

51 See: Flaubert's (1857) *Madame Bovary*, Tolstoy's (1878) *Anna Karenina*, Chopin's (1899) *The Awakening*, and Wharton's (1905) *The House of Mirth*. I was struck by the similarities of these stories. In each case, the protagonist is a strong, intelligent and fiercely independent woman, who seeks to wrestle control of her own life from a cold and dispassionate husband. They are all extremely bored, trophy wives, trapped in loveless marriages. In each case, the women decide to follow their desires. It should be noted that these desires are wrapped up in the love of another man – whom they hope to live happily ever after with. In reality, they are 'doing a geographical' (trying to escape psychological problems by relocating the Self to a new town, county, school, house, etc), switching one useless idiot out for another. This, of course, was bound to end in disaster. Each of them slowly devolves into hysteria as society, and then the men they desire, shun them for their refusal to conform. In all cases, this ends with them in ruin and, finally, taking their own lives. Perhaps, though, these suicides can be read as a rejection of, and ultimate control taking from, the status quo. The warning, however, is crystal clear: when the hysteric decides to deviate from accepted societal constraints and follow their desires they will end up silenced and destroyed.

Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* is the most independent of these women and the only one who isn't yet married. Early in the novel, Lily professes that it is her career to seek, find, and marry a rich gentleman. But, as the story unfolds, it becomes obvious that she doesn't really want one (she rejects what she desires) – she wants to control her own narrative. In fact, each time she is on the brink of being made an offer of marriage by the rich suitor she has been pursuing, she pushes the self-destruct button, and either rejects or rebuffs him or runs away. In this way, I would argue, she is positioning herself as the hysteric v the university. She is seeking the security and respectability of marriage in the same way the hysteric seeks knowledge from the university. But she, like the hysteric, rejects what she is offered – what she and the hysteric are being offered doesn't jive with what they desire. And, just to be clear, it is unclear what they desire. They only know that what's on offer is not it. This is how one of her friends, Mrs. Fisher, describes Lily's behaviour to Seldon (who Lily actually loves, but will not marry because he is poor, and therefore not a suitable match), "...sometimes I think it's because, at heart, she despises the things she is trying for." (p. 197). This, of course, is quintessential hysterical behaviour. Mrs. Fisher could be describing my

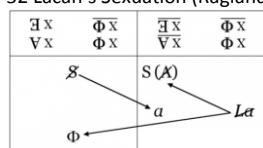
the pages of *Anna Karenina* and *The House of Mirth*, among others, was that this not only makes for outrageously great reading, but that their hysteria actually mirrors my own. I, like them, am trapped in a one-way relationship (with the university as opposed to a hapless husband). And, mirroring their inability to rid themselves of their hideous spouse and prison-like marriage, I am unable to break free of the gravitational orbit of the university and seek knowledge (pleasure) elsewhere and under my own terms. And, just like them, I receive the raised-eyebrow-scorn of the status quo when I seek to break the rules and follow my desires: I am not doing as I am told. I don't know my place. I am getting above my station. I am risking everything through my actions. I am uncontrollable and unmanageable. When you pause and think about it, I could be describing Anna Karenina or Madame Bovary or any of these fierce women, rather than myself. So, in typical hysterical fashion, while accepting the fact that I have crossed a line, the midline on Lacan's map of Sexuation,⁵² to hang on the right side, the feminine side of the equation, with my fiction and hysterical questions, opposite the all-knowing phallus (knowledge) that I shall always lack and be separated from, apparently, I also, simultaneously, utterly reject the notion that hysteria and the hysteric can be located, or assigned, or associated, or defined by one specific gender and/or sex.⁵³ That folks, is

own academic and working careers – I too detested many of the things that I was supposed to be seeking in the corporate world (promotion, success, power) and in the business school (grades, diplomas, recognition). Unfortunately, for Lily, society at the time only had one career for smart, beautiful women – it was called marriage. And, just like Hamlet, Lily's indecision regarding her numerous marriage proposals led to the same fate as our favourite Danish Prince. Interestingly, Quindlen (2000) suggests that a key theme in *the House of Mirth* is, "...the conflict between what we wish to be and what society insists we become..." (xi). And, this mirrors the hysteric/university dichotomy, in which the hysteric poses the question to the university: what am I to you? And then rejects the university's answer, which is to seek to position the hysteric as incomplete and lacking – the very thing that the hysteric is pointing out about the university.

This theme of hysterically seeking and rejecting your desires is present in all three of Wharton's most famous novels – *The House of Mirth* (1905), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). *The Custom of the Country* (1913) basically poses the question: what if Lily just married one of these suitors? What we see play out in Udine Spragg, the updated and ruthless version of Lily, is the repetition of pursuing/desiring a man, marrying him, preceding to be disappointed with his imperfections (money, position, education, manners – AKA: lack), divorcing him, and moving on to what she perceives as a more successful version. In this way, Udine makes her way up the social headachy. Finally, married to a billionaire who will let her do anything she wants, she is still not satisfied ("...she still felt, at times, there were other things she might want if she knew about them" (p. 411)). In *The Age of Innocence* (1920) this unrealised desire is split between Newland Archer and Ellen Olenska. Franzen (2012) claims that Archer and Olenska are split versions of Wharton's Self. That each represents contrasting and, perhaps, contradictory, desires held by the author. In other words, Wharton is not simply playing with the hysteric's desire but, I would argue, subtly inverting and subverting the hysteric's gender via these characters. Thus, if we read the female characters as if they were male, we see that their hysteria actually appears far more logical and socially acceptable. Lily just wants to be a bachelor like Seldon. Udine just wants the best of everything like Moffatt. Ellen just wants the person she loves like Archer.

As I am writing this footnote, I am suddenly struck by the similarities between these fictional women and my own mother's slide into hysteria (as retold in chapter 6). After reading these works, I am starting to wonder if, perhaps, she too felt trapped under the constraints of society – maybe she was simply bored out of her mind and stuck in a loveless marriage with a useless husband. This is probably something that my eight-year-old Self missed.

52 Lacan's Sexuation (Ragland, 2012.) I have chosen to be located on the *right* side (considered the wrong side).



53 I play with the idea of hysterical doubling throughout this text. My understanding/version of hysterical doubling begins with Binet (1905) and Prince (1906) and their discussions regarding individuals presenting double consciousness/dissociated personality (AKA: split personalities). I then pay homage to, and subvert, some elements (mainly mirroring) of René Girard's

simply a load of horseshit and should be considered for what it is: an historical (hysterical) data collection error.⁵⁴

The hysteric, though, won't be alone in presenting my screwy educational experiences and will, instead, be joined by Cerberus,⁵⁵ a yapping, three-headed-service-dog (the analyst, the master, and the university), who will guide me through the dark and confusing labyrinth of discourses as I search (my unconscious) for knowledge and understanding. In other words, I will be constantly shifting the point of view between all four discourses⁵⁶ as I try to get to that good shit known as the Truth.⁵⁷ Before we can get to my antagonist, the university, we need to first pause and address the giant, ugly, and putrid fat slug in the corner of the room: the discourse of the master⁵⁸ (AKA: the Boss, the Arsehole-in-Charge, the numpty who dishes out the tasks, and the various other guises this dipshit shows up in). The (puppet) master has his hand shoved firmly up the business school's arse and is happily pulling all the strings and moving all the levers from behind a curtain⁵⁹ – they need the university to legitimise their insane bullshit.^{60 61} And, of course, the business school happily bends and takes it.⁶² And while the master is

theory of psychological mimesis. According to Garrels (2005) "Psychological mimesis is the tendency of human beings to imitate the gestures, behaviours, intentions, and desires of other persons" (p. 48). This is then weaved with the idea of the dual, contradictory narratives and endings found in postmodern fiction. As Richardson (2000) explains, "In these texts, there is no single, unambiguous story to be extrapolated from the discourse, but rather two or more contradictory versions that seriously vitiate the very notion of story (histoire) insofar as it is conceived as a single, self-consistent series of events that can be inferred from the discourse" (p. 25). All of this is then mixed and combined and delivered within the hysteric's narrative. Thus, the text is not only rich with discussion regarding doubles, doppelgangers, and mirror opposites, but also seeks to continuously remind the reader of the hysteric demands to exist within a binary-quantum-postmodern state – both negating and supporting opposing, contradictory views, conclusions, endings, and so on, simultaneously; that they are, in fact, the quintessential split subject.

54 Actually, I think it's fairly obvious that Lacan meant for these terms – the phallus and so on – to be read as metaphorical. Thus, the term feminine can be considered a placeholder for that which opposes the dominant discourse/ideology (represented as masculine).

55 In Greek mythology, Cerberus guards the gates of Hades – AKA: the underworld (the unconscious). However, I am appropriating and repurposing him as a guide dog.

56 As Fink (2018) states: "...while Lacan terms one of his discourses the 'hysteric's discourse,' he does not mean thereby that a given hysteric always and inescapably adopts or functions within the hysteric's discourse. As an analyst, the hysteric may function within the analyst's discourse; as an academic, the hysteric may function within the discourse of the university. The hysteric's psychical structure does not change as he or she changes discourses, but his or her efficacy changes" (30).

57 As Yates (2014) points out, "hysterical realism makes use of how the author function's authority, the narrator's many masks, metatextual and intertextual diversions in the manner of a multivariate equation, wherein the precise magnitude of each element cannot be grasped from a single result" (p. 17).

58 For me, the master in this quartet of discourses recalls Hegel's master/slave dialectic (Fink, 2018). As Cole (2004) points out, "...the master is really the slave, dependent upon the slave to recognize his or her mastery" (591). However, the hysteric sits outside this Hegel's binary (master/slave) system and is, therefore, somewhat independent of the herd. The hysteric, rather than accepting and pointing out the master's superior position, points instead to all his flaws – and this is why, rather than fixing the problems and potentially making the company or organisation better, the master will silence the hysteric by managing them out. In other words, the hysteric undermines the master with the truth: you are not the master, you are a flawed individual just like the rest of us (Yates, 2014). This is clearly illustrated in Spielberg's (1993) *Schindler's List*. In this scene Göth (Ralph Fiennes) arrives to inspect the construction of the concentration camp. He is met by an hysterical engineer (a Jewish prisoner) complaining that the German soldiers are refusing to listen to her and are not, therefore, following her instructions. She tells Göth that this will result in the building having to be pulled down and rebuilt. Göth nods, shoots her in the head, and then tells an officer to do as she said.

59 Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The Wizard of Oz* [Motion Picture]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

60 According to Grey (2002), "...the function of business schools lies in their role of socializing managers and legitimating management" (p. 509).

61 As Fink (2018) points out, "...the university discourse provid[es] a sort of legitimation or rationalization of the master's will" (p.33).

62 Khurana, 2010. As Fotaki & Prasad (2015) state: "The business school and the ideology of neoliberal capitalism have become conflated and ubiquitous." However, they go on to point out that "[q]uestioning neoliberal capitalism is one

banging away, he flat-out denies it, even though we can clearly see it happening right in front of us. When we point this out, he just smiles and tells us we're all just a pack of paranoid, left-wing losers.⁶³

"It wasn't us," they say. "Nothing to see here. We're not interfering with the excellent work of the business school. Oh, and by the way, here's a new Simplification Complex⁶⁴ for you, a new VR Masturbatorium, a new fucking fleet of buses with our logo on them – you can park them beside the twenty-foot statue of our CEO and founder that we donated last year as a water feature at the centre of your main compound. Don't you just love the way the water cascades in foamy spirals out of his flaccid phallus on the quarter-hour? You're welcome!"⁶⁵

I think the correct terms we're looking for here are: quid pro quo & (im)plausible deniability. It is fairly obvious that the business school's primary function is not teaching and research, but to do the bidding of its corporate overlords. I really doubt this is even in dispute by anyone in the university who isn't employed by the business school. The business school's goal, at its core, seems to be to produce an army of jargon-spewing capitalist fanboys, who have been utterly brainwashed with the doctrine of profit-seeking and marinated in the language of neoliberalism – these fanboys then go out and replicate this empty wordplay in the corporate world. The master happily receives the antiknowledge they ordered and paid for from these new graduates, cuts away all the unnecessary good shit that the university attached by accident, like ethics and morals and a plurality of ideas, and then offers a slightly modified (in name only) version of it back to the business school as new, improved cool shit that they need magicked into education ASAP. The business school then proceeds with its mission of force-feeding this utter garbage into the minds of the next class of disciples, like geese, so they can offer the master a tasty new batch of foie gras (I believe this translates from the French as:

important step in envisioning and transforming the business school into an effective institutional site for catalyzing transformative social and economic change" (pp. 571-572).

63 Tarantino, Q. (Director). (1994). *Pulp Fiction*. [Motion Picture]. Miramax Films. I am recalling the scene where Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) is being raped. He is tied over a barrel and is being sodomised by a pawn (porn) shop owner wearing a sheriff's uniform. Wallace (a crime boss) is being dominated and humiliated by the faux authority figure against his will. In my example above, the university has prostituted itself to the master – and now it is reaping the rewards/paying the price. In the movie, Wallace is saved by Butch (Bruce Willis), who, rather than escaping, returns to free him. Interestingly, Wallace had ordered Butch to be killed because he wouldn't follow instructions. Here then is the point: the hysteric, Butch, didn't follow instructions because they violated his moral code. He couldn't leave Wallace, because this too would violate his moral code. Thus, in this example, the hysteric attempts to save the university from the master, because he feels a sense of moral responsibility, even though he could just walk away. Interestingly, Wallace tells Butch, after he is freed, that the scene he had just witnessed never took place, that it should never, ever be mentioned.

64 I am referring, ironically, to the business school/industry collaboration centres that have begun appearing on university campuses. Normally, they are given hyperbolic titles (Incubator, Innovation Complex, Start-up Bootcamp, Launching Pad) to match their cutting-edge architectural design.

65 See: Pfeffer & Fong, 2002.

fucking shit) on the daily. Thus, the business-school-corporate-binary of antiknowledge acquisition and replication is cyclical and unchanging.⁶⁶

When I think about the master's bitch, the business school (AKA: the discourse of the university), I imagine Shakespeare's idiotic Falstaff:⁶⁷ a portly greybeard, sitting on some stage somewhere dressed like he's just stepped out of 1632. I imagine he's clutching a sceptre in one hand and a book (Business Department School Manifesto – AKA: the BDSM) in the other. And, when he opens his mouth to speak, his fat bouncing lips aren't quite synced to the master's bullshit pouring from between them. When he is addressed, he doesn't respond, he doesn't appear to notice. He is simply not programmed for this level of intercourse. A conveyor belt of students passes before him to get capped.⁶⁸ It is absurd. It is pure spectacle. As the hysteric, I will never cross that stage. Why the fuck would I? I'm not there for all that fake shit.⁶⁹ But, in some parallel universe, If I did in fact turn up, they would have to rebrand the event. It would instead be titled – *Finally Capping the Hysteric: management lessons gleaned from costa nostra* - a post-modern revenge flick by Martin Scorsese.

"*Hasta la vista baby*,"⁷⁰ the tagline would read, "*that annoying motherfucker had it coming*."

In order to make sense of all this shit, and make it all work, I have to traverse a ragged rope-bridge between the university and the hysteric's discourses. In theory, when the university finally stamps 'Passed' on this work, it will immediately subsume it into its own discourse. In other words, the hysterical work can never be completely severed from, or exist outside of, the discourse of the university. It is simply impossible to escape it, even though I like to pretend it isn't.⁷¹ During the text, you will find about a million footnotes – and each of these footnotes is also a footprint of the discourse of the university.⁷² These footnotes are provided to not only help you navigate the creative,

66 Yes, I'm aware that it does change – but this only occurs when a new and improved method of profit acquisition is developed. It is unchanging in terms of its addiction to profits.

67 Shakespeare, 1632: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

68 I find it interesting that this term is also used by the mafia – to indicate being shot and killed.

69 Parker (2001) points out that the discourse of the university presents knowledge as a "...battery of signifiers...[that] confronts each individual...[such as] journals, textbooks, exam papers, degree certificates..." (70). In other words, these objects are used as sacred symbols to represent a certain type of certified knowledge.

70 Cameron, J. (Director). (1991). *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* [Motion Picture]. TriStar Pictures. I find it interesting that the villain of the first movie, the machine (Arnold Schwarzenegger), becomes the hero of the second. One again, we are playing on that hysterical doubling – the protagonist is also the antagonist. In some ways, then, the hysteric plays both these roles.

71 And this is evidenced by the inclusion of these continuous footnotes. They provide the requisite (university) discourse on the text.

72 As I read back through the text, I found the sheer number of footnotes almost overwhelming – did I need to read them, were they important, were they integral to the plot or my understanding of the text? If I was thinking this, so then, I reasoned, would everyone else. This, of course, is exactly what the discourse of the university does - it seeks to overwhelm you through bureaucratic nonsense (enrolment regulations, prerequisite requirements), ridiculous jargon (a secret language that alienates and excludes. This language acquisition replaces knowledge), and pointless rituals (lectures, assessments) and artefacts (textbooks, gowns, diplomas) (Parker, 2001). However, it should be noted that as the novel progresses, as the discourse of the hysteric starts to drown out the discourse of the university, the footnotes begin to fall away.

hysterical work, but to also understand how it is actually infused and underpinned with solid, academic ideas. Interestingly, this book wouldn't work without these footnotes – I know, because I printed it without them and was shocked. The book felt lost and naked. Basically, I have spent so long in the university that my own hysterical discourse has been well and truly infected with the university's. In some ways then, I am really engaging in a kind of doublespeak,⁷³ a kind of university/hysteric hybrid language, where the truth is not attained within the university lexicon but sourced through the hystericizing⁷⁴ of it – and that's exactly what this thesis is attempting to achieve.

Helping me move backwards and forwards between these two opposing discourses is my fictional academic supervisor. Although this character is fully invested in the university's discourse, he is also flirting with subversion and his own potential destruction by encouraging this hysterical thesis.⁷⁵ I would argue that there is an underlying sense in the text that he has been waiting patiently for the hysteric to finally come along – looking forward to the opportunity he presents to firebomb the university via the resulting manuscript. In this way, the supervisor not only provides a mirror for my own subversion, but also offers me the length of academic rope I need to get to the other side. And, just like the length of rope that Andy is handed in the *Shawshank Redemption*,⁷⁶ I can either use it to help me get out of the shit tunnel (the university) or for academic self-destruction. Towards the end of the movie, after Andy has sourced this rope and is in his cell and hasn't emerged during morning muster, he is existing in the quantum state,⁷⁷ he is Schrödinger's Andy, both dead and alive – having both escaped and self-destructed. While this thesis is still being written and not in the hands of the examiners, I too am existing in this quantum state – I am Schrödinger's Hysteric. My fate is still unknown. In other words, the hysteric's discourse, while rejecting and detesting the university's discourse, simultaneously requires, and covets it in order to attain the kind of legitimisation it rejects yet desires. I am also aware of another uncomfortable fact: the hysteric and the university are much more similar than either would like to

73 Orwell, G. (1949). 1984. Secker & Warburg. I'm referring to his idea of doublethink.

74 Fotaki & Harding, 2012: Alakavuklar & Dickson, 2017: Gherovici, 2015.

75 Every time I read this line I am reminded of Avery Tolar (Gene Hackman) in *The Firm* (Pollack, 1993). Avery is Mitch's (Tom Cruise) mentor – and, just like my fictional supervisor, he is fully invested in the firm, even though he regrets this decision. There is a feeling that he would like to leave, but it is too late.

76 Darabont, F. (Director). (1994). *The Shawshank Redemption* [Motion Picture]. Columbia Pictures.

77 During the text I will make numerous references to quantum mechanics. As an hysteric and, therefore, the quintessential split subject, I am particularly captivated and drawn to the craziness of the quantum world. In particular, I find myself revelling in the ongoing confusion and anxiety that the double-slit experiment, among others, has created within physics due to its inability to understand, let alone solve, this puzzle. This somewhat spooky, seemingly unsolvable riddle highlights not only the limitations of science, but also the need to seek answers via means other than the scientific method (see: Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle). Interestingly, Fink (2018) reminds us that Lacan actually points out "... that the discourse of science and the discourse of the hysteric are almost identical" (p. 35). Lacan is suggesting, I believe, that we (the scientist & the hysteric) are both seeking some form of unknowable and undefinable knowledge (the truth) and are both frustrated and dissatisfied with the answers we receive. We also, it should be pointed out, both lean on the university as a crutch, or context, to aid us in our search for this unfindable knowledge. See also: Žižek, 1996: Gullatz & Gildersleeve, 2018.

admit. In fact, if Lacan has taught us anything, it is that the hysteric and the university are mirror opposites⁷⁸ – dialectally opposed. Let me explain. In the novel, I present the hysteric as a kind of Shakespearian clown, as a jester in the university's court,⁷⁹ that has a multitude of truths to offer the university but is continuously thwarted because no one takes him seriously. But I also present the university as a clown: as a ridiculously officious, overly anxious, bureaucratic nonsense. As the hysteric, I view the business school as one views having to move in with their drunken, yet wealthy uncle – as someone that you begrudgingly put up with because it allows you to pursue your goals. But, if I turn my hysteria way down, and believe me it is difficult to do this, and turn the discourse of the analyst way up, I can see that the university, for all its crazy, does, in fact, have some truths hidden in amongst the endless bullshit. The question is: can the university see the truths hidden in my crazy?

Trying to work out what exactly is hidden in my crazy falls to my fictional therapist (who represents the discourse of the analyst⁸⁰). The manuscript is, at its core, an exercise in narrative therapy. The chapters are designed and presented as a series of personal diaries that I subsequently read to my therapist. At the end of each chapter these readings are then dissected by my therapist, who offers his interpretation, some of which I would prefer not to hear.⁸¹ We then debate his take on my situation. For this to have any chance of working, it became very clear to me as the novel progressed that I had to be completely honest with myself.⁸² There could be no holding back. There could be no worrying about what others might think or say. There could be no wondering about the desire of the other at fucking all. I just had one person to please. And that person was me. Not surprisingly, this honesty required a great deal of personal disclosure – much of which was very difficult to revisit and articulate. As I wrote each chapter, previously forgotten personal situations would bubble to the surface. Initially, I was unsure whether to include them or not. Normally, academic writing requires you to place

78 As Fink (2018), points out, "The hysteric's discourse is the exact opposite of the university discourse, all the positions being reversed" (p. 35). See below:

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{H} & & \text{U} \\ \frac{\$}{a} \rightarrow \begin{array}{c} S_1 \\ S_2 \end{array} & \begin{array}{c} S_1 \\ S_2 \end{array} \rightarrow \frac{a}{\$} \end{array}$$

79 Kavanagh, 2009.

80 According to Fink (2018), "The analyst plays the part of pure desirousness...and interrogates the subject in his or her division, precisely at those points where the split between conscious and unconscious shows through: slips of the tongue, bungled and unintended acts, slurred speech, dreams, etc. In this way, the analyst sets the patient to work, to associate, and the product of that laborious association is a new master signifier. The patient in a sense 'coughs up' a master signifier that has not yet been brought into relation with any other signifier" (p. 38).

81 Interestingly, Showalter (1997) points out that, "Freud believed...hysterics were unable to tell a complete...story about themselves; that they left out, distorted, and rearranged information...Thus the therapist's role was to edit and construct...a narrative for the patient" (p. 84).

82 I am well aware that this striving for honesty and truth is basically impossible to achieve. A more honest declaration might be: I will try to piece together and present a palatable version of myself from within the various fictional strands (faux history, embellished events, the elimination of certain characters and scenes) that make up my potential Self(s). In other words, even though I am trying to be truthful, the facts, and resulting narrative that I present, are still fictional (Hollway, 1984).

yourself to one side. It prefers the personality of the author to be polished out of the work. But I finally realised that I couldn't exclude it. I understood that these events, no matter how painful, were central to creating my hysterical views – the hysteric, after all, is a product of his environment. Interestingly, in retrospect, the retelling of these events was very cathartic and, ultimately, provided a sense of calm – and, I would argue, it did provide me with a greater sense of Self. In the end, I realised that the hysteric doesn't compartmentalise knowledge or have a filter - they present the whole of themselves. And that's exactly what I had to do. This, then, is what the hysteric's thesis is – complete, honest, and utterly unvarnished. The four discourses that bind this work together are simply Lacanian mirrors in which I paused to examine the Self along that journey. Each allowed me to hold a Socratic dialogue with a particular version of my Self: the subversive, the academic, the analytic, and the manipulator.⁸³ Afterwards, when the conversations concluded, I took a hammer to each, splintering the various versions of my Self in a shower of mirrored shards. The book you are about to read is my attempt to locate the Self from within the fiction of my past by carefully reassembling a version from amongst those sharp and dangerous splinters. As Gin points out in the epigraph at the start of this chapter: I've got all the pieces to the puzzle. Now, I just have to make them fit.

83 Hughes, J. (Director). (1985). *The Breakfast Club* [Motion Picture]. Universal Pictures. I am referring to the final lines of the movie. Here, Brian (Anthony Michael Hall) writes a letter to the assistant principal Mr. Vernon (Paul Gleason) instead of the required essay. "Dear Mr. Vernon: We accept the fact that we had to sacrifice a whole Saturday in detention for whatever it is we did wrong, but we think you're crazy for making us write an essay telling you who we think we are. You see us as you want to see us: in the simplest terms, in the most convenient definitions. But what we found out is that each one of us is a brain, and an athlete, and a basket case, a princess, and a criminal. Does that answer your question? Sincerely yours, The Breakfast Club." What Brian is telling Vernon (the discourse of the university) is that they are not easily defined: that each is a brain, athlete, basket case, princess, and criminal. In other words, each of the discourses represented in the movie by the different characters actually resides within all of them.

Acknowledgements

“When the fuck are you going to hand this thesis in?” my wife demanded, towards the fag-end of one of her award-winning motivational speeches. “When the fuck are you going to stop obsessing about commas! Just let it fucking go. It’s finished. You’re done. I’m done. It’s done.”

“But I haven’t written the acknowledgements,” I said. “I’m not sure how to do them.”

“Jesus fucking Christ!” she said. “Can you stop being so neurotic? Do you think Brad Pitt worries about this shit when he is doing his Oscar speech?”

“Has Brad Pitt won an Oscar?”

“Just write,” she said, “how your ever-patient wife had to kick you in the dick everyday to keep you motivated, how she demanded that you get it done, that she had the sense to tell you when it was over. It’s over. Hand the fucking thing in. Oh, and good job by the way. Now take the fucking rubbish out. It stinks.”

Thank you, Kate for keeping it real and keeping me grounded. I couldn’t have done it without you. Speaking of keeping me grounded, a special thanks to Hunter and William – both of whom follow their own paths. I am incredibly proud of both of you. And, finally, I must also thank my dog, Indi, for her quiet counsel, for reminding me that all we really need is a full stomach, some good exercise, and plenty of sleep.

Having cookie-cutter, garden-variety doctoral supervisors selected and assigned by the Ivory Tower’s supervision panel, was never going to work, let alone happen. I needed a team that had no fucks to give, who understood that crazy was actually a positive character attribute, who would happily give me the space to explore that crazy, and who would challenge me academically and creatively as they pushed me to my absolute limits. Luckily, I was able to find that team. The Three Weird Brothers, who joined me at the cauldron of knowledge to prophesise about my future were: Craig Prichard, Andrew Dickson, and Ozan Alakavuklar. Thank you for accompanying me on this journey. I am incredibly indebted to each of you.

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Part One: Examining the Self

*Your handwriting. The way you walk. Which china pattern you choose. It's all giving you away.
Everything you do shows your hand. Everything is a self-portrait. Everything is a diary.*

— Chuck Palahniuk

In Therapy

I was sprawled upon a canary yellow chaise longue in a booklined suite housed in the student health centre. Down below, through the arched window,⁸⁴ I watched as students marched⁸⁵ between lectures, their heads bowed towards their phones.⁸⁶ My therapist, the aptly named Dr Richard Dick, Dr Double Dick, or TripleD as he liked to be called, had asked me to construct a journal in the belief that it would help me to come to terms with my hatred of the business school.⁸⁷ Just lie back and fixate on it, he said. Let it all out. Just type and the words will come, will turn into stories, as if by magic.⁸⁸ Oh, and don't stop until you are sated (AKA: never). He told me the diary would help me uncover some

84 Cumming, I. (Director). (1972-1990). *Play School* [Television Series]. TVNZ. I am referring to one of the segments in this show. This involves an exploration of the external world by looking out one of three windows: the arch, the square, or the oval. I am also having a subtle dig at the university, suggesting that it is really not a lot different.

85 This is an allusion to the music video that accompanied English rock band Pink Floyd's (1965-2014) famous song *Another Brick in the Wall* (1979). In the video we see the robotic, uniform marching of students. The message/warning that Pink Floyd is offering is that education and indoctrination are different sides of the same coin.

86 The mobile phone has taken the place of religion in the indoctrination process – this is evidenced by the students' slave-like addition, and worship, of their devices and, in particular, their reliance on social media to not only shape their personalities, but to gain a sense of Self. This is not helped by education providers demanding that students bring their own devices to school. Schools (and universities) are in the midst of an identity crisis. They are no longer a place that distributes knowledge – that's what the phone is for. I would argue that they should do away with the idea of information distribution and, instead, transform themselves into places where actual conversations are held – Socrates-style. They could become, if they so desired, a place where knowledge is thrashed out and actual thinking takes place – where real, personal learning and growth is achieved. Please note: I will discuss some issues I have with the Socratic Method below.

87 In other words, I'm involved in a kind of self, or more correctly narrative, therapy (Angus & McLeod, 2004: Brown, 2007: Brown & Augusta-Scott, 2007: Lewis, 2011).

88 Lončar-Vujnović, 2013. I am suggesting that by writing in a stream of consciousness (See: James Joyce, Virginia Woolf), and not consciously thinking about what I am trying to achieve, I can tap into the unconscious. Freud (1908;1956) toys with this idea when he conflates creative writing and (day)dreaming. Freud points out that the writer is engaged in a type of imaginative, childlike play, where those childhood memories and experiences will, unconsciously, infect the writer's prose. This is what I have tried to achieve. My first chapter drafts were written in a Kerouac frenzy. But then I would go back and edit, run my analytical eye over the text, and look for symptoms (which is what I am doing now). Interestingly, with each subsequent reading of the text (and other texts), I am making new discoveries and connections – I am finding hidden truths within the metaphors. In this way, then, I am taking on the discourse of the analyst. This confirms, for me what I already suspected – that rejecting academic writing and, instead, employing demotic, fictional prose is the way to a greater understanding of Self.

truths about myself and business education. He told me all sorts of shit I didn't believe. This diary, then, much to the Academy's frustration and pleas to the contrary, forms the basis of my PhD thesis. In it, I head back in time and try to work out why I forced those business degrees down my throat. It doesn't make any sense to me if I'm honest. I hate the corporate world. I'm a Karl Marx⁸⁹ fanboy. I'm so far left I make the Green Party look like a bunch of fascists – albeit, vegan, tie-dyed ones. So, what the hell was I doing? What the hell was wrong with me? Why did I keep coming back for more? To get to these answers my therapist told me I had to not only traverse my shitty education, but also my screwy childhood,⁹⁰ that I would have to discuss my father's hyper-competitive, passive-aggressive demeanour and my delusional mother – her angry, somewhat violent and paranoid outbursts, her worsening anxiety, obsessive fixation with my bowel movements and addiction to handcrafts.

"Stop moving!" my therapist spat, tulip fragments flying from his mouth. "And keep reading. How can I do my job if your identity keeps shifting?"

He stood to the left of his desk, behind an easel, a palette in his left hand, a brush working a canvas.⁹¹ And even though he was dressed like Captain Stubing⁹² from the *Love Boat*⁹³ and was eating caramelised tulips⁹⁴ from a ceramic skull, I went along with his mad plan. It seemed a lot saner than the alternative: filling in the blanks on the PhD template the business school had supplied.

"Just remember to always colour within the lines," they told me, like I was just another production-line student looking forward to risk-free knowledge upgrade. "The AI that will mark it isn't programmed to read anything that's outside of the narrow borders that the business school desires and has legitimised."

"I'm more of an abstract type of guy," I said. "I like the freedom that chaos provides. I like to be surprised by the journey, not constrained by a predetermined destination."

"We don't care about what you think you want," I was told. "The fact is, if you want to pass, you'll need to follow the rules and do as you're told as laid out in the BDSM

89 Karl Marx (1818–1883) is a German philosopher

90 According to Leader (2003), "Lacan's focus on myth shows how a fiction should not be understood simply as something "false" but as something that can be used to organize disparate and traumatic material" (p. 42).

91 This Freudian setting is a recalling of the opening of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) by Oscar Wilde.

92 He is dressed as a seaman (semen). He is, therefore, simultaneously an overt authority figure (military) and a carnivalesque character (the Village People). I am also alluding to, and juxtaposing, Pablo Picasso, who dressed as a sailor (and his portraits are often presented from various perspectives; thus, the identity of the subject is presented as ever-changing), with Popeye (his identity is fixed and never changing: I am what I am). The use of the term Seaman for sailors, also reminds me of Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851). Melville continuously refers/inserts sexual allusions (the name of ships (Town-Ho), etc) into the text.

93 Baumes, W. (Developer). (1977-1987). *The Love Boat* [Television Series]. CBS.

94 My therapist's tulip addiction is a call-back to Jung's suggestion that, "We can even play with the language of tulips: Tulips; two lips." Of course, Jung was talking about the vagina here (Papadopoulos, 1992). Thus, the bowl of caramelised tulips is pointing to the commercialisation of feminine sexuality – it has become a product that can be consumed. And, because I am writing as the hysteric, and am taking on the feminine, I am also a product that can be labelled, categorised and consumed - by the therapist.

(Business Department School Manifesto) in the chapter titled Conforming is Compulsory under the subheading: obedience, subservience, & other rewarded traits.”

“I’m not good at following instructions,” I said. “I don’t tend to read user manuals, cook books, rule books, or how-to-guides, maps, the sides of tins, warning labels, or anything, in fact, that dresses in the robes of help, that is the Iago⁹⁵ of assistance, that is actually designed to govern, rather than aid, my intellectual exploration and freedom.”

“We just want you to pass,” they said. “Passing is what is important. Not what you produce. Let’s be honest, no one will read it anyway. Not even your supervisor. Not even your examiners. They’ll just yawn, see that you have filled in the template, and stamp ‘Passed’ on it.”

Actually, to be honest, I didn’t give a fuck if I passed or not. If passing meant producing an unreadable piece of shit, then, no, I didn’t want to pass. I wasn’t doing this for the fancy poster saying how clever I was – I already had plenty of fancy posters and was well aware of my intellectual advantages as well as my limitations. I just wanted to produce something I could be proud of, something that harked back to a time when intellectuals didn’t have to fill in a fucking template, didn’t have to conform, weren’t simply commodities in the Knowledge Factory.

“Stop moving!” my therapist screamed. “What the hell is wrong with you?”

His dog, an aged Dachshund affectionately referred to as Lump, lay in a basket at his feet.⁹⁶ Behind his desk Lacan, hand on chin, watched on from a wall-length tapestry.

“When you crunch those tulips,” I told him. “I have an overwhelming urge to hurl you down upon those idiotic human-sheep.”⁹⁷

“And how would that make you feel?”

“Sated,” I tell him. “Replete.”

“Are you suggesting I’m a metaphor?”

“What?”

“It’s not me that’s making you angry, is it?” he said, clapping crumbs from his hands. “It’s business education. And when you’re done writing about it, you plan to throw your book down upon the business school like a Molotov cocktail.”

He claps his hands more loudly this time.

“Kaboom!”

⁹⁵ Shakespeare, 1623: *Othello*. Othello trusts and listens to Iago. It is this blind trust that allows him to be easily manipulated – and which, ultimately, leads to his downfall.

⁹⁶ Lump is the name of Pablo Picasso’s dog.

⁹⁷ This is a reference to Nietzsche’s discussion in *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) about the majority of humans being nothing more than herd animals.

"You're not a metaphor," I told him. "You're a mirror. You're me. I'm discovering who I am and what it is I desire, via you. And, let's be clear here: you only exist in my imagination. You're not real."

"Imagine," he said, "if the line between fiction and reality was so blurred we couldn't tell the difference."

"Now you're getting it."

Down below people walk into each other and bounce off in different directions. Their brief, wordless interactions with the Other spinning them, unconsciously, on new paths.⁹⁸

"When the hysteric looks in the mirror," he asked, "what does he see?"

"If you're the mirror," I replied. "Then I see you."

"The analyst?" he asked.

"Fucking A," I said.

"Objet petit a?"^{99 100 101} he asked.

"Yes," I answered. "Why not?"

He raised an eyebrow like McCoy in *Star Trek*.¹⁰² I raised my hand into the shape of a question mark.

"What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Yes," I answered, "Exactly. What the hell is wrong with me?"

98 I am drawing on, and distorting, Hunt's (1989) assertion that "Fieldwork is, in part, the discovery of the self through the detour of the other" (p. 42). What I am suggesting is that the Self is not merely discovered via the detour of the other, but is, in fact constructed by it.

99 By looking into the mirror and desiring what I see I am, in some ways, recalling the myth of Narcissus. But, unlike Narcissus, what I see reflected back is not me, it is the analyst. I am, therefore, desiring not my physical form, but to understand my Self.

100 *Objet petit a* is a placeholder for desire. As Kirshner (2005) explains, "...objet petit a is a fantasy that functions as the cause of desire" (p. 1). He concludes by stating that it "...is an expression of the lack inherent in human beings, whose incompleteness and early helplessness produce a quest for fulfilment beyond the satisfaction of physical needs" (p. 20).

101 Fink (2018) points out that the analyst will "...occupy the position of object (a) for an analysand..." (p. 39).

102 The character of Dr McCoy in *Star Trek: the original series* (Roddenberry, 1966-1969) represents emotion (the discourse of the hysteric) – a counter to the logical Spock (the discourse of the university).

*For I do not exist: there exist but the thousands of mirrors that reflect me. With every acquaintance
I make, the population of phantoms resembling me increases. Somewhere they live, somewhere
they multiply. I alone do not exist.*
— Vladimir Nabokov

Chapter 1: What the Hell Is Wrong with Me?

On a warm summer morning in early 2014, I jetted off to provincial New Zealand for the MBA indoctrination weekend. I was a little apprehensive to say the least. I was decked out in a casual checked shirt, blue jeans and a pair of black and white Vans. I was hauling my wife's faux leopard skin carry-on suitcase.¹⁰³ I needed good coffee and probably a Xanax. I could tell others on the plane were heading down for this course as well. They all sported corporate haircuts and shuffled papers and had proper, manly suitcases.¹⁰⁴ I thought about offering a greeting. I thought about the fact that most airline accidents occur on take-off and landing – at the beginning and end of the journey. Yet, these accidents, statistically, are the least likely to kill you. It is the other accidents, the ones that occur over the ocean, midway between your point of origin and your point of departure, just as you are tucking into the plastic food and sucking down another bottle of imitation pinot, that tend to be fatal. If any little accidents were to befall me on this MBA journey, I asked the God of Money & Corporate Desires to allow them to happen this weekend. That way, I could scuttle back to Auckland and lick my wounds and pretend the whole thing was just some odd, bad dream.¹⁰⁵

103 I am clearly displaying femininity (hysteria) via this bag (it contains/carries all of my artificial layers of identity). The faux leopard skin is not only a form of camouflage (I am hiding from the other students), but also symbolises of my feelings of faux power (impotence) in this business setting. Interestingly, the bag draws, rather than reduces, attention - I am challenged about it on more than one occasion. I am being sounded out by other males – am I one of them or am I different? Once I mention that the bag is my wife's there is relief – but there is also curled-lipped disgust. What real man would use his wife's bag? I am, therefore, mistrusted/misunderstood right from the beginning.

104 I am reminded of a song in the children's TV show, *Sesame Street* (Cooney & Morrisett, 1969): "One of these things is not like the Other." I was definitely the odd-man-out. The Other, in this instance, stood for corporate conformity and the continuation of the industrial machine (AKA: the discourse of the master).

105 I haven't even begun my MBA journey, but I'm already clearly cynical, and more than a little anxious, about what I will encounter. There is also a hint of masochism in my desire to take on (I say take on, rather than take up, because my position is one of adversary rather than that of student) an MBA, even though I know it will be painful. In other words, I get some sort of

We were greeted by a high-ranking official decked out in the colours of the Chancellor's Office. He was standing in the foyer of the hotel in his patent leather jackboots with his gloved hands clasped in front of him.¹⁰⁶ A team of simpering toadies moved around him in a blur.¹⁰⁷ I was quickly ushered for a photo-op-handshake before being unceremoniously pirouetted into the entrance funnel where I was photographed and fingerprinted, plastered with a name badge, dog-tags, and, finally, injected with a microchip under the skin of my left palm.

"It's the latest tech," I was told, flatly, by one of the toadies. "One of the alumni developed it specifically for us. He got lost on the US study tour and woke up in Kansas with the Tin Man."¹⁰⁸

"It's standard operating procedure,"¹⁰⁹ I was informed by another eye-rolling toadie when I questioned the need for all this information harvesting. "How else are we going to monitor your progress? And don't forget to download the surveillance app and grant us remote access to your electronic devices. This voucher," he added, palming me a rectangle of cardboard, "can be exchanged for the CCTV system that we'll need you to have installed in your home, car, and at your place of employment. Have a great weekend and thank for choosing to upgrade your career with X University – proudly preaching

perverse pleasure out of pain I am about to inflict upon myself once *again*. Embarking on yet another degree in search of knowledge that I know I won't find is, well, simply crazy. This repetition (almost OCD (Obsessive-compulsive disorder) like mania) of desiring knowledge – the hysteric's crack cocaine – and seeking it via the discourse of the university, which has proven over and over again to be impotent in its delivery of that particular drug, is at the core of my hysterical jouissance. According to Lacan, "Jouissance is undoubtedly there at the point where pain begins to appear" (as cited in Dimitriadis, 2017). Lacan goes on to point out that "...the basis of the analytical exploration of desire is masochism—the subject grasps himself as suffering" and that "The subject does not simply satisfy desire, he enjoys desiring...and this is an essential dimension of his jouissance." (as cited in Dimitriadis, 2017). In other words, I don't simply "...get off on knowledge..." (Fink, 2018, p. 35), but actually get off on seeking it, failing to discover it, and then cycling through the process over and over again. It is this sadomasochistic repetition, then, that is the key to understanding the odd-man relationship between the hysteric (masochist) and university (sadist). (See also: Lacan, J., & Swenson, J. B. (1989). Kant with Sade. *October*, 51, 55-75).

106 I'm positioning the discourse of the university as fascist-like. For me, the discourse of the university is clearly dictatorial, overly controlling, likes to squash alternative voices, and prefers to revel in its own faux truth/reality. As Fotaki & Harding (2012) state: "The discourse of the university is a tyrannical and totalizing power which limits individual's thinking, desiring and acting in ways that perpetuate the existing social order" (p. 163).

107 This scene is reminiscent of *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* (1964). But, unlike Charlie, I am not a good boy, and will not follow Wonka's rules or play his game. The hysterics in *Charlie & the Chocolate Factory* are destroyed for not controlling their primal urges/appetites. Wonka, who represents the University/Master, is malevolent, manipulative, and controlling. His ideology must be followed. Only then can you pass and get your diploma. Only then can you own the means of production. Interestingly, Bosmajian (1985) suggests that "*Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is a clever displacement of what has come to be called the 'excremental vision.'" (p. 37). In other words, the chocolate factory sucks us in and then shits us out. There is a clear parallel, here, with Andy's escape from Shawshank (Darabont, 1994). Andy/Charlie have to patiently navigate the intestinal corridors/tunnels in which they find themselves. Both have a wise companion, are faced with a devious, psychopathic antagonist, and have to use a combination of wits, cunning, and luck to finally exit, victorious, the strange, alien world they are confined within. There have also been comparisons drawn between both narratives and Dante's 'Inferno' (See: *The Divine Comedy*, Alighieri, Binyon, Rossetti, 1979; Bosmajian, 1985; Jewkes, 2014). This, of course, suggests that I am also comparing the hysteric's journey through the university system to that of Dante/Charlie/Andy as they navigate their own versions of Hell. However, I would also point out that the hysteric is not simply navigating the university, but also pointing to its defects and, therefore, attempting to change (hystericize) it, rather than just escape it.

108 Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The Wizard of Oz* [Motion Picture]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The Tin Man is emotionless - he has no heart/feelings. Thus, he represents the scientific/logical approach to business that the MBA pushes – he, like it, is artificial, scientific, and cold.

109 Standard Operating Procedure is neoliberal code for: don't question the status quo; if everyone else does it, it must be normal.

the lexicon of unbridled profit acquisition to tomorrow's potential Little Masters since 19XX."

I was manhandled off the entrance carousel by a brace of security personnel and set free at a string of tables offering all manner of breakfast options. I chewed down a putrid coffee, tried to wipe the ink from my fingertips, to avoid mindless chitchat with my fellow prisoners. But this proved impossible. I was soon accosted by some random guy and his wife – they were both taking the MBA, they said, in what appeared to be a conjoined, codependent double act.¹¹⁰ He had picked me out of the line-up, he laughed loudly, because we were wearing the same shirt.¹¹¹

"We're twins,"¹¹² he laughed. "Brothers from a different mother."

This shirt was three years old. I had bought it from Barkers as part of a two for one deal. It was the end of the line – no one, it appeared, had wanted to wear it back then, let alone now. Sadly, though, it was the least worn-out shirt I owned. That's because it was fucking repulsive and I had resisted the urge to wear it. Now, though, with my shirt supplies in terminal decline, I had little choice but to break it out, dust it off, and make the best of it. And that's why I was wearing it. I wondered why he was wearing it.

"What do you do?"¹¹³ he asked, stuffing a production-line muffin in his mouth.

This question, then, would be the catchcry of this crowd not only for today, but for the rest of the MBA and beyond. They weren't interested in who you were, not really, they were only interested in how you impacted the neoliberal machine.¹¹⁴ When I told him I

110 My wife, who holds a first-class honours degree in Sociology, did an MBA the year before me. This meeting, then, is really a meeting between myself and my wife and me.

111 I am using the lexicon of the police/prison, here, metaphorically conflating the MBA with jail – you enter, do your time, and then exit with a new understanding of Self.

112 This is another example of the mirroring/doubling I mention above.

113 The question "What do you do?" reminds me of an episode on *That 70s Show* (Turner, Turner, Brazil). In the episode Red Forman (Kurtwood Smith), who has just been made redundant, is attending a party with his wife Kitty (Debra Jo Rupp). At the party he is constantly asked, "What do you do?" by all the men in attendance. He eyes those asking this question, angrily, and answers, "About what?" It should be noted that Red is characterised as the quintessential Real Man – he fought in Korea, works hard, provides for his family, and is a man of few words. By not having a job, and relying on his wife to work and support the family, his identity is thrown into turmoil. "About what?" can be viewed as a masculine challenge. Red is asking them to, basically, back-off and to shut the fuck up. If they don't, he is prepared to illustrate his masculinity in far more primitive ways. Over the years, when I was a student, or unemployed, this unavoidable question would always cause me anxiety – and I would rehearse various stories that I could blurt out when it was asked. During the MBA, I decided to quit my job at the bank and help my wife with her business. As a result, I was constantly asked by my classmates when I was going to get another job – they viewed my lack of corporate credentials as disturbing, perhaps a harbinger of what could happen to them – I was a zero in their eyes. A null. In more recent times, I find that I am no longer asked this question. I am not sure why this is. It could be that I am older and therefore the younger males fear that I might do something better than them, so they refrain from asking. But I think the answer might be simpler: because I don't give a fuck any longer, and have no pre-prepared answer, I don't give off a sense of fear. My answer, to their contextless question, would simply mirror Red's 'about what?'

114 This obsession with people's CVs, reminds me of the movie *Gattaca* (1997), where individuals are recognised (and legitimised) through their DNA and not their outward appearance – or what they believe or think. It's not what they can do that matters, it's what their CV/DNA suggests they can *potentially* do that matters. This is probably why there is so much fudging of facts and details on CVs (EL-Sakran, 2019). They have basically become their own fictions – their own neoliberal poems; each divided into sections/stanzas, with an expected buzz-word cadence, a positive, almost pharmaceutically induced willingness to do whatever it takes to become the very thing that they hate (a worker drone). The gatekeepers (HR managers) will either accept or reject your CV (Self) based on whether or not it conforms to their narrow expectations and desires.

was in banking he was suitably impressed. I didn't have the heart to tell him that my role was mindless, pointless and basically useless.

"You can be in our group and do the numbers," he said.

I shrugged. Yeah, nah,¹¹⁵ I thought. I knew fuck all about numbers if the truth be told. I just answered the phone. He, this muffin consumer, was in Information, Technology & Design. Whatever that meant.

"Okay," I said, bored by this pair who had slowly worked me into an anxiety-inducing dark corner.

"I can work the tech," he said. "I can design awesome title pages with bold headings and fancy logos."¹¹⁶

His wife didn't eat the muffins. She looked at me and thought about speaking but turned away instead.¹¹⁷ It appeared that he, muffin boy, was in charge of information gathering, group allocations and so on. She was busy scouting for a better deal.¹¹⁸ It was her, I guessed, that had bought him that shirt.

The Chair of Propaganda (COP) took the stage in a bluster of self-importance and posturing. He smiled and told us with a straight face that we were the 'cream of the crop' and how we were going to change the world once we had been processed through his Knowledge Factory. He reminded me of one of those snake oil salesmen you see in Westerns – the ones that roll into town and sell the dim-witted cowboys magic potions that cure everything from bad breath to spots on your dick. The audience sat riveted to their seats, their hands paused mid-air over the bowls of confectionary, and swallowed his nonsense wholesale along with their sugared snacks. He then proceeded to launch into a ridiculous speech based on a capitalist myth: The Tragedy of the Commons.¹¹⁹ His speech went something like this. If industrialists hadn't fenced off the natural resources and kicked the peasants out and taken these common goods for their own selfish needs, the ignorant presents would have, ultimately, destroyed them. Only capitalists, he argued, had the capability and incentive (ongoing profits) to look after these things for the good of all. Because of capitalists, we were told, these resources could be better

115 This is a commonly used response to a plethora of questions in New Zealand – and is particularly prevalent in the answers provided by rugby players to thorny questions asked by journalists. The duality, the affirmation and negation, built into the answer is confusing and somewhat quantum (both are right and wrong simultaneously) in nature. It is, therefore, akin to picking both heads and tails. It can be translated as: yes, I have heard you, but I don't agree; or, yeah? I don't think so bro; or, yes, that's happened, but no, we're not going to do anything about it.

116 The MBA, as I soon found out, is more concerned with packaging than content – it's all shiny surfaces and no depth.

117 The MBA is, overwhelmingly, a male domain – there are few women. For the women who do take on the MBA, their voice is often muted or masculinised. More on this below.

118 Like all good capitalists.

119 Cox, 1985.

organised and distributed to benefit everyone.¹²⁰ His ravings reminded me of some sort of unholy amalgam of Thomas Gradgrind and Josiah Bounderby from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*.¹²¹ Gradgrind was only interested in indoctrinating the children with the appropriate facts (not knowledge or education) so they could become productive little workers in one of the blustering Bounderby's hideous Victorian factories, which, I realised, was exactly what I was happening here.

I sighed and called bullshit on the COP's Orwellian retelling of history. What was spewing forth from his lips was clearly the direct opposite of the truth – the Commons, historically, used to benefit all, now they only benefitted the few. I asked him to explain how, for hundreds of years, these natural resources were never in danger of being exhausted – until, that is, these industrialists got their hands on them? And, how come, I added, it was after the beginning of the industrial revolution, when England needed the people off the land and into factories, that it suddenly became such a problem? Moreover, I pointed out, these natural resources were taken, improved upon in some way through the very labour that was being exploited, and then sold back to them.¹²² He smiled at me like I was some sort of idiotic, left-wing plant (as did the rest of the class) and failed to answer.¹²³ Instead he went on to point out how the government has no place in owning these sorts of things (or anything, it seems), because organisations have the skills to do it far more capably and efficiently – skills, he finished by saying, we were learning here.¹²⁴ The message I received was loud and clear: the MBA was not open for criticism – they didn't want to hear about opposing ideological positions – unless, of course, they could be proven to be more profitable.

I sat emotionally deshelled over an elaborate lunch and viewed my peas and carrots with an accusatory eye and craved a pint, perhaps two, of red wine. In my solitary moment of alcoholic longing I was joined, unexpectedly, by a tall, angular individual with blindingly white teeth. He eyed me over a fork-full of roast beef and told me how interesting it all was and how he had just got back from Thailand.

“Beach holiday?” I asked, eyeing him suspiciously. “Phuket?”

120 This false belief is, of course, at the core of the neoliberal myth.

121 Dickens, 1854

122 Marx, 1844

123 The discourse of the university does not answer questions, it asks them – and then it tells you if you are right or not.

124 This is a key point: the MBA provides neoliberal skills (read as: language, methods, procedures) so you can help organisations attain more profit. It doesn't provide, or critique, knowledge. Questioning/critiquing proven profit generating methods (even though they negatively impact the environment/workers, etc) runs counter to its narrow mission. Thus, when I try to do it, I am greeted with a confused silence – I've wandered off the path and moved beyond the limits of the course.

“I got my teeth done,” he smiled, before chewing down on another mouthful. “In Bangkok. Much much cheaper than over here. An absolute steal.”¹²⁵

“You weren’t worried about, you know, medical misadventure?” I asked. “Like being killed or getting some exotic, untreatable infection?”

“I ran the numbers,” he said matter-of-factly. “Statistically I had more chance of getting chlamydia from the hotel toilet seat than being killed by a rogue dentist.”

And, then, between swallows and at the end of a lengthy debate on whether or not it was possible to actually get a sexually transmitted disease through direct contact with a bathroom surface, he finally broke and asked me everyone’s favourite question: what did I, in fact, do? When I gave him the standard answer, he smiled his arctic grill at me once more. It transpired, somewhat frighteningly, that he, this bespectacled somewhat balding classmate, also worked at the bank. My bank. Only in Wellington and not Auckland. I did not find this admission as cool as he seemed to. I had to fight an incredible urge not to leap from my seat and run to the airport and enter the first plane that was available and escape. And, worse still, he was not in a shitty role like me. He had a proper job.

“So, you work with the Big Kahuna,”¹²⁶ he presumed, wrongly. “I know him well. Next time I’m in Auckland we should all get together for golf and then a bit of fishing in the Gulf. His boat is awesome, isn’t it?”

This whole conversation had a weird *Nightmare on Elm Street*¹²⁷ vibe and my banking colleague was quickly morphing into Freddy Krueger. I looked at the waiter and then at the bar. I looked at the door. I looked around the room. Muffin Boy, I noticed had changed his shirt for a crisp white one. Oh fuck, I thought, pushing my food away, suddenly losing my appetite, this was bad. Nuclear bad. I was not even supposed to be here. I was supposed to be at home sick. The bank had no idea what I was up to. What the fuck was I supposed to tell Thailand Grill? I could tell him that I was so far down the corporate ladder that the Big Kahuna would need to requisition the Hubble Telescope just to see me, that I was actually just a minion, that I’m the last person he’d invite out on his boat,

125 I am alluding to the neoliberal ideal of outsourcing and offshoring. While it destroys/disrupts local economies (through the removal of manufacturing/distribution and, subsequent, loss of jobs) and exploits the offshore workers (who are paid very little) and their environment (loss of natural habitats, discharge of externalities, etc), it is still presented, and considered, absolutely necessary and normal in the global economy. If it is cheaper, the moral of the story goes, it is better and must, therefore, be implemented. Naturally, I disagree with this.

126 This is a reference to the fictional Big Kahuna Burger that appears in the movie *Pulp Fiction* (Tarantino, 1994). Over the years, Kahuna has been appropriated, bastardised, and redeployed from its original Hawaiian usage: to refer to a person of high authority – whether male or female (Brown, 2016). As a male hysteric, I am interested in the genderless positioning of this word. Brown (2016) also points out that there are genderless Akua (Gods) in Hawaiian methodology (p. 157). However, this was not always the case.

127 Craven, W. (Director). (1984). *Nightmare on Elm Street* [Motion Picture]. New Line Cinema.

that I had, in fact, told my boss I was suffering from bleeding haemorrhoids just to get the day off.¹²⁸

“Does red wine stain those teeth?” I asked in a desperate attempt to change the subject.

“No,” he said. “I had them laminated and Scotchgarded. I opted for the premium service.”

“Anyway,” I said. “Speaking of red wine.”

“Anyway,” he said, laughing salad from his mouth, “at least the bank pays for all this, right. But, I ask you, who in the right mind would use their own money? That would be utter madness. You could get all sorts of shit fixed in Thailand for the cost of this course.”

He raised his hand aloft to signal the waiter.

A few months later my boss at the bank would also raise her hand aloft. Only she was not ordering another plate of oysters. She, like a Native American in a 70s’ western, was offering me an unemotional final farewell.¹²⁹ She took my keycard as if it were a rare sacred artefact and edged me towards the electronic doors, through which I was unceremoniously sucked mid-sentence and deposited on the sidewalk like a stinking pile of Indi’s dog shit. I had finally been expunged (or escaped – depending on your point of view) from the bank. This decision had been brewing for a while – perhaps from day one. This event was, of course, inevitable. It followed my usual pattern: apply for a job. Get an interview. Put on my best suit. Listen to their lies while I told mine. Accept the job. Celebrate by drinking too much. Start working. Immediately see all the flaws in the company and co-workers. Foster a love-hate relationship with the coffee machine. And then, like a sadomasochist, offer unsolicited and unwanted suggestions for improvements. Get repeatedly told to shut my face and do my job. Get told that there was nothing wrong with the place. Try repeatedly to get promoted. Get continuously rejected. Start acting out through sheer boredom. Get smacked down at performance meetings. Get sidelined, overlooked and, ultimately, managed out. This, then, was the cyclical

128 My bullshit answer to ‘what do you do’, the corporate fantasy/story I provided, has been cracked. This caused a great deal of anxiety and, looking back on it, accelerated my departure from the bank. It was only a matter of time, I surmised, before Thailand Grill spoke to the Big Kahuna and discovered that I had been more than a little creative in presenting my oral CV. I visualised the potential ridicule when this information was discovered and, ultimately, passed on to the rest of the MBA cohort (this fear was never realised. I had, somewhat neurotically, overestimated Thailand Grill’s interest in me – he would never ask the Big Kahuna about me, because, simply put, he would never think of me). I had, in fact, done a George Costanza (Jason Alexander. See: David, & Seinfeld (1994-1998). *Seinfeld*). George was notorious for his elaborate lies when trying to get a job/talking about his job – and his subsequent undoing when his lies were discovered.

129 As Reese (2016) confirms, “In old westerns, Indians are shown saying ‘hello’ to white people by saying ‘how’ and raising the right hand (as if to take an oath).” This, of course, was not an indigenous greeting, but a Hollywood creation. I am seeking to conflate my boss’ goodbye gesture with the question: how? “How come you couldn’t do as you were instructed?” she seemed to be asking with her non-verbal gesture. My response, also non-verbal, was to simply nod (yes, you are right, I can’t be instructed) and walk away (so I’m rejecting you and your organisation).

pattern of my working life – this was just the last resignation in the long line that preceded it.¹³⁰ I needed to break the cycle. I needed to work out what the hell was wrong with me. I needed to upskill and get over the plebeian plateau that I had spent entire my working life trapped upon. I needed to stop crawling about in the dirt with the other worker drones looking for a few bucks just to get by. Basically, without putting too fine a point on it, I needed a serious plan and then I needed to take action.¹³¹

Years ago, when I was teaching high school English, one of my colleagues laughed when she found me tucked away in a dark corner of the library grading papers. I was supposed to be sitting with the rest of my department in a sleepy professional development meeting on alternative teaching strategies. I was supposed to be listening as the aged deputy principal mumbled his way through some new cutting-edge advancement in the chalk/talk paradigm. Even just thinking about it now makes me yawn. Instead, I made the decision to spend the time productively marking papers. That way, I reasoned, I could go home and actually speak to my family. Perhaps, if I was lucky, I might even have time for a run. Fuck them and their bullshit PD,¹³² I thought. I'd pretend that I had forgotten when my HOD quizzed me about my lack of attendance. I'd change the subject. I'd ask her questions on some obscure aspect of one of Shakespeare's¹³³ lesser known plays that she could never answer in a kabillion years. Her eyes would cross in confusion. I would smell the potent scent of intellectual fear as she waved me off, as she shuffled papers and nervously checked her email.

"I'm glad I'm not your manager," she said, with a smirk. "Because, let's face it, you're unmanageable."

This was news to me. Was this my problem? Was I, in fact, a loose cannon? Was I incapable of being led, managed, coached or trained? I didn't think so. It wasn't me that was the problem, surely. It was them. The Other. The boss. The person who told me what to do. Wasn't it?

During the cold and rainy winter of 2013, when I was still at the bank, when teaching high school English was nothing more than a series of shudders and the occasional intestinal cramp when I accidentally thought back on it, I made the decision to finally try and break the cycle. I enrolled in an MBA.¹³⁴ I don't know, if I am completely honest, if I

130 This, again, is just another example of my hysterical repetition – only this time, rather than the university, my antagonist is the Master. However, there is no simply exit strategy from a job, or a string of similar jobs (really just the same job in a different setting). There is no diploma at the end of the tunnel. There is only mental resignation and, then, the actual, formal, resignation.

131 In some ways, I'm putting myself on an action plan. More on action plans below.

132 I have always thought it interesting that PD, professional development, can also be read as periodic detention, which is exactly what it is.

133 William Shakespeare (C1564–1616) is an English poet and playwright.

134 In other words, and somewhat ironically, I didn't break the cycle, I repeated it. This is how it always goes. The origin of my sad, cyclic, educational addiction can be traced all the way back to the frozen Canterbury winter of 1991. I was leaning on my

enrolled in the MBA because I wanted to improve my career situation or whether I wanted to apply another layer of academic armour in order to shield myself from God Knows What. The less of me I displayed to the corporate world, at this time, seemed like the only sane defence to the modern slavery that working had become. Before I discuss the MBA, I need to get something straight right from the-get-go. I thoroughly despised my job at the bank – basically, I was a glorified telephonist. When I started working in this monument to money, I believed this position was merely a stepping-stone, that I wouldn't be in the role long before they realised I wasn't stupid and offered me a position that better matched my capabilities. This, somewhat surprisingly, happened quickly - well sort of. About three months after I started, I discovered a secondment that matched my skills. They needed someone to help the computer engineers (mostly foreign nationals) craft user manuals. I was an English major and had written pieces for various publications. I had a truckload of editing experience. I applied, and they were very happy to offer me the role. I was told that it would, undoubtedly, turn into a full-time position. I was less happy, to be honest, than relieved – I was escaping the telephone. But my boss, to my horror, refused to release me. I was informed I needed to spend at least a year in my current position (this turned into four) and that I should not apply for any other roles without consulting her first. I was told that they had spent time and money training me, and that it was policy (I am guessing unwritten, because I was never able to find any documentation substantiating this) to do my time in the trenches. I noted that she got a strange sense of satisfaction out of the pain this inflicted on me. I was, for all intents and purposes, her bitch until further notice. My fate, sadly, was sealed.

'74 olive green Hillman Avenger, eating a pie and drinking a coke at the Edgware shopping centre. It was a rare day off. I had been working two jobs at two different hotels – one full-time and one part-time. Both jobs were shit. I had been putting in, and hoping for, a better role for almost 18 months. I had been hoping to get away from the floor buffer, from the little pink lollies that I had to throw in the staff urinals. I had been hoping to avoid being forced to make-up rooms when they were too busy or the maids were sick. While I stood there, blowing on my pie, I was accosted by the guy from the local real estate agency. He had exited his office for a cigarette, saw me loafing, and leaned on the other side of my Avenger in his sharkskin suit and puffed away and we talked about work and the state of the economy. At the end of this conversation, he smiled broadly, fixed my gaze, and offered me a job. He told me that if I put 70 hours of work into selling property, instead of buffing floors and cleaning shitters, I'd be on a hundred grand – that I should quit today and join him in utopia. This, sadly, was a load of shit. Over the next three years, I grinded away, selling the odd house, listening to his motivational sermons, and making minimum wage. Finally, fed up and on the edge of bankruptcy, I desperately tried to take a sideways shift and get a job in marketing or sales – after all, I reasoned, I had been involved in both. But it was not my fate to be hired in either sales or marketing. And this was because, I was told (more poor advice), I didn't have a university degree. Sadly, I believed them, just like I had believed Captain Real Estate. Thus, towards the fag-end of 1993, faced with zero work prospects, I bit-the-bullet and enrolled in a BCom. This sad tale would repeat again, like a 60s sitcom, in 1999. This time, on my return from the UK, I was once again unable to get a proper job (or any job), so I enrolled in a BA (I think I was finally rejecting the business world to be honest – I'd had enough of their shit). But this was not the end of it. In 2002, again faced with few opportunities, I silenced my gut feel, and enrolled in a teaching diploma – teaching, I presumed wrongly, would save me from a life of grinding shit jobs. I think we can all see the pattern here: shit jobs/no jobs, seek the comfort of the university (like a womb), graduate, work for a short time in a shit job, seek comfort in the university – repeat. And, here we are once again. What will happen after the PhD is finished? Will that old-world, European university I covert finally provide the utopian conclusion to this story? And will the publication of this book finally provide the solace that I have spent my life seeking? What does the hysteric do when they have reached the end of the university's educational shit tunnel? Does he escape, like Andy at the end of *Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994), to Zihuatanejo (utopia) or does he end up like Brooks? Does he, as Andy instructs: get busy living or get busy dying?

When I think about this situation, of hiring smart people and then keeping them in roles that are obviously beneath them, I am reminded of the tragic historical figure, Branwell Brontë. Branwell had the (mis)fortune to be educated by his father – a Cambridge graduate. In fact, Patrick Brontë educated all his children – and we all know how the girls¹³⁵ turned out. Branwell was as sharp as a razor, had a vast knowledge of a myriad of subjects, and could speak several languages. Basically, this humble Victorian, the son of a mere clergyman, had been moulded into an intellectual heavyweight. However, the only roles he could fill were clerks (counting train carriages) or tutors (teaching the children of the upper classes). Not surprisingly, he was bored stupid and took up several hobbies – wine and Laudanum - to fill the void. Branwell's situation, I would argue, is even more poignant and relevant today. More and more individuals are being educated in our universities only to end up serving coffee or answering the phone. In other words, their minds have supposedly been improved and their eyes opened. They are, theoretically, smart and capable.¹³⁶ But none of this matters a fig. Because, for the vast majority of them, they are going to end up being a Branwell.¹³⁷ They are going to end up being mere cogs in the corporate machine.

After four years of trying to escape my role at the bank for a better one and being constantly rejected, I discovered, somewhat by accident, that the bank had a policy that allowed employees to study in a work-related field, have the fees paid, get time off, etcetera. Perhaps, I reasoned, I needed to upskill.¹³⁸ Perhaps then, after they had invested in me, they would let me escape the prison I was in. It seemed like a good plan. But, before I approached my boss, I decided to get all my ducks in a row and present the strongest possible case. I went out to the university, talked to those in charge, got accepted, was supplied with a letter by the MBA Director explaining how this course of study would supercharge me as an employee, and prepared my speech. When I was thoroughly organised, I approached my boss and told her I was thinking of taking on

135 Charlotte (1816–1855), Emily (1818–1848), and Anne (1820–1849). Although Anne is the least known and read of the three sisters, I actually prefer her novels to those of her sisters. Anne's female protagonists (Agnes Grey in *Agnes Grey* (1846), and Helen Graham in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848)) are strong, determined, independent women. In fact, I can clearly see hints of Helen Graham in the characters of the aforementioned novels of Edith Wharton. Helen, like Wharton's protagonists, marries the wrong man. Although he appeared witty and handsome, he is in fact a drunken, debauched idiot. Finally, she plucks up the courage to flee with their son and seeks a divorce (again, Wharton). Naturally, being the arsehole he is, Drunken Man refuses and sets out to find them and drag them back to their prison-like home. Hence, her reason for residing in Wildfell Hall under an assumed name.

136 Although, let's be honest here, not to the degree Branwell was. Today's graduates have been certified. But the questions remain (depending on the subject): have they been educated? Can they speak French, German, and Latin fluently? Have they read, understood, and integrated the philosophical and theological canon? Have they read the great works of literature? Have they studied the natural sciences, mathematics, law, and a myriad of other topics? No. No they haven't. Their knowledge of siloed, narrow, and specific (AKA: useless certification). Branwell's was broad and vast (AKA: valuable education).

137 Lacan (2007) explains this fucked-up phenomenon by pointing out the following uncomfortable truth: "Capitalist exploitation effectively frustrates him of his knowledge by rendering it useless" (p. 32).

138 It is more likely, if I am honest, that I was simply seeking out the comfort the university environment had always provided me. Perhaps, however, I was also screaming at them to acknowledge how smart I was – something they would, of course, never do.

some study to improve my worth to the bank. She pulled a face, admitted that no one in my role had ever brought this up before and, somewhat reluctantly, read the policy document I had printed for her. When, after consulting her colleagues, she realised that the bank did in fact encourage personal growth through study, she suggested, to my surprise, that I should not only apply but that she would support my application – I was gobsmacked. She was normally the least helpful person on the planet (I later found out she had KPIs to meet for staff development). This had gone far better than I had expected. I called my wife with the good news. She told me not to count my chickens, that the bank was not my friend, and that I should take a wait and see approach.

A few days later my wife's prophetic warning played out in all its graphic horror. My application was flatly rejected. I was informed that the course I wanted to take, an MBA, was not for me. It was, I was told, for the higher-ups. The manager of my department, a full three levels up in the hierarchy from my boss, had one and so did his boss. My boss didn't have a degree at all. She used to be a store manager at Hardly Normal – the big box store for all your electronic junk. They just did not believe, I was told, that an MBA was in anyway relevant to my current role. No fucking shit! That's why I wanted one, so I could escape my current role, not stay in it! Interestingly, the aforementioned Big Kahuna made the time to come down from his office to tell me just how hard an MBA was and how I should just focus on the internal learning modules if I wanted to get ahead (I had already completed them). But, I explained, I already had a double degree, so I was sure I could handle it. This information, however, didn't seem to register. He just smiled at me like I used to smile at the kids I taught who had trouble spelling the name of their street. He, I realised, was patronising me. I got the message loud and clear. The bank would like me to work in my current role until the end of time – perhaps longer. I seemed to be okay at it and they didn't really want to have to get someone new. So, if I could just stop having these delusions of grandeur and just get back to answering the phone like a good robot, that would be awesome. This not only made me furious, but also confused the hell out of me. Why did they not want me to progress? Why were the kids that I worked with promoted and I was stuck? What the fuck was going on?

Despite the warning of the Big Kahuna, I decided to enrol in the MBA anyway. It felt like a small rebellion. A site of resistance. I had to keep it quiet, though, because I had been informed that if I disregarded their desires and enrolled in this course and it impacted my performance, I would be placed on an action plan.¹³⁹ It was not long, though, before I took the initiative and managed myself out. The last straw in my sad

¹³⁹ An Action Plan required you to sit with a manager for days on end until you either broke and resigned or met their unrealistic demands. These things were feared and well known to be 'the beginning of the end'.

corporate life occurred a few months later. This story is so bizarre I seriously wondered if I should, in fact, include it here. On the day in question, I arrived back from lunch to find two weird things happening simultaneously. The first was the fluffy woman (I called her this because she was about 65 and sported a cloud of white, curly hair – but, she wasn't, of course, fluffy at all. She was a serious, no nonsense, hard-arse. She was ex-military intelligence and rode a Harley Davison and had tattoo sleeves and came complete with an icy stare that could shatter glass. She was not, I knew, to be trifled with.), who ran the queuing system and provided us with our daily statistics (call times, shit times, logon times), was standing at my desk. Oh fuck, I thought, what now? She never called with good news. There was never any good news.

“Are you feeling okay?” she asked.

Apart from wanting to kill myself so I could escape this horrendous place I was, I believed, fine.

“Yes, thank you,” I replied, wondering what trap I was being led into.

“Well, according to the stats, you have been in the toilet for forty-six minutes. Is there a problem? Are you sick?” she asked, drilling me with her eyes and waving the incriminating paperwork in my grill. It turned out I had gone to the bathroom before lunch. Afterwards, I had stopped to chat with a colleague and then headed off outside. I had not, as required, returned to my desk to unclick the giant toilet icon and depress the hamburger button. I had committed an unforgivable sin: I had screwed up their sacred adherence-to-the-stats. But, for reasons unknown to me, I did not explain this and beg for forgiveness. Instead, I looked her in those cold blue eyes, shrugged, and said, loud enough for everyone to hear, “Thank you for asking. As a matter-of-fact, I had to take my time. I didn't want to pop one of the haemorrhoids. Last time I did that the bathroom ended up looking like someone had been killed in an abattoir. Blood went up the walls. I had to stick one of my wife's panty-shields between my arse-cheeks just to get out of there alive. I think I might have been eating too much red meat because, to tell you the truth, it felt like I was trying to push a broken terracotta pot complete with rubber plant and a tonne of dry as hell dirt out my sphincter hole.”

She formed an arsehole with her mouth, narrowed her eyes, clutched her papers and told me I was very strange and had some serious issues and then stormed back to her desk and banged out an official email to me on her keyboard. I sighed and pushed the giant telephone button. Fuck her, I thought, if she can't take a joke. Opposite, I noticed, some kid, who was perhaps eighteen if he was lucky, was plugged in and listening to calls with one of my co-workers. I assumed he was here for work experience as part of a school release programme. I was wrong. My boss's boss, a large matronly, Russian

woman had, in fact, recruited him from McDonald's where she always ate lunch with the fluffy woman - because he smiled and did as he was told (the opposite of me, in other words). This fucked with my sense of identity. I was surrounded by individuals with degrees in finance and economics and yet they had also hired a kid with no qualifications or experience to do the same job as us. This story doesn't finish here, though. Within a month, perhaps two, he was promoted to my Boss's 2IC (second in command). So, when she went to lunch or was absent, I had to ask his permission when I needed to process a transaction above my designation. But that was not the worst of it. What really ground my gears, what really slapped me in the face, what really boiled my blood, was having to ask him to check my grammar and spelling before I was permitted to send an external email. When he came to my desk and questioned my use of commas I would bristle with barely concealed incredulity - he knew I was an ex-English teacher, yet he still required me to justify myself. But, weirdly, after a while, I didn't feel angry about it at all. I just felt resigned - like a baby gazelle who has finally been run down by an apex predator and knows the game is up. I felt a sense of calm wash over me and typed up my resignation.

During the afternoon coffee break on day one of the MBA indoctrination weekend, I called my wife, telling her in a manic panic that I had made a horrible mistake, that I needed to disenroll immediately, that the majority of people on the course were corporate arsehats. That, rather than working with creative people like I'd hoped, I'd be spending two years with a bunch of individuals who were just like the Big Kahuna. I threw up in my mouth a little and looked out over the sea of crisp white shirts and black suit jackets. Even though we had been told not to dress in business attire the students couldn't help themselves. The need to dress to impress¹⁴⁰ was firmly ingrained in their corporate identities.

Just prior to the break, a guest speaker, who was the leading authority on our nation's ecological decline, had spoken passionately about the poor quality of our waterways, explaining how this was mainly down to dairy farming, and how we, as future business leaders, could play a part in fixing it. I liked this guy. He said it how it was and didn't pull any punches.¹⁴¹ But I quickly found I was alone. He was savaged by the crowd. But what

140 For uniformity and conformity - they have been moulded by the ideology of neoliberalism.

141 It occurs to me as I edit this section that this ecologist was the quintessential hysteric. He was pointing directly to all the master's flaws. He was laying the master bare. "Look," he was saying, "you're fucking the place up you dumb bastards!" This was an indisputable fact and he had the evidence to prove it. The response of the class (the self-identifying corporate elite - AKA: LDMs (Little Disciples of the Master)) was to attempt to twist this back upon itself (as the master had taught them to do) by pointing out his lack of solutions. Interestingly, he was not to be baited by this deflection. Instead, he responded by reminding them that it was not his job to come up with solutions, but to simply point out the problem. It was their job, he said, to find solutions. Touché! And that solution was obvious wasn't it: capitalism would need to move away from the exploitation & destruction model that constantly fed its insatiable lust for wealth, to one of prudence (relying on the science), moderation (not expecting to rape the land for ever without pause), and reduction (less dairy farms, and less cows per

about the wealth the dairy industry brought the country? he was asked. What about the jobs? The food it provided? And, like good disciples of the master they berated him for his naivety, for his blunder of highlighting a problem and not providing working solutions that removed the problem but none of the benefits. What I was quickly discovering was that my fellow classmates, those people in society who had the high-powered jobs were, for the most part, more than a little narcissistic,¹⁴² that they lacked a certain empathy, had a very narrow set of beliefs, were quick to become visibly angry or utterly dismissive when these beliefs were questioned, and were, on the whole, conformists.¹⁴³

Their desire for a nice, flat reality, where businesses made profits and the exploitation of individuals and the environment went unnoticed, where there were no bumps in the road, where annoying hysterics remained silent and didn't point out their fucktardary, reminded me of when I taught *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*¹⁴⁴ years ago to a senior English class at a middle-of-the-road high school. Kesey's book was taught in conjunction with *Lord of the Flies*.¹⁴⁵ The latter was a tome to the dangers that, supposedly, accompany a lack of authority within society. The kids in this book represent the working classes, the average Joe in the street, whereas adults were painted as the requisite authority figures: parents, managers, teachers, priests, the police, and politicians - what Althusser referred to as Ideological State Apparatuses¹⁴⁶ - individuals who have sucked down enough of the Kool-Aid to ensure the smooth running of society for those who own the means of production by keeping the great unwashed in check. Golding's sans-control world in *Lord of the Flies* was depicted as one which was rife with fear, paranoia, violence, and chaos. The underlying message was blindingly clear - unless you want anarchy (or another Luddite uprising, French Revolution or Communist takeover), you must condition the masses to kowtow to those in charge. And this conditioning began early, in school. Here children were trained to see the authority figure as absolute and unquestionable. Here, they were taught how to behave through sitting in rows for hours on end in silence completing, as Sir Ken Robinson suggested,

hectare on those that remain) and sustainability (and not the fake kind of sustainability, not the bold-print bullshit in the corporate manifesto, nor the feel-good-smoke-and-mirrors-sustainability they teach in business schools, but real sustainability led by actual ecologists, and assorted scientists, like this guy).

142 This is a well-documented fact. See: O'Reilly, Doerr, Caldwell, & Chatman, 2014. But far worse, is the high percentage of CEOs who are psychopaths (4%) compared to the population in general (1%). See: Skopec, 2019; Boddy, 2006.

143 Conservative/conformist behaviour may not be simply a choice and/or be socially constructed (although both these factors obviously contribute) as previously believed. Kanai, Feilden, Firth, & Rees (2011) suggest an enlarged amygdala may play a significant role in this behaviour.

144 Kesey, 1962

145 Golding, 1954

146 Althusser, 2006 (first published 1970 in *La Pensée*).

low grade clerical work.¹⁴⁷ Here, then, was where they learn to be productive, obedient cube-farm workers.

Conversely, Kesey's book highlighted the very real dangers of an overly structured and controlling society – where those aforementioned authority figures actually wield the power that Golding alluded to. This time, instead of an island paradise, society was presented as a mental hospital – The Combine.¹⁴⁸ The patients were the working classes, and the Big Nurse was the authority figure (the master/university). The protagonist and antihero, McMurphy (the hysteric), refused to not only bow to her control, but to even acknowledge it. And even though she tried to silence him via a number of avenues including drugs, electric shock treatment, and psychological bullying, he was unbreakable. He wanted to experience life to its fullest. He had no interest in living as a subservient tool for the bourgeoisie. Because of his 'negative' influence on his fellow patients, who not only began to question their prior acceptance of the Big Nurse's authority, but to mimic his subversive behaviours, he was completely silenced via a lobotomy. Unfortunately for the Big Nurse, the damage was done. His example was just the catalyst the patients needed to wrestle control from her and break the shackles of their mental and physical enslavement. It was a powerful message about the dangers of an overly controlling society and goes some way to addressing the batshit crazy dystopia presented by Golding and others if these controls were to be removed. When I asked the kids what they thought of McMurphy's journey in comparison with that of the boys in *Lord of the Flies*, I was utterly gobsmacked by their responses. McMurphy was, the head prefect argued, a loser and a troublemaker, who should have done what he was told, instead of acting like such a dick. He made things far worse for everyone, another continued, his actions leading directly to Billy Bibbit's death. He shouldn't have rocked the boat, I was told, what was he thinking? If he'd put his head down and worked with the Big Nurse, he would have been able to eventually leave and contribute to society. What I learned from this discussion was that people who have been institutionalised, who have learnt to follow the rules, and who closely associate themselves with those in power, because of awards (or rewards, tokens, or limited authority) they have received from those in charge, will support that power no matter how inappropriate it may be. They will refuse to see or acknowledge the faults no matter how closely you point to them – and, believe me, I pointed. They will have no desire, therefore, to change either

¹⁴⁷ Robinson, 2011.

¹⁴⁸ Kesey was referring to a combine harvester, which mechanically separates the wheat from the chaff. In other words, the Combine's job was to separate the good, normal people, from the bad, defective people. Those who passed and were good and obedient, could re-enter society, while those who would not conform either remained for further re-education/conditioning or were destroyed.

themselves or society because they believe they have a vested interest in keeping things just the way they are (even if they don't). And this was why my high-flying classmates on the MBA did not want to engage with information from the workers' point of view or environmentalists or anyone in fact that challenged their narrow views – they wanted to go up the ladder, which meant, in their minds, taking on the ideals of the corporate overlords to the exclusion of all else. They had no desire to look down as they stood on the heads of those below them, they had no desire to acknowledge them at all. And this was why these corporate ladder climbers were not my type of people. They were industrial drones singing songs directly out of Adam Smith's capitalist manifesto.¹⁴⁹ I was embarrassed by their blockheadedness. I felt I was surrounded by a bunch of loud and indignant ignoramuses. However, I didn't speak up. I felt silenced by the mob. Lacan's discourse of the master was overpowering and subsumed all. I shuffled in my seat uncomfortably and felt not only powerless but utterly disgusted.

I didn't go out drinking with the student body that evening, even though it was compulsory, even though I would be marked absent and labelled as an introverted, unsociable weirdo by the AIC (Academic in Charge).¹⁵⁰ Instead, I took a long, slow run about the empty, grid-like streets. I had to clear my head and try and make sense out of my senseless day. I was passed by wide-side trucks with confederate flags. I was sworn at. I was chased by stray dogs. It was provincial New Zealand. This was where John Key's¹⁵¹ average Kiwi lived. I hung a left and jogged down street after street of state houses.¹⁵² They were designed in maze-like cul-de-sacs.¹⁵³ The front lawns were littered with rusted shopping trolleys and broken cars. Teens in white singlets leaned on posts and eyed me suspiciously from behind wraparound shades as I jogged by. The only people allowed to go running in New Zealand were rugby players in training. It was essential that they identified themselves by donning a rugby jersey and carrying a rugby

149 Adam Smith (1723–1790) is a Scottish economist.

150 Arsehole in Charge.

151 John Key (1961–) is a former Prime Minister (2008–2016) of New Zealand.

152 John Key lived in a state house when growing up. Somewhat ironically, his government actively sold these houses off to private investors. As Small & Walters (2015) report, "Prime Minister John Key today confirmed the Government planned to sell 1000 to 2000 state houses in the next year to community-housing providers, with more sales possible in coming years."

153 Once you find yourself in this socioeconomic group, exiting it can be difficult – this is why John Key's rise to wealth and fame is held up as an example of what hard work can achieve in a neoliberal economy. But this, of course, is disingenuous – Key is not the norm: he is an outlier. The majority of those in poverty are not able to achieve what he did – no matter how hard they work. When I read stories about how individuals have overcome great odds to succeed, I am reminded of the card game Scum. This game requires people down the social hierarchy to hand over their good cards (as a form of tax) to those up the social hierarchy. The bottom position is referred to as Scum. When you are this player, trying to move up the social hierarchy is virtually impossible. It should be noted that skill is not relevant to your success – it is the luck of the draw that decides your fate. See also: Nichol, A., (Director). (2011) *In Time* [Motion Picture]. 20th Century Fox. This movie also considers the difficulty (impossibility) of social mobility in a neoliberal society.

ball. The mouthguard was optional. All other runners were considered fair game, like a possum crossing the road, for abuse and derision.

In the last session a farmer/ex-military regular turned professor gave a freakish talk about what was and wasn't acceptable scholarship – this included rolling his eyes and throwing textbooks and student papers about the conference room in a rage as he critiqued each in turn. He strutted about in his overly tight pants, ranting and stomping on the literature he considered the most worthless. He flexed his biceps and roared like the maniac he was. He alone, it seemed, had the chops to divine what good scholarship should look like. He had been to Harvard, he said, even though it was just to visit when he was on vacation with his family. He had sat on those sloping lawns in front of the pretty ivied redbrick buildings and read a picture-book about combine harvesters until security had asked him to leave because he was making the students uncomfortable. He was, therefore, legit and knew what he knew was what we needed to know. And, not surprisingly, it was not, according to him, that pussy-whipped, newfangled, screwy qualitative shit that was just, basically, navel gazing, was just typing about one's feelings like some kind of soft-boiled egg.

"We are men!" he bellowed, pounding his chest, ignoring the women in the room, "studying management. We're not some gender-non-specific-binary-confused member of the Humanities or Social Sciences studying useless cross-dressing shit that doesn't lead to profit and growth."¹⁵⁴

What the fuck? No one blinked an eye.

He then concluded his unhinged lecture by telling us a weird story about how good-looking his daughter was and how good she was at shearing sheep.¹⁵⁵ He was proud of this. I am not sure how we were supposed to respond. I am guessing we were supposed to clap and salivate simultaneously like the naïve first-year students that he most probably captivated with these bullshit stories. I yawned and sucked down the remains of some cold coffee instead and awaited the completion of this shitshow.

¹⁵⁴ The discourse strengthens its own position while simultaneously overpowering and drowning out critical, or differing, points of view. The extent of this exclusion is not just limited to course selection, however, and clearly permeates all aspects of the MBA. The course is, therefore, designed and structured, taught and delivered, and marketed and sold in very narrow terms that attract and serve a 'preferred' cohort within society, the very same cohort that has, and still does, control industry: white, middle-class, heterosexual males (Simpson, Sturges, Woods, & Altman, 2005, p.241). This process, I believe, works in much the same way as Laura Mulvey's 'Masculine Gaze'. Mulvey argues that Hollywood films position all audience members, regardless of their gender, as men (Mulvey, 1989). In this way, I would argue that regardless of their gender, politics, sexuality, or culture, all MBA participants are positioned as an homogenous group: white, heterosexual males – that their differences are ignored, discounted, and dismissed, and their acceptance of the dominant culture is demanded, expected and finally celebrated.

¹⁵⁵ There is an incestual/homoerotic element at play in his representation of his daughter – on one hand he presents her as sexually attractive and available, while simultaneously suggesting she is one of the boys. He was also confirming his masculine bias, and that of the MBA in general, when he discussed his amazement that pretty girls were capable of doing so called masculine (read: management) jobs well.

Somewhat unexpectedly, he ceased telling us about how hot his daughter looked when she was bent over sheep in her dungarees, rearranged his crotch, and launched into a story about how he had read the uncorrected proof of Adam Smith's mythical lost work *Natural Born Winners*:¹⁵⁶ *control the commoner, control the market, control the world* in the original crayon. Smith had written it, according to Camel-Toe-Pants, when he was incarcerated in a home for the mentally deranged in the last years of his life. It's a masterpiece, he said. It shows just how important we are.

Now, he said, it was time to prove it. He immediately divided the herd into what he called *cluster-flocks*, handed us packets of spaghetti, tape, blu-tac and a marshmallow. He was rolling out the build-a-tower-the-highest game that we had all played many times before. What an embarrassment. I shook my head, sighed, and went for a shit.

Rather than return to the scene of the crime, I left via the front door, planning on a long walk, planning on, perhaps, walking back to the airport. Leaning on the side of the hotel, smoking a cigarette, I found one of the new recruits. He was obviously from the Deep South.¹⁵⁷ He eyed me suspiciously and raised his forehead in the traditional greeting of those from the other side of Cook Strait.

"So, whereabouts in the South Island are you from?" I asked.

He tilted his head like my dog Indi. He would not answer until I could confirm my credentials.

"I'm from Ashburton," I told him, giving him the secret handshake. "*Originally.*"

"Vegas," he said. "Know it well. The Devon. The Somerset. The Clock Tower. The Boston Burger."

I nodded.

"I thought you were a fucking Jafa (Just Another Fucking Aucklander) like those other cunts," he said. "You look like a Jafa. No offence."

He spat on the sidewalk in disgust. Charming. Chatting to him was like taking a time-machine back to 1980s' small town New Zealand. He was just like everyone at my high school. Literally. He was dressed in moleskins and an aertex shirt, had a pair of well-worn RM Williams on his feet.

156 Stone, O., (Director). (1994). *Natural Born Killers* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers. I am having a dig at Smith's view of capitalism and conflating it with Stone's (1994) *Natural Born Killers*. The movie presents and treats violence as a commodity – with clips appearing on the hugely popular TV show, *American Maniacs*. This, of course, is capitalism taken to its 'natural' conclusion – everything is spectacle, everything is packaged and for sale. That folks, is called letting the market decide what is acceptable (not philosophy or the law or history or anything other than dollars) – AKA: supply v demand.

157 This character represents my hidden, small town angst/cultural cringe. He is a silenced and (mostly) discontinued part of my history. By including him here, and then excluding him, I am illustrating how one has to commodify/compartmentalise themselves to enter the MBA. In some ways, he is the dark hysteric that hides deep inside – awaiting an outlet. His blow-up at dinner, mirrors my own blow-up when I arrived at dinner to find that the catering staff had not provided gluten free options. When I questioned them, they said that they didn't know what to provide and pointed to a bowl of fruit. Rather than discuss this in an assertive manner and have the situation rectified – the hungry me let the façade drop and the bogan me from the 1980s peeked through for a short, angry time.

“Let’s get a drink,” I said. “I’m buying.”

“Fucking A.”¹⁵⁸

We took a booth in the broken-down Café Landtmann¹⁵⁹ that was situated directly across the road, ordered drinks, and he proceeded to tell me his story. His dad wanted him to take over Glengow Station – a monolithic, sprawling series of farms perched preciously on the edge of the Southern Alps.¹⁶⁰ The place the family had owned for generations was larger than Auckland and Hamilton combined. But, first, he said. He was instructed by his old man to get some book-sense.

“Yeah, nah,” he said, shaking his head. “The Olds think farming is a lot more complicated than it actually is. Everyone knows that no one ever learnt shit from a fucking book.”¹⁶¹

I drank my scotch and tried not to listen to his stories about cows and sheep and marrowfat peas. He was going to piss about for the two years, he said. Have a holiday, before he was sentenced to the rest of his life on that Station. I felt sorry for him. His life was an open wound. He was just a stock character in a generic story. He had no free will. His fate was set and predetermined. He was well and truly fucked and he knew it. His job was to spawn an heir and, ultimately, join the family plot next to the apple orchard.¹⁶²

“Mum wants me to get married,” he said. “To find someone who’s good at accounting. She wants grandkids asap. She’s hoping I’ll find someone here.”

But he wouldn’t. How could he? It was impossible. There were no female accountants here. There were only white males from Jafaland. He was doomed from the get-go.

“Why did you move to Auckland?” he said. “What’s all that about?”

“I got off the bus at the wrong stop,” I said. “Story of my life.”

He lasted until the end of the day. He blew up at the catering people over the state of the dinner. He was not used to synthetic beef and overly white potato surrogate, apparently. I do not eat fucking salad because, he said, I have a fucking cock and not a V J fucking Singh.¹⁶³ And where the fuck are the custard squares? What the fuck are you Jafa cunts up to with all this fruit and organic cheese? Christ, he said, eyeing the carafes

158 This conversation mirrors the one I have with my therapist at the beginning of this chapter. In that sequence it was me who uttered Fucking A, to which he responds: objet petit a? Here, then, the roles are reversed. I am positioning myself as the therapist (discourse of the analyst), while bogan me is under the spot-light – I am simply having a drink with past self, trying to reconcile the two, trying to, perhaps, bid that part of me adieu for the next two years.

159 Freud’s favourite café in Vienna.

160 The powerhouse of the New Zealand economy has always been farming. Here, therefore, I am conflating farming with capitalism.

161 The book(s), my bogan Self is referring to are those anointed and recommended by the business school – aka the physical product that contains the empty, blathering speech of the discourse of the university.

162 In other words, in the neoliberal machine, he is not important – what is important is repeating, and reinforcing, what has gone before.

163 Vijay Singh (1963-) is a Fijian golfer. In Christchurch, during the 1990s, his name was used as a placeholder (mainly by men) for vagina. This appears to be an appropriation of the more widely used feminine: ‘vi-jay-jay’.

of wine, can't a man get a couple of tubes of DB? Where I come from men eat real meat and spuds and not this fake, fag shit. He looked at me for support, shaking his head. But I slipped further away like he was a flaming car wreck about to explode. I looked the other way. I would not catch his eye.¹⁶⁴ He huffed and puffed and slammed his foot into the carpet like Rumpelstiltskin.¹⁶⁵

The AIC spoke into his elbow. The Crisis Response Team (CRT) from Student Health's Psyche ward were in the chopper and inbound before my South Island compatriot could stuff his food hole. He was at a table ranting at the librarian about the state of the porn industry in New Zealand and explaining how someone in this shitty university ought to invent some immersive VR equipment. We could lead the world in first-class filth, he said.¹⁶⁶ By the way, are you going to eat that spud? The librarian did not respond. He just sighed and shimmered and merged with the decor.¹⁶⁷

The QRT circled and told him, calmly, that they had some fresh, homemade apple pie and real ice cream for him out the back. He nodded and said it was about time and asked why the fuck they didn't tell him this earlier and chewed the last of the librarian's potato and belched at an ear shattering timbre. He was led away and, not surprisingly, I never saw him again. When I searched for him in the glossy handbook the following day, I noted that his face had been overlaid with that of an everyman generic student – although the bio remained the same.

The next morning, when I arrived fully refreshed and well medicated, I found the student body in disarray – they had a collective, Jungian hangover. It was beautiful. They sat, slumped in their chairs and listened to a string of old white men talk about boring shit that didn't matter and took turns at going to the bathroom to vomit.

The keynote speaker was a guy who owned the only cycle store in this one-lung town. He was the closest thing, I'm guessing, they could find to an actual business executive or entrepreneur or whatever. Before he began, we were all forced to sign a nondisclosure agreement, because he, this cycling guru, had invented something so cutting-edge that if

164 In other words, I put on a protective mask and distanced myself from bogan me in order to get through the course. This fear-based survival behaviour is, of course, bullshit. You're giving those in power what they want – subservient, obedient replicators of the status quo. As Jim Morrison sagely puts it: "The most important kind of freedom is to be what you really are. You trade in your reality for a role. You trade in your sense for an act. You give up your ability to feel, and in exchange, put on a mask. There can't be any large-scale revolution until there's a personal revolution, on an individual level. It's got to happen inside first."

165 Grimm, J., & Grimm, W., 1812.

166 My bogan Self's knowledge, his homespun, rural, street-smarts, appear, on the surface, to have little use in the university setting. However, I would argue that this belief is, in fact, wrong. Instead, I should have revelled in the differences that my upbringing provided, used it to differentiate myself from the rest of the pack, and valued the rich tapestry of experiences my past had provided. This, of course, is what I am doing now.

167 Dick, 1997. This is a reference to the scramble suit that Fred wears in *A Scanner Darkly*. In this way, the librarian stands in for and represents knowledge. Knowledge, of course, is a slippery beast – it is always disappearing just when you think you have a handle on it. The librarian will appear/disappear at various times throughout the book to illustrate this.

word got out it would cost him millions, that what he had come up with would revolutionise cycling completely.¹⁶⁸

He took the stage and told us a rambling story about how school was a waste of time (true) and how he had left at fifteen to fix punctures at The Bike Shop, that bikes were his passion, and that through hard work, through polishing on and off¹⁶⁹ and pumping up and down and doing what he was told, he had been promoted over and over again. I am not sure about the levels of hierarchy in this one room retail outlet but, from the sounds of it, they were multileveled and highly sophisticated. He continued to explain that all we had to do was work hard and we too could be promoted, that it was inevitable, like catching herpes from the town bike. He laughed at his off-colour joke and finished by telling us that, in his opinion, university was a waste of time (also true). I am guessing he was not vetted and given a script (or couldn't read it) by the way the AIC was staring at him and talking into his elbow.

"You'd be better off working at a supermarket than doing one of these fancy degrees," he said. "On the job learning is where it's at."

The gold fillings in his teeth sparkled under the lights, glinted off his cufflinks, his Rolex. His finale comprised of presenting his latest invention, which he developed in conjunction with the Individual Innovation Incentive (Triple I) on campus. It was, and I am not joking, a double-arsed bike seat (DABS). It had literally two arses. He had chopped a bike seat in half.^{170 171}

"There is space for the air to cool your junk," he said. "You can take a dump directly onto the tarmac and keep pedalling."¹⁷²

It looked like some odd sex toy. I looked around at my hungover friends. But they were all just staring blankly at their phones. No one was paying him, Lance Armstrong's Bitch, the slightest bit of attention.

"Has this been tested?" I asked, startling him with my unasked for question.¹⁷³

168 There are a couple of things going on here. On the surface, the use of the bicycle metaphor suggests that I am alluding to the constant cycling of neoliberal narratives – the same story is simply repackaged and repositioned as new and revolutionary. In this way, his story repeats the hackneyed 'work hard to succeed' myth. But there is also something deeper going on. The bicycle – or bi-cycle – is also a reference to my cycling between the binary/bisexual positions of famine/hysterical/fiction and masculine/business school/non-fiction.

169 Avildsen J. G. (Director). (1984). *The Karate Kid* [Motion Picture]. Columbia Pictures. Here, the student is trained by the master through a series of boring, repetitive tasks. It is through these seemingly unconnected tasks that the student learns mastery overall. The message is clear: the apprentice/student doesn't know what is good for him and must trust the master/university.

170 Innovation, in his eyes, was not about revolution and disruptive change, but unnecessary incremental 'improvements'. In other words, he was advocating for wealth creation through altering something that does not actually need to be changed. In this way, he is breaking the old adage - if it aint broke, don't fit it - for personal gain.

171 I'm engaging in hysterical splitting here.

172 I am playing with the homophonic Pedalling/Peddling. He, like the MBA, is peddling a nonsense.

173 The master does not expect to be questioned. He expects to ask rhetorical questions, give instructions, and be obeyed.

“What?” he asked, spooked that I had spoken to him without written permission. “What do you mean?”

“Have you let actual cyclists try it?” I said. “And did they like their arse crack getting additional airflow? What, exactly, did they say?”

He laughed and looked at me like I might be insane.¹⁷⁴

“We don’t want this sort of high-tech gear getting out,” he said. “This is a top-secret, one-of-a-kind prototype.”

“But,” I asked again. “Has anyone tried to ride a bike with this seat, with the ability to take a shit mid-race? Have you tried it? Have you tried to take a shit while traveling fifty Ks an hour in Lycra? And, just out of interest, does Lycra have an arse-flap? And what about hygiene? You know, toilet paper, soap, a hand dryer?”

“The water bottle works as a bidet,” he said. “I squirted it up my own arse to check. It works fine.”

“While riding?”

He stared at me for almost a minute, his fat face colouring to a rich, ruby Bordeaux, and then he glanced towards the AIC. The AIC took his cue and glared at me, waved his index finger backwards and forwards in front of his grill, before placing it upon his thin, closed lips.¹⁷⁵

“No,” he finally said. “Don’t be daft. In the toilet like a normal person.”

At the ostentatious dinner on the final evening, complete with imbecilic guest speakers and far too much of the red wine I had been craving, I settled into a series of one-on-ones with students, lecturers, and assorted high-profile guests – it was press-the-flesh-time. While these conversations were, for the most part, as predictable as *The Flintstones*¹⁷⁶ repeating scenery, one in particular stood out.

“Tell me,” the student asked after the preliminaries. “Which was the hardest?”

“What?”

She was an athlete by trade, she said, pouring more wine. An ex-Olympian looking for a way to monetise her ideas and skills. She was curious by nature and wanted to know what the key differences were between a degree in the Humanities and one in the Business School. She already had an inkling, she said, that what they were peddling here required little more than a wafer-thin understanding of neoliberal economic theory.

174 The master perceives that any knowledge the hysteric offers is not only inappropriate (I didn’t ask for it/know your place), but utterly worthless (what you think you know is of no value to me).

175 The hysteric’s incessant questioning of the master is silenced via the university.

176 Hanna, W., & Barbera, J. (Creators). (1960-1966). *The Flintstones* [Television Series]. ABC.

That everything else that the business school presented was just orbiting around the core of this idea. Obviously, she thought differently from the other students.

“The English degree was far more rewarding,” I said. “It *was* an education. I am not sure what the BCom was. But It felt like paint-by-numbers compared to the BA. The BA requires you to actually read good books by interesting people, while a business degree is simply about absorbing a lexicon of worthless jargon and then spewing it out in incomprehensible, empty sentences.”

One of the key pieces of advice I appropriated from her during our drunken conversation was her reworking of the Law of Diminishing Returns. I had, unfortunately, bought into this limiting idea. Thankfully, she had not.

“You can work on an essay for 20 hours,” I said. “And get, maybe, seventy percent. You could probably do another 20 hours and move that up to 72. If you’re lucky. Your time is better spent working on something else. Opportunity cost and all that.”

“Wrong,” she had replied, shaking her head.

We chugged wine and eyed each other curiously.

“You have it backwards,” she said. “As an athlete, I put in hundreds of hours – mostly in your diminishing returns side of the equation - just to get an extra tenth of a second. That’s how you get to the top – it’s the hours you put in after the easy work is done that matter. Winners work for that tenth of a second. That’s what sets them apart. Losers settle for good enough. Losers worry about opportunity costs.”

Fuck, I thought. She’s right. I was reminded of a news item on netballer Irene Van Dyke. She had hoops installed all over her house and would throw baskets all day long. No matter what other task she was involved in. That’s because, in her world, the difference between winning and losing was one goal in the last tenth of a second of the game. It was like a lightbulb going off in my head. I finally got it. If you wanted to be fucking ace at something, you had to work at it incessantly, even if progress didn’t appear to be happening, even if you appeared to be stalled. All those years I had been living by a broken idea. I had been putting in minimum effort for maximum return. I had been Mini-Maxing it. Now I was determined to put in maximum effort for minimum (incremental) additional returns. I was ready to Maxi-Min it. After all, she concluded, if it’s worth doing, it’s worth overdoing.¹⁷⁷ She was sharp. I made a mental note to work with her on a few group projects. This, unfortunately, didn’t happen. She was smart enough to work out that she didn’t actually need an MBA, wasn’t at all happy with the

¹⁷⁷ This quote is attributed to the philosopher and novelist Ayn Rand (1905-1982). Interestingly, Rand’s philosophy and political positions are diametrically opposed to mine.

misogynistic tone of the course, and quit a few months in – once again proving that she was smarter than me.¹⁷⁸

“All this talk about arseholes,” my therapist began, between brush strokes, between tulip munches, between screaming at me to stop moving. “And sphincters and shit. You’re fixated. You’re still floundering in the anal stage. You’re living in a metaphorical anus. You are, in fact, an areshole.”

He chuckled.

“Is that all you’ve got?” I asked him. “All those years at shrink school and that’s your professional opinion? Just shut the fuck up and paint your picture.”

“I’m sensing hostility,” he said. “Is this anal probing touching upon a sore spot? Ripping you a new one? Re-opening an anal fissure, maybe?”

“Do you really want to know?”

“Not particularly,” he said. “I was just fucking with you. Keep reading your book. Unlike this conversation, I like where it is going.”

Lump panted. The clock ticked. I turned another page.

“Just so you know,” I began.

“I don’t want to know,” he said. “And, to be honest, I just don’t care. This is narrative therapy not proctology. We study stories and try to find truth tucked up in the metaphors, in the marginal notes, in the subtly placed double entendres. We don’t dissect and study stool samples. Keep that shit to yourself.”

“I have celiac disease,” I continued, ignoring him.

“Don’t make me jamb my fingers in my ears,” he said. “Don’t make me do fire engine noises.”

“When I was a kid,” I said, “my idiotic parents made me eat Weet-Bix every morning followed by a cut-lunch.”

“Uh-oh.”

“So, yeah, I was either constipated or had the shits for my entire childhood. For ten fucking years.”

178 While my MBA might have been a giant waste of time, it was not completely worthless. Let me explain. In John Irving’s (1989) novel *A Prayer for Owen Meany* the main characters John and Owen spend a lot of time practising a basketball shot – it requires both of them to pull it off – John lifts Owen who dunks the ball. While reading the book, this doesn’t appear to be anything more than a device for character development. However, towards the end of the novel, the shot becomes crucial in saving the lives of children. John and Owen employ it to dispose of an explosive device. I have thought about this shot a great deal over the years and tried to work out what Irving was trying to say. I finally realised that he is pointing to one of life’s simply facts: we don’t know what will prove important/valuable at any given time and that, because of this, we must follow our gut-instincts and just do what feels right. There is, of course, a hint of Taoism running through this idea – and, in particular, the philosophy of flow. In some ways, then, my reading and writing of fiction over the years and my addiction to the Academy could be read as practicing my shot/seeking the Toa. I was simply practising for something in the future that I had no idea was coming - this thesis.

“You were up shit creek without a paddle,” he said. “You were stuck in a parental inflicted shit storm.”

“Instead of working out what was wrong with me through an elimination diet like normal people,” I said. “Instead of using their common sense, my parents took me to the local witch doctor instead.”

“Elimination,” he said. “Excreting. Expelling. Evacuating.”

“He prescribed suppositories.”

“Superstition,” he said, moving into word association. “Superlatives. Supervision.”¹⁷⁹

“I have this memory of this tube of liquid being squirted up my arse while I was bent over,”¹⁸⁰ I said. “And then having to sit on a potty in the middle of the kitchen floor while dumb and dumber¹⁸¹ waited to see what would come out, see what would happen.”

“Shit happens,” he said. “It comes out in the morning, mostly.”¹⁸²

179 The purpose of academic supervision, perhaps, is to help me identify and then remove/insert shit from/into this work.

180 Freud would have had an orgasm over this childhood memory.

181 Farrelly, P. (Director). (1994). *Dumb and Dumber* [Motion Picture]. New Line Cinema. Even as a child, I was acutely aware of my parents' intellectual limitations. There were always evasive answers to simple questions. There was always head-tilting uncertainty. What interests me about this is not their lack of knowledge or education, but their desire to hide this truth from me. I remember, for example, having a strange discussion with my father about my grammar usage. It was a Saturday afternoon, and we were in the car, returning from a game of rugby. I was in the backseat caked in mud and dried blood. I was telling my father that I witnessed Stuart Lancewood poking his finger in another kid's eye. “He did it,” I said. “I saw him do it. The kid could have been blinded. Stuart just laughed when he cried and punched him in the dick.” My father, who liked to pretend that there was never anything to ‘see here’, didn’t respond to my accusation, but instead attacked my grammar. “It’s not ‘I saw it’,” he said. “It’s ‘I seen it’. We don’t use saw. A saw’s for cutting wood. How many times do I have to tell you?” I sat there in shock. I was momentarily muted by his dumbfuckery. “But,” I said. “My teacher (I tried to appeal to a higher authority) Mr. X told us it was either ‘I have seen a dog’ or ‘I saw a dog’. Mr. X said ‘I seen it’ was a class-marker, like using ‘they’ as a singular pronoun instead of he or she. Mr. X said it was really important that we didn’t mask potential intelligence or highlight possible ignorance through the delivery of avoidable dictional deficiencies.” He didn’t respond, smoked his cigarette, and eyed me angrily in the rearview mirror. When we were finally parked in our driveway, he stabbed out his cigarette in the ashtray, turned his head, and looked down at me over his left shoulder. “Listen,” he said. “I don’t care what Mr. X thinks is right. That pompous wanker is from Auckland and they do things differently up there. This is Ashburton. And we say ‘I seen it’ in Mid-Canterbury. We always have and we always will. I don’t want to hear you say it in that poofster Auckland way again. Do you want people to get the wrong idea, to think there is something a bit funny about you? Is Mr. X married? No. Why’s that do you think?” I had no idea. I was nine years old. The only thing I knew for sure was that my father was, to quote the Fonz, incorrectamundo. Looking back on it, my father was obviously conflating sexuality/gender with grammar usage (incorrect = straight/masculine v correct = gay/feminine). Interestingly, Kulick (2003) discussing the history of this subject, points out that, “Early research on language and sexuality concerned itself almost exclusively with lexical items...the assumption [was] that the specialized vocabulary of a group reveals something about [it, and that]...because the only people deemed to have a “sexual identity” were deviants and perverts, it was their linguistic behavior that was examined” (p. 120).

Sadly, when I used correct grammar around the house (‘I did it’, rather than ‘I done it’), or uttered words that my parents didn’t understand (about 80% of my vocabulary), or pronounced words correctly that my parents had learnt to say in some bastardised form (siren as si-reen), I would be (un)corrected and punished. This whole antiknowledge, stupidity training, reminded me of the re-education that was inflicted upon Alex towards the end of Burgess’ (1962) *A Clockwork Orange*. My parents were attempting to condition me BF Skinner-style (Skinner (1904-1990) is the guy who worked with rodents and food pellets to observe behaviour modification – he is the king of the behaviourists. Think: intermittent reinforcement or positive punishment) just like the doctors had tried to do to Alex. In other words, in order to make themselves feel less anxious, they were trying to overwrite my Self with the discourse of the idiot. It should also be noted, that Alex and his droogs (friends) also had their own lexicon, Nadsat, that gave them their shared identity. When Alex meets an old friend at the end of the book, who no longer uses Nadsat, he is forced to face the truth – that he is alone. When the language was no longer shared, it was stripped of all its power and rendered null. This, I think, is why my parents were determined I should share their lexicon, no matter how wrong it was – it positioned me as a full-fledged member of the family.

182 Cameron, J. (Director). (1986). *Aliens* [Motion Picture]. 20th Century Fox. This is a reference to a line from the movie *Aliens*: “They mostly come out at night, mostly” – ambiguity/anxiety is purposely built into this line. By including it, I am suggesting that I didn’t really have control over anything in my childhood, including my bowel movements. This is probably why I had such a problem with the bank monitoring my convenience breaks.

"I must have been about seven or eight. It was humiliating. It was downright child abuse. Afterwards, I'd be forced to eat some more gluten just so we could repeat the whole thing the next day."

He paused babbling his river of words that began with Sup. He placed his head on the side like Lump's. I could hear a toilet flush. Down the corridor someone coughed.

"There, does that confirm your anal stage thesis?" I asked.

"Your childhood," he said, "was an endless stack of shit sandwiches."

I did not reply.

"Kiwi kids," he sang, "are Weet-Bix kids."

"Can you not?" I asked. "Can you just get back to helping me. Can you just get back to the fucking point?"

"If Kiwi kids were rice bubble kids or cornflakes kids," he mused. "You'd probably be fine. You wouldn't have been abducted by aliens and anal probed. You wouldn't be here talking to me about shit. You'd most probably be normal."

"This is not helping," I told him. "This is making things worse. Are you trying to drive me insane?"

"What do you think this whole sad affair taught you?" he said. "What do you think you learned?"

"That dumb people like to feed you a load of bullshit,"¹⁸³ I told him. "And then they expect you to perform as normal. To go outside and play follow-the-leader. But I can't do normal. I couldn't do it then and I sure as fuck can't do it now. I couldn't digest their crap. And, I won't digest their crap. I'm crap free."

"But," he said, "you keep repeating the cycle."

"What are you talking about?"

"Industrial education is the gluten you keep feeding yourself," he said. "Even though it makes you sick you keep coming back for more. You've actually learnt nothing. You're a masochist."

"Let's not get carried away," I said.

"I think I finally understand," he said, putting his paintbrush down.

He collapsed into his Edwardian Club chair and assumed the classical thinking position – fist on forehead. I waited. He breathed out of his mouth, paused, and then in through his nose. He tapped his index finger against the chestnut leather. He tapped his foot. Beside him, on an occasional table, were a stack of books on origami. Upon the top,

¹⁸³ I'm not only talking about my parents here, but also the business school.

balanced unevenly, was a ceramic paperweight of Freud playing paper-scissor-rock with Jung while Sabina Spielrein¹⁸⁴ waited patiently.

“This is why you refuse to take any shit,” he finally said. “and why you don’t give a shit either.”¹⁸⁵

Perhaps he wasn’t as useless as I had assumed.

“Maybe you paid attention at shrink school after all,” I said.

“Unlike your education,” he said. “Mine was real. Unlike your education,” he repeated. “I actually learnt something. What exactly did you learn again?”

I couldn’t answer. I was drawing a blank. I had no fucking idea what I was supposed to have learned.

184 Sabina Spielrein (1885-1942) is a Russian psychoanalyst. She was a patient, and subsequent lover, of Jung – and corresponded with Freud about this affair. This patient/psychoanalyst connection/dilemma led Freud to propose his theory of transference/countertransference – where the patient/psychoanalyst transfers feelings onto the psychoanalyst/patient. Hence, my discussion with my therapist/myself regarding my parents is really a form of mental handball, where I bat my feeling/thoughts against this fictional, mental mirror and try and make sense of, and interpret, what is returned.

185 These then, are the twin, repeating cycles (the bi-cycles) I have been discussing throughout this chapter – they are looped together like a figure of eight, each interacting, and mirroring the other: not giving a shit and not taking a shit are, therefore, the underlying, dominant narratives driving not only this book, but my hysteria.

*...every text I read is interpreted and rewritten through my own biography and my autobiography
is rewritten as I read it through alternate texts, a reciprocal writing and rewriting.*

- Kaufmann

Chapter 2: What the Fuck was I Supposed to Have Learned?

Two and a half years later, in the late spring of 2016, I was supposed to be at graduation. I was supposed to be dressed in medieval pseudo-religious garb, smiling, and high-fiving my classmates. I was supposed to cross the stage and be capped by some aged academic, receive my scroll, and then slope off to a reworking of that original, ostentatious, black-tie dinner. I did none of those things. I made excuses. I railed against Kate, my ever-patient wife. I dug in my heels. I would not go. For reasons that are still not all that clear, I had no desire to return to the place where my education had begun. Kate blamed this resistance, wholesale, on what she diagnosed as my deep-seated inability to celebrate success. I had constructed faulty pathways in my brain, she explained, and it was time to grow up, to let these old pathways fall into ruin, and take a less well-trodden route. My 70s' dad and his ilk, she continued, had well and truly fucked me up through their insistence that you should not overtly celebrate success, but should simply put your head down and jog back to halfway.

This rugby metaphor is not as benign as it seems. As it turns out, rugby played a huge part in my transformation from gormless Norm to ever-questioning hysteric. During the 1970s, the hysteric within me was still dormant, was simply awaiting a catalyst to ignite, was biding its time. It was, to continue this theme, awaiting the referee's whistle to signal kick-off.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁶ In fact, I was very obedient at primary school and didn't challenge authority at all. I trusted those in power to know what they were doing. I also relied on them to control the bogan kids who wanted to rip my arms off for being a teacher's pet and a try-hard. When I told on them for hitting me in the head with stones or ripping up my books, they were normally strapped in front of the class. This display of violence was terrifying. The teacher would go all red in the face as they dished out six-of-the-best with a purpose-built length of well-worn leather across each held out palm. The kid would howl. I would sit there terrified. Of course, I would be blamed for this outcome and hated further.

“Why,” my father asked, on a chilly winter’s day in 1977, “do you just sit there like a lump reading all the time? You should be outside kicking that football I just bought you. You need to stop being so lazy. When I was your age, I didn’t waste time reading. I was outside finding bird’s nests and fishing. I was busy being a kid. Why don’t you go down to the park and play bull-rush with the other kids?”

Because, I thought, they’re imbeciles. Because, I thought, that would be a pointless way to waste a Sunday afternoon. I slow-blinked and did not look up from my book. I was lounging on the burnt orange beanbag in a triangle of sunshine in the living room. I was systematically working my way through the complete works of *Biggles*.¹⁸⁷ I glanced at my father for a second, considering his lame attempt to get me outside. I looked out at the day. It was cold out there. The kids at the park were feral wastrels, who hated me. I rejected his offer by turning the page.

“Can we go to the library?” I asked. “I need to get the rest of this series.”

He sighed and raised his palms to my mother. She was smoking a Pall Mall and working on her latest hobby. This time it was wicker plant holders that hung from the roof, and contained pots from her short-lived ceramics foray, for my father to crack his skull on. There were lengths of cane everywhere (which I appropriated and turned into bows and arrows that never worked as well as I hoped). There were various designs hanging about the place and at our relatives’ homes and at all of her friends’ homes. She made them cough up money for these things whether they liked it or not. She had to fund this habit somehow. Last year, as mentioned, it had been pottery. She had produced ashtrays like a factory in China. Her paint-by-numbers phase was all too obvious if the walls of our house were anything to go by, not to mention the tapestry and rug making addictions that had come and gone over the years. I was wearing one of her jerseys from her knitting and sewing foray. This was the 70s. She was a mother in her mid-twenties, who had never worked, and had already formed the mantle of retired baby boomer. She liked to keep busy. She liked to buy toys that would be later discarded into the depths of the garage to gather dust.

“Why isn’t he out playing rugby?” my mother demanded. “It’s not normal to sit around like this doing nothing. He’s been staring at that book for hours. What is wrong with him?”

¹⁸⁷ The masculine indoctrination starts early and not simply with rugby. *Biggles*, for example, was populated with real blokes who controlled their emotions and killed people for a living – mostly Nazis. There is a homosexual/homosocial element running through these books. None of the main characters marry – and there are no females mentioned – even though the stories span more than 25 years. They all live in close proximity to each other and would lay down their lives for their mates. The complete works of *Biggles* contains almost 100 titles.

He doesn't play with other kids. He doesn't have any friends. I'll invite Judy and her son over."¹⁸⁸

Fucking hell! Not Stuart fucking Lancewood. This kid had a serious issue with violence. He liked burning shit. He liked punching me in the face. He liked to break all my things and laugh about it.

"You're a weirdo," he'd say. "Why have you got a bookshelf in your room with actual books in it? Are you a girl? Did your dick fall off?"

And then he'd punch me in the guts before I could answer.

After school on the Tuesday, following this weekend of manic parental paranoia, after my seven-year-old-self had walked the four blocks home, my mother had told me to get in the car. I assumed we were going to the dairy so she could purchase another carton of cigarettes. I was thinking about what flavour ice cream I would convince her to buy me on the journey. But, to my confusion, we were not going to the shop, we drove straight back to the school I had just exited. Get out, she told me flatly. I did as I was told. She threw a pair of second-hand rugby boots at my feet and waved at the middle-aged coach. I recognised him. He was the guy who owned the dairy. He was the guy I had to ask for the cigarettes my mother sent me to buy while she waited impatiently in the car. I turned to ask my mother what was going on, but she pulled the door shut before I could raise a complaint and drove off without looking back.

"So," the guy who sold the cigarettes said. "your mother tells me you want to play rugby. That you want to be an All Black. Get those boots on. My son is over there pushing that kid's face in the mud. If you're quick, you can push his face in the mud as well."

Rugby, then, was the very first attempt by authority figures to mould me into the World of the Norms.¹⁸⁹ I was being forced to play a sport I had no interest in with kids who thought I was some kind of abnormal freak because I spoke words that they had no idea existed. It occurred to me that this was why my father had told the eye examination lady, even though I had clearly failed the test, that I was fine, that I most probably just needed to stop reading so much, that you couldn't, you know, play rugby with glasses. But I can't see the board, I said. And I don't like rugby. Sit closer to the front of the classroom, he told me angrily. And don't be stupid, everyone likes rugby.

I would like to say that I went home after rugby practice and told my parents to go fuck themselves. But, alas, I hadn't gone full hysteric yet. I was still compliant. I still did as I was told. I was still a fucking people pleaser. My father was over the moon that I had

¹⁸⁸ I have never seen either of my parents read a book. There were no books in our home – apart from the ones I bought or had been given for birthdays and Christmases. This activity was not valued – and was considered 'doing nothing' and 'being lazy'.

¹⁸⁹ This is a reference to Plato's World of the Forms (Plato, 2013).

joined the rugby team. He had played at a representative level and, even though all evidence suggested that I would never achieve this, he assumed I would do the same. He soon pushed the ice-cream-store guy out of the way and took over as coach. Now I was well and truly trapped. Now I had to participate in highly competitive father-and-son days at the local rugby club and roll out every Saturday morning to have my face pushed in the mud. I couldn't see. I ran the wrong way. I had endless bleeding noses. My teammates hated me. Better kids had to ride-the-pine because my father let me play instead. I was a liability. It was demoralising. My father looked at me disappointedly and pointed out other kids who I should be more like. That, if they had been teamed with him at the father-and-son-day, he would have won the trophy – that their fathers were fat-loser-desk-wankers. I would like to say that this horrendous shit lasted for a season or two and he finally got bored of psychologically scarring me and moved on to something else like genocide. Sadly, this did not happen. Rugby was his life. I had to suffer this bullshit for ten seasons. It wasn't until I was sixteen, when I discovered girls and beer, that I finally told him that I wasn't going to play anymore. That I was done with it.

"But you are just getting the hang of it," he said. "In a couple of years, you'll be as good as Stuart Lancewood. You might even make the rep team."

"It's over," I told him. "I'm going out with my friends."

"Those losers?" he said. "They don't even play rugby. You should be hanging out with your teammates not those weirdos. They listen to punk rock music and probably smoke funny cigarettes. Your teammates are normal."

"I hate those aresholes," I told him. "I have always hated them. And they have always hated me. I am never playing or watching rugby ever again."

"But I always get you up in the middle of the night to watch the Test," he said. "It's tradition."

"Not anymore," I said. "And by the way, I'm going to Christchurch with some friends on Saturday to a concert."

I finally made a stand.¹⁹⁰ It had taken ten long years, but I had finally got there. I had finally said no to an authority figure and it felt good. I had discovered something valuable. If you stood your ground and refused to comply, the authority figure was divested of power, they had nowhere to go. They were exposed for the impotent fuckers they were.

190 Hughes, J. (Director). (1986). *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures. This reminds me of Cameron's (Alan Ruck) decision to 'take the heat' about the destruction of the Ferrari and make a stand against his father. It is his crisis point, where he decides to make the transition from ever compliant Norm to ever questioning and challenging hysteric. The lesson is clear: if you never make a stand, you will forever be subjugated and suppressed by the discourse of the master. In other words, the hysteric is born out of his refusal to accept, acknowledge, or comply with, the master's authority.

My father, as you have already guessed, was hypercompetitive in a hugely unhealthy manner. Unfortunately, his need to be the winner, to be the one who did the celebrating, extended to me. He hated losing. He viewed the celebrations of others through some weird, broken lens. It was as if, in his mind, they were pointing directly to all his hidden insecurities and failures – even when he was a mere spectator and wasn't actually involved. For him, someone else's success meant one less portion to go around – he saw success, falsely, as a finite resource. Alternatively, if some small success was to be celebrated, he would always feel the need to claim a hearty portion of that success for himself. When I was in my last year of primary school, for example, I won a playwriting competition. I remember sitting up in bed on a Sunday night after my biweekly bath and *The Wonderful World of Disney*¹⁹¹ and my father's famous fry-up, trying to write this play. I remember periodically going into the living room where my parents were watching TV and asking about the best name for a character or how to spell a certain word. He had given me perfunctory answers, while my mother looked on impatiently from the burnt orange couch where she sipped instant coffee from a Temuka pottery cup and smoked a Pall Mall. Each time he would sigh and tell me not to get out of bed again, that lights would be out soon. The next day, when my name was called, I stood at the front of the class and nervously read my play. While I retold this tale, there was utter silence. I wasn't sure if this was a good thing or not. Nevertheless, when I finally said The End, the class erupted in applause. The teacher narrowed his eyes and asked me if I had written it myself. I told him I had.¹⁹² When the class voted for the best play mine was unanimously selected – even by the kids whose hobby it was to give me a bloody nose at lunchtime or throw rocks at me when I was reading by the library. I was amazed. Looking back now, it's not too hard to see where my love of writing originated. The play was performed a few weeks later, along with plays from all the other primary schools, at a local hall. Afterwards, on the way home in the car my beaming father said how he had spoken to my teacher, how he had conspiratorially informed him that the play was really a combined effort between him, me, and my teacher. I remember his exact words: "I told him," he said, "it had a little bit of me and a little bit of you and a little bit of him." As I sat in the back of the car my teacher's words came flooding back to me: "Did you write this yourself?" and, just like that my work was delegitimised and I positioned as a cheat and

191 Disney, W. (Creator). (1969-). *The Wonderful World of Disney* [Television Series]. ABC.

192 This sort of instinctual disbelief is prevalent in education settings. Teachers tend to believe that they are the source of all knowledge. When a student produces something that exceeds the scope of this knowledge, they are suspicious (read: anxious/confused). How, they seem to ask, can he know/do this if I don't know this? I haven't taught him. He must have cheated. There can be no other explanation. I alone have the knowledge. This false, often unconscious, narrative regarding the implausibility of the student to achieve something that is far in excess of their peers is not only textbook discourse of the university, but an ongoing issue for kids with talent or skills that are beyond the understanding of the teacher.

a liar. A fraud. I went from euphoric to anxious in an instant. It was on this short drive from a non-descript church hall to our home in a cigarette smoke filled¹⁹³ Morris 1100, where my childhood Self began the transition from being a quiet, weird kid to the ever-questioning, authority hating hysteric. I, just like Chris Taylor in *Platoon*,¹⁹⁴ had my reality shaped by a dual-headed monster. But, rather than Barnes and Elias, my twin psyche-adjustors were my father and my teacher.¹⁹⁵ I learnt a powerful early lesson on that fateful car ride: the people you are supposed to trust, the people in charge, weren't interested in your wellbeing, they were only interested in themselves and will fuck you over as quick as look at you. I didn't, of course, really understand why my father was doing this back then but, thanks to hours of therapy, I do now. If someone he knew was lucky enough to be successful, he would insist that it was, primarily, down to him – and greedily claim his rightful share of the kudos. That evening, and these two idiots, would sadly become the template for every subsequent relationship I had with authority figures over the years. Ironically, I had learnt to play a role. I had learnt my lines and knew what was expected of me. I just had no idea, when I took my place on the stage, that this one-act-play I had penned was not the real drama that would unfold, it was just the preamble for all that would follow. On reflection, I can see that Kate was, in fact, correct. My father had indeed, and somewhat inadvertently, gifted me the foundations for my hysteria.¹⁹⁶ But despite Kate unfolding this truth and her logical and sometimes passionate entreaties for me to attend graduation, I sent messages of congratulations to the few individuals I liked and respected and, instead, took Indi to the beach.

Muriwai is a rugged, surfing hotspot situated a short drive from our home on Auckland's untamed West Coast. It is the northern most sibling of the famous Karekare, where Jane Campion filmed the dark and brooding *The Piano*,¹⁹⁷ and the ever-popular middle child, Piha. On the day in question, the air was refreshingly crisp and clean. The

193 I found it interesting that during the process of writing about big picture events from my past, the more important, yet subtle, details that I had long forgotten would bubble to the surface. This was normally triggered by something quite benign – like seeing a wicker planter online, or my idiotic neighbour smoking a cigarette outside my office window. Proust (1913) refers to these unsought for recollections as involuntary memories. For Proust, these memories bubbled to the surface through exposure to particular sounds or olfactory sensory stimuli – like when he tucked into his infamous madeleine teacakes (Mace, 2004).

194 Stone, O. (Director). (1986). *Platoon* [Motion Picture]. Orion Pictures.

195 My teacher (Elias) represents the discourse of the university while my father (Barnes) represents the discourse of the master.

196 Somewhat ironically, though, this thesis actually hinges on my shitty childhood to work - well rounded, non-screwed up individuals do not tend to rail against the status quo, do not tend to see flaws in the institutions they inhabit, and endeavour to shake things up. They like things the way they are. In some ways, then, my need to change the external world, to make it better, stems from my inability to control it when I was a kid. Thus, if I practise a form of cognitive reframing here – I can offer gratitude towards my parents. Although they were basically useless, I am, nevertheless, a recipient of my worldviews because of this incompetence. In other words, I was very lucky that I wasn't brought up to be a sheep, a heard animal, by Mr & Mrs Brady or Mr & Mrs Cunningham

197 Campion, J. (Director/Writer). (1993). *The Piano* [Motion Picture]. Jan Chapman Productions. I enjoyed the postmodern dual ending of this film – the silent hysteric, Ada, both lives happily-ever-after and drowns. In some ways, this PhD will have a dual ending – potential publication v passing. Both or neither may be achieved.

sun was lazily lounging behind a rogue cloud in the otherwise arterial blue sky. As usual, at this time of day, the shorefront was absent of people. It was a John Mulgan¹⁹⁸ novel. But, unlike Johnson in *Man Alone*, I felt anxious and unravelled, I felt more like Zac Hobson (Bruno Lawrence) in *Quiet Earth*.¹⁹⁹ I dropped my dog paraphernalia in a pile and grabbed the ball and racquet while Indi bounced excitedly at my feet. I smacked the ball in a long curving arc into the ocean breeze and watched her sprint off. I have always found a sense of calm when I am here with the dog – there was something cathartic in the solitude, about the repetition, the sound of the breakers, and the unflinching, steely focus of the quintessential gundog as she waits, like an Olympic sprinter, for the ball to be dispatched. Indi dropped the ball, mid-return. She circled, squatted and looked back at me over her shoulder. It was a Code Brown. I shuffled over, fishing a plastic bag from my pocket and waited patiently. I bagged her recycled breakfast and, in that moment, as shit and sand became one and were scooped up and disposed of, I started to think back on the preceding two years of my study. I tried to work out what it was that I was supposed to have learned.

One of the things I learned in the MBA was that you got incredibly tired on the two-week international study tour. I also learned that you should always pay extra and get a room of your own. Having to share a room kitted out with Jemaine and Bret²⁰⁰ beds was a very bad idea. My assigned roommate was an insomniac who would iron his novelty, anime underpants at three in the morning. He talked endlessly in broken haiku about all things Japanese: about sumo wrestling and sushi and the need to hunt whales for scientific purposes.

“There’s heaps of them,” he told me. “The ocean is literally teeming with them. This Rare Whale Hypothesis is fake news. It’s Western political interference. They don’t want us making important discoveries.”

He ironed and paced. He gelled his hair into cartoonish spikes. He duolingoed himself to a rudimentary, conversational level of the Japanese language.

“They’re hindering our culture,” he said, sucking noodles.

“They’re repressing our way of life,” he said, sipping his Hakushu whiskey.

“They’re stopping vital scientific work,” he said, chewing strips of salted seaweed.

He was also, I discovered to my horror, addicted to J-pop, J-porn, and J-Tinder – preferring to participate in all three simultaneously as if I wasn’t in the room, as if I

198 Mulgan, J. (1939). *Man Alone*. Selwyn and Blount.

199 Murphy, G. (1985). *The Quiet Earth* [Motion Picture]. Sam Pillsbury & Don Reynolds.

200 Bobin, J. Clement, J., & McKenzie, B. (Creators). (2007-2007). *Flight of the Conchords* [Television Series]. HBO.

wasn't just laying on Bert's²⁰¹ bed reading my book. He was not, though, Japanese. His curly red hair and rolling Rs gave away the fact he was, in reality, from Invercargill. His parents, he told me even though I wasn't interested, were fourth generation goat farmers.²⁰² He brother, who he hated and referred to as Rimmer²⁰³ even though his name was Mark, worked for Environment Southland.

"My parents are so conservative," he said. "They won't even entertain the idea that rice is an option, that dinner can be served sans-potatoes. They think Japanese cars are an abomination. And don't even get me started about my brother. He's so square that the local box factory uses him as a template."

He held the sole licence, he said somewhat proudly, to distribute manga in the South Island. He spent his days traversing the dusty rural roads of Southland and Otago in a Scooby van painted with large breasted, wide-eyed, spiky haired girls, trying to convince the local convenience store and gas station owners that what the kids really wanted more than anything was to get their hands on these books. The old, conservative folk who ran these shops were not convinced. Their faces contorted as they flicked through the pages, their eyes widening, their frown-lines deepening as they were confronted with the overtly sexualised images. They sold *Turf Digest* and *Farmer's Wife Monthly*, they told him. The teenagers bought cigarettes and condoms. They didn't waste their money on magazines. Especially ones you had to read backwards like some sort of satanic demon. They had the internet, he was told, for all that reading nonsense. Yet, unperturbed, he continued with his lost cause. At night he would read the sales manuals with google translate. He would absorb the books and dream of escaping Invercargill and jetting off to Tokyo and frolicking under the cherry blossoms. But first, he said, he had to hit gold status. Only then, would he be granted access to the inner sanctum. Only then, he said, would he be shipped to HQ to participate in an ancient ritual of Misogi Shūhō²⁰⁴ and become one with the founder.

201 Cooney, J. G., & Morrisett, L. (Creators). (1969-). *Sesame Street* [Television Series]. Reeves Teletape Studios. Ernie and Bert shared a room with single beds just like the aforementioned Jermaine & Bret in *Flight of the Conchords*. Bert was the officious one who read and followed the rules. Ernie was the annoying one that kept Bert awake talking and eating cookies. Here, then, I have flipped the roles – I am now the boring one (as opposed to the hysteric) trying to get some peace, while he is the disruptive hysteric.

202 I regularly refer to goats throughout this text. I am doing this because of their innate stubbornness, uncontrollability, and their distinct difference to sheep (Nietzsche's (1886) herd animals - AKA: the Norms). Of course, there is also the biblical parable of the sheep and the goats: the sheep are good and controllable and do as they are told and, therefore, will be saved, but the goats are, well, fucking goats, so they are going straight to Hell in a handbasket. Interestingly, 'the goat', in sporting parlance, is shorthand for the 'greatest of all time'. Perhaps, the sporting community are inadvertently pointing out a subtle truth here: to be hugely successful and influential in your chosen field, you first have to remove the robes/fleece of the sheep and embrace your goatness – to be *the* goat you first have to be *a* goat.

203 Grant, R., & Naylor, D. (Creators). (1988-). *Red Dwarf* [Television Series]. BBC. In this show, Rimmer is characterised as the quintessential conformist, rule following, upholder of the status quo.

204 Misogi Shuho is the Shinto practice of purifying oneself by washing away impurity/obscuring energies in a river, waterfall or sea.

“Why aren’t you on the Far East study tour?” I asked him. “Why are you here, in the US, bothering me?”

“I pushed the wrong button,” he admitted, shaking the iron angrily. “And the PDC (Programme Delivery Coordinator) refused to change it even though I argued my case for days on end, even though I presented a Samurai sword and threatened to commit Seppuku under the golden Chicken Wing. The only reason I’m doing an MBA in the first place was to go to Japan. I wasn’t planning on getting back on the plane. I was planning on defecting. To be honest, though, I don’t think the PDC was listening. He just told me that the button couldn’t be unclicked once it was clicked. That it was impossible. That the flowchart in the manifesto didn’t have a backwards arrow. That my ticket was booked and paid for. That I was going the US like it or not.”

“You’re obsessed,” I told him one morning as we ate breakfast, as he was telling me about Kobo Abe’s *Woman in the Dunes*.²⁰⁵ “You need to get some perspective.”

Abe’s book, he told me, was about a Japanese bug collector who falls into a deep-as-fuck sand dune. He is stuck there with a woman who he doesn’t know. Each day they have to labour laboriously just to keep the sand at bay. The locals bring water and lower it into the hole. And, try as he might, he can’t climb out. He’s fucking trapped.

“There was no exit,” he said. “There was no escape.”

“Why are you telling me this?” I asked. “Are you trying to send me over the edge? Are you telling me I am going to be stuck here with you forever shovelling shit?”

“Don’t you get it?” he said. “You and me. We’re the same.”

“What the fuck are you talking about?” I asked, tipping hot coffee down my throat, resisting the urge to stab him with my fork. “I’m nothing like you. I jack off in private. I use a variety of porn. I don’t eat potatoes or rice or pasta. I hate all carbs equally.”

“You and I are both here, on this tour,” he said, “because we are trying to escape something.”

“I’m trying to escape you,” I said. “But you just won’t fuck off. You’re like fucking herpes. Like vacuum cleaner salespeople.”

“It’s just like in Abe’s book,” he said, ignoring me. “We think this MBA is our rope ladder. But the system is hell-bent on keeping us where we are. We can climb as high as we like, but we’re never getting out of the hole. We’re stuck in the dune brother. You and me both. And we’re not getting out anytime soon.”

²⁰⁵ Abe, 1962.

“Speak for yourself,” I told him. “I’m not in a dune. And I’m not on *Gilligan’s Island*.²⁰⁶ I’m in Stalag 13.²⁰⁷ I can leave anytime I want. I can take one of the assorted tunnels. It suits me to be here now in this broken, dystopian university. But when I am done with it, I am out of here. I’m in that tunnel. I’m fucking gone.”

“The professor can make a radio out of a coconut,” he said. “But he can’t patch a hole on a boat? I don’t buy it. He didn’t want to get off that island. It defined him. Hogan and Klink were co-dependent. They needed each other to understand who they were. Kobo’s protagonist actually escaped the dune, but he returned of his own volition. He realised he needed the woman. He needed the dune. Gilligan needed the island. Hogan needed Stalag 13. You need the university. Without it your identity shimmers and fades. Without it you’re a blank. You’re a Norm. And that’s why you keep coming back.”

I thought about how he never slept. How he kept following me about like Indi. How he needed to work through his obsessive-compulsive issues. I thought about how the sausage I was chewing down was probably not, like the waitress had assured me, gluten free at all. I thought about how he, this amoeba on the other side of the table, was starting to make sense, was probably right, was the most annoying person in the world.

“And,” he said. “Here’s yet another way we’re the same.”

“I’ll pass,” I said. “I’m all full-up on comparisons today. Pass that coffee pot.”

“You criticise me for trying to sell manga to all the Norms in the South Island,” he said. “You tell me that I might as well accept the fact that no one is interested in my shit but me. That I am like a Christian Missionary in Stalinist Russia.”

“And I’m right,” I said, “You’re wasting your time.”

“But you can’t see the irony,” he said. “You can’t see how you and I are both shovelling sand in the same dune.”

He ate rice for breakfast. He ate raw fish which he dipped in soy sauce. He sipped green tea. His chopsticks were a blur.

“You’re in the management department,” he said, “trying to convince all the little Adam Smith disciples that they need to come over to the Left, that they need to look at what they do critically, that they need to help the common man, the planet, that they need to give themselves over to the greater good. And you call me mad. I have more chance of organising a Yu-Gi-Oh! tournament at the Gore RSA, than you have of selling that Marxist shit around here. If you haven’t noticed, you’re surrounded by suit wearing corporate drones. Face it, we’re in the same foxhole Kemosabe.”²⁰⁸

206 Schwartz, S. (Creator). (1964-1967). *Gilligan’s Island* [Television Series]. CBS.

207 Fein, B., & Ruddy, A. (Creators). (1965-1971). *Hogan’s Heroes* [Television Series]. CBS.

208 Trendle, G., & Striker, F. (Creators). (1949-1957). *The Lone Ranger* [Television Series]. ABC. I would argue that either the Lone Ranger is a manifestation of Tonto’s unconscious or Tonto is a manifestation of his. In other words, Tonto (like my

The study tour was run by The Boss, a no nonsense, ex-military, Cantabrian, who had an Ivy league education and resembled a quintessential prop forward. His wingman was an unflappable retired Lieutenant Commander from the Royal New Zealand Navy, who I affectionally and somewhat ironically referred to as Captain Mainwaring.²⁰⁹ This dynamic duo was tasked with getting us in front of as many successful businesspeople as possible.

On the very first night, immediately after we landed in New York City, we were whisked away to West Eggelton,²¹⁰ to the sprawling estate of reclusive New Zealand internet guru Winston Wilson Watson. Watson was an alumnus of our university, so The Boss harvested his phone number from the data base and phoned him out of the blue and invited all three dozen of us to dinner. Surprisingly, Watson had agreed to this outrageous idea. This was, on reflection, the first indication his wiring might be a little faulty.

That evening, we stood about one of his pools and drank expensive champagne and nibbled on tasty hors d'oeuvres that were hand delivered by an army of well-manicured waiters, while he stood behind an art deco microphone on the wrought-iron-encased balcony and waxed lyrical. This is what we did on the study tour – we listened to successful men retell their origin story. We were, apparently, looking for the magical formula, for what made them different to all the losers out there, for the recipe to their secret sauce.

He cleared his throat and sipped his drink and told us all about his serious and unrelenting addiction to formal education. He had a string of master's degrees going back decades, he informed us, and was now completing his first, of which he indicated would be many, PhD. As we discovered later, on the grand tour, he had books and whiteboards and laptops sprawled all over his mansion – he had drawn notes on walls and windows, on kitchen appliances and bathroom accessories. He was, not to put too fine a point on it, a complete nutjob.

“My wife's in Australia,” he told us flatly, unexpectedly, and then paused and angrily ordered his minions to open the Kiwi floor of the wine cellar and bring his new friends from the bottom of the earth a proper drink and to bin this Californian piss water. “The kids like the beaches there,” he finally said, returning to the point. “The Gold Coast is

roommate) provided the truth or solution to some ethical decisions that the Lone Ranger was forced to confront. Interestingly, the Lone Ranger hid his identity (as I am doing on the MBA) behind a mask. Thus, either Tonto created the Lone Ranger as a palatable outer manifestation to fight injustice or the Lone Ranger created Tonto as a touchstone for ethical and moral reasoning.

209 Perry, J. (Creator). (1968-1977). *Dad's Army* [Television Series]. BBC.

210 This is a reference to Fitzgerald's (1925) *The Great Gatsby*.

their happy place. I need to be here, apparently. I am not sure why, but my wife tells me it is for my own good.”

He laughed and drank wine from the bottle.

“She once tried to kill me as I slept,” he continued, “with an ice-pick.²¹¹ Apparently, I was talking in my sleep again. Like that’s the crime of the century. I was giving the usual: a looping lecture about the need use your unconscious hours to practise giving lectures. She just couldn’t take it, she said. The endless writing on the walls, the babbling incoherently over dinner, the ever-increasing line of letters after my name. Unfortunately, my alarm went off just as she was bringing the ice-pick down, and I instantly rolled out of bed and went for a run as was my practise. She was never a good shot, my wife. I think she has a depth perception issue if the truth be told. She has always refused to wear glasses. I did ten miles at a seven minute and twenty-seven-second pace, naked, around the estate. I felt the wind on my penis. The bounce of my nut-sack. The sun on my nipples. It was grand. When I got back and was preparing to cool off in the pool with a few laps she went full Wile E. Coyote²¹² and slid a large planter off the balcony above my head. He pointed to the very spot. But, sadly, The Blind Assassin²¹³ missed, and the heavy planter complete with fruit-laden apple tree landed on the end of the diving board instead and catapulted onto her new dog – it was a Shih Tzu, I believe. A cotton-ball with legs. It was squashed like a bug. Splattered. This act of unnecessary violence really annoyed me. I had written some very important notes on that planter, which I have tried to piece back together, Kintsugi-style,²¹⁴ but it is very difficult. I could tell she knew how crucial my planter notes were – there is a whole series of them up there that are fundamental to my thesis – by the way she screamed when it impacted Snowflake and shattered into a thousand pieces. If only she had purchased a bigger dog, the planter may have been saved.”

We stood in silence, wide-eyed, and looked at the spot where his terracotta notebook had impacted his wife’s dog. Waiters bought glasses of Central Otago pinot noir. A string quartet began to play Dave Dobbyn’s²¹⁵ greatest hits. He was, and I am not joking, not only crazy but autistic as all fuck.

211 Verhoeven, P. (Director). (1992). *Basic Instinct* [Motion Picture]. TriStar Pictures.

212 Jones, C., & Maltese, M. (Creators). (1949-). Wile E. Coyote and the Road Runner. In *Looney Tunes* [Cartoon] Warner Brothers.

213 Atwood, 2000.

214 This is the practice of repairing ceramics with gold and other precious metals. The Japanese understand that the breakage is part of the object’s history – and is, therefore, not something to be hidden or disguised, but highlighted. This book is my Kintsugi – I am using it to piece my broken Self back together, highlighting all my imperfections as I go, in the hope that what I end up producing will, through its brutal honesty and authenticity, produce some sort of aesthetic peace for me from the reorganisation of the pieces.

215 David Joseph Dobbyn (1957-) is a New Zealand musician.

Later that evening, I had an illuminating conversation with him about our shared addiction. He was happily frolicking in the craziness of the whole thing – enjoying adding another diploma to his wall annually – while I was feeling more than a little hungover from the years of constant intellectual self-abuse.

“I can see your problem,” he said, after I told him my story. “You’re not doing what you want. You’re doing what you are told. I never do as I am told. I do what I like. The university doesn’t question me. I make grants. I fit-out sports teams. They approve and rubberstamp everything I say and do, no matter how weird it is. I’m currently writing a thesis about a guy writing a thesis about thesis writing. It’s an endless maze of mirrors, a well stacked Matryoshka doll, a snake eating its own tail,” he said, laughing and drinking and spitting wine all over my grill. “It’s a post-modern paradox, a fucking *Seinfeld*²¹⁶ episode. Giddy up! They don’t like it, but I built a new wing on their staff club and stocked it with rare scotch and hung my naked portrait front and centre to remind them that Winston Wilson Watson can do whatever he wants whenever he wants.”

He laughed again and offered me a selection of colourful little pills. They filled a bowl on his desk like M&M’s. He pointed to each, explaining the benefits and weakness, before palming a handful into his mouth and swilling them down with a chilled Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc.

“Tom Waits²¹⁷ was wrong,” he said. “Reality isn’t for people who can’t handle drugs. Reality is a drug, a fiction, for people who can’t face the truth. Here,” he said, winking, and palming me a fist-full of little white pills shaped like UFOs, “try some Dylar. I guarantee it’ll fix your problem.”²¹⁸

In Niagara Falls, a week into the tour, things started to fall apart.²¹⁹ Rumours were quickly circulated that organisations we were scheduled to see in San Francisco, our next stop, were cancelling – they were falling like dominos. The Boss was getting stressed. Captain Mainwaring was pacing. They tapped keyboards. They pressed phones to cauliflower ears. Jaws were opened and closed more rapidly. Frown-lines were formed. It soon became apparent that The Boss fed off a steady flow of adrenaline, while Captain

216 David, L., & Seinfeld, J. (creators). (1994-1998). *Seinfeld* [Television Series]. NBC.

217 Tom Waits (1949-) is an American singer.

218 This is a reference to DeLillo’s (1985) *White Noise*. In the book, Jack Gladney seeks Dylar, which is supposed to quell the fear of death. Not surprisingly, it doesn’t work. However, once the drug is consumed, the addict is unable to tell the difference between words (the signifier) and what they represent (the signified). Or, to put it another way, between fiction and fact.

219 This is a subtle reference to Nigerian author Chinua Achebe’s (1958) novel *Things Fall Apart*. One of the key themes in the novel is the fear of failure, which mirrored what the Boss and Captain Mainwaring were experiencing. However, another key idea in the book is the documenting/combining of history via fiction (Carroll, 1980: Snyder, 2008).

Mainwaring remained unflappable – he did not panic.²²⁰ The Boss’ singleness of purpose reminded me of Voltaire’s *Candide*.²²¹ In this novel, Candide sets out on a world-wide quest to recover the object of his desire – Cunégonde. But, unlike Candide, The Boss was seeking something that he couldn’t really define and could never really reach. His Cunégonde, then, was not the rediscovery of some imagined past love, or even some individual business guru, in some final, management utopia, but something far more nebulous – like Hammett’s Maltese Falcon²²² or Pynchon’s V.^{223 224} In this way, The Boss was, as Lacan points out, seeking to sate an unquenchable desire through one more appointment, meeting, or seminar. But the sad reality was much more prosaic: we were simply mice on rotary wheels eyeing a piece of cheese on the table that was just out of reach no matter how hard we ran – and, boy, did he make us run.

Interestingly, when Candide finally found his lost love he did not, much to his despair, desire the woman she had become. He was not in love with her at all. He was in love with an ideal, with a photoshopped, airbrushed version of her that he had created in his mind. The reality never stood a chance against the fantasy, just as the business leaders we encountered never stood a chance against the myths that had been created around them. They were just regular Joes who were as fucked up as the rest of us – some more so. And that’s why we quickly thanked them and moved on to the next wondering why each had been given so much kudos.

I didn’t mind that we were beached in the Falls. I was exhausted. I’d been struggling to keep my eyes open for days. The endless meetings from six in the morning until midnight had well and truly taken their toll. This kind of exhausting routine, of course, was synonymous with the modern corporate ideal. I blamed that arsehole Fredrick Taylor.²²⁵ Old Freddie T. The T Monster and his infamous stopwatch were the bane of my existence when I was at the bank. Everything was recorded and, just like Taylor, they

220 “Don’t panic Mr. Mainwaring,” is the catchphrase of lance corporal Jones (Clive Dunn) in *Dad’s Army* (Perry, 1968-1977). Jones tended to utter this line while panicking and running around. What I find interesting, here, is that Jones doesn’t refer to Mainwaring by his assigned title of Captain but by his civilian title of Mr. In other words, Jones, the hysteric, doesn’t appear to recognise the authority that has been granted to him. This may be because Jones is a veteran of previous wars, while Mainwaring is simply the town’s bank manager – his status in the town was responsible for his military rank, not his experience.

221 Voltaire, 1759.

222 Hammett, 1930.

223 Pynchon, 1963.

224 Hammett’s Maltese Falcon and Pynchon’s V are never observed or even described. They remain mysterious and unknown – much like the contents of Marsellus Wallace’s briefcase in Tarantino’s (1994) *Pulp Fiction*.

225 Fredrick Taylor (1856-1915) is best known for his (in)famous 1910 pig iron experiment. In this experiment, Taylor used monetary incentives to encourage a single employee (Schmidt aka Henry Noll) to cart 45 tons of pig iron in a single day instead of the normal 15 tons. According to Taylor the employee was removed from his fellow workers and closely scrutinized by an observation team as he set about carrying out this herculean task. Whether he was actually successful, or the experiment even took place, is highly disputed – no one was ever able to track Schmidt/Noll down and verify the validity of the experiment (Wrege & Perroni, 1974, p. 6). Thus, Taylor, rather than being cited as the father of scientific management, should be remembered as the Father of Fictional Employee Exploitation. Regardless, Taylor published his dubious results in *The Principles of Scientific Management* (Taylor, 1911) - and his teachings have been widely employed ever since.

didn't simply take averages – but rather, looked for outliers and then made this impossible ideal the new normal. Let me give you two examples of this in action. The first occurred when I was sipping horrible coffee in the lunchroom one winter's afternoon back in 2011. Two team leaders were chatting at the next table about the strain convenience (toilet) breaks were putting on their stats. If only, one moaned, the FTEs (Full Time Employees) could wait until their scheduled breaks, productivity would improve by two FTEs per annum. Additionally, one of the team leaders, a young guy of about twenty-two, had actually, he crowed, timed himself going to the toilet. He argued that if he could perform this act in one minute and thirty-six seconds, so could everyone else. I wanted to lean over and tell him that he was not only full of shit, but when he was actually full of shit it would, undoubtedly, take him a little longer to go to the John. Naturally, I didn't say anything. What would've been the point? They had already nodded in wide-eyed agreement. They had already drunk the Kool-Aid. Anything I said would simply be categorised as negative and defeatist and duly discounted. I was not surprised when a few days later a staff wide memo came out informing us to a) go to the toilet on our own time and b) that the average convenience break should not exceed two minutes and c) total convenience breaks were reduced from twenty minutes a day to ten. The memo went on to pre-emptively berate those who placed their fellow workers under pressure by taking these breaks on company time. Moreover, it stated, any individual who exceeded these times must have a valid reason, such as a medical problem backed up by a doctor's note. Non-compliance, we were informed, would result in those individuals being placed on action plans to address their inability to act like adults. I should add, all our times for our key activities were placed alongside our names on a giant whiteboard. The numbers in green indicated acceptable levels, while those in red were sliding into action plan territory – convenience breaks were clearly highlighted on this list, even though I informed my superiors that this was most probably in breach of our basic human rights.

The second case of Taylorism-run-wild smacked me right between the eyes when I returned from leave after a much needed corporate detoxification. I was informed, on this depressing morning as I sat down and prepared to push the giant telephone icon, that they had held a competition in my absence. Apparently, a young and relatively new team member had crushed all our stats and won a pair of Hoyts movie tickets. My boss looked down upon me with her blank little eyes and informed me that Not Ready Time (NRT) had been slashed from 60 minutes to 10 minutes – this was time we used to solve complex issues such as mislaid transactions or potential fraud cases and so on. The contest winner, she told me, had accrued a mere six minutes over the course of the day

and that this was the new benchmark. Every minute over this, she said, would be queried. I suppressed a sigh and asked her how long I had to get up to speed – assuming I would have a week or two to reduce this stat by the required percentage. She curled her lip and looked at me like I had just stepped in some of Indi's dog shit and said, coldly, that I had to achieve it that very day. She then asked if I would like the new guy to show me how to do my job properly. It transpired, when I confronted him about it at the coffee machine, that he had done all his after-call work during his breaks – he wanted to win those fucking movie tickets about as much as I wanted to punch him in his smiling face. Over the course of one short holiday, my workspace had transformed from a place where you could ask a colleague for an opinion to a place where interruptions were considered career sabotage.

There was a sleep-deprived madness starting to seep into the student body. Cracks were starting to appear. The drivers of corporate desks weren't used to this sort of military operation. They were nine to five people. Their evenings were filled with Netflix and scotch, their weekends dedicated to hobbies that normally involved boats or horses or both. They were getting ratty. Their shirts were getting more creased. Their hair was becoming wild. I could feel an explosion brewing. I wondered who would detonate first. I hoped it wouldn't be me. But, in some ways, I had already gone over to the dark side. That morning, for example, I had arrived nice and early at the breakfast room as we had been instructed to do. As usual, I was first. But before I could sit down and order a cup of their shitty coffee surrogate, I was unexpectedly intercepted and thoroughly berated by the waiter. He was, it turned out, a maniac who had not heard about this new and amazing thing called customer service. He was only interested in my immediate removal, in boxing me about the ears with reprimands and demands, of pointing at my chest and eyeballing me in an intimidatory manner. He was, basically, a prison warden in an apron. He was not interested in listening to me. I was, in his mind, just some dumb-as-fuck-tourist, who was screwing with his morning routine, who needed re-educating, who needed to get out of his space asap. I tried to explain the situation as calmly as possible. I told him that he was mistaken, that The Boss had booked us in early, that we had a full day planned, that he should hurry the fuck up and get me a coffee before I lost my grip on reality. Sadly, he was not open to reason, customer feedback, bullying, or other motivational devices. He just kept repeating himself like your drunken uncle at Christmas. He just kept talking over me. Unmoved.

“Just get me some coffee,” I told him. “Before I transform into David Banner.²²⁶ Before my eyes go all shiny and I spiral out of control. My fuse is burning. My defences are down. I am vulnerable to an unexpected and uncharacteristic angry outburst. It is imminent. You have been warned.”

“The breakfast room is closed,” he repeated. “You must leave. Come back in an hour when we’re open.”

We eyed each other like prize fighters. We circled. I considered my options. All of them were bad and involved various amounts of violence. I was joined at that crucial juncture, as I eyed a pointy ended salt shaker, by my dishevelled roommate. He looked at the waiter and then at me. He shook his head like Indi. He smiled.

“I’d like a green tea,” he said. “Please bring a pot. If you could perform the Japanese Tea ceremony that would be much appreciated.”

The waiter turned to him and exploded. My roommate’s hair was blown back. His eyes nearly rolled out. His mouth fell open. He looked at me and shrugged. He looked at me and pointed at the waiter, rolled his eyes, and actually laughed.

“Don’t you have green tea?” my roommate asked. “Is that the problem? A lot of places don’t have it in Invercargill either.”

“Get out!” the waiter screamed, turning purple. His head spun. His ears flapped. His teeth, I noticed for the first time, were sharp and jagged.

“I get this sort of negative, knee-jerk reaction all the time,” my roommate said, unaffected. “The people of Southland can be a little racist too. It’s not their fault. They prefer English Breakfast with milk and sugar. They dip gingernuts. They eat wine biscuits and think it’s the height of sophistication.”

The waiter screamed. He flapped his arms. His body shook. His face twisted into a Picasso. My roommate, in all his wacky splendour, didn’t seem to notice. He continued to explain how the waiter and the people of Southland were all tarred with the same brush, were the same narrow-minded, culturally barren, intellectual deserts. I, however, had reached the point of no return. My caffeine levels had red-lined. My eyes glazed over. My skin turned green. My arms and legs burst out of my clothes. The room shook. The glassware clattered. My roommate stopped his monologue and turned to me and asked me if I was feeling okay. The waiter, for the first time, looked vaguely uncertain. A wave of fear washed across his face. His pointing finger trembled. I ignored them both. I curled my lip. I cracked my neck, my knuckles, my back. They watched in silence as I slipped

226 Johnson, K. (Developer). (1978-1982). *The Incredible Hulk* [TV Show]. Universal Television.

past and walked through the staff only door, as I pierced the membrane between them and us, and sought out someone in command.

I told the waiter's superior that somebody had better bring me a pot of strong coffee if they knew what was good for them, that I was not used to being debated by people in the service industry, that having a lunatic in direct contact with the public didn't inspire me with confidence and pointed directly to some collective chromosomal deficiency. They apologised. He was new, I was told. A student. He had missed the briefing that morning informing them that the MBA cohort would be here early. He had been late to work. That, only yesterday, he had been hauled over the coals for serving guests before the restaurant was open. That he was overcompensating. I did not give two figs, I said. I did not ask for nor desire this litany of excuses. I wanted coffee. And I wanted it now.

"You could have ordered me a green tea," my roommate said when we were seated and I was sipping my horrible hotel beverage. "I don't think it is too much to ask. And now that the waiter has disappeared, who am I supposed to order from? Sometimes you can be really selfish."

Indi ran at top speed. She was focused. She would get the ball no matter what. Between ball retrievals, I thought about how I could, would, fix the MBA if I had half a chance. I thought about how, early in the programme, I had explained to a high-ranking official from the Chancellor's Office my ideas for overcoming some of the limitations I had already observed. He was not, it appeared, if rolling eyes were anything to go by, open to customer feedback of a critical nature at that time – he was only interested in hearing how great everything was. In other words, the meeting was supposed to be one of those sycophantic, mutual appreciation moments, where he (pissed in my pocket) told me how great I was, while I (blew smoke up his arse) told him the course was the greatest thing I had ever experienced. Unfortunately for him, I had missed the memo from my grandmother advising me to shut my gob if I had nothing nice to say. I tried to explain, for example, that there was little point in resitting a bunch of papers I had already passed at undergraduate level. Instead, I asked, if I could flesh out my knowledge by taking papers such as social anthropology, sociology, and philosophy. He just chuckled and ignored my request and told me to consider the compulsory papers an upgrade like I was some sort of learning cyborg. But they weren't upgrades at all. They were basically a poorly cobbled together collection of papers lifted straight from my stage-one textbooks of the 90s. I was shocked and angry. I felt duped. This was not what I signed up for. Where was the cutting-edge shit that had been promised in the glossy brochures? When I had asked the high-ranking official at which point, for example, we would be

covering online business strategies such as social media marketing, because this was one area where my own knowledge was thin, he had pulled a face, formed a double teapot, and condescendingly told me it wasn't important, that we would stick to the basics, that I could google it if I wanted.

This, of course, frustrated the hell out of me. I wanted to rage on the beach like Lear²²⁷ on the heath. But what would be the fucking point? No one had listened and no one would listen. Their nodding heads were simply a learned response to being presented with opening and closing mouths, narrowing eyes, and pointing fingers. They were marionettes on mechanical springs. No one, except the dog, had heard a goddam word I had said for two long years. She, unlike them, always listened attentively with the tilt of her head and the wag of her tail. She, unlike them, had the ability to learn and change her behaviour. Perhaps, I mused, as I stood on that beach with a panting dog at my feet, they were all happy to frolic in the shared illusion that the MBA was some sort of magical finishing school for business leaders – that it rebuilt them like Steve Austin²²⁸ and then dispatched them back to industry after their six-million-dollar makeover. Regardless, The MBA, I believed, had the potential to not only reshape people's lives but also businesses and, by extension, society as a whole – it could do a great deal to make the world a better place. But, first, it had to throw back the magic curtain and reveal itself for what it currently was.²²⁹ It also had to accept that it was not producing a line of bespoke corporate superheroes, but that its conveyor-belt-assembly-line's primary focus was indoctrinating career stalled individuals with a blackbelt in ungoverned capitalism. It was, it seemed to me, hellbent on building an army of jargon-spewing, monothematic, corporate robots. The programme was far too heavily dominated by clones seeking a few new additional upgrades for their outdated CPUs. If the MBA wanted to attract a diverse clientele, it occurred to me as another dog bounded over to join in our fun, it would need to ask why its structure and culture appeared to exclude them.²³⁰ Indi and her new friend went through their dog examination ritual of circling

227 Shakespeare, 1698. *King Lear*.

228 Bennett, H. (Producer). (1973-1978). *The Six Million Dollar Man* [Television Series]. MCA TV.

229 This is never going to happen. The MBA likes things just the way they are. They barely tolerate critical management studies, if the curled-lip response to the question 'what is your thesis about' is anything to go by, let alone far more radical ideas/positions. The MBA's inability to make real change, or accept alternative voices as valid, is best summed up by Sinclair (2007), who states: "The more I was able to mount my critique of traditional MBA learning, the more effectively the status quo was maintained. The mere presence of my subjects in the programme gave the School a lustre of pluralistic tolerance, which might have repelled more deep and far-reaching change. Indeed, there was evidence that the work I was doing was valuable to the School's marketing but not taken up in its substance. Many students liked the fact that I was there but, in the end, did not avail themselves of my teaching" (p. 470). In other words, Sinclair's hysterical methods were simply absorbed and subsumed by the discourse of the university, which, in doing so renders them as nothing more than oddities and amusements – in the same way the clown is rendered powerless once he is absorbed into the court. From the outside, he poses a potential, existential threat. But once he is an employee, once he is in the court, he simply becomes an amusing object of ridicule.

230 Sinclair, 1995.

about like prize fighters before sniffing each other's arse. Once accepted, the ball was now their competitive target. The other owner stood out of earshot looking at her phone, sipping coffee, her eyes hidden behind an oversized pair of Jackie Os. She was not really here, I realised, much like me during the majority of the papers I sat through on the MBA. I retrieved the ball from the feet of our interloper, patted his scruffy head, and smacked it out into the waves. Indi, of course, did not hesitate - she was up for the challenge and bounded into the foamy breakers head-on.

Towards the end of the MBA, I'd finally had enough of what I perceived as serious failings with the course and decided to tackle it head-on – by constructing a thesis that was overtly critical about what and how I'd been taught. No one had been interested in listening to my continuous, yet somewhat gentle, criticism. Each time I had broached the subject with the hierarchy, I had been dismissed with head-turning smiles as a blathering fool. But, just like the clown²³¹ in *King Lear*, I believed I had some real truths to deliver, if they would just sit still long enough and listen. But, of course, just like Lear, they never did. Perhaps, I finally decided, somewhat naively, they might pay more attention if I wrote about it instead. First, though, before I could make this a reality, I had to dance a jig with the Research Methods Simulator – a fourth generation, holographic, algorithmic, and lithium powered mainframe computer (HAL²³² for short), that was housed beneath the Provost's Office in a secure bunker. HAL processed your ideas and deemed if they were suitable, practicable, and consistent with the university's agenda. His algorithms were set up by an army of utterly risk-averse, black-suited zealots from the Theology of Management department, to reward conservatism, quantitative research methods, and boring as all hell research questions. HAL liked surveys and numbers and graphs that looked impressive and scientific. HAL also liked research that pointed to increased profit motives, that championed strong, somewhat sociopathic leaders, and that provided another layer of confirmation that neoliberalism was, undoubtedly, the panacea for all. HAL didn't like the sort of wishy-washy things the humanities were doing – even though it had no idea what they were. I decided my best approach was to fuck with HAL by asking for small concessions. I began by asking if it would be okay if I wrote my thesis as an extended essay rather than as a report. HAL wasn't happy. But, try as he may, he couldn't come up with a sensible reason why this wouldn't work. He just pulled a face, fiddled with his tie and told me my t-shirt was inappropriate, that real businesspeople wore suits. It said so, apparently, on page 114 of the BDSM, in the chapter titled The

231 The clown in *King Lear* is, perhaps, the very first literary hysteric.

232 Kubrick, S. (1968). *2001: A Space Odyssey* [Motion Picture]. Stanley Kubrick Productions.

Uniform of Corporate Domination: black suits & white shirts, under the subsection - the scientific link between red silk ties and profitable companies.

"See," he said. "It's a proven fact."

"Dude, just give me your answer,"²³³ I told him.

"What?" he asked.

"You heard," I told him.

Later, after a planning session with my supervisor, we decided to hit HAL with my research proposal, which contained a dense literature review of Lacanian psychoanalytic theory that applied to business education and a methodology that pointed to reflexive exploration.

"What's this?" he asked, incredulous.

"My research proposal."

"Didn't you listen to my lectures on what is and isn't real research?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"They weren't relevant."

He huffed and puffed. He pulled at his hair. He went red in the face.

"Where are your survey questions?" he demanded. "Where's your Likert Scale. Where's your in-the-box thinking? If you don't follow the rules and do as I say, you could end up with results that contradict what we are doing, and no one wants that."

"I want it."

"That's blasphemy," he said. "We want a body of work that confirms what we already know. This is far too random. Far too touchy-feely. How did you get in this course again?"

"I paid."

He pulled another face, swallowing the reality that his favourite pet, neoliberalism, did in fact have its flaws.

"This is unreadable," he said, pointing to my literature review. "It's gobbledegook!"

He straightened his already straight tie. He flattened his already flattened hair.

"He's French!" he complained. "Some of his seminars I looked at were complete and utter salad talk. His writing was far worse. It was incomprehensible."

"It's Lacan," I answered. "It's supposed to be like that. That's part of his charm. That's part of his method."

233 In *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), when Dave (Keir Dullea) begins to shut Hal down, Hal begins singing Dacre's (1892) song *Daisy Bell* (a Bicycle Built for Two). This line is a reference to the chorus: Daisy, Daisy/Give me your answer, do/I'm half-crazy/All for the love of you.

"I don't like what I don't understand," he said, "It's scary. I'm not designed for this level of randomness."

"You sound like the kids I used to teach," I told him, "when I cracked out The Bard."

"Who's that?"

"That's what I thought you'd say, HAL, my dim-witted collection of misfiring circuitry."

"This is madness!" he responded. "We like numbers here! We like simplistic, easy to understand pie charts. We like multiple choice tests and two trains heading in opposite directions and one of them is carrying - "

"Have you shown my paper to an actual Lacanian?" I asked, interrupting him. "A human?"

"Yes," he, reluctantly admitted.

"And?"

He huffed and puffed again. And finally, accepting defeat, printed out my approval.

"HAL?"

"Yes?"

"On your bike."

When Indi was greeted by another dog that was a little too boisterous, or a little too dominant, she would apply the following strategies. First, she would emit a low growl. This was dog language for 'piss off asshole'. If the dog kept up its antics, she would retreat to her safe place, which was to hide between my legs. All I would see, looking down, was her wagging tail. It's your job, she was saying, you're the Pack Leader. Get rid of it! What I noticed over the years was that the dogs barking the loudest were the most frightened. When, in the human world, I was confronted with an over-talker, a loud and verbose, know-it-all, I immediately thought about Indi and her doggy friends. I immediately knew I had nothing to fear. That's why I didn't listen to HAL. HAL was full of jibber-jabber. He was a talker. He, like all his ilk, were just terrified of change, of being replaced or made redundant, of their knowledge being discounted and rendered obsolete. And that's why HAL liked to cling to his thin grip on power.

"I'm starting to lose my thin grip on reality," my therapist said, adjusting his Che Guevara beret,²³⁴ twirling the waxed ends of his moustache. "You were supposed to be writing

234 Ernesto "Che" Guevara (1928–1967) is an Argentine Marxist, who is best known for his role in the Cuban Revolution. I have dressed my therapist in the robes of the rebel – however, this outward display of rebellion doesn't ring true: the discourse of the analyst is simply another mask (as is the discourse of the university) worn by the master. Let me explain. Each time I have engaged a therapist (always a behavioural practising CBT: cognitive behavioural therapy), their goal didn't

about what you learned during your MBA. Not talking about beaches and dogs and shit. I'm starting to think you're not actually the Hysteric. That you're actually Diogenes the Cynic."²³⁵

I did not reply. I lay on the chaise longue and simply ignored his babbling. I looked into his mirrored Mavericks,²³⁶ at the ceiling fan as it slowly circled, down upon the army of slow walkers as they moved between lectures.

"One of the things I learnt on that beach was that when you mix shit with non-shit you don't dilute it," I said. "You just end up with more shit. Shit spreads. It expands to fill all the nocks and crannies. Shit squared. Cubed. You get the picture. And that picture is a kaleidoscope of faecal browns. Of tans and fawns and other earthy shades."²³⁷

appear to be helping me come to terms with my underlying psychological issues, accept them, and embrace my hysteria, which was what I wanted (and what this book helps me achieve). Their goal appeared to be to supply me with some tactics (mental tricks I could play on myself) to help me overcome my psychological (hysterical) ticks and, ultimately, be a good, functioning member of the Norm collective (AKA: neoliberalism) (Nolan, 1998: Thomas, 2006).

235 Diogenes the Cynic (C412BC–323BC) is a Greek philosopher and, perhaps, the first real hysteric. He is also, arguably, the coolest philosopher to have ever lived. Diogenes refused to comply with any societal norms, choosing instead to live in a barrel on the street with his dogs – which he believed we should study in order to learn how to live better lives (cynic = dog-like). Diogenes would spend his time walking naked in the streets, openly masturbating, or ridiculing authority figures (both the discourse of the university and the discourse of the master) by pointing to their lack (of knowledge for the university and power for the master). He would often troll Plato's lectures, undermining his status and authority, by pointing directly to all the flaws in his arguments. This led the frustrated, argument lacking Plato to suggest that Diogenes was simply: 'Socrates gone mad'. Plato was suggesting, here, that because Diogenes didn't conform that he was essentially mad/hysterical and, therefore, his arguments were utterly inconsequential and illegitimate. In this way, Plato (somewhat cynically) switched from the discourse of the university to the discourse of the analyst when Diogenes rendered Plato's arguments impotent. It is also probably the first time that the discourse of the university rebuffed the discourse of the hysteric. In the most famous anecdote regarding Diogenes' dismissal of power (the discourse of the master), he was sought out by Alexander the Great (who was, apparently, a raving fanboy of Diogenes) for his wise council. When, at the conclusion of this meeting, Alexander (the most powerful man in the world) asked Diogenes what he could do for him in return, Diogenes simply replied: get out of my sun (Hershino, 2014: Doloff, 1991). Diogenes was pointing out to Alexander that that things he required were simple – and that he was, therefore, beyond the reach and control of the master (DeLay, 2017). Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, Hershino (2014) draws a comparison between Shakespeare's clown and Diogenes – both of which offer unpalatable truths to those in power. But, as mentioned above, the clown is absorbed into the King's court, which neutralises not only his ability to influence those in power, but also provides those in power with a structural, discursive anecdote to those truths. Diogenes, however, doesn't enter the court (the university or commerce), but remains outside of it – revelling in the madness that they prescribe to him. Thus, his power to provide the unvarnished truth remains undiminished – something, I'm guessing, Alexander the Great, a man surrounded by sycophants, would have been well aware of. The lesson is clear: the hysteric must remain outside the spheres of influence of the master and the university, accept the defining hysteria offered by the analyst with open arms, if he is to be true to himself and, as a result, have any influence over the other two.

236 Scott, T. (1986). *Top Gun* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures. In this movie, Maverick (Tom Cruise) is presented as uncontrollable and dangerous. In other words, he is the hysteric. The flight school, which is trying to indoctrinate him, is the university. Maverick, like all hysterics, must quash his own personality if he is to pass. Interestingly, it is the death of his co-pilot, Goose (Anthony Edwards), that is the catalyst for this transition. I would argue that Goose is simply a Lacanian mirror for Maverick. He represents not only the discourse of the university ("I've got to be straight with you, Mav. Right now, I just hope we graduate.") but also Maverick's Super-Ego (he tries to curb the excesses of Maverick's personality "Come on, Mav, do some of that pilot shit"). Maverick and Goose are, therefore, manifestations of Pete Mitchell (Maverick's actual name) 'split ego' – where, according to Freud, the two contradictory positions exist simultaneously (Freud, 1964: Bokanowski & Lewkowicz, 2018). However, rather than arguing, as Freud does, that this splitting is a form of defence, I would contend that it is simply a war playing out in the unconscious between what the individual desires and what they perceive the other desires them to be. The hysteric, who resists and, ultimately, quashes the desires of the other (AKA: the aforementioned Diogenes), can simply accept the internal incongruity as white noise, wear it as a flag signifying that they have absolutely no fucks to give, overcome conformity and, therefore, flourish as a whole being. Interestingly, when Maverick is ready to silence his Id/hysteria and make the transition to conforming team player (to be absorbed by the discourse of the university), he no longer requires this mirror – hence, Goose is jettisoned (is folded back into his unconscious) literally. Thus, Maverick is no longer presented as the inverted (dangerous and giving the bird), split subject but as a self-sufficient, conforming and reliable, member of the team ("I'm not leaving my wingman"). His wingman, of course, was Ice Man (Val Kilmer), who was presented as in complete control of his emotions, unflappable, and totally reliable. Ice Man was the personification of an impossible ideal – the perfect, preferred student as conceived, and ordered, via the discourse of the university, by the discourse of the master).

237 I am suggesting that when the discourse of the university incorporates other, alternative voices (discourses) into its lexicon, it doesn't change – it simply absorbs these competing voices, overlaying them with its own, expanding its own discourse (shit) in the process.

“If you could please just stop with the shit-talk for a sec and focus,” he said. “If you could climb out of your own areshole for a moment and do me a solid – why don’t you tell me what you *actually* learned about leadership, about bossing people around and having them agree to it Gramsci Style,^{238 239} to have them asking for more like good little downtrodden minions they are. That would be awesome.”

But what could I tell him? Everything I had learned about leadership had been despite the business school’s indoctrination, not as a consequence of it.²⁴⁰ He waited patiently, almost expectantly. I had no fucking idea.

“You tell me,” I finally said. “You’re the shrink. Shrink me.”

He sighed and placed the paintbrush on the palette, wiped his hands, paced up and down, scratched his head.

“You talk,” he said. “I listen. That’s the way it goes. Those are the rules. This is what we agreed to. This is not Dr Phil.²⁴¹ This is the Socratic Method.”²⁴²

“Just spit it out,” I said. “Be the analyst.”

“Let’s just keep talking about dogs,” he said, deflecting. “That’s nice and safe. Woof woof woof!”

238 Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is a Marxist Philosopher. Gramsci Style, for me, refers to his discussion on cultural hegemony, where he suggested people will agree to things that are not in their best interests, that actually repress them, because they aspire to be in the position of the repressor and believe they can get there through hard work – that the reason they are not currently successful is their own fault and has nothing to do with the structures of society. In other words, it is a subtle and insidious form of brainwashing and has the hallmarks of neoliberalism all over it (Williams, 2019).

239 I am also alluding to Psy’s (2012) k-pop song *Gangnam Style*. While the song, much like Gramsci’s notebooks, is mostly incomprehensible to its western audience it was, nevertheless, hugely influential.

240 My sentiment is very similar to the one Amory Blaine espouses towards the end of Fitzgerald’s (1920) *This Side of Paradise*: Here Amory argues: “...in spite of going to college I’ve managed to pick up a good education.” Amory, of course, is coming to terms with the somewhat painful realisation that university is just another arm of the bourgeoisie (the master). He now understands that any agency he thought he had over the world, and his longing to be a *Übermensch* (Nietzsche, 1883-1885), was nothing more than a naive fantasy – that he is, and will forever be, a prole. This realisation hits Amory after he is offered a lift by a couple of wealthy businessmen. To repay them for their generosity (Fitzgerald is making the point that, to get through life, the prole is forever reliant on the crumbs from the bourgeois table), Amory inflicts upon them a bitter, still unformed, socialist thesis. During his rant, Amory argues for change for change’s sake – and that they stand for the unchanging status quo: something he has also argued for throughout the book, but now, at its conclusion, rejects. It should also be noted that by choosing to name his discontented protagonist Amory, Fitzgerald is evoking the Latin phrase *Amor Fati* (Love of fate), which captures the essence of Amory – he always felt he was destined for greatness (his ideal fate), but now realises that this is not the case (his actual fate). Amory references Nietzsche a great deal throughout the text and it no surprise, therefore, that Amory’s car-ride-rant and Nietzsche’s (1908) discussion on *amor fati* (“My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but love it.”) should mirror each other so perfectly.

241 Dr. Phil McGraw (1950-) is an American celebrity clinical psychologist, who is famous for his confrontational style. In other words, he is not applying the discourse of the analyst but the discourse of the university – he is the embodiment of an old-school teacher, who gives ranting, somewhat unhinged lectures, about the need for a student to correct their behaviour. He is famous for prefacing his sentences with, the imperative: “What you need to do...”

242 When I was reading Plato’s (2013) *Republic*, I had the distinct feeling that Socrates wasn’t really involved in education – that education was simply a by-product – but, rather, a highly sophisticated form of mental masturbation (AKA: puzzle solving). When I thought about Socrates posing his questions to his circle of followers, I was reminded of House (Hugh Laurie) (Shore, 2004-2014) using his team to solve puzzles. They were simply mental backboards (that mirror his ever-present whiteboard), that allow him to hold conversations with his Self. They were, therefore, filters through which ideas were sifted. However, somewhat contradictorily, I was also aware that Socrates was doing what every classroom teacher does (including me): leading the students (witness) to provide the answer they desire. I should note, that when I point this out to teachers they actively, and somewhat vigorously, reject this assertion – preferring, if their arguments are anything to go by, to frolic in the mirage that industrialised education is, in fact, a free-flowing, dynamic knowledge acquisition system, rather than the hurry-up-and-fill-in-the-blanks factory that we all know it is.

“Okay Pavlov,”²⁴³ I said, pushing him into a corner. “I like a good dog story. I was always a big fan of *Lassie*.²⁴⁴ Of *The Littlest Hobo*.²⁴⁵ Bring it on.”

He thought for a while and then told me about a paper he had been reading. He told me that, according to the authors, dogs and humans had always been best buds. BFFs. Together forever. We have always been Scooby & Shaggy,²⁴⁶ he said, helping each other escape imaginary scary shit, sharing giant sandwiches, and unveiling the inequities of the status quo.

“If it wasn’t for those meddling kids,” he said. “Things would never change. Evil old white guys in masks would scare everyone into compliance, would rule supreme, would never be revealed for what they truly are.”

He stopped pacing and dropped into his Edwardian club chair and munched a handful of tulips. I waited. I looked out over the crisscrossing paths and then at Lump. He clapped crumbs from his hands and sipped some seltzer. There was a knock at the door. A team of servants entered with tea trays. They set them down on side tables. poured hot beverages and offered cookies.

“Are they gluten free?” I asked.

“Of course,” he said. “I’m not a maniac.”

I took one and sipped some tea.

“This means that Scooby & Shaggy have shaped each other,” he finally said, munching cookies down like the Cookie Monster.²⁴⁷ “They coevolved.²⁴⁸ They understood each other. They were inseparable.”

His mouth continued to open and close, but no more words exited, just cookie fragments, even though he gestured, even though his face ran the gauntlet of emotions.

“Fred was the alpha,” he finally said, the soundtrack kicking back in. “He was driving the van. He was in control. Velma was the brains of the operation. The voice of reason. Daphne was the quintessential damsel in distress. She was a danger magnet. Shaggy & Scooby were the hysterics. They were uncontrollable. They were random, unpredictable. Driven by their primal needs. For food and survival.”

“Fred was not really in control,” I said. “He was just following a road well-travelled. The hysteric is always better suited to the ‘off-the-beaten-track’ narrative. That’s where

243 Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849-1936) is a Russian physiologist who is famous for his experiments on dogs – many of which were ethically questionable.

244 Knight, 1940.

245 Rondeau, C. (Director). (1963-1985). *The Littlest Hobo* [Television Series]. CTV.

246 Ruby, J., & Spears, K. (Creators). (1969-). *Scooby-Doo, Where are you?* [Television Series]. CBS.

247 Cooney, J. G., & Morrisett, L. (Creators). (1969-). *Sesame Street* [Television Series]. Reeves Teletape Studios.

248 Schleidt & Shalter, 2003; Nagasawa, Mitsui et al, 2015.

he thrives. That's why Fred's plans to foil the monster of the week always failed. That's why Shaggy & Scooby always saved the day. Even though they weren't trying."²⁴⁹

When I looked over to see why he hadn't responded, I found him engrossed in the paper, his finger trailing the words, a hand searching for the tea tray.

"According to these guys," he said. "Dogs are easily trained. They're obedient and do as they're told. They don't question the alpha. Just ask Cesar Millan."²⁵⁰

"What about Marley?"²⁵¹ I asked. "What about Snoopy?"²⁵²

"Exceptions to the rule," he said. "Regressive genes. Anomalies."

"Unicorns," I said.

"Dogs," he said, searching for key words. "Packs. Alpha Bitches. Obedience."

He paused, smiled. Nodded slowly.

"Here's the thing. Here's why you're different. Are you listening? Have you cleaned out your earholes? I am finally getting to the point."

"I didn't realise there was one," I said. "You better not start talking about Schrödinger's cat."

He pulled a face. I put a finger to my lips.

"It's not just conditioning," he said. "It's not just training that guarantees compliance. Obedience is a predisposition. It's an inherited trait."²⁵³

"Are you making this shit up?"

"Hysterical dogs were managed out," he said. "They were terminated, literally. Only the obedient ones got to pass on their genes. It's the cornerstone of leadership. Blind adherence to authority by robotic slaves. Dissent is a trait that has been weeded out over the generations."

"Like Michael killing Fredo,"²⁵⁴ I said. "Like Barnes killing Lias."²⁵⁵

"Milgram²⁵⁶ proved it," he said. "Hitler. Christianity. Capitalism. It's all the same. Conductors controlling a conditioned, willing orchestra."

"So, to summarise," I said. "Humans are sheep."

"It's about maintaining the status quo via a dominance hierarchy," he said. "Anything that threatens it is removed. This is not about doing what is better. This is not even about doing what is right. This is about power and control."

²⁴⁹ What I am really saying is that my narrative, this narrative, is more suited to coming up with fresh and new solutions and, therefore, overcoming the status quo, than some proxy of it.

²⁵⁰ Cesar Millan (1969-), originally from Mexico, is a celebrity dog trainer based in the USA.

²⁵¹ Frankel, D. (Director). (2008). *Marley and Me* [Motion Picture]. 20th Century Fox.

²⁵² Schultz, C. (Creator). (1950-2000). *Peanuts* [Comic Strip]. United Feature Syndicate. Snoopy is Charlie Brown's dog.

²⁵³ Ostro & Arato, 2019; Bouchard, 2009.

²⁵⁴ Coppola, F. (Director). (1974). *The Godfather Part II* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures.

²⁵⁵ Stone, O. (Director). (1986). *Platoon* [Motion Picture]. Orion Pictures.

²⁵⁶ Stanley Milgram (1933–1984) is an American social psychologist.

"No fucking shit," I said. "I didn't need you to tell me this. I can clearly see it by looking out the window. Just look at them down there. They're herd animals. Nietzsche²⁵⁷ knew it. We all know it. What else have you got?"

"But here's the thing," he said. "You're not a sheep."

"No shit Batman."

"You're a billy goat," he said. "And an annoying little one at that. No offence."

"Get to the point!"

"At some point in the distant past, after the Pleistocene, one of your distant ancestors gave the alpha the metaphorical finger and left the pack. And, rather than get eaten by a lion or killed by another group of bogans, which was the norm, he survived. Most probably because he was smart and resourceful."

"Obedience is the trait of the Norms," I said, accepting this truth. "And I'm not a Norm."

"There is a very long line of your ancestors," he said, "giving authority figures the bird. You can't control it. It's in your genes."

He laughed.

"Even when it's in your best interests," he said. "Even when it is irrational. You still tell authority to go fuck itself."

"This is actually making me feel a lot better," I said.

"Don't get carried away," he said. "That's the least of your problems. There's a lot of other issues we have to work through."

This was true.

"Oh," he said. "I forgot to mention that leaders are more likely to be psychopaths. The alpha dog is nuts. Is void of empathy. Is Patrick Bateman."²⁵⁸

"Well that's just peachy."

"What starts off as rational quickly devolves into the irrational," he said. "Both are inherited genetic traits."

He looked at the cookie plate at his elbow.

"There's only one left," he said. "Do you want it?"

Before I could answer, he placed it in his mouth and chewed. As usual, he was eating the last cookie.

²⁵⁷ Nietzsche, 1886.

²⁵⁸ Ellis, 1991.

Fiction is the lie through which we tell the truth.
— Albert Camus

Chapter 3: Eating the Last Cookie

It was a chilly Saturday morning in late August 2018, when I took a winding drive through the countryside to the university campus. The fog was just lifting from the undulating, lush green pasture surrounding the properties that lined this stretch of road. Mostly they were beautifully restored villas with duck ponds and arenas for the chestnut ponies who stood motionless as I sped past.²⁵⁹ I was attending, at the invitation of my supervisor, the MBA's Entrepreneur and Innovation weekend. He had suggested that I might get some good data for my doctoral thesis through observing how I reacted to my interactions with the students.²⁶⁰ I wasn't sure how I'd feel about being confronted by the MBA up close and personal once again.²⁶¹ But the closer I got to the faux Spanish facades of the university the greater the metallic tang in my mouth, the deeper the throbbing at my temples, the more intense the tingling in my fingers became.²⁶² I tried to rationalise away these physiological symptoms as the result of one too many cups of coffee, of the series of late nights that had become the norm, of my new-found insomniac lifestyle, of anything, that is, rather than admit that I was a little wary of meeting another bunch of corporate fanboys.²⁶³ I shuddered and sucked down some more coffee. The road was dotted with clumps of middle-aged cyclists wrapped in tightfitting lycra. They

259 I am describing the landscape I'm bisecting, but don't feel a part of. There is a sense of alienation that creeps into the text. The scene is almost a tableau – lifeless, yet beautiful, but nevertheless, out of reach. And this is how I felt during my time in the MBA.

260 I was not interested in what they said or how they acted – but only in my own responses to them. In this way, I was engaging in self-analysis via the other. I was seeking to know myself better through observing myself in the MBA student mirror. I was also engaged in reflexive practice, because I was not only recording these feelings, but also reflecting upon them and asking what they meant in regard to my Self.

261 The use of the word 'confronted' indicates a combative, almost aggressive feeling I have towards the MBA. I am preparing for a 'confrontation' not a weekend of data collection.

262 Here I am clearly experiencing a physical reaction to having to interact with MBA students. This is probably 'muscle' memory from my own uncomfortable MBA experience. I am aware that my politics and ideology don't fit.

263 My leanings are Marxist in nature – I am not a supporter of the corporate environment. Additionally, the use of the term fanboys indicates that the students are not only overwhelmingly male, but also cultish in their appreciation of capitalism and the corporate agenda.

were out early to avoid the traffic and to beat back their mid-life crises. I eyed them suspiciously from behind my Poncherellos²⁶⁴ and gave them a wide berth.²⁶⁵ I recalled the last few times I had been on campus. There was a theme, I noted, that had crept into these pilgrimages. Let's call it: conjuring anxiety through bureaucratic insanity.²⁶⁶

A month or so after I enrolled in the PhD, the Fourierist²⁶⁷ invited me to a relaxed gathering of doctoral students on campus. These fellow students met weekly to chat about their work and struggles and offer each other advice and encouragement. It sounded like something I should probably get involved in. There would be pizza, he said by way of inducement, and if you are lucky, proper coffee. Before we joined the other students, we first purchased the aforementioned hot beverage from a retro caravan in the quad below the Management building and sat opposite the golden chicken wing and talked about a trinity of wise Marcuses:²⁶⁸ Aurelius, Cicero, and Thrane,²⁶⁹ and how the university system seemed to have been structured in such a way as to deter intellectual freedoms, promote conformity,²⁷⁰ and, finally, the terrible Auckland housing market.

The PhD students, we discovered when we eventually breezed through the door sufficiently caffeinated, were arranged in a semicircle about a central seat. The individual, who sat upon this throne, was tall and athletic and sported a suit jacket over a new shirt and jeans. He had the requisite corporate haircut and smiled broadly.²⁷¹ He oozed success from his moisturised and scented pores. The students sat in small, anxious clicks, eagerly awaiting his wisdom with notepads and pens clutched as talismans in

264 This is a reference to the character, Frank Poncherello (Erik Estrada), from the 1970s TV show, *Chips* (Rosner, 1977-1983). Ponch, who wore mirrored aviators, was the rule breaker (the Maverick) and risk-taker, as opposed to his clean-cut, steady-as-she-goes partner, Jon Baker (Larry Wilcox). Here, once again, just like in the aforementioned *Top Gun* (Scott, 1986), we see the duality of the rebel (Maverick/Ponch) juxtaposed against the status quo (Jon/Ice Man). Both Jon and Ice Man are presented as the perfect example, the template for Ponch and Maverick (students) to follow. However, it is the combination of these two discourses, rather than the overlaying of one with the other, that forms a far greater, more powerful whole. In fact, I'd go so far as to suggest that without the each other, their wingman (mirror), that they would lose their definition, purpose, and narrative footing.

265 The well-heeled, middle-aged, white office workers have traded their weekday suits for another kind of uniform: lycra (an artificial costume). I don't just want to avoid them in the here and now – but also the possibility of ever becoming them.

266 I am alluding to one of my central arguments that the university has become an overly officious, rule following institution – and that this has been constructed as a type of defence to protect its position as gatekeeper, and distributor, of knowledge.

267 Charles Fourier (1772–1837) is a 'pre-Marxist' French intellectual. I chose to use Fourier and, by extension, Fourierism here, because I want to juxtapose it (and his utopian vision) against the cookie-cutter (almost homophone) Fordism that has infiltrated the university. All the students are basically Model Ts rolling across the stage to get their scroll. It is ironic that one of the key arguments against communism is that it wants to shrink individuality, yet the champion of capitalism, of individuality, Henry Ford, made identical black cars on a production line.

268 I am using this name as a homophone for Marxist.

269 Marcus Aurelius (161-180 AD) is a Roman Emperor & philosopher; Marcus Cicero (106 BC–43 AD) is a Roman Statesman & Philosopher; Marcus Thrane (1817-1890) is a Norwegian labour movement leader.

270 This is achieved, in part through inappropriate KPIs – such as instructing the academic staff to seek publication in so called 'A' journals rather than produce work that is considered fringe (like this work for instance) yet is important to them. Hence, the work produced cements the university's position (ie, it solidifies the status quo), while simultaneously silencing dissenting/alternative voices that seek change or a plurality of ideas (Sinclair, 2007). Additionally, universities are also faced with a corporate growth model, which requires more bums on seats + passed students + positive student course evaluations = continued funding and job security (Alakavuklar, Dickson, & Stablein, 2017: Ruth, Wilson, Alakavuklar, & Dickson, 2018).

271 This is what I (wrongly) thought I looked like when I stood in front of the mirror.

anticipation. Behind this semicircle of the young and eager, was another - this one was populated with a triumvirate of androgynous aging academics. They sat cross-legged, adjusting their thick rimmed glasses, clearing their throats, narrowing their attention onto the seated individual.²⁷² The whole thing reminded me of the interrogation scene from *12 Monkeys*²⁷³ where Cole (Bruce Willis) had to try and retell his journey(s) into the (his) past under the stern gaze of the analyst(s).²⁷⁴ And, just like Cole, he proceeded to delve back into his dark and terrifying history. He began to rattle off his PhD story in fragmented, disjointed layers. It was a sorry list of anecdotes about long nights and wasted time. He was, I guessed, sounding a warning. Learn from my mistakes, he seemed to be saying. Listen to me. I know. I've been there. You don't want to be there. There were knowing nods. He was preaching to the converted - to those who were destined to repeat these sad tales, like it or not. One of the stories he unfolded was about his manic desire to write a thousand words a day. He had fixated on this number. He would hit this word limit, he said, even if it meant he had to write his name, repeatedly, for a third of them. In that instant, as his insane confession spewed forth from his flapping lips, he morphed from the sympathetic James Cole of *12 Monkeys* into the unhinged Jack Torrance (Jack Nicholson) from *The Shining*.²⁷⁵ I could see him, my PhD confessor, in the library of the

272 See: Socratic Circles (Copeland, 2005). As mentioned above, I am not a fan of this kind of approach – it is still teacher-led, despite the rhetoric to the contrary and, therefore, can't be separated from the desires of the teacher (discourse of the university). I prefer a completely student-led (anit)pedagogy. And here's why. When we decided that school wasn't working for my youngest son, we removed him during year 8, and began our home-schooling journey. This involved going through a long period of trial and error. We began by using government approved texts (basically copying school at home), moved through a series of more bespoke programmes (a modified version of school at home), before abandoning this completely and rebooting our fundamental understanding of what teaching and learning was about at its core. We basically started to close our ears to advice, the Ministry of Education, my teacher training, and began listening to our gut (we're getting close to Taoism again here). And what our gut was screaming at us was that the shit we were pushing was not education, it was not about knowledge acquisition or self-improvement, it was about absorbing useless government approved facts, and was complete and utter bullshit. Instead, we embraced, and entered, a period of deschooling (Illich, 1971: Hern, 1996). This decschooling process was hugely beneficial for breaking the chains of indoctrination that years of industrialised education had provided. The recommended duration is a month for each year at school. During this period, we let our son re-find himself, let him peel off all the artificial layers, let him work out what he was interested in. Then, without our involvement, he simply entered the wonderful world of unschooling (Gray & Riley, 2013: Rolstad & Kesson, 2013). In other words, he began to follow his own desires and hyper-focus on the subjects that got him up in the morning – which was a love of animals (particularly birds and insects). He read everything he could find in the library and online about it. He went birding and insect hunting for hours upon end. It was incredible to watch. He was excited and was acquiring vast swathes of knowledge in the process. As a result, when he was 15, he was granted an exemption to study towards a Certificate of Companion Animal Care. He had wanted to take this course at 14, but they had insisted he wait another year. In order to convince them he could do this course he had to meet with the Director of Studies and tell his story. Within minutes, this guy, who has a PhD in the sciences, realised that my son knew far more about specific animals than he did. Not surprisingly, he was granting admittance and, ultimately, passed with distinction. None of this surprised us. He wasn't there for the certificate – he was there for the knowledge. As a result, at 16, he was offered a place in a Bachelor of Applied Science (ecology) programme. My son doesn't consider himself involved in studying, academics, or education - he just sees it for what it is: a context in which he can explore his passions. I am convinced his journey, and my research into deschooling and unschooling, was instrumental in forming my views and decisions regarding the content and construction of this doctoral thesis.

273 Gilliam, T. (Director). (1995). *12 Monkeys* [Motion Picture]. Universal Pictures.

274 There is also knowledge transference going on here. The PhD graduate is disseminating knowledge to the students who are wedged in between the academics and himself. Thus, the knowledge has to be filtered as the orator wonders what role the Other desires him to play – the students want him to be a guru, a mentor, while the academics want him to provide the appropriate signposts and maps. In other words, he has to walk a fine line between cliché, propaganda, and knowledge.

275 Kubrick, S. (Director). (1980). *The Shining* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers.

Overlook writing redrum²⁷⁶ in long strings of crazy – the truth reflected in his glazed and demented eyes. It occurred to me that I had inadvertently, just like the insurance assessor (Edward Norton) in *Fight Club*,²⁷⁷ invaded some weird fringe group therapy session. It also became glaringly obvious that I wasn't one of these people. I did my therapy solo and I didn't write my name more than I had to.²⁷⁸ I eyed the stack of pizza boxes sitting on the counter and then the clock and then the door. But then, without warning, he paused unexpectedly as if reading my unspoken thoughts. I felt compelled, in that moment, to refocus and pay attention.

"Everyone here's confirmed, right?" he asked, offering his toothy smile again, his eyes darting about their sockets like Scott Tracy's from *Thunderbirds*.²⁷⁹ "You're all good to go?"

All good to go where? There were nods and affirmative murmurings. Confirmed what? It sounded like some sort of religious ceremony. It sounded like the sort of thing they did for mafia wiseguys when they made their bones. I had no idea what he was talking about. I shrugged. But, try as I might, I could not flick off the thin tentacle of anxiety that had started to curl about my throat. Fuck, I thought. What's he on about?

The E&I weekend was all set to go when I arrived. I grabbed terrible coffee and found a spot in the corner and made myself (un)comfortable. The MBA students were filing in. I watched as they searched for their name tags like minor guests at your second cousin's wedding. I opened my laptop and tried, unsuccessfully, to get online. Out of the corner of my eye, as I argued with the firewalls and forms, as I clicked and typed and swore to myself, I clocked one of the students. He looked kind of familiar and I wondered where I knew him from. And then the sad truth came crashing down. He used to work with me at the bank. I pushed the panic-attack-genie back into her bottle and took a series of deep breaths. His presence threw me out of the comfortable anonymity I was hoping to use as

276 I chose to draw this allusion because I believe the standard PhD format 'murders' creativity. It seeks, through its paint-by-numbers structure(s), consistency (conformity) and rewards those who seek the comfort of risk averse knowledge creation (doing what one is told and following the rules) over cage-rattling risk takers (doing what you like and making up the rules as you go).

277 Fincher, D. (Director). (1999). *Fight Club* [Motion Picture]. 20th Century Fox.

278 But, let's be honest here for a second – there was something familiar (and uncomfortable) in the mirror provided by the PhD graduate. When I was writing novels years ago, I often set myself arbitrary word targets. I had also tried to find published writers to listen to – and attempted to mirror their lives in the false belief that their success would somehow rub off on me. It wasn't until years later that I realised that this path was fraught with disappointment. One has to find their own path, has to close out those false voices, has to listen to their own gut and dance to their own tune. In other words, his story was a little too close to the bone for my liking.

279 Anderson, G. (Creator). (1964-1966). *Thunderbirds* [Television Series]. ATV. This Thunderbird reference is an allusion to 'puppets' saving us from disasters – usually of our own making. The puppet is, of course, operated by strings (of influence), and although they appear independent, are, in fact, doing the bidding of others. The help that I am getting on this occasion is wrapped up as being necessary for our own good – rather than the fear based, ideological conditioning that it actually is.

a (mirror) shield.²⁸⁰ I felt the coffee burn in the back of my throat. I would have been happy just being the PhD guy down the back of the room taking notes. But now the real me was about to be exposed – to be torn from his hidey-hole and waved about for all to jeer at. He, my banking colleague, knew my sad and dysfunctional work history. He, unlike me, was one of the chosen ones at the bank. He was one of the few who got to move through the system. They liked him. He was fast, unquestioning, and malleable. I was not. Basically, his experience at the bank was the mirror opposite of mine. Why then, I wondered, was he doing an MBA? Was the bank paying – like it had refused to do for me? I felt, as these anxiety-laced ideas cascaded about me, like I had just taken on the role of Golyadkin senior from Dostoevsky's *The Double*.²⁸¹ In this work, Golyadkin, a titular councillor,²⁸² was confronted with a mirror image of himself. But, unlike our hero who was paralysed with anxiety and fear, who was socially inept and impulsive, his double was charismatic, charming, steady, and solid. Of course, his double was simply a figment of his own fragmenting sanity. His slide into crazy-town was a result of the battery-hen-like existence he was forced to lead. He worked within a hierarchical bureaucracy, much like the bank, that squeezed his personality until it burst out in all sorts of unhealthy ways. To gain an illusion of control²⁸³ he had to conjure a version of himself that was cool and successful, because the chances of that happening in reality were impossible. This premise, interestingly, was also employed by Chuck Palahniuk in the aforementioned *Fight Club*.²⁸⁴ Here the loser narrator created an imaginary alter ego (Tyler Durden), who was a winner, so he could function in the constrictive (post)modern world he inhabited. My ex-colleague's presence was, annoyingly, a tangible reminder of my tragic corporate life. He, my doppelganger, was the manifestation (my Tyler Durden perhaps) of the corporate fantasy that I had sought but had not been able to achieve. And

280 See the Painting: *Rinaldo and the Mirror-Shield* (1650) by Francesco Maffei. Also see the epic poem by Torquato Tasso (1581) *Jerusalem Delivered*. What I am hoping to do, therefore, is to present as the other (as a mirror for them) – someone that they will look at and view by my academic credentials and not my CV or identity. In this way, I hope to be protected from their pointed questions and overly inquisitive questioning – I have found MBA students like to decide upon hierarchies when placed in group situations. This is, of course, decided upon by your current job in the 'real world'. As I did not have one, I should be able to sit outside this pecking order. In this way, I would be a kind of non-person, identity-less, because MBA students (generally) tend to conflate identity and occupation – "I am Chief Executive at XYZ"

281 Dostoevsky, 1846.

282 Titular: having the title and usually the honors belonging to an office or dignity without the duties, functions, or responsibilities see: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/titular>. Additionally, and somewhat ironically, he is a councillor – someone who is supposed to offer sage advice.

283 For an individual, accepting employment should not be viewed as a time of celebration - as we have been conditioned to do through the ideological state apparatus (schools, family, and so on - see: Althusser, 1970), but as a time of mourning. This is because employment requires the unconscious relinquishing of personal desires as they are subsumed and overlaid by those of the employer. It is not simply the individual's time that is purchased (through wages), therefore, but their psychological and physical independence.

284 Palahniuk, 1996.

now he was here in the flesh, on my turf, to remind me of all my failings. I stood and sloped off to the bathroom to pull myself together.²⁸⁵

A few weeks after my PhD therapy session, I was summoned out to campus for the requisite formalities. I had to meet with the PDC and get the lay of the land. There was a bitter sting of irony attached to this meeting. I had been forced through sheer need (the university had declined my scholarship application) to seek a job – a place to travel to on the bus in the morning with the other cube-farm prisoners and work for a few dollars so that I could then donate this money to the supermarket and the landlord. What was it that Marx said again?²⁸⁶ I was also, somewhat prophetically, warned by a friend, who had previously worked there, that this job was going to be a nightmare. It is toxic, she said matter-of-factly. Disorganised. It's a horror show. She told me how she had to imagine, so their insanity wouldn't affect her, walking around in a giant invisible bubble. But it did not matter how many invisible bubbles she constructed, because she was unceremoniously fired anyway – she did not fit the culture, apparently. She needed to be more sociopathic, perhaps, or maybe have been the proud owner of a handful of borderline personality disorders. The job I took was the position of Course Delivery Coordinator (CDC) at the School of X-. On the surface, this role seemed quite prosaic – it's the sort of job you can imagine your aunt doing. However, this role, and I am not joking here, may well be the worst job I have ever had. Worse than the six weeks of stacking bags of grain at the seed cleaning factory when I was eighteen (at least I got fit). Worse than when I had to sell men's underwear to octogenarians at the old-fashioned department store in Christchurch (at least I got to find out how angry people can be when they discover the underpants they have been wearing since 1900 have now been discontinued). Worse than all the shitty gas stations I worked at as an undergrad (at least I got to discover how hangovers and petrol fumes don't mix). Worse, in fact, than all of the horrible jobs I have stacked up in a giant unsteady pile of Jenga in my brain. The role I was assigned was shrouded in mystery – my boss only had a vague idea of how my predecessor did the job (luckily, though, she had left an e-manual complete with broken-links and out of date information). This meant I had a list of tasks, but no clear path to achieve them. When I asked her how I was expected to carry out these jobs when I didn't

285 On reflection, I can see that the merging of these two worlds (corporate and university) is at the heart of my uncertainty/anxiety. Normally, in the university setting, I am comfortable, confident, perhaps even a little arrogant. Conversely, in the corporate setting, I'm anxious, unsure, and reluctantly submissive. Thus, the unexpected merging of these worlds through the introduction of an ex-work colleague, tips those nicely compartmentalised fears all over the confident façade my university Self presents.

286 He said, among other things that will be discussed below, that in order to become wealthy you need to own the means of production, not be them.

even know what the jargon meant – that I didn’t even know what she was saying half the time (this particular field of study is heavy on the argot), she would give me some bloated explanation, which I quickly translated as: I have no idea, you are on your own, please stop asking, you are making me uncomfortable. But I did not stop. This continuous questioning of my boss (and, by extension, the role and her role and, of course, the company) was quickly, and successfully, turned back upon me as a clear indication of my incompetence – why, they seemed to be asking, couldn’t I just do it, what was wrong with me? Why did I have to cause issues and rock the boat? Why was I insistent on making them look bad? Well, I can actually answer that last question: because, I was a Lacanian mirror. I was the other in this twisted relationship, reflecting back to them all their hideous deformities. I wasn’t making them look bad, they did that all on their own.

In this role, one of the few tasks I was able to perform, with any semblance of competence, was to invite new students to come in to discuss the lay of the land. It was my job to force a good, cold cup of boredom down their throats for good measure. I had to quiz them and get them to complete forms – fill in little empty rectangles, and tick boxes and do shit that, quite frankly, made me want to hurl myself from the building (we were on the 8th floor). These meetings were pointless – everyone knew it, but they kept me and my boss and a few of the other minions employed, so they would continue.²⁸⁷ This, then, was why my meeting with the PDC was making me feel so uncomfortable.

The PDC shook my hand and tried to form what he most likely hoped was a smile. He was short and portly. He was about fifty with a receding hairline and a pair of heavily rimmed spectacles. His voice was high-pitched and he laughed at his own dad jokes nervously. At his feet sat a mechanical dog.²⁸⁸ We’re not allowed real ones, he said sadly, tapping its aluminium sides affectionately. He was flanked by the librarian, who was here to give me the good oil, he said, on research, and an administrator, who sat off to one side, motionless. He appeared to be either asleep or offline. His head was lolled forward, his hand robotically tapped his mouse, even though his computer screen was blank. The librarian was covered in chalk dust and when he moved he seemed to shift and merge with his surroundings. Can I tell you a story about how best to survive the PhD? The PDC asked. No, I thought. Please don’t.

287 I am happy to announce that this job did not last long. As I was ideating about resigning, I was unexpectedly let go under the 90-day trial rule. It appears that my lack of giving a fuck was not as discreet as I had imagined. Interestingly, I had been asked by my boss’s boss to rattle some cages, but when I did this (I wrongly pointed the finger at the broken leadership team and not the line workers for the lack of productivity, which they had smugly assumed I would), I was quickly snuffed out like a minor character on *The Sopranos* (Chase 1999-2007). In fact, and I am not exaggerating here – within 30 minutes of my email pointing out their personal flaws I was frogmarched from the premises. I didn’t even have time to retrieve my lunch.

288 This is a reference to K-9, the Doctor’s mechanical dog from *Dr Who* (Newman 1963-).

While he babbled away, animated and happy, the administrator came back online and handed me a thick wedge of paperwork from within a cavernous filing room, and demanded I tick endless boxes and sign unread declarations and so on. He twitched and rolled his eyes and murmured inappropriately about my questions and my inability to tick and sign without reading. When the PDC finally concluded his sermon, the administrator took himself outside and joined a flash-mob for Tai Chi.²⁸⁹ The PDC set down his gilt-edged copy of the BDSM and waited patiently for my response. He did not look pleased when I had nothing to offer but a bleeding nose and a thumping headache. He shook his head, pulled a face, raised his eyebrows, and swivelled to the librarian. For a second, I could not see his bookish colleague. He had vanished. But then he shimmered back into view in front of the photocopier. He cleared his throat, which sounded like the fluttering of pages, and commenced an impromptu PowerPoint presentation on the need for constant reading. I was well and truly addicted anyway. He might as well have been urging Ernest Hemingway to have another carafe of Château Margaux²⁹⁰ or begging Renton (Ewan McGregor) to take another vial of Mother's (Peter Mullan) Skag.²⁹¹

After the failed ideological conditioning and pointless library propaganda, the PDC frogmarched me through the maze-like university corridors. He was giving me the grand tour. He was, he said, taking me to observe the PhD students at their toil. It was as if they were some sort of bizarre modern art installation. And, then, there they were, all slumped in front of computers, just like the battery hens who, once-upon-a-time used to occupy this space, looking suicidal.²⁹²

"Look," he said. "This is you. You've been allocated the middle desk on the second row, one from the back. Number 129, if I am not mistaken. Your productivity will be monitored electronically. There will be no need for monthly reports."

The fluorescent tubes hummed. The server hummed. The librarian hummed a Bavarian drinking song. The students stepped forward, timidly, to shake my hand and offer me wide-eyed cries for help. They introduced themselves by desk number. Their eyes darted to the PDC and back to me again checking that they were performing their role to his satisfaction.

289 The flash-mob is an allusion to the seemingly chaotic yet highly choreographed and organised university system. Tai Chi, while promoted as a form of meditation is in fact a martial art – the inbuilt duality in both these activities reflects the organisation/disorganisation, risk taking/risk averse knowledge seeking/knowledge dispensing nature of the university.

290 Ernest Hemingway named his daughter after this particular wine.

291 Boyle, D. (Director). (1996). *Trainspotting* [Motion Picture]. Miramax. It is interesting that Renton's habit requires him to constantly desire a return to (a surrogate) Mother (the big Other), who provides a soothing (drug) cure to the physical horrors that his own lack (of drugs/hope/a future) conjures, and makes him, for a short time, feel whole. Somewhat ironically, this wholeness he experiences also renders him trapped in a cyclical self-destructive process. It is only when Renton finally 'chooses life', and abandons the pseudo-comfort mother's skag provides, that he become truly free. Applying this metaphor to myself, I can clearly see that I am addicted to education and my surrogate mother is, of course, the university. If I am to do a Renton and choose life, I must also seek to sever the cycle by overcoming by addiction to the faux comfort it provides.

292 The university grounds were once a chicken farm – hence the aforementioned golden chicken wing sculpture.

“Hi, I’m 86,” said a voice from the shadows, his hand thrust forward for shaking, like Maxwell Smart.²⁹³ “We’ll be neighbours. You don’t breathe too loudly do you? I only ask because the last guy was a mouth breather and it really wore me down.”

The PDC eyed him angrily and the librarian made a strange gesture very much like one Piri Weepu²⁹⁴ used to make at the end of Kapa o Pango²⁹⁵ and the student fell back into the shadows. Sadly, I did not get to answer. I didn’t get to tell him that he needn’t worry, that I’d be working remotely, that my desk would just be a placeholder, that I didn’t, as it happened, breathe through my mouth.

On the way back to his office the PDC told me in a dramatic, conspiratorial aside to be wary of my supervisor. He is, he said, just a naughty little schoolboy.

“He often doesn’t follow the rules and goes off script. It is very difficult for me to control people like this,” he smiled. “But controlled he must be. Otherwise, the machine breaks down. And when the machine breaks down, we break down. And I simply cannot allow that.”²⁹⁶

Back at his office I was re-seated and forced to take a polygraph.

“It’s standard procedure,” he said. “You’ll have to wear one during the confirmation ceremony anyway, so you might as well get used to it. There’s nothing to worry about.”

I was also forced to spit in a tube and give a stool sample.

“We like to do these tests to ensure you are basically normal,” he said. “That you don’t stray too far from the mean?”

“Okay,” I replied, offering the hint of a smile. “But, tell me, what’s wrong with the odd outlier?”

The librarian and the administrator looked at each other and produced false smiles before shaking their heads disappointedly.

“You’re hysterical!” the PDC chuckled. “But seriously. My advice would be to stop asking questions. It’s not a good look. It makes you appear needy and weak.”²⁹⁷ You need

293 Brooks, M., & Henry, B. (Creators). (1965-1970). *Get Smart* [Television Series]. CBS Productions. I picked this show because I am interested in the link (co-dependency/duality) between Control (the discourse of the university) & Kaos (the discourse of the hysteric). It is also somewhat ironic that the USA/capitalism is defined as Control (something that the West, in its fetishisation of individualism, rails against) whereas the USSR/communism is designated as Kaos (something that is normally presented as the negative end of freedom).

294 Former All Black rugby player.

295 All Black Haka.

296 This line is delivered by Sargent Barnes (Tom Berenger) in the movie *Platoon*. Barnes represents the status quo (the discourse of the master) – whereas the soldier he has just killed, Elias (Willem DeFoe), represents the discourse of the hysteric. In this way, the master (fires) silences dissenting voices and keeps hold of power.

297 When I was teaching at one of Auckland’s premier boys’ schools, the headmaster actually gave me this piece of advice. He also told me to shelve any fancy teaching ideas I had. We just do, he said, chalk & talk here. You are the expert, he said. The boys don’t teach themselves – that’s a load of bullshit. The blind do not, he said, lead themselves for a very good reason. No, I thought, they have dogs for that purpose. We were in an institution defined by a strict dominance hierarchy. He was the pack leader – the alpha. I was just another working dog. The students were puppies to be indoctrinated into this broken belief system. They weren’t there to learn how to think for themselves in the world about important matters, they were there to learn about positioning, and mobility, within a hierarchy. Let me explain. The students were referred to by surname only. Thus, their assigned identity was scrapped right from the get-go. They were their father’s son and that was all. On the very

to exude confidence – not nervous uncertainty if you want to get through the confirmation process. Now we just need a retinal scan for the after-hours access, and then we'll send you to the lab for the psychometric testing."

In that moment, I considered leaping to my feet and sprinting out of the building and driving off like Jesse Pinkman at the end of *Breaking Bad*.²⁹⁸ And, although this would have relieved the short-term tension, it would probably have caused a long-term impact in my academic career, so I resisted my urges and repeated my favourite calming mantra: Strength, Positivity, Wisdom, Calm. PhD students funnelled in to ask why their phone access has been denied or why the photocopier was treating them like a criminal and other assorted shit you'd expect from an episode of *The Office*.²⁹⁹ The PDC's broken machine metaphor did not, it appeared, extend to actual appliances. These requests were dealt with by the semi-awake administrator. He was dismissive. He was just like the disapproving aunt in Lois Shawver's *Lacan's theory of Self and the Story of the Last Cookie*.³⁰⁰ He was making the students feel bad for asking him to do his job. He was shaming them for not fixing the issues themselves. Try XYZ he seethed with headshaking frustration before slumping back in front of his blank PC and clicking his mouse even though it wasn't plugged in. The barking metallic dog, which sounded like Stephen Hawking laughing, provided a surreal soundtrack to the ongoing madness. But the students were soon back, apologetically, with more questions. Their problems remained unresolved. I am guessing they would never be resolved. If they wanted to make the nightmare stop, if they wanted to escape their Combine-like existence, they would have to hurl the photocopier through the square window just like Broom at the end of the aforementioned Ken Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* and run for their lives.

"Now, speaking of confirmation," he said, considering me narrowly.

"Yes," I said. "I've been meaning to ask –"

But he was not listening. His ears were ornamental.

"When are you scheduled to perform it?"

first day of high school, each student had to sit a battery of tests, run around the Auckland domain, throw a ball, sing, swim and so on. It was a day dedicated to placing the students on the normal curve. I remember watching the students who came in first or second on the run being told by the running coach that they were on the team. No one had asked them if they wanted to be on the team – they were simply on the team because their skills said so. The same with the kids who could sing or play the piano – they were in the band/choir/orchestra like it or not. On the second day, the headmaster assigned this new batch of third formers to their classes. He read out their names from #1 to #300. They were assigned to a class (3A to 3M) depending on how they did on the tests the day before. At the end of each term this process would be repeated. Students would be reshuffled depending on how they did. On each student's school report their form position was recorded (23/300) and their class position (3/30). This way, the headmaster said, everyone knows where they stand. The boys like it, he said. It instils competitiveness. And boys thrive on competition. Interestingly, this school provided the community with a lot of lawyers and accountants and doctors and engineers and All Blacks. But it didn't produce a lot of entrepreneurs or novelists or philosophers. Rule breakers and anarchists and alternative thinkers, it seems, were not on the menu at this school.

298 Gilligan, V. (Creator). (2008-2013). *Breaking Bad* [Television Series]. Sony Pictures.

299 Gervais, R., & Merchant, S. (Creators). (2001-2003). *The Office* [Television Series]. BBC 2.

300 Shawver, 1998.

I had no idea. I had no idea what, in fact, it was.

"I'm not sure," I said, pulled a face, presented the upturned palms of my hands, and shrugged my shoulders, resigned to the fact that I didn't have a fucking clue.

"Well you need to find out," he said, frowning disapprovingly. "It's very important. I have to enter the date into this rectangle here on this form."

He showed me the empty box. He pointed at it with a shaking finger.

"It's empty," he said.

I offered a half-smile. He was, I realised, trying to shame me out just like the Big Nurse tried to shame out the angst-ridden Billy Bibbit after he had slept with one of McMurphy's girls and was finally happy.³⁰¹

"I'm serious," he said, reading my boredom for a lack of understanding. "You can't leave here with an empty Grade 5 box. It's impossible. All Grade 5 boxes must be completed. It's in the BDSM. You'll find it in the chapter titled The World of the Forms³⁰² under the subheading: empty rectangles & blank quadrilaterals."

"But I'm still in the preamble phase," I said. "I'm still getting my ducks sorted."

"Well, you should already be writing it," he said, looking shocked. "As documented on the flowchart 'Where should I be up to?' on page 65 of the Manifesto. Otherwise you'll run out of time."

"But I have a year, right?" I asked. "I've just started. I haven't even thought about thinking about this stuff. I'm still at the pre-thinking phase. I'm still unconsciously incompetent."

"A Yeah, right?" he said, "Are you trying to be funny? Does this look like a Tui commercial to you?"

"Are you declaring your incompetence?" the librarian asked, pointing to a red hexagon in the flowchart with the word in it.

I sighed. They launched into a treatise about the importance of the flowchart. What they seemed to be telling me was that to survive the whole bureaucratic process, I had to self-lobotomise, I had to cut away the creative part of my brain and replace it with the brain shaped piece of polystyrene they offered, that only then would I be in a suitable position to survive the Combine/Confirmation process. That the hysteric was on very thin fucking ice here. That the university was a serious place for serious people with serious faces.

301 This happens towards the end of Kesey's (1962) *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The Big Nurse's (the big Other) shames Billy by asking him what his mother would think/say about him having slept with a prostitute. Billy, unable to live under the weight of the imagined shame, kills himself. Billy is denied a psychological separation from the desires of his mother here – thus, he is barred from seeking and revelling in his own desires.

302 This is a reference to Plato's World of the Forms (See: Turnbull, 1998: Plato 2013).

“Are you taking this seriously?” the PDC asked.

I smiled and nodded.

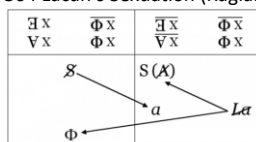
But I, just like R.P. McMurphy, didn’t take anything seriously. What was the point? This whole write a paper to confirm you could write a paper felt like a complete and utter waste of time. I looked up into his bowling-ball-like face. His thin lips were drawn into a flatline. The librarian had disappeared, had merged once again into the decor, the administrator yawned and closed his eyes and prepared for sleep.

My supervisor was just about to make his opening gambit, had just got the room to pay attention, when a high-ranking official dressed in the colours of the Chancellor’s Office burst into the room and stomped his jackboots. He was accompanied by a chorus of simpering toadies. They were a blur of motion, a flutter of officious paper and purpose. The official waited while one of his toadies organised a desk and seat. There was a moment of silence. Heads were turned. I had been in the same position as my supervisor on many occasions when I was teaching high school English. You would be just about to start a class, when the headmaster would kick the door in, unannounced, and take a seat. To say it was off-putting was an understatement. You had to recalibrate. You had to consider your demeanour, what you were going to say, and how you were going to say it. Mostly, I was teaching subversive literature that was laced with themes about questioning authority and disrupting our current dystopian state. I would usually make an example of the school’s hierarchical structure, positioning the headmaster as a malevolent dictator, who was not interested in their education but in protecting his or her own hold on power through the systematic reproduction of the status quo. And, of course, my supervisor, who was poised in front of the whiteboard was just about to introduce the class to Lacan. The official was expecting to watch a lecture about how Slick Jackie the entrepreneur divests his cattle for legumes and is a runaway success,³⁰³ not about how some screwy French madman from the 50s came up with a theory involving castration he called Sexuation.³⁰⁴

A quick word here on castration before I continue with this story. When my mother finally gave up her fixation with my bowel movements, with sticking shit up my arse and watching me defecate, she took up another, far worse, obsession – the focus of her crazy

303 Merryman, 1734. I am, of course, referring to the fairy-tale: Jack and the Beanstalk. Jack, the ultimate risk-taker, is perhaps, the first example in literature of entrepreneurship.

304 Lacan’s Sexuation (Ragland, 2012).



was no longer my arsehole, but my genitals. Over the course of a few weeks she constantly pointed her cigarette towards my junk and told my father and extended family members, close friends, the butcher, mailman, the guy at the dairy, and anyone else within earshot, that there was something terribly wrong with my plumbing, that she was going to have it fixed, that she was going to get it cut off. As an eight-year-old, I only heard one thing: we are heading to the doctor and he is going to cut off your gear – that you are soon to become a girl. I was, quite frankly, terrified. The sad reality was far more simple - she had decided that not having me circumcised as a baby was a mistake, that it was somehow magically inhibiting the growth of my penis, that Judy Lancewood had told her, in no uncertain terms, that not having your kid circumcised would turn them into little wankers – literally. That I was already weird enough, that she had heard that non-circumcised boys were more likely to become, well, homosexuals or peeping Toms or some other kind of pervert like Joe the Pole.³⁰⁵ Judy Lancewood was fucking nuts. She was a fucking witch. Even back then I knew she was utterly crazy and hell-bent on winding my fragile mother up for shits and giggles. Her husband worked for the Ministry of Works and the family lived in a work's hut next to my grandparents – the very hut my father had grown up in. But my father had escaped and had a business and his own house and, as such, fucking with his trophy wife appeared to be the appropriate recompense for the unfair distribution of opportunities and wealth.

My mother smoked her cigarettes and paced, wrung her hands, drunk far too many cups of instant coffee and made up crazy little worst-case-scenarios. This is happening, she told my father. And God help anyone who tries to stand in my way.

My father did not utter a word of support, but just sat there drinking his beer and looking blankly at his newspaper. He didn't really think she would go through with it. He just assumed she had left the sanity reservation, for a short time, as she did periodically. That she'd forget about it when the next handicraft phase kicked in. This was not the case. Later that week, I was bundled in the car and we did the rounds of the doctors in our shitty small town. At each one I was forced to display my junk like I was some sort of circus freak. Thankfully, they were well aware my mother was not playing with a full deck, was as high as a kite on prescribed meds, was an accident waiting to happen. So, they humoured her little insane desires and sent her on her way, unfulfilled.

305 When I was growing up in homogenous Ashburton during the 1970s, there was a Polish family who lived a block or so away. Because their son, Joe, was over 30, still lived at home, and rode a bike into town to do his shopping, he was considered the textbook definition of the weird other – he wasn't, of course, he was just European. Kids were told to avoid 'Joe the Pole' by their parents, to run away if he came anywhere near us, and never, under any circumstances, to ever talk to him. When we passed him in the car, I would hide. If I saw him when I was out mucking around, I would actually run screaming and hide behind the nearest tree. When I was forced to sell raffle tickets door to door for the local rugby club, I always missed his house out – marvelling at the strange garden and patio furniture that dotted the property. He was, therefore, the personification of the bogymen.

"Why do you want to do this?" she was asked.

"So, it can grow," she said. "Look, it's tiny. There's something wrong with him."

They looked at me sadly and shook their heads. They looked at my gear and told my mother that I was completely normal. That there was nothing to do here. That there was no way they were going to perform this unnecessary operation no matter how angry and swearsy she became.

"Either you do it right now," she threatened, "or I'll do it myself. I'll just use the fucking carving knife!"

They shook their heads and opened the door.

That night my father slowly closed his paper and finished his beer and finally answered the endlessly ringing phone. He stood there listening. Nodding. He eyed my insane mother through her requisite cloud of cigarette smoke, as she worked on a large landscape tapestry, with darkening eyes. She sucked on her cigarette and worked the coloured strands through the cotton oblivious to what was going on. His mouth formed a flat line. He hung up and opened another bottle of beer and refilled his glass and told my mother that according to the doctor I would not be getting my dick chopped off anytime soon, but that her meds were going to be increased because they didn't appear to be doing the job, that she should not turn up there with non-medical issues in future, and that it was not appropriate to threaten the doctor, his nurse, the receptionist and the half dozen patients in the waiting room.

He sipped his beer and calmly waited for the implosion that we all knew was coming.

She screamed and hurled her tapestry into the fire, threw her coffee cup at the wall and, unexpectedly, ripped me off the couch and flung me to the floor and shook me up and down until my clothes were well and truly shredded. It was random and terrifying. My father stood, motionless, and passively observed her antics. He did not intervene to save me.

"He needs his dick fixed," she screamed in my father's grill, cigarette smoke exiting both nostrils, as I crawled away. "And I am done with those fucking pills that you and those other useless cunts are force feeding me. There is nothing wrong with me! I'm completely normal. You're the one who needs fucking pills. I'm done with you and this shit!"

She packed a bag and left for her parents.

My father sighed and sat in his favourite chair and continued to read the paper and drink his beer.

"Does this mean I'm not getting my dick cut off?" I asked, still shaking.

"No one's getting their dick cut off," he said. "Now go to bed."

“But it’s only six o’clock.”³⁰⁶

I could feel the tension and wondered if my supervisor would push on or alter his opening to make allowances for the authority figure seated directly behind him. In Charlotte Brontë’s minor work, *The Professor*,³⁰⁷ the protagonist is teaching English in Brussels and finds himself always confronted with the headmistress seated in the class doing needlework. He seemed to be able to cope with this but, for reasons mentioned above, during these scenes I always felt uncomfortable on his behalf. Later in the novel, the ugly truth about her continued presence was unveiled - the headmistress informed him that she never had to dismiss anyone. That she just turned up, took a seat, and did her embroidery. The turnover of staff, she said, was good for the school. Masters got tired or stale, she had told him pointedly, and then it was time for them to go. In other words, she managed people out with her passive-aggressive knitting. The Professor understood, of course, and fell on his sword. Sure, there was a lot of other shit going on. He had harboured an unhealthy longing for her. He also had some sort of weird attachment to one of his students – ironically, the needlework teacher who was also sitting in on his classes. She had done a little too well and he had become infatuated with her. The mistress didn’t like this. She was supposed to be the object of his desire, even if that desire could never be reciprocated. The whole thing was weird. Of course, Brontë was conjuring the masculine. Here, we have a woman writing as a man about a man desiring two separate women. It was a psychoanalyst’s wet dream.

Down the back, the official did not take out embroidery. He sat there motionless with his legs crossed. His hands were gripping a pair of black leather gloves. Meanwhile, his crew set up a camera on a tripod, arranged lighting, and called for action with the snap of a sandwich-board. Interestingly, my supervisor didn’t appear to make allowances, even though Lacan himself would argue that the dynamic had changed, that the individual would have to compensate for the desire of the other. What my supervisor would be unconsciously considering, as his whiteboard marker hovered in mid-air, was

306 My mother’s (the one who chops) desires combined with my father’s aforementioned competitiveness seem almost the perfect ingredients for a reworking of Freud’s favourite Greek Play – Sophocles’ (c. 429 BC, 1939) *Oedipus Rex* (AKA: the Oedipus Complex). Let’s break this down. My mother was demanding my circumcision/castration as an antidote for the anxieties she had developed about my lack of phallic power (size). Prune it, she seemed to be saying, in order to stimulate growth. But, the conspiratorial, non-compliance of the men - the doctors and my father – resulted in the failure of her twisted, faux desires: my reaching my phallic potential (maturity). As a small child, the message was clear: without the magic of medical intervention I would not transform/mature into a real boy. My dick, just like Pinocchio’s (Collodi, 1883) nose, would not grow (Nonnekes, 2000: Sharon-Zisser, n.d.). I would, my mother seemed to be insinuating, remain incomplete, be nothing more than an impotent, puppet/dummy. All this, she was unconsciously adding, was all my father’s fault. He did not want me, a Freudian reading presumes, to progress and supplant him (Gozlan, 2008).

307 Brontë, C., 1857

what does the other desire from me?³⁰⁸ What does he want me to be? When it was just the students in the class, it was obvious – they wanted him to be a professor. But, now, he had to be simultaneously a professor and a subordinate – the link between the corporate desires of the MBA and the customers/students. The class should have morphed, I guessed, from a teaching and learning dynamic to a corporate/client one. But, I am happy to say, it did not.

“Lacan,” he said, smiling a little as he disregarded the official entirely, put his foot on the throttle and let the whole bag of wild cats explode about the room.

Lacan, I realised, sipping my now cold coffee down the back and watching the show unfold, permeated and informed my work regardless of whether I wanted him to or not. He was always there babbling in my ear in French or scrawling algebraic equations on my mental whiteboards. I could not escape him. I was first introduced to him when I took a cabbage (non-continuing) psych paper at Canterbury in the 1990s. In this paper we briefly touched on his idea of the mirror stage in a bundle of lectures dedicated to developmental psychology. We read Lacan alongside the likes of Erikson³⁰⁹ and Piaget.³¹⁰ I should point out that of all the papers I have taken over the years, this one has had the greatest impact on me. I have remembered almost everything we learned and have referred to it numerous times. I probably should have switched from business administration to psychology. But the younger me had no idea. His idea of Self was developed from watching far too much of Alex P Keating³¹¹ (Michael J Fox), and assorted knockoffs, strut about in a suit spewing forth capitalist doctrine³¹² like it all made sense. A few years later, when I was studying literary theory, I was reintroduced to Lacan. Here, his ideas, and those of Barthes,³¹³ Derrida,³¹⁴ Foucault,³¹⁵ and others, were applied to literature to enable the reader to understand these works in new and exciting ways.

It wasn't until I undertook the MBA, almost twenty years later, that I would reencounter him. This time, in the cold and dark winter of 2015 at the Entrepreneur and Innovation weekend in Christchurch (the very same workshop that, in 2018, I was

308 This is best summed up by Woźniak (2010), who points out that “...by contemplating what the Other ‘wants’ from us we fall into an intersubjective field of the Other at which moment our ‘want’ emerges in relation to the Other’s desire. The moment one falls into the symbolic field of the Other, one emerges as a subject and sustains subjection to it...” (p. 398).

309 Erik Homburger Erikson (1902–1994) is a German psychologist and psychoanalyst.

310 Jean Piaget (1896–1980) is a Swiss psychologist.

311 Goldberg, G. (Creator). (1982-1989). *Family Ties* [Television Series]. Paramount Television.

312 Alex was presented as a smart, go-getter who worked hard and would, ultimately, be successful – this was wrapped up in a conservative, Republican ideology, thereby conflating success with conservative, neoliberal values. He was juxtaposed against his counterculture, hippy-era parents (presented as flaky and naïve), who protested the Vietnam War and ran a public access TV show, while he fully supported Regan during the Cold War. In other words, the network was selling conservative US ideology to the world’s youth through the seductive characterisation of Alex P Keaton – particularly to young men who thought he was a cool winner and, therefore, an appropriate role model.

313 Roland Gérard Barthes (1915–1980) is a French literary theorist.

314 Jacques Derrida (1930–2004) is a French philosopher.

315 Paul-Michel Foucault (1926–1984) is a French philosopher.

reattending and recounting in this document). During a break on the second morning, as others munched on sugared cakes and spoke politely in smiling, caffeinated clumps, I turned away and looked out the arched window.³¹⁶ I called my wife and watched people scuttling across the adjacent carpark in the cutting snow. I sipped shitty coffee and told her I was well and truly fucking over it, that I was a black Lego brick in a sea of red ones, that I had hit peak capacity for the smug, overly happy whack-jobs I was surrounded by. I just didn't fit. I had spent an entire morning nursing a bruising hangover, while listening to my classmates babble utter garbage about entrepreneurship like it was some sort of mystical skill shrouded in mystery. The fact was, entrepreneurs were just regular Joes who acted on their impulses.³¹⁷ They weren't special – they were just able to turn off the switch in their heads that regulated risk. They had, most probably, impulse control issues. She talked me down. She told me to go and have another coffee.

“And eat something,” she said. “Have you had anything to eat?”

I hadn't.

“Yes,” I lied. “A shit sandwich and a huge slice of humble fucking pie.”

Before the mid-morning session commenced a bunch of readings were passed around. To my absolute astonishment one was on Lacan. My interest was piqued. I was not sure what was going on. I looked about nervously like a pre-internet teenager hunched over a cache of recently uncovered porn. I had been listening to business bullshit for 18 months. I had long ago given up on expecting anything vaguely intellectual to be introduced. As I flipped the pages, I got a surge of adrenalin. I watched as my fellow students frowned over the text. It was opaque and dense and required, unlike all the other papers we had ever been presented with, more than a careless skimming to read, let alone understand. I waved over the lecturer who was responsible for this reading.

“This is Lacan,” I said pointing out the obvious.

He looked at me suspiciously. It was probably my twitching eye, my trembling fingers. It was most probably the wide-eyed, religious stare I was forcing him to meet.

“I've read this,” I told him, bouncing about in my seat.

He tilted his head, and eyed me like I might, in fact, be crazy. For the record: I am crazy.

“I doubt it,” he said. “When?”

“It's Lacan,” I repeated. “The mirror stage guy.”³¹⁸

“You know Lacan?” he asked.

316 I am, once again, referring to the children's television show, *Play School* (Cumming, 1972-1990).

317 Interestingly, there is evidence to suggest that entrepreneurs may in fact be simply seeking dopamine due to cognitive issues such as ADHD (Nicolaou, Shane, Adi, Mangino, & Harris, 2011; Wiklund, Yu, & Patzelt, 2018).

318 Lacan, 2014.

"I read some of his shit at Canterbury when I was doing my BA," I said. "I love this kind of stuff."

During the reading several hands went up.

"Why are we reading this?" someone asked. "And why hasn't it been bullet-pointed and properly explained?"

"What's his point?" asked another. "Why isn't this condensed into a simple paragraph?"

"This is bullshit," stated one of the more concrete thinkers in the room. "It doesn't even make sense."

Not for him, anyway. I fucking loved it. It was exploding the minds of my mindless colleagues. It was shattering their pumice-like skulls. Their jaws were disengaging and dangling open, their heads rotating like mechanical circus clowns. The air was thick with confusion and a palpable anger. Business executives do not, under any circumstances, like to be placed in a position where they are unable to make sense of what is in front of them.³¹⁹ I was elated by their anxiety. I smiled to myself, stood, and set off to corner this lecturer once again. This time I felt something akin to excitement as I asked about doing my thesis on Lacan.

"I'd like to write something weird," I said. "Something twisted. Something that virtually no one will understand."

"Have you heard of the four discourses?"³²⁰ he asked.

I shook my head. I didn't have a clue. And even though I couched my MBA thesis in Lacan's discourse analysis, I still didn't understand, if I am completely honest, more than a fly shit of things that exited Lacan's twisted croissant-hole. That's because Lacan was the King of the slippery French motherfuckers, the intellectuals, guys like Sartre³²¹ and Camus,³²² who had flourished alongside him in Parisian cafes and bars in the mid-thirties. His ideas were so opaque, so freaky weird, so beyond normal comprehension, that you couldn't just read and understand them. To actually get any of it, to actually reach some sort of conscious competent state, you had to think deeply about it for years if not decades. And then, just as you thought you had a handle on some small corner of an idea, you peeled it back to reveal yet another layer and realised you were still just an amateur, that Lacan had sprinted off down some maze-like boulevard laughing

319 They, therefore, embody the discourse of the master: they are empty shells. They give instructions and expect results from the labour of others in their everyday corporate lives, but do not offer anything but clichéd, jargon riddled responses. Thus, placed in a position of those workers they subjugate - of someone trying to interpret the thoughts of others - makes them feel uncomfortable and angry. As Olivier, (2008) puts it, "...the master's discourse systematically hides or represses the unconscious 'knowledge' of its incompleteness - it shows no interest in knowledge as such; as long as things 'work'" (p. 182).
320 Lacan, 2007.

321 Jean-Paul Charles Aymard Sartre (1905–1980) is a French philosopher and novelist.

322 Albert Camus (1913–1960) is a French philosopher and novelist.

manically. To be honest, I could probably read his stuff for a thousand years and still only scratch the surface. That's why deploying Lacan with business wankers over a three-day weekend was so dangerous. The whole keg of crazy had the potential to ignite and blow everyone to hell.

My supervisor and one of his assistants³²³ took up opposing positions on either side of the whiteboard. They were about to discuss Lacan's discourse of capitalism³²⁴ – his fifth discourse. I wasn't even aware this one existed. I had mistakenly assumed that there were only four (master, university, analyst, & hysteric), and that the discourse of the master was basically interchangeable with capitalism. They began by explaining the impossibility of articulating desire. It goes something like this - we want something, but we just can't work out what it is, so we happily fill the void with substitutes. But these alternatives never quite do the trick, so we are back, banging on the shop counter demanding more misshapen pegs to try and fill the weird-arsed hole in our psyche. To illustrate this point, my supervisor and his assistant drew on the example of Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak³²⁵ and their battle of Opposing Ideas. Wozniak was a techie nerd who believed that people buying computers were, essentially, the same as him – weirdos who wanted to fiddle with RAM and slots and motherboards. And he was kind of right and kind of wrong at the same time. He was basing his ideas on what he had seen and knew to be true. Steve Jobs, on the other hand, wasn't interested in what had gone before, what people thought they wanted, or what colour Wozniak perceived the sky to be. He had been to the future and knew exactly what everyone wanted – and, newsflash, it wasn't Waz's Apple2. My supervisor explained how, in this example, the iPhone played the part of what Lacan referred to as *Objet Petit a* and stood as a place holder for that unknowable and unattainable thing we desire. We all wanted the iPhone or one of its clones because we believed it would fill that dull, cold hole in our soul – the one that Freud banged on about, the one he called Lack. But, even though the iPhone's sleek design was seductive, it didn't fill the gap, or compensate for the lack, and left us frustrated looking for some other shiny thing that would do the trick. This unsated desire was, of course, Steve Jobs' magic beans – he'd match our unquenchable desire with a production-line of new and improved iPhones. Each one would promise to fill that gap that the previous model had

323 When I refer to my supervisor and his assistants in this chapter, I am alluding to K. and his idiotic, almost childlike assistants in Kafka's (1926) *The Castle*.

324  Lacan, 2007: Vanheule, 2016.

325 Steve Jobs (1955-2011) and Steve Wozniak (1950-) are the founders of Apple.

failed to do.³²⁶ It was as if, I mused, Steve Jobs was Rainman³²⁷ at the blackjack table counting cards. He knew what we wanted even before we knew. He knew how many picture cards were in the deck and was going to exploit the system. He knew that the individual was always trying to sate an unknowable desire through the acquisition of shiny new shit.³²⁸

This whole impossible search for 'it' reminded me, as I sat there watching the MBA students scratch their heads and try and follow the algebraic equation on the board, of Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty in Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*³²⁹ (ironically Kerouac's 'it' mirrors Waz's IT). Kerouac was playing with what he believed, as a Catholic, was the gap between heaven (Paradise) and hell (Moriarty/mortality) - where our heroic duo was caught in some sort of perpetual purgatory of their own making. Here, our twin pleasure seekers spent years crisscrossing the US seeking something they couldn't quite put their finger on but, nevertheless, obsessively coveted anyway. In the end, they were confronted with the impossibility of the task. In the end, they were confronted with cold hard reality - there were no real, authentic experiences to encounter, only contrived, commercialised existence. As the shattered façade fell away, they finally realised they would never find Old Dean Moriarty³³⁰ and discover the existential truths they sought –

326 According to Boothby (2001), this occurs, because the "...subject is "strung along" by the unfolding of a chain of signifiers..." (p. 9). He concludes by suggesting that, through this process, the individual is, "...being is conditioned by the organisation of linguistic code" (p. 13). In other words, desire and language are tightly interwoven.

327 Levinson, B. (Director). (1988). *Rain Man* [Motion Picture]. United States: MGM.

328 You can clearly see, as Lacan points out in his 1972 'Milan' lecture *On Psychoanalytic Discourse* (Olivier, 2009: Vanheule, 2016: Holland, 2016: Pauwels, 2019), that the subject in the capitalist discourse is hysterical in their constant need to sate their desire through the endless and repetitive accumulation of commercial shit (cars, clothes, and so on). This commercial shit can then be displayed, like religious artefacts, to indicate one's position in society. In this way, bikers purchase Harley Davidsons and leather jackets, while the upper middle classes purchase organic vegetables and free-range eggs from Wholefoods and Jerry Seinfeld purchases another Porsche. But, unlike the actual hysteric, the subject at the core of the discourse of the capitalism, is simply seeking the hollowed out empty signifier rather than the *underlying* benefits, the deeper knowledge perhaps, that these things also provide. Thus, while the hysteric seeks knowledge within the academy, the subject in the discourse of capitalism are not interested in this knowledge at all – it is merely a by-product. What they are after the diploma. After all, this is the product, the commodity, that the neoliberal university is selling (Tilak, 2008). As a customer of the business school, they are purchasing a poster to hang on the wall and a coat of arms to display on their LinkedIn profile: a visible (yet empty) sign, attained through their willingness to tithe, of their religious-like faith in the corporate machine – thus, they believe, like Christians, that they can, and are, buying their way into their dream job/Heaven. When they are unsuccessful, they simply purchase another empty signifier to replace the last one: self-help books, a new suit, a new CV, a new haircut, and so on. And, this is how the discourse of capitalism works – it offers you and endless, cyclic stream of shit, each turd a potential saviour, each offering to complete you, but none, of course, ever succeeding.

This practise of diploma seeking sans education became clear to me years ago when I was having a conversation with an aged relative. She was telling me that her niece had to go to university and undertake the same course of study that I had just graduated from – a B.Com. Her niece, she said, was already working in the corporate machine and, as a result, already knew everything they taught in the degree. Yet, stupidly, she said, she still has to go through with the charade in order to get the promotion she deserved. She still has to actually attend classes to get a piece of paper to prove she knows what she already knows. It's quite ridiculous, she said. She could teach that course. When I pointed out that going to varsity required a little more than simply writing down what you know and getting the diploma, she actually laughed in my face. Apparently, I was brainwashed and naïve. This is best summed up by E M Forster in his novel *Howards End* (1910). Here, the personification of the master is represented by the industrialist Henry Wilcox. When the Schlegel sisters, Helen and Margaret, are discussing a debate they had just attended on the redistribution of wealth to the poor, and try to inform him of their thoughts on the subject, he is not interested – their subject is beyond his scope and, therefore, of no value: "The man of business smiled....With a good dinner inside him and an amiable but academic woman on either flank, he felt that his hands were on all the ropes of life, and that what he did not know could not be worth knowing."

329 Kerouac, 1957.

330 Dean's father is a metaphor for the past. Thus, they are, somewhat nostalgically, seeking an America that no longer exists – and, perhaps, never existed.

they would never, they finally acknowledged, find 'it'. The road didn't lead anywhere but, just like for Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*,³³¹ back in a figure-of-eight to where it began. There was no way, they realised, to get beyond the road (capitalism) – there was only more (of the same) road.³³²

This unquenched desire was also played out to its inevitable conclusion in Kafka's *The Castle*.³³³ Here, the hysteric K. was caught in the perpetual trap of seeking, and failing to achieve, a meeting with Klammer. Only Klammer, K. believed, could provide him with answers to his questions³³⁴ - could give him meaning to his existence in the strange world in which he found himself. Eventually, K., like Sal and Dean, became cognisant of the impossibility of his task, ideating on the fact that Klammer constantly morphed and shifted and was elusive - that no one had described him in the same way, that he was a different person for different people. In other words, he was what each individual desired yet remained beyond definition and was, therefore, unattainable. In the end, K.'s desires, just like those of Dean and Sal, were left unsated. Perhaps, somewhat poetically, this impossibility of unfulfilled desire was emphasised perfectly in the way *The Castle* ended: the book finished abruptly, mid-sentence,³³⁵ just as K. was about to learn an important truth. This occurred, not because Kafka was the King of leaving people feeling unfulfilled – but because he died before he had a chance to provide K., and us, with an answer.

My supervisor and his assistants were nodding in a close circle about the official from the Chancellor's Office at the completion of the morning's session. I waited patiently. While I stood there watching the bobble-headed, chin scratching, I was accosted by my ex-banking colleague. He eyed me a little confused. How the fuck, he seemed to be asking, was I doing a PhD? How the fuck had the guy that did handstands in the meeting room, that neighed like a horse to indicate the beginning of lunch, or suggested laying grass on the carpeted corridors so we could let sheep and other farmyard animals roam free

331 Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The Wizard of Oz* [Motion Picture]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

332 They needed to leave the road - and this is exactly what Kerouac does in *Big Sur* (1962). He moves into a hut in the woods that overlook Big Sur in order to consider life and try to understand it at its essence. I would argue that Kerouac is simply returning to the ocean, which was prevalent in his first, yet 'lost' novel *The Sea in my Bother* (2011). In other words, he switches out the road for the ocean as a metaphor for understanding life and existence - it is constant, ever changing, and unpredictable. It should also be noted that Kerouac had rejected the duality (Heaven/Hell) of Catholicism by this time and replaced it with the cyclic nature of Buddhism (Lott, 2004) – hence the ocean in *Big Sur* (1962) or the forest and mountains in *The Dharma Bums* (1958). Unfortunately, this shift in metaphorical and religious thinking did not result in a eureka moment for Jack – for him 'it' would forever remain unattainable. The lesson is clear: an artificial, appropriated framework/construct cannot provide real answers.

333 Kafka, 1926.

334 Much like I believe the University has answers to my questions.

335 This is the final line of Kafka's (1926) *The Castle*: "She held out her trembling hand to K. and had him sit down beside her, she spoke with great difficulty, it is hard to understand her, but what she said..."

about the building, end up here – observing *him* doing his MBA? When I explained it was a natural progression from the MBA he was gobsmacked.

“You have an MBA as well?”

“Of course,” I said, like everyone had one, like you could just pick one up from the 7/11.

And then it all came out. It was as if I had morphed in a split second from clown to Priest³³⁶ and we had entered a confessional. I was surprised. He had, he admitted, suffered a shit time at the bank after I had exited the place like Andrew Dufresne in the *Shawshank Redemption* – I had to, just like Andy, crawl through miles of (psychological) shit before I finally got out of that place.³³⁷ He had suffered, he said, from The New Manager Transmogrification.³³⁸ His protected position had crumbled after his friendly manager had been torched and biffed down the dead-hole³³⁹ for not hitting her (ever increasing) KPIs (or perhaps, more likely, for hitting 40). He had, I could tell, been burnt, and this was why he was here. He was searching for answers and applying a shiny coat of protective armour just like I had. His story, then, was not much different than mine. Although, somewhat ironically, I would argue it was far worse. That’s because he had been one of the anointed few. And then he had been stripped of his favoured position and banished like Coriolanus.³⁴⁰ He had tasted corporate success, he had sat at the top table and basked under their benevolent gaze, and then it had all been ripped away from him – he had been cast out. Whereas I had only ever viewed it through the looking glass,³⁴¹ had always been on the outer, had always been the jester in their fucked-up court. He seemed to want to confide something else, some sort of untold (shared) truth, but felt unable to do so. I watched as he swallowed those words and we shook hands again and I wished him luck.

When I turned around my supervisor and his assistants were still feigning interest in empty words that were spilling out of the official’s mouth.³⁴² I had met him before and we had discussed the future of business education at length, but I could tell by the way he was eyeing me, he couldn’t remember who I was.

336 I am alluding to Kafka’s *The Trial* (1926). But unlike the priest in this work, I am not telling my banking colleague to accept his fate, I am listening to him explain his fate. Ultimately, at the end of *The Trial*, Joseph K, a man, who has been driven purely by self-interest, just like most of the MBA students in the room, is found guilty and butchered and killed. His last words are “Like a dog”. Here, Kafka is reminding us of the cynical nature of his work – how he believes most men are like Joseph K. Cynic, of course, in Ancient Greek means ‘dog-like’ – hence, Diogenes the Cynic.

337 Darabont, F. (Director). (1994). *The Shawshank Redemption* [Motion Picture]. Columbia Pictures.

338 This is a reference to the episode titles of the television show *The Big Bang Theory*.

339 As mentioned above, I grew up in rural Mid-Canterbury. When dead lambs were found on farms, they were disposed of in a narrow pit – it was referred to as ‘the dead hole’ or ‘offal pit’.

340 Shakespeare, 1623: *Coriolanus*.

341 Carroll, 1871.

342 This is a reference to Lacan’s idea of empty speech. As Driver (2005) states (citing Muller & Richardson, 1982): “Empty speech is the discourse we engage in that is supposed to express who we really are but instead expresses only an ‘alienated reflection’.” In other words, we are unable (perhaps unwilling) to articulate our unconscious desires.

“We have met,” I said, during a pause in the conversation. “I’m the PhD guy³⁴³ who came to see you about bulldozing the business school.”³⁴⁴

He tried to form a smile, but his face wasn’t designed for that kind of expression and he slapped his gloves on his side dismissively. He had no idea who I was or what I was doing here. He was informing my supervisor and his two assistants that they needed to get the students to fill in the online survey before lunchtime. That the data was key to continued improvement and efficiencies. My supervisor nodded. His assistants tried to form serious faces. But we all know the survey was bullshit and wouldn’t provide anything of use.

When I had met him for slice of warm apple strudel³⁴⁵ a few months prior he had, surprisingly, listened to the craziest of my ideas with head-nodding positivity. I was amazed. I remember thinking that he really was going to turn the university into a powerhouse for creativity and innovation, that he was actually going to design a course of study that would truly transform individuals rather than just inform them. It was exciting. There were doubts, of course, if I am honest, creeping about the conversation. Perhaps it was Duetto Sull'aria *Le nozze di Figaro*³⁴⁶ playing on the gramophone or the collection of ceramic gundogs on his desk. I wasn’t sure. But one thing was sure: none of it added up. It wasn’t until I was in the car and heading home that I finally clicked – I had been played.

This was not the first time I had been duped by the matey-meeting-manipulation (3M) scam. I had been skewered with it once before, years ago, when I had just completed my B.Com. Back then, in the time before smart phones and the internet, I had been attending a string of job interviews – none of which, perhaps fortunately, I got. But, before I get to the 3M situation, I should mention the broken job market that the university unceremoniously birthed me into in the mid-nineties. Each Saturday I would wake, cradle a hangover, and head down to the dairy (one of the few that sold newspapers other than *The Press*) that was nestled beside Nancy’s Hotel at the top end of Riccarton Road opposite Hagley Park, and buy *The Herald* and *The Otago Daily Times* and *The Dominion* with the remains of the shrapnel that I had scraped together post Friday night’s bender. I would pull out the situations vacant sections and discard the rest

343 Here, I hide the real me behind the PhD façade. I want him to view me as an academic and not as an individual.

344 Parker, 2018: Parker, 2018b.

345 This is a reference to Quentin Tarantino’s (2009) film *Inglourious Basterds*. In particular, it is the scene in which Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz) questions Shosanna Dreyfus/Emmanuelle Mimieux (Mélanie Laurent), while eating apple strudel. I am drawing attention to what I perceive as the bureaucratic, rigid and somewhat draconian culture of the confirmation process – I, like Shosanna/Emmanuelle, am being questioned narrowly by an ‘authority’ figure. And, like her, I am fighting against this authority – however, my weapon of choice, is this document.

346 This is a reference to *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1984). Here, I am drawing allusions to the illusion of freedom that this music provided Andy and the illusion of progressive change that the high-ranking official from the Chancellor’s office was able to convey.

right there on the counter, disregarding the angry reprimands of the old crone behind the counter and head off home to begin the arduous task of going through the ads. Afterwards, there were cover letters to prepare and CVs to print and envelopes to stuff.³⁴⁷ And, then, in an exhausted haze I'd slope off to the post office and cough up the last of my drinking vouchers for a few stamps. It was a laborious, utterly tedious, and ultimately futile waste of time and money. When it was all over, and I had washed the stench of inevitable failure off my hands, I would stop in at Video Ezy to talk to Doug, who had a master's in management, and rent some movies to lose myself in.

"The job market is fucking toast," he would say. "Stop wasting your fucking time."

And even though I knew Doug was as sharp as a tack, that he had more chance than I of scoring a proper job, I didn't really believe the rules applied to me. I thought I was somehow immune.

"I am going to be stuck here forever," he spat, "renting pornos to all the sad fat fuckers who live around this shitty fucking place."

On the off chance that I was delusional, and that Doug was in fact correct, I organised a contingency plan. I would apply for a hundred jobs and if I didn't land one I would get on the first plane to the UK. Of course, I didn't actually think I would have to go through with it. I thought I would get a proper job, even though all the evidence suggested the opposite. I remember, a few months later, counting through the rejection letters in my cold and damp student flat. I had them stacked in piles of ten. I didn't quite hit a hundred. The final count was ninety-seven. I had attended ten interviews and been shortlisted twice – whatever that means. And it was at one of these interviews that I had come face to face with the 3M scam. The interview had been awesome. The guy had put me at ease and listened with a smile and the occasional chuckle as I told my stories. He had shaken my hand warmly and told me that he would definitely be in touch. I was over the moon. I had just scored, I believed, my dream job. I stopped in to tell Doug the good news.

"You tinny fucker," he said. "When are they letting you know?"

As it turned out, never. The phone did not ring. And, a few days later a thin envelope arrived in my mailbox. I had been rejected. I let out an angry roar of pure, unfettered frustration that probably awoke life on Mars. I placed it on the ever-growing stack on my dresser and wondered what the fuck had happened. The following day I caught up with The Australian, a mature student in his mid-thirties, who I often drunk coffee with on campus. He was a wealth of knowledge. I told him about the weird interview and the even weirder outcome. He ordered another round of coffee and told me I had been well

³⁴⁷ I should mention that this was all done at one of the university's computer labs – there were two, aptly named the Cave and the Dungeon. No one I knew owned a PC in 1996, let alone a printer.

and truly fucked over. The interviewer, he informed me, had been trained to make people feel comfortable, so they would not be the interviewee, but themselves – in my case, a drunken idiot. The interviewer had formed a nice little Lacanian mirror for me to pull faces into. What he was desiring was the real me and I stupidly gave it to him.

“What did you talk about?” The Australian asked.

“Drinking piss and student parties,” I said. “He wanted to know how things were on campus these days.”

The Australian smiled.

“Oh, fuck,” I said, finally understanding the horrible truth.

And so, it was with a frustration akin to being banned from your favourite pub that, a few months later, after I had burned all those rejection letters, I stormed into Student Travel and demanded that they immediately post me to London.³⁴⁸

During the lunch break I suggested to my supervisor that we seek out the Fourierist³⁴⁹ and grab some proper coffee. He thought this was an excellent idea and we set off, weaving a path through a maze of identical corridors, past the repeating coke machines and pin-board stations, up one staircase, then another, and finally over an air-bridge. Eventually we found him in his plush corner office. He was sitting crossed-legged on a hexagonal coffee table, opening walnuts with a Winston Churchill nutcracker. He reminded me of Kurtz (Marlon Brando) in *Apocalypse Now*.³⁵⁰ A French Bulldog sat on his desk overlooking the quad, panting. We crunched over the discarded walnut shells and shook hands and told him we were in desperate need of caffeine. He nodded, stroked his beard, stood and pulled on a silk dressing gown, shuffled into a pair of slippers, pushed a pair of blue John Lennon’s³⁵¹ over his eyes and, taking his dog in his arms, led the way. The Fourierist morphed, in that moment, from the introspective Kurtz into The

348 I only applied for one job in London, had a five-minute interview, and was offered the role. And, just like that, I had a real job. I was a category analyst at Shell UK. The week before I had been cleaning toilets in the middle of the night, packing goods into boxes at a factory during the day, and pumping gas in the weekends – all for \$8 p/h. I swapped my uniform(s) for a suit and so began my cube-farm existence. This job was, and still is, the best job I have had. It paid well, the work was varied and interesting, and the people were awesome. When I returned to New Zealand a few years later, I assumed, wrongly, that my experience would count for something. It didn’t. I was back pumping gas and wondering what the fuck had happened – it was as if I had woken from a dream into a nightmare. Oh, and Doug was still renting videos – when he saw me he just shook his head and told me I was the dumbest fucker on the planet for coming back to this shit hole. He was right. I soon hung up the gas pump and enrolled for degree number two. Perhaps, I mused, I had taken the wrong degree. Perhaps, if I take a different one, things will turn out differently. Spoiler Alert: they didn’t.

349 François Marie Charles Fourier (1772–1837) is a French philosopher. Fourierism is concerned with the inevitable shift towards communalism and is often described as a utopian form of socialism (Pankhurst, 1956: Guarneri, 1991). According to Cordillot (2018) “...the Fourierist project was conceived as both a progressive utopia anticipating future developments accompanying the industrial revolution and a remedy for the evils that were threatening to cause a new series of bloody social outbursts. According to them, the aim was to offer an alternative path towards a peaceful social evolution from which all classes of society would have something to gain” (p. 119).

350 Coppola, F. (Director). (1979). *Apocalypse Now* [Motion Picture]. United Artists.

351 This is a reference to Vladimir Lenin.

(relaxed and chilled) Dude (Jeff Bridges).³⁵² We headed down to the retro caravan in the quad beside the golden chicken wing and talked about the MBA and Lacan and my upcoming confirmation ceremony.

“And what exactly are they supposed to be confirming again?” I asked. “Does anyone actually know?”

There were shrugs and downturned mouths. There were headshakes and upturned coffee cups.

“It’s basically a casting couch,” my supervisor said. “You have to get your phallus out and wave it around. Afterwards, you will feel exploited and soiled.”

“They want to know that you actually know what you think you know,” the Fourierist said. “Otherwise they won’t know that you know and then we will get a No. And no one wants a no, you know?”

Sadly, I did know. A no was definitely a no-no.

“But that’s never going to happen,” I said. “I’m never giving them what they want.”

“That’s true,” the Fourierist said. “Instead, you’re basically going to attempt to dominate the real, the facts of the business school, with your imagination, with your fictional Self, with your alternative, hysterical narrative. Your refusal to conform/confirm³⁵³ will throw you and the confirmation panel into the theatre of discursual struggle.”

“You’re basically,” my supervisor added, “going to attempt a kind of non-consensual/consensual narrative copulation.”

“Excuse me?”

“You’re the reluctant seducer, the coquet, in this relationship,” my supervisor said. “But secretly they enjoy your simultaneous disgust and desire for them.”

“What?”

The dude abided. The dog panted.

“It’s all about fucking,” my supervisor said thrusting his hips. “It’s always about fucking. You’ll be engaging them in an erotic, yet highly choreographed, naked wrestling match, where you not only intend, but are actually expected, to pin them down, penetrate them, and, ultimately, impregnate their discourse with your own. In other words, you intend/are required to dominate them with your narrative until they submit. Think of it like a weird-deviant-sexual-roleplay-game.”³⁵⁴

352 Coen, E. (Producer) & Coen, J. (Director). (1998). *The Big Lebowski* [Motion Picture]. Working Title Films.

353 As Schwartz (2005) states, “... when the imaginary takes upon itself the task of dominating the symbolic, we get the mental configuration known as hysteria”.

354 As Schroeder (2000) points out, “...the hysteric’s discourse is the challenge to or critique of the other discourses” (p. 72).

I slow blinked and considered the MBA students as they formed anxious cliques of threes or fours on the periphery, beside the retro caravan, at an appropriate distance. They raised their cups, crossed their eyes, moved from one foot to the other in a nervous shuffle.

“But the opposite is also true,” my supervisor added. “They are simply drawing your discourse in, enveloping it, and rendering you spent and assimilated. And this is why you will, ultimately, feel exploited and soiled.”

“You,” the Fourierist translated once again, “are taking the boring, emotionless factoids the university shits out and re-purposing them into something useful, uncovering new knowledge as you go. But when you try to offer this new, pimped out knowledge back to the university, they will systematically rip away your fiction, strip it back down to its component parts, and finally, into a series of hollowed out points – the facts. Facts that confirm their discourse will continue to be greenlit. They will then return these turds and offer you an attaboy and a pat on the back. Congratulations, they will say, here is the knowledge you were looking for. You have confirmed. You have been assimilated. Resistance is, was, and will forever be, futile.”³⁵⁵

The Dude poured Kahlúa into his caffè latte, stirred and sipped and, satisfied, put the bottle back into the pocket of his dressing gown.

“All ideas start as fiction/fact or fact/fiction,” the Fourierist said, “and ultimately move back and forwards as they are re-appropriated/reinterpreted by the hysteric/university. In other words, the hysteric and the university are trapped in an eternal, co-dependent game of intellectual pong.”

My supervisor gave the thumbs up.

“What you are really constructing here, through this creative process, is the Self,” the Fourierist continued. “You are selecting from the various shards of a shattered Lacanian mirrors of your past – building a mosaic, perhaps, of tiny disconnected scenes that you wish to present as a seamless whole, as a palatable, authoritative version of yourself.”³⁵⁶

The construction of Self via the fact/fiction dichotomy, reminded me of what my English professor at St Albans College (an exclusive graduate school, situated in the leafy Christchurch suburb of the same name, whose sole focus is creative writing and New

355 Roddenberry, G. (Creator). (1987-1994). *Star Trek: the next generation* [Television Series]. Paramount Domestic Television. I am, of course, referring to the catchphrase of the Borg: resistance is futile. The Borg’s single purpose was to seek out life – but rather than study and understand it like the Federation did, they simply assimilated it into their collective. When, during my MBA, I argued that corporations seek innovative individuals but then, perhaps unconsciously, insist on their conformity, I was accused of suggesting that organisations were akin to the Borg (this was written on my proposal in red marker). The AIC argued that I was far too binary in my discussion. But rather than ridiculing my idea, which was his objective, he actually confirmed it. Assimilation in the doctrine of the business school, I was being told, was absolutely compulsory, and, more importantly, resistance would prove, he suggested, not only futile, but terminal – to deviate from their narrow views of what research and scholarship would result, I was warned, in failure. Naturally, I didn’t listen.

356 Driver, 2008.

Zealand literature) used to say about Janet Frame.³⁵⁷ She argued that, in Frame's autobiographic writing, Frame was overwriting actual history with a fiction and constructing a version of herself that she wished to present as truth; whereas, she suggested, Frame's actual fiction presented the real clues of her life. Basically, she was saying that Frame's fiction and autobiographical writing were mirrors of each other. I should also mention that she was obsessed with Janet Frame. She used to tell stories about how she'd head down to Oamaru with her binoculars when she was a graduate student and get in a good session of stalking. She'd find, she said, some high ground overlooking their old family home and settle in to watch the show. She was pretty pissed off when she was overlooked to write Frame's authorised biography. That's because she had already written an unauthorised version that presented Frame in a less than favourable light – as batshit crazy. When the authorised biography came out and contradicted much of what my English professor had written, she exploded like Chernobyl on a bad day. Her lectures became unhinged, pacing rants, the spittle exiting her lips in tsunami-like waves, her hair wild and untamed. She was Lear on the heath and Janet was her Cordelia.³⁵⁸ She had lost all perspective. She, perhaps naively, believed that she knew exactly who Frame was – that her version of Frame, although conjured via her binoculars, was authentic. Basically, Frame and my English professor were struggling for control of the fact/fiction duality of Frame's Self. The great irony here, was that she went on to publish a bunch of shitty novels about Janet and Frank Sargeson³⁵⁹ – she, herself, had fictionalised and profited from the very woman who she had demanded present, and be presented, as an unvarnished, warts and all, truth.

"I'm worried," I said, "that they'll insist I add all sorts of academic shit to this thesis, that they'll slowly edge me towards conformity, that, by degrees, I'll end up producing what they want."

It seemed ridiculous to craft out this (anti)thesis only to then turn around and cake it with a tonne of unpalatable academic bullshit just to keep a bunch of multiheaded gorgons happy – it was akin, I argued, to flicking shit all over a freshly laundered white sheet as it hung on the line.³⁶⁰ The whole thing would become hijacked, would become weighed down through compliance and conformance, would become just another

357 Janet Frame (1924–2004) is a New Zealand novelist/writer.

358 Shakespeare, 1608: *King Lear*.

359 Frank Sargeson (1903–1982) is a New Zealand short story writer, whose work is reminiscent of Hemingway.

360 This sentence reminds me of Sargeson's (1964) short story "A Piece of Yellow Soap". In the story a woman refuses to pay her milkman while clutching a piece of yellow soap. The milkman always ends up giving her the milk for free. The soap, therefore, acts as not only an ideological weapon, but also as a form of exchange. By giving the woman the milk, the milkman acknowledges the struggle this woman faces on a daily basis (much like those Sargeson himself faced), and also allows him to raise a middle finger to capitalism. Through my refusal to follow the university's 'rules' (pay the milkman/piper), this document is my piece of yellow soap.

boring, unreadable research paper. It would become exactly what I was trying to avoid, the opposite of what I desired to achieve. The shit they desired, I concluded, was completely misplaced in what I was trying to achieve.

“That fucking chicken wing is misplaced,” my supervisor said looking at it with disgust. “It is the wrong thing in the wrong place at the wrong time. It is a metaphor for the MBA. Perhaps, it is a metaphor for you.”

And he was right, of course. It stood there huge and golden, juxtaposed against the faux slate grey of the buildings. It looked like a logo for a fast-food chain. The whole campus had once been a chicken farm and this thing, this out of place sculpture, was the university’s cringeworthy attempt to construct something to recognise what had gone before. It was called, somewhat ironically, the Golden Promise – it sounded like some sort of sexual fetish you purchased at your local brothel or perhaps a pile of salmonella-ridden wings slapped on a paper plate for \$9.95 from your neighbourhood takeaway. He was also right about business education. It had even less right to be on the university campus than the giant chicken wing. Business schools, let’s face it, should be broken up and the good bits absorbed by the humanities and social sciences. The rest, the non-academic box ticking shit like accounting and marketing, could be housed where it belonged – in a polytechnic. And, of course, he was also right about me – I was well and truly misplaced. This whole discussion on how to avoid the unwanted academic bullshit conjured images of Norman Rockwell’s painting *The Connoisseur*.³⁶¹ In this work Rockwell, who was a realist, depicted a Jackson Pollock³⁶² within his painting. Rockwell was basically flipping the bird to all those who suggested he was not a serious painter – that he was the chocolate box guy. He was saying: see I could do it if I wanted, but I am choosing not to. And that’s what I wanted to say. That’s what I was going to say.

He painted and didn’t respond. I wasn’t sure if he’d heard anything I said for the last hour or so. Perhaps, I’d been talking to myself. Perhaps I’d been talking to my ghostly reflection in this picture window. Down below, between the library and the Student Health building there were a hodgepodge of stands selling religion. There were several offering variations of Christianity – including Seventh Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Mormons amongst others. The Buddhists were there in their robes. As were the Hare Krishnas. The Pastafarians ran about with their flying spaghetti monster held aloft. What a shitshow. Sure, it was all dressed up as saving us, of offering us spiritual health, as doing us a favour, of presenting a bullshit get-out-of-jail-for-free card

361 See: <http://www.nrm.org/thinglink/text/Connoisseur.html>.

362 Jackson Pollock (1912-1956) is an abstract painter

in place of eternal darkness – AKA: death.³⁶³ But, in reality, they were just selling another commodity – like life insurance or blowjobs or cosmetic surgery. In front of these stands stood conservatively dressed, semi-ugly people with bad haircuts and cheap shoes. They clutched poorly written magazines in a glassy-eyed fervour. Their smiles were tea-stained and synthetic. Only the idiotic noodle boys with colanders on their heads were having fun. The sad bastards. They reminded me of the clowns who used to dress from head-to-toe in black and run about campus with toy guns in the 90s. This group was appropriately called KAOS – a kind of prosaic precursor to Chuck Palahniuk’s Project Mayhem.³⁶⁴ I was studying on the third floor of the Canterbury Student Union building, and I am not really sure why I was there, perhaps the library was too full of distractions. Anyway, I was working hard trying not to crash and burn in this boring as all hell Management Science paper. This was a kind of pseudo-math paper dressed up as management. The lunatic who invented it thought management could be broken down into scientific equations sans people. He was particularly enamoured with regression, time-series analysis, EOQ (Economic Order Quantity) and WTF (Waiting Time Formulas – AKA: queuing theory). He hated the human variable. Before lectures he would grumble that we had actually turned up, stating that his favourite lectures were the ones he presented to empty rooms. See what I mean? This guy had no place in front of students. He was a closet physicist who had taken the wrong degree.³⁶⁵ Anyway, I was sitting there, bored and stressed, practising these equations, encoding them into my long-term memory, even though I would never use them in the real world. I was vaguely aware of a knot of these sad little KAOS fuckers in the far corner. But I was too busy pulling my hair out to pay them much attention. Then, out of the corner of my eye, I noticed something being thrown at me. I almost shat myself. I was struck in the side by what appeared to be a hunting knife. I nearly passed out from a huge shot of adrenalin. They

363 E M Forster (1910), in his novel *Howards End*, discusses the binary nature of death - and, in particular the idea of being saved versus actually living. In a meeting with the poor and downtrodden clerk, Leonard Bast, Helen Schlegel tells him: “Death destroys a man: the idea of Death saves him”. She is not talking about Heaven here. She is talking about accepting that your time on the planet is limited and that, as such, you need to make sure you follow your desires and are true to your Self. Helen is, therefore, pointing out that the individual actually needs the abyss (Fonzie (Henry Winkler) needs to jump the garbage cans, (Marshall, 1974-1984) Captain Miller (Tom Hanks) needs to save Private Ryan (Matt Damon) (Spielberg, 1998)), the possibility of destruction, to spur them into action. In this way, I understand that my approach to this thesis is highly irregular and could, very easily, result in my failure (my academic death). But without this tension, my work would be *Death Proof* (Tarantino, 2007): it would be, in other words, prosaic, forgettable, and risk-free. But here is the irony: to produce work sans the possibility of death is to commit academic suicide. Only through, as Helen points out, accepting the idea of death (failure) can one be saved, can one create something that reflects who they are. It is about embracing, understanding, and accepting the stakes, not hiding from them, that makes the individual seek something greater. I am reminded of a scene in Petersen’s (2004) *Troy* that sums this up beautifully. Here, a messenger tells Achilles (Brad Pitt) that a huge Thessalonian is waiting to fight him and that he would not like to face him. Achilles shows no emotion and responds with a simple truth: “That’s why no one will remember your name”. To fulfil his destiny, Achilles understands that he must accept not only the challenge, but also the possibility of his own death.

364 Palahniuk, 1996.

365 It turns out that he was a closet novelist – since retirement, he has been writing and self-publishing science fiction.

were laughing. I was not laughing. I bent over and picked it up. It was made of rubber. Smouldering with rage, I walked to the window.

"Hey," one yelled, getting all bent out of shape. "What do you think you're doing. That doesn't belong to you. Hey stop!"

I eyeballed him. It is fair to say that I was radiating violence. That I was about to detonate. I opened the window and threw it down into the river below.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" another yelled. "It was just a joke!"

I took a deep breath, swivelled and returned to my books.

"You're a fucking asshole," I was told.

"You'll pay for that," I was told.

"You're going to get it," I was told.

I slammed my fist down on Hans' shitty textbook. The table shook. I shook. I pulled a Clint Eastwood face.

"Just piss off," I spat, "before I lose my temper."

My therapist chuckled.

"What did you really say?" he quizzed. "I just don't buy you in this assertive tough guy role you're offering. You're a pussy. A people pleaser. In fact, you're the least aggressive person I have ever mind moulded. You're so passive, you basically shrink yourself."

"I don't know," I admitted, ignoring his barbs. "I can't remember. I just remember the rubber knife, shitting myself, and chucking it out the window. The rest is speculation. It is possible I didn't say anything. It's possible that I just packed up and left. It's fact wrapped in fiction. Just like that religion down there."

"What's the truth part of religion again?" he asked, confused.

"No one can remember," I said. "That's the problem. Just like the five monkeys."

"That experiment didn't happen," he said. "It's made up. Just like your tough guy routine."

"Just like you," I countered.

"Just like the Philadelphia experiment," he continued. "Homer's Robots.³⁶⁶ Milli Vanilli."³⁶⁷

"Like business education," I added. "It's all just a shared illusion. An overly hopeful pond of salvation. A pot of gold at the end of a three-year rainbow."

"Roy G Biv," he said. "Fake news. Photoshop. Facebook. Instagram fucking stories."

"Narcissus' Echo," I said. "Narcissus' Reflection."³⁶⁸

366 Groening, M. (Creator). (1989). *The Simpsons* [Television Series]. 20th Century Fox.

367 Milli Vanilli became famous in the late 1980s for being unmasked as a fake band – they fronted for the real musicians.

368 Ovid, 8 AD.

“Which one am I?”

“Neither,” I said. “You’re just my inner troll.”

“That’s my job,” he said. “Trolling the Troll.”

When the going gets weird, the weird turn pro.

- Hunter S Thompson

Chapter 4: Trolling the Troll

On the first of April 2019,³⁶⁹ at high noon, I had a non-negotiable date with destiny. I was scheduled to present my case for PhD confirmation to a battery of my peers and to a throng of my academic betters. I would be listened to, scrutinised, questioned and judged. I would either be gunned down in a hail of misplaced and inappropriate reprimands or my presentation would send them into cognitive paralysis and render them thoroughly mute.³⁷⁰ It could go either way. I wasn't holding my breath. Needless to say, I wasn't planning on playing it safe either – even though the avalanche of messages had been clear: give us what we are expecting or face Hellfire & Damnation. Sure, I made a half-hearted attempt to write a normal speech. It was painful going. And, not surprisingly, boring as all hell – not only to write but to listen to. I screwed it into a metaphorical ball and threw it into my mental trashcan. I stared at the screen. I tapped the keys randomly. I berated myself using my mother's voice. I paced. I drank coffee. Nothing. I was, officially, blank. It was time, I realised, to think, to get my head straight – to shake out all that academic noise, to kick the bullshit rules to the curb, to ignore their

369 April Fools' Day.

370 I am playing with the trope of the mythical gunfight developed in westerns. The gunfight is the logical endpoint (albeit a stripped down and demotic version) of the quintessential English duel. However, rather than two drunken Lords fighting over the honour of a Lady in Hyde Park, the two men in the western are fighting over the historical record – between the right to go down in history as good v evil. The gunfighter (the outlaw/risk taker) must face the sheriff (the upholder of the status quo). Thus, the silent, often reluctant hero must, ultimately, finally confront his mirrored Self on a dusty street outside a saloon. The whole thing is choreographed, follows unwritten rules, and ends with the destruction of the protagonist/antagonist duality. They both, in the end, fold into one. The drifter is normally handed the sheriff's badge and has to take the place of the man he has just slain – that is, of course, until the next drifter rolls into town. The trick, I guess, is to resist the allure of becoming Mr. Jones (Orwell, 1945) - to refuse the badge and continue to be the drifter. Mr Jones, of course, is the farmer whom Napoleon, the pig, 'apes' after he overthrows him and assumes power.

cross-eyed desires and imbecilic demands. It was time to get back to who I was and what I wanted to achieve. It was time, I realised, to go for a run.³⁷¹

I pounded up and down the undulating footpaths that surround our suburb. The air was warm. There was a gentle breeze. Dogs lay in puddles of sunshine on classic-Kiwi-decks. It was a perfect autumn day. I dodged slow-walkers. I leapt steaming piles of dog shit. I waited, patiently for unobservant, reversing drivers. As my footfalls hit the pavement the words tumbled out onto my mental notepad. I knew, I realised, what I needed to say. I just needed to work out how to say it. Much to my running app's confusion, a few hundred meters from the house, I lost my footing on some loose shingle outside a house renovation, rolled my ankle and hit the pavement, ripped the skin from my palms, lost my glasses, phone, water bottle and all. The pain was so intense that I let out a primal scream. My teeth started chattering. Time slowed down. The world narrowed to this single moment. The builders continued to hammer on, oblivious. They couldn't have given less of a shit. I crawled to my phone and called my wife. Three weeks earlier, I had also called her to come and rescue me. On that occasion, I had tripped over a piece of uneven concrete outside a bus stop. The damage had been minimal. Yes, I had also torn my hands to pieces. Yes, I was also shaken and stirred. But this was different.

"Not again!" she grumbled. "Why can't you look where you're going?"

"My ankle," I whimpered.

"When are you going to learn," she said, "that you should run on the treadmill like everyone else?"

"It's fucked," I spluttered.

"You're almost *fifty*," she said, unnecessarily. "Perhaps you should find a safer hobby."

"Hospital!" I screamed.

"Really?" she said. "You're such a drama queen."

Finally, a builder strolled out of the house, a little irritated, to see how I was. He viewed the blood and my writhing with a crooked sneer as if I might be some kind of softy, aping it up.

"We get the boy to sweep it in the morning," he said, by way of explanation. "But, yeah, nah, he's getting pies from the dairy at the mo."

I did not care. I did not answer.

"You okay?" he finally asked.

371 A lot of my ideas are developed while running. I would argue that this is a genetically inherited trait – that during the Pleistocene those who could think quickly on their feet, who were able to either get dinner or avoid being dinner, were more successful and, therefore, passed on their genes.

Okay? Was he blind? I was pretty fucking far from okay.³⁷² I accessed some sort of primitive lexicon, looked up at him and grunted out an accusatory sentence laced with expletives. If I could have, I would have reached up and popped his head like a child's balloon. He raised his eyebrows at my lack of self-control, opened his mouth as if to say something, but shrugged and holstered his hammer instead. He turned and wandered back to his pie and cup of instant coffee.

At the hospital, they seemed upset and somewhat confused that I had arrived.

"Why didn't you go to the twenty-four-hour medical centre?" I was asked.

"What?" I responded, looking around, somewhat confused. "Am I not at the hospital?"

Not this again, I thought. Years ago, I had fallen, also while running, and cracked a rib or two. The closest hospital at that time was, sadly, Geraldine. They did not have a doctor on duty. I had to go and see some random GP in one of their residential suburbs. He, when I finally found him, just referred me back to the hospital for an x-ray. It was the old circular-bullshit-loop routine.

"But," he said. "Even if they are broken, there's nothing we can do. Not really. They will just strap them."

"Why don't you just strap them then?" I asked.

"Well," he said. "We would need the x-ray first. And, anyway, I don't have a nurse on duty. It's the weekend. This isn't Auckland."

It turned out that today's excuse was a far simpler one: they were too busy dealing with pretend illnesses, drug seekers, and paranoid lunatics. I had to be transferred to the private sector post-haste. But that was okay, because they could give me a referral, the nurse said, so there would be no charge. The nurse apologised for the inconvenience, handed me crutches, and demanded I eat a cupful of assorted drugs before we left.

At the commercial medical facility, they looked at me and back at the referral and back at me again.

"You went to the hospital first?" she asked, incredulously.

I saw it all very clearly. She thought I was on the make. That I was gaming the system. The codeine, unfortunately for her, had loosened my lips. The synapses in my brain were fizzing and bursting.

"Of course," I said. "How else could I get out of paying. After I injured myself, my first instinct was not to seek treatment, but to seek answers on Reddit as to how best to avoid medical bills. I am nothing if not practical."

372 Tarantino, Q. (Director). (1994). *Pulp Fiction*. [Motion Picture]. Miramax Films. This line is delivered by Marsellus Wallace (Ving Rhames) to Butch (Bruce Willis).

Sarcasm delivered. Message received. She pulled a face and told me to take a seat with a frosty smile. Eventually, after x-rays, a nurse confirmed the break and fitted me into a moonboot and sent me on my way.³⁷³

Later that day, in bed, stoned on society-approved-drugs, I hatched a plan for my confirmation speech – I would, I decided, rework Norwegian fairy-tales. And, in particular, the Three Billy Goats Gruff. This was most probably a result of clomping about in the moonboot. I would stand in front of academic body, I decided, and tell them a story. I would remind them of how stories were hardwired into our collective (un)consciousness, how they provided a touchstone for our shared humanity, how stories contained truths more powerful than boring academic writing. As the dopamine and serotonin cascaded about my bloodstream, mixing and mingling with the synthetic opiates, it all made sense. The weird colours popping about my head provided me with a surreal background which reminded me of a kid's kaleidoscope as I typed away.

I emailed my supervisor to tell him the good news.

I told my wife my whole crazy idea in an excited frenzy.

"I'll make an actual kid's book," I said. "with illustrations and everything!"

She palmed my drug stash and told me not to send emails or comment on social media and to try and get some sleep.

As confirmation approached, I was the recipient of an increasing number of pointless, anxiety-generating meetings. These were packaged as well-meaning, double-checking: had I done this or that? Was I prepared? Did I have any fucking clue what I was in for? The kids today refer to this kind of bullshit as concern trolling. What was really happening, was that the troll was beset with their own anxieties, which they were trying to defuse by transferring them onto me. This, of course, was impossible. What they really needed was therapy. Years ago, before the internet named this behaviour, I used to call people out by telling them that I hadn't asked for their input or needed it. I used to tell them, somewhat sternly, not to judge me by their own limitations and constraints. Yes, I was young and abrasive. But, let's be honest here – that's what they were doing. And, in doing so, they were also saying: I don't believe you are capable. But the opposite was true. I was just a Lacanian Mirror – they, of course, were not capable. And that's why they should shut-the-fuck up and piss-the-fuck-off.

³⁷³ The moonboot's core job is to govern and control my recovery with minimal risk. It holds the bone in place until it heals. In this way, it is the perfect metaphor for the discursual constraints, the academic regulations that accompany a doctoral thesis. They are supposed to help you get to the end of the journey without suffering damage. But they also constrain you – they restrict your ability to produce something new and fresh. In this way, I made the decision to remove the boot/the regulations so that I could run/think freely.

This whole slow down and do as I say or you'll fuck things up narrative, was mirrored by my physiotherapist. I told him I would most probably go insane and kill someone if he didn't get me back running immediately. That he should just rub some magic potion on my ankle, some exotic and ancient cream containing camel snot and goat cum perhaps. That I didn't have time for his conservative ideas, for his rulebook babbling, for his medical expertise, which, let's be honest here, were limited at best.

"In six weeks," he said. "After the specialist gives me the thumbs-up we can talk about removing the boot and go from there. We should have you running again by The End of Time if you are lucky. But don't count on it."

Unfortunately for him, I had experienced this all before. Twelve years ago, I had broken this ankle while walking between classes in one of Auckland's premier high schools. I had changed direction a little too quickly, having remembered something at the last minute, and my \$20 black shoes from the Warehouse couldn't handle the torque – the imitation leather was just not up for the challenges a vigorous stroll could induce. I knew all too well that the moonboot they were forcing on me, not only fixed the break but in doing so caused all sorts of painful side-effects – mostly around the loss of movement. I remembered clomping about like the Hunchback of Notre Dame for months on end after the moonboot was finally removed, my ankle well and truly fused into a weird position while some physiotherapist waffled at me from his textbook about bullshit exercises that would eventually bring me right. I was not signing up for that again. Fuck that shit. I took to Dr YouTube to seek mission appropriate answers. I found an extreme mountain biker who had removed the moonboot after two weeks. He had walked about his apartment at first. And then, as time went on, he had pushed the boundaries. On the six-week anniversary of his break he was back racing. This was what I wanted. He, this tattooed and bearded man-child, would be my guide. I would put my trust in this unqualified, most probably crazy, American cyclist. This seemed a far more sensible idea than believing some kid with a diploma on his wall and an ideology to follow.

"What are you doing?" my wife asked. "Why aren't you wearing the boot?"

I was walking slow laps in the hall.

"Did the physio tell you to do this?" she asked. "I thought you weren't supposed to take it off for six weeks?"

"We have different agendas," I said. "He is risk-averse. He is statistics driven. He likes the new quantitative data to match the old textbook numbers. He likes to take things slow. I don't do slow. I like to move really fucking fast. Like Mr Wolfe."³⁷⁴

"Isn't he like the expert, though?" she said. "Shouldn't you be listening to him?"

"I'm not going to confirm his data," I said. "I'm going to be an outlier. I'm going to do what my intuition tells me. This boot is a metaphor for conservative thinking. It's a prosthetic, a symbol, for the status quo. It is governing my recovery so that it complies with what has gone before."

"Not everything is a conspiracy," she said. "Sometimes I think you need to see things for what they are."

"The medical profession is not interested in my speedy recovery," I said. "They are not interested in me at all. I am a number. A fucking barcode. I am a set of symptoms to deal with. They are simply following the flowchart in the manual. They're only interested in protecting their knowledge and replicating their results."

Within a few weeks, to my wife's surprise, I was walking freely. The only time I put on the boot was to attend the pointless physio sessions. I wasn't sure why I was keeping up the charade. I seemed to be involved in some sort of shared dramatic performance with the medical profession. We were both, it seemed, going to pretend that my recovery was down to them.³⁷⁵

"We should be getting you out of that boot in a few weeks," he would say. "Your ankle is progressing really well."

I'm sure he believed it. I'm sure it gave him a nice warm feeling of calm. But things were about to turn pear-shaped in his world. On the very next appointment I turned up sans boot. He lost his shit.

"Where's your boot?" he said, looking so worried I thought the planet was about to explode.

"I forgot to put it on this morning," I lied. "Everything seems fine."

"You can't take the boot off until the specialist says so," he said. "You're asking for trouble. You're not supposed to make these decisions for yourself. You're supposed to wait until a suitably qualified person makes them for you. I fill in the boxes here," he

374 Tarantino, Q. (Director). (1994). *Pulp Fiction*. [Motion Picture]. Miramax Films. Winston Wolfe (Harvey Keitel) plays the cleaner – he fixes situations that have the potential to spiral out of control. In one of his famous lines he says: "If I'm curt with you it's because time is a factor. I think fast, I talk fast and I need you guys to act fast if you wanna get out of this. So, pretty please with sugar on top. Clean the fucking car." It is interesting that Winston's job is to fix/overwrite the historical narrative. This, of course, recalls the job of Winston Smith in Orwell's (1949) *1984*.

375 Showalter (1997), in her discussion on the construction of hysterical narratives, points out that "...doctors' stories tend to dominate medical discourse, while *patients* have to modify their stories..." (p. 82) to fit. I would contend that the university/hysteric discourse also works this way – the hysterical student must alter his story/work to fit the narrative/knowledge that the university has constructed.

pointed to the little rectangles on the screen. "Then the specialist looks at them. If he doesn't see completed boxes, he won't let you take off the boot."

"I've already taken it off," I said. "To be honest, I took it off weeks ago."

"Your ankle won't heal!" he said. "You'll have to wear it for months!"

"It's healed," I said, bouncing up and down.

"You won't be able to go running."

"I went for a run this morning," I said. "Four miles at a nine-mile-pace. It felt fine."

He huffed and puffed. He stood and sat again. He slammed his fist on his desk. His face became satanic with anger.

"If you break it again," he said, changing tack, "I won't fix it again."

"No offence," I said. "But you didn't fix it in the first place."

"If you break it again," he said. "ACC won't come to the party."

"I don't care," I said. "I just want to run. Is that too hard to fathom. This is what I told you at our first meeting. But you didn't listen."

"Why won't you just do as you are told!"

"I never do as I am told," I said. "That's who I am. That's what gives me my charm."

The concern trolling began with the PDC querying my confirmation document. I had arrived at the university to meet with a professor who I was going to do some tutoring for. I did not want to do this tutoring. It was for a subject that was only borderline academic at best. But it paid the bills, so I had little choice. I did not want to see the PDC, hear from him, or interact with him in anyway. But, unfortunately, the office to which I was destined, was right next to his. He waved me over. His administrator was drinking coffee and staring into a fish tank. The librarian was, I guessed, merging with the surroundings as usual.

"I read your abstract," he said, even though he was not supposed to, even though he should have just passed it on to the relevant academics, even though he was neither qualified nor tasked with this duty. "And, well it's a bit, um, how should I put it: *different*."

"Yes," I agreed. "It's different. That was my plan."

"Well," he said, pausing and rearranging ornaments on the counter. "You will be performing the first confirmation ceremony for the academic year. And, I just wanted to make sure you read the guidelines I sent you?"

Message delivered: your confirmation document looks different. It does not comply with my narrow view of the world. It must be wrong. You must be incompetent. And I don't want this setting a bad precedent for the newbs. I looked at him and stifled a sigh. What a buffoon. I did not answer. But, yes, for a second, I did feel a slight tingle of anxiety

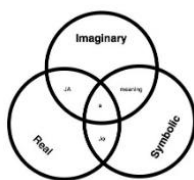
creep about me. This, sadly, was not an isolated incident. The concern trolls were out in force. It was, I thought, their last, sad attempts to pull me back into line. This, of course, was the creative individual's lot in organisations. They were constantly being forced to shove their personality back in the box and conform. Well I was done with all that. It was high-time to let my freak-flag fly.

A week before my ceremony, I was summoned to the university to meet with the Chief of Censorship, Control, & Policy (CCCP).

"I'm just going to tell you how the day will unfold," he said. "And make sure you perform as expected."

He talked in clichéd jargon. In sound bites. His desk, I noted, was empty of personal items. His bookshelves were alphabetised. This was a guy who liked order. He took a pair of scissors from his top drawer and trimmed a fern on his bookshelf as he talked. He was hidden directly behind my left shoulder. I twisted myself into a Borromean Knot³⁷⁶ just to maintain eye contact, just to watch his gardening performance.³⁷⁷ He used a hairdryer to remove the offending off-cuts of vegetation, and then applied a fine mist upon its foliage from a ceramic pump-bottle sporting the crest of the Business Roundtable (BRT). He asked me questions and didn't wait for answers. He asked me if my life insurance policy was up to date, if I had revised my Will recently, if I had undergone therapy.

"Some students wig out," he said, by way of explanation, looking at the leaves of his plant through a large magnifying glass, his hands gloved like that of a conductor. "They go postal. That's all. Nothing major. It's good to cover off all the possible contingencies just in case you run amok. But don't worry, there'll be a trio of burly bouncers to contain you until the Crisis Response Team (CRT) arrive from Student Health. Your insanity will



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Lacan, 1974. As Stanizai (2018) points out, "Lacan illustrates his conceptualization of the triad of the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary with the topology of the Borromean knot" (p. 3).

377 His plant maintenance is an allusion to the dichotomy between nature/culture feminine/masculine hysteric/university. He is attempting to control nature, to get it to conform with his desires. This idea is best illustrated in Campion's (1993) *The Piano*. Here, the antagonist Stewart (Sam Neil) busies himself with clearing the landscape – through cutting down trees and clearing bush. He is determined to tame the rough and rugged landscape – to overlay it with English sensibilities. This is also what he tries to do to his wife, Ada (Holly Hunter), who is a mute hysteric. Interestingly, Ada is voiced by her young daughter (her inner child who represents nature) Flora (as opposed to fauna) (Anna Paquin) and through her piano. Stewart is juxtaposed by fellow Englishman Baines (Harvey Keitel) who does not try to control nature, he simply lives within the landscape and become one with it. Baines is presented as emotional and passionate, while Stewart is cold and distant. The CCCP is, therefore, seeking to prune and trim my personality – but, for my own nature to flourish, I have to resist. I have to remain mute like Ada.

be dealt with according to the procedure set out in the Comprehensive Counter to Creatives Manual (CCCM)."

"But I'm the Hysteric," I told him.

"Yes," he said. "I know. That's why we've gone directly to Defcon 2. We've taken all possible counter measures. We're having your presentation in the padded room in the psychiatric wing. But don't worry. The CRT has indicated you won't be required to wear a straitjacket. Although one will be provided. Just as a precaution. You're a medium, right?"

"Why not just get me to drink the Kool-Aid now," I said, "and get it over with."

"Well," he said, "The Academic Board did recommend this. But your supervisor vetoed it. Apparently, there's a barely remembered ancient rule in the constitution that says we have to listen to opposing voices even though we don't really want to. Even though we'll have our fingers in our ears. Can you believe it? How are we going to get a uniformity of research out of this factory if we have to make allowances for maniacs like you? No offense."

A few days out from my event, the Fourierist was confronted by Agents from the Ivory Tower, that sits at the epicentre of the sprawling Management complex, as he was eating his lunch in the rundown staff cafeteria. They had somehow gained access to my confirmation document and had made the long trek down the sweeping marble staircase to seek out and harass him because he was seen loitering, they said, with the accused and his idiotic-sheep-obsessed-supervisor on more than one occasion. They were angry, apparently, that a mere student had the audacity to criticise their workplace – this bastion, this utopia of educational excellence.

"This place is perfect," the Fourierist was told. "It says so in the BDSM in the chapter titled Stamping out Criticism. You can find it under the subheading Heretics & Hysterics: killing alternative voices. Haven't you read your copy?"

The Fourierist had not read the propaganda from the Tower. Sadly, he had been far too busy marking essays that the students had just purchased from the recently opened Term Paper franchise that was located just next to Starbucks and sat directly opposite the disused library. This business was so profitable last year's MBA cohort used it as a case study.

"Why does he think he has the right to criticise us?" they asked, circling the Fourierist in their sharkskin suits. "He has no idea what we do. We distribute important knowledge. We say what is right and wrong. We are frank in our franking of ideas."

They're merely errand boys, the Fourierist realised. Sent to deliver a message by clerics in the Tower.³⁷⁸

Oh, I knew exactly what they did. They wrote boring papers about their boring subjects that they hoped to get into boring journals that no one, in their right mind, read. They designed and taught classes that confirmed and replicated their boring ideas. They made the simple as complicated as possible. They made up new words and stupid acronyms. They forced students to join them in the illusion of knowledge acquisition. They revelled in their wafer-thin layer of understanding. They were, not to put too fine a point on it, deluded simpletons.

"It's his job to write a thesis that will confirm how we are doing a great job here," they said. "He's supposed to build us up. We want things to chug along in the same way they always have. You need to talk to him. Frighten him. Tell him we will come to his confirmation and make ill-informed and inappropriate statements, that we will pull faces and call him names. Tell him that we are watching. That we would very much like him to comply. That he should do as we say."

The Fourierist finished his Turkish Delight and sipped his cup of tea and nodded like Freud in conversation with Dora. Like Marx in conversation with Engels.³⁷⁹ Like Lacan in conversation with himself. He lit a cigar and asked them to elaborate on the worst-nightmare-scenario they were presenting. He asked them about their screwy childhoods, about their limited libidos. He asked them to explain exactly what happened on their uncle's farm.³⁸⁰

"The university doesn't need a critical voice," he was told. "That's so old school. Everything is fine. There's nothing to see here. Weren't you issued with Rose Coloured Glasses?"

"You should come to his confirmation and pull your faces," the Fourierist said. "You guys are familiar with Lacan, right?"

"Of course we're familiar with Lacan," the first one said, adjusting his crotch, coughing uncomfortably. "How else would we have been given offices in the Ivory Tower? He's the weirdo, right, that talks about things-that-are-not-important, like escargot and French cinema?"

"And, anyway," said the other, "we don't ask questions. We make statements. We distribute knowledge. We don't get it from students. Are you mad? What is wrong with you?"

378 Coppola, F. (Director). (1979). *Apocalypse Now* [Motion Picture]. United Artists. A version of this line is delivered by Kurtz (Marlon Brando) towards the end of the movie.

379 Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) is a German philosopher.

380 Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the Lambs* [Motion Picture]. Orion.

Post confirmation, I was strip-searched, de-loused, dressed in an orange jumpsuit, then escorted to the interrogation room by a brace of robotic security personnel. I was placed on a hard, wooden stool under harsh lights, given a shot of sodium pentothal, wired to a polygraph, and finally, had electrodes attached to my temples, nipples, and testicles.

“I thought you were joking,” I told the CCCP. “I thought you were just for show.”

“Do I look like Jerry Seinfeld?”³⁸¹ he asked. “Do I look like a Porsche 911 Targa?”

Seated across from me, partially obscured in the glare of the powerful lights, were the Twin Consuls.³⁸² It was their job to give me a good, solid working over. It was their job to ridicule me. To try and get me to crack. It would be a brutal tag-team affair. The whole thing reminded me of the WWF³⁸³ (World Wrestling Federation) back in the 80s – the pageantry, the weird roles, the sense that it was all just an act.

“I didn’t like it,” the Ultimate Worrier stated, his voice booming, his eyes rolling, his face paint shimmering under the lights.³⁸⁴ “And I don’t like you. You’re a pathological manipulator. You purposely constructed your confirmation speech in such a way as to make my counterarguments appear unhinged.”

I wanted to unhinge the window and hurl him down the upon the Golden Chicken Wing.

“I didn’t get that,” said his twin, the Iron Maiden, the metallic cage that encased her face clinking as she shook her head. “I thought he was just being strategic.”

The Ultimate Worrier slapped his sibling, knocking her false teeth through the grill and across the table. I handed them back.

“And you’re just so boring,” said the Ultimate Worrier, stabbing his finger at me. “On the card it says you’re supposed to be hysterical. But I didn’t find you funny at all. I was expecting you to look like the Joker.³⁸⁵ I was expecting you to look like you were about to set off trick or treating. Where’s your costume? People expect a show. People expect you to play a role. You have to think of the audience. You just can’t turn up and be yourself. That’s ridiculous.”

“That’s true,” said the Iron Maiden, replacing her teeth. “What’s the point of putting on this performance if you’re not going to follow the script. You did receive your copy from the PDC didn’t you?”

381 Jerome Allen Seinfeld (1954-) is an American comedian.

382 The two consuls (509-27BC) held the highest office in Ancient Rome – they made the decisions. Their purpose was to remove ultimate power from one individual.

383 McMahon, V. (Creator). (1986-2001). *WWF Superstars of Wrestling* [Television Series]. Syndicated.

384 I am playing with the dichotomy between the homophones - Worrier/warrior. The Ultimate Warrior is a wrestler in the WWF.

385 A seminal character from *Batman* (Kane, 1939-).

I glanced over at the CCCP to see if he was following the insanity that was unfolding. But he did not respond. He was too busy watching a plant grooming video on his phone, his earbuds firmly in place, his face plastered with a waxy sheen.

“Goats?” the Ultimate Worrier asked. “Trolls?”

“Where were your stuttering monologues?” the Iron Maiden asked. “Where was your boring PowerPoint slideshow?”³⁸⁶

“Forget about that debacle of a speech. What about this document? This paper of yours is utter bullshit!” the Ultimate Worrier boomed, and threw my confirmation document directly into a wastepaper basket. “I didn’t like the look of it. And I don’t like the look of you!”

“I couldn’t get past the Abstract,” the Iron Maiden admitted, shaking her rattly head. “It didn’t look anything like the one we had sent him.”

I opened my mouth to ask her a question, but noticed the Ultimate Worrier’s thumb twitching on the Nut Buzzer and changed my mind. My teeth started to chatter. My heart rate increased. There was a line of sweat forming on my brow. These questions appeared to be rhetorical. My input was not required.

“And all these trendy, irrelevant pop-culture references,” the Ultimate Worrier continued. “I didn’t get any of it. I listen to the BBC World Report. And the only book I read is *the Book* – the Business Department School Manifesto. Who has time to read literature? That’s what the Humanities is for. This is a proper school. We don’t read books here. We skim. We look for bold headings. At pretty illustrations. At mesmerising graphs. Just an FYI, we like acronyms. They’re a KPI. Where were your acronyms?”

386 The shift to PowerPoint lecturing is a complete and utter abomination. The lectures I recall from my time as an undergraduate, were delivered by passionate individuals who told stories. Stories people. You had to think about them to understand the power of their point. There was no spoon-feeding. They didn’t use technology because there wasn’t any (unless you consider an overhead projector with a busted bulb technology or running a short clip on VHS the height of sophistication). They had to communicate complex ideas in easy digestible (mostly metaphorical) ways. They had to capture your attention and hold it for an hour with nothing more than words. The two Kings of this at the University of Canterbury were, in my opinion, Leonard Wilcox and Denis Dutton (both Americans). There was something astonishing in simply listening to them speak. Perhaps it was because I was from Ashburton and hadn’t heard any real Americans speak before (apart from through the TV) let alone met any. Wilcox taught American literature. He would stand behind the lectern and tell these amazing stories about Jack Kerouac and Thomas Pynchon and how he really missed pancakes when he first moved to Christchurch. He told us how he walked up and down Riccarton Road seeking his favourite breakfast meal. Nada. Not a flapjack, pikelet, or hotcake in sight. I was offered a scone and a cup of tea, he said, like I was Jane Austen. He had this knack of weaving his own history into the work we were studying – and, in doing so, making it real and alive. He, I think, was instrumental in reigniting my love of literature. I had abandoned novels and taken up the tomes of the business school. This, I realised, as he ranted a little unhinged from the podium, his hair wild, his suit a little shabby, had been a grave mistake. This shit was alive. The books I was trying to read were, in comparison, fucking shit – they were PowerPoint slides, while the books he taught were *the shit*. Dutton, the second of this very short list, taught the philosophy of art. This course was like busting open a window in your head that had been shuttered. This was a 12-point paper – the standard course was 6-points – and, as with all the papers back in the 1990s, it went all year (the shift to single semester papers for economic reasons is another appalling decision). Dutton’s plan, always, was to shock – he wanted to spark debate: he would keep probing until someone complained. I don’t agree, someone would eventually say. I find that idea offensive. Good, he would respond, you’re supposed to. Finally, he would continue, smiling, someone is awake. Today, however, no one is awake. And that’s because the PowerPoint, is the little security blanket lecturers like to carry into the lecture halls on their memory sticks. Wilcox and Dutton didn’t need memory sticks – and this is probably why these memories, ironically, have stuck.

“Yes,” said the Iron Maiden. “And just to pivot for a moment, I noticed a serious lack of jargon. One of your main tasks was to convince us that you understood the language of business. Jargon is what we teach in this school. It’s our core competency. There are a lot of moving parts and you need to assign the appropriate corporate doublespeak³⁸⁷ to all of them.”

“And,” said the Ultimate Worrier, “you were supposed to spell everything out for me. That’s a rule I just made up. And now you must follow it because I have been granted this small moment of power over you and I intend to exploit it to its full potential. That’s what leadership is.”

“But I did explain everything,” I replied, “It’s all in the footnotes.”

“Apparently,” the Iron Maiden laughed, “we were supposed to read them. I guess that’s why he included them. As irritating as they are.”

“You didn’t read them?” I asked.

“They were not in bold,” the Ultimate Worrier spluttered. “If they were important, they’d be in bold. I can’t read everything. That’s not how knowledge transfer works in the business school. Don’t you know anything about how business schools work?”

“Anyway,” I said. “Back up the truck just a sec. I have a PSA.”

They both swivelled to stare at me.

“But we’re are not expecting a message from our sponsor until the interval,” the Ultimate Worrier said, scratching his head. “It says so on the agenda.”

“Believe it or not,” I said. “I don’t have to spell anything out for the reader. That’s not how literature works.³⁸⁸ It’s not the job of the novelist to muse over the potential cognitive limitations of specific, individual readers. It’s not the job of the author to speak down to the reader in an attempt to idiot-proof the text for the lowest common dominator. This path terminates in the hamlet of shitty-book-ville. It’s my job to construct the best story I can. The writer writes. The reader reads. The shit you call understanding or interpreting or comprehending is completely out of my hands. That’s the domain of the reader. That’s your job. Not mine.”

“Well then!” he roared, his eyes revolving in their sockets like the villain of the week in *Stingray*.³⁸⁹ “I’m out!”

He vaulted out of the ring and ran down the corridor, his arms waving, and disappeared into the Green Room. The CCCP eyed me, sighed, and removed his earbuds.

³⁸⁷ Orwell, 1949.

³⁸⁸ The Ultimate Worrier wants and expects a thorough, join-the-dots, academic explanation. This is the normal way of things in academia – I am going to do this (introduction); this is what has been done (literature review); this is how I will do this (method); I am doing this (body); this is what I found (results); and, finally, here is my contribution to knowledge (conclusion). He is not, therefore, able to put this aside and consider the text as a novel and himself as a reader of fiction.

³⁸⁹ Anderson, G., & Anderson, S. (Creators). (1964-1965). *Stingray* [Television Series]. ATV.

“What did you say to him?” he asked.

“I wouldn’t agree with his warped ideology,” I said. “It was a firm no from me.”³⁹⁰ He just flipped the bird in my grill and flipped out.”

“We are not used to being questioned,” the Iron Maiden said. “Students normally want to pass. They just do as we say and it’s business as usual. You, on the other hand, seem hellbent on doing the exact opposite of what we want.”

The Ultimate Worrier burst back into the room, rolled his eyes and bared his teeth. He poked out his tongue and slapped his bare chest and screamed. He leapt upon the boardroom table, squatted in front of me, and pointed an angry finger in my face.

“Are you ready to comply now?” he roared. “Or do I have to have another tantrum?”

Unfortunately, I didn’t get to answer. There was a tap on the door. The PDC put his head in the door.

“Time’s up,” he chirped. “Give me the student.”

The CCCP indicated with a nod of his chin that I should get up and get out.

“Oh, and hurry up and come to a decision,” the PDC said. “I only have access to the guillotine for another hour. Plus, we are expecting the next victim at three. We can’t waste all day with this one. I think it’s fairly clear which way this is going.”

Before we move into the PDC’s office and converse with that idiotic bureaucrat about my potential, still yet undecided, futures, we first need to dive back into the past and discuss the origins of the fear and anxiety that engulfs me at these crucial decision-making moments – where my fate remains, largely, in the hands of others. This particular origin story bubbled to the surface while we were sitting in a café on a wide boulevard in Paris on spring morning in 2017. The catalyst for this trip was my eldest son’s unexpected ultimatum: I’ve found a job and a flat, he stated. I’m leaving school and moving out. It shocked us out of our treadmill existence. It woke us from our middle-class slumber. I shook my head like Indi. My wife paced. We waited for her fuse to burn down. My youngest son sat transfixed. The story unfolding in front of him was better than any video game. Right, she finally said. But not before we head off on one last family adventure. Okay, I thought, but how the fuck are we going to pay for that? She turned to me, narrowed her eyes, and read my thoughts. We’re selling the house, she said. I’m quitting my job. You’re quitting your job. Where are we going? I asked. Every-fucking-where, she said. Consider it a colonic, she told me. Consider it a reboot. A part of our life, it appeared, was soon to be over. But my son was not keen. No offence, he said. But I actually hate you guys. I don’t want to live with you, remember? Let alone travel with

390 Fuller, S. (Creator). (2002-) *American Idol* [Television Series]. Fox. This is a catchphrase of one of the hosts/judges Simon Cowell.

you. Needless to say, he spent the trip looking at his phone, texting his girlfriend, and refusing to participate in activities. So, yeah, teenagers are hard work.

I was trying to order coffee and some gluten-free Madeleine tea cakes³⁹¹ from the waitress. She listened patiently to my broken, childlike attempts to articulate what I desired.³⁹² But it was like my tongue wasn't my own, that it had knotted itself and refused to cooperate. I might as well have been Jodie Foster in *Nell*.³⁹³ I might as well have been Indi asking for her breakfast.³⁹⁴

She looked at me with quizzical humour. Kate looked at me like I might, in fact, be having a stroke. She shook her head.

"Gâteaux au thé de madeleine et café, s'il vous plait," Kate said, effortlessly, smiling. "Sans gluten, merci beaucoup."

What the absolute fuck?

As far as I knew she hadn't learned or spoken French since high school. Yet here she was, thirty years later, still able to bang out a phrase like it was nothing at all. I dunked my tea cake and sipped my coffee and accepted the fact that the year or two I spent on Duo Lingo had been a complete bust, that it had been pretend learning – much like the MBA.

The reason Kate learned French at high school, while I had not, was due to the results of the Weighted Evaluation Test (WET), which was part of the country-wide Formal Academic Realignment Trials (FARTS) that occurred at the end of year eight (AKA: form two).³⁹⁵ I was not permitted to take a foreign language in high school. It was as simple as that. I had to choose between metalwork or woodwork. And the reason for this was straightforward and non-negotiable. I fucked up the high school entrance exam. That's right people. After years of always being the top of the class,³⁹⁶ of always being shunned

391 Proust, 1913.

392 I am alluding to the fact that we can't actually articulate what we desire.

393 Apted, M. (Director). (1994). *Nell* [Motion Picture]. 20th Century Fox.

394 We have a bell in our living-room that we have taught Indi to ring with her nose when she wants to go out for a shit.

However, she has started dinging it to tell us it's dinner time. We are living in an inverse Pavlovian unaversive, where the dog dings the bell and the humans preform as they have been conditioned to do so.

395 Kate and I attended the same high school. Although, I didn't know her then. She was a year ahead of me. She dated older guys, while I dated younger girls. Thus, our paths never crossed.

396 A couple of caveats here: I was never good at learning random, contextless facts. In other words, I was shit at spelling tests and doing math equations. What this means is that, for a data driven education system, I appeared to be very average. It was only the observant primary school teachers - the big three: Mrs O'Malley (standard 3) Mr Telfer (standard 4) and Mr Bishop (primer 1), who got it, who understood me. I remember having a conversation with Mr Bishop when I was in standard 4. We had just practiced my play in front of his new entrants in the school library. Afterwards, he came up and smiled and said "Steve Scott, well done. I just don't know how you do it. It was amazing." This was high praise indeed. It was also a question I could not answer. I didn't know either. Looking back at this conversation, I can clearly see the three key attributes primary school teachers should always possess: kindness, a positive focus, and a soft voice. The second caveat, though, is the real kicker: after all these years, I have finally been diagnosed with ADHD. This, very recent revelation makes the puzzle of my childhood education, and my working life, all begin to fall into place. Because I have ADHD, I tend to hyper-focus of specific tasks that produce a lot of dopamine – like writing this thesis, or reading novels, non-fiction, watching movies, etc. However, it also means I get fucking bored very easily. I can't stand being told shit I already know or listening to someone blather on about shit that doesn't matter. This is why, at primary school, I spent the vast majority of my time either daydreaming in class or reading. If you are a boring motherfucker and want to tell me about your boring shit, I would strongly urge you not to do

as a know it all, of reading all the books in the local library and being on a first name basis with the librarians, I was having my reality checked. I was having, as we like to say in Ashburton, a new arsehole cut. Let's be clear: no one had ever told me I was clever or smart or above average. I had always been told I was weird or strange. By everyone. Family. Teachers. Friends. Relatives. The whole shooting-box. So, when my name was read out on the first day of high school and I was placed in a class with Joe Below Average, we all just accepted it as cool and normal. I had, it was decided, a run-of-the-mill intelligence. I should note, my reports from that time make for excellent reading: here is a snippet from my fourth form English Teacher. Class Average: 36. Steven's mark: 88 | D (the letter grade was for attitude). "Steven does not deserve this high mark. He is generally disengaged (I had read all the books we were discussing in primary school), disruptive (he asks too many questions I can't answer), and needs to learn to take instruction (he won't listen to me because I have nothing interesting to say)." To be fair, I wasn't even trying by the end of the fourth form. I simply didn't care. I had given up. The scam that is formal education was very clear to me by then – it was not about knowledge acquisition at all. That was just a ruse. It was simply about organising society into nice, clearly labelled boxes. It was, at the end of the day, a mechanism for enabling social stratification and cementing the preferred social order. But I do have one final question for Mrs. Johnstone: why the fuck, Mrs J, didn't you see I was bored and capable and have me put in top-band? I can actually answer that for her: he is too disruptive. We can't have him negatively impacting the conforming kids. It's just too risky. Anyway, his high marks were a fluke. They'll go down, you'll see. And, he's a pathological liar. No one had read all those books. I haven't even read them. He's just a kid from Ashburton. I've met his parents. They wouldn't know a book if it hit them in the face. What a joke. Top-band? Not on my watch.

This whole debacle only occurred because I was absent from school for a fortnight or so before the entrance exam. I'm not sure what was wrong with me. I have no memory of being ill at this time. Perhaps my mother was trying to have me castrated again. Perhaps my gluten-rich diet had caused my arsehole to implode. Perhaps I had asthma induced bronchitis due to the serious amount of passive smoking I was engaged in. I don't know. But what I do know, was that on my first day back at school, I sat in an empty classroom and wondered where everyone was. They were, of course, at the hall, as instructed, taking the test. My teacher, seeking her coffee cup, had found me sitting there

so. I will appear rude and disinterested. I will, perhaps, walk away mid-sentence, or escape into an imaginary world and switch off. I will not be listening to you. Just so we're clear, this is not my fault. It's the way my brain is designed. I consider it my superpower.

reading my book and quickly frogmarched me to the hall. They all had their heads down scribbling. I had lost a quarter of the allocated time before I even began. I was silently handed a piece of paper and a pencil. I wasn't told what it was for. I had no idea what was going on. I sat there and read it, like it was a memo, trying to work out what I was supposed to do. I had no urgency. When they finally called time, I hadn't even finished. I had barely begun. If they had bothered to tell me that I'd be stuck in a classroom with twenty-nine bogans, all of whom would want to kill me for being weird, I would have got my shit together. I would've had added motivation. However, this was not the case – and this was why I was to take metalwork and not French, because French was for the kids who were smart and would go to university, and building letterboxes and cake tins³⁹⁷ was for the kids who would enter the trades, drive trucks, and kill animals at the local abattoir.³⁹⁸ This, then, I realised in a cliched Parisian café, was why arbitrary testing, forms, documents requiring information, or, in fact, any unexpected paperwork, or decision making that was out of my hands, scared the absolute fucking shit out of me.

I was strapped to a chair in the PDC's office while the Twin Consuls, the CCCP, and my supervisor argued about my future.

"Do you want something to drink?" asked the administrator. "I can do instant coffee, water? We've got some expired boxes of juice with Chinese writing on them in the back of the fridge. Or you can have a nice refreshing shot of Kool-Aid? What'll it be?"

"I just don't understand it," the PDC muttered. "I just can't believe it."

"What are you mumbling about?" the librarian asked, shimmering into focus. He coughed a cloud of chalk dust and looked at the PDC like he might actually kill him.

"Why didn't anyone ask him how this, this thing he has written, is research?" he said. "I wanted to. But I wasn't allowed. Because I am not a member of the academic staff. I just can't understand why it wasn't brought up."

"Because," I said, refusing the drink the administrator brought me. "It wasn't relevant."

"Why not?" he said. "It seems completely relevant. It seems fundamental."

"Because," I said again. "They all knew it was research. Only you, sitting at the back, working the lights, worrying about the time, didn't know it was research. And that's

397 Interestingly, while Kate can speak French, I cannot build cake tins or make letterboxes.

398 It wasn't until I was 24 – just over ten years later – that I realised that something was up. I just knew that the path that I was on was not the right one. How could it be? Thus, at the start of 1994, my personal Dark Ages were about to end. I quit my job and enrolled at Canterbury. It was time to pick up where I had left off in 1982. It was time to start reading again. I was time to start thinking. I have no idea what my life would have been like if I'd not been sick, if I'd aced that exam, if I'd been in top-band, and headed off to university with all the other smart kids. Would I still be the hysteric? Would I still push against the status quo? Would I just be another Norm? Maybe. Perhaps, then, this was a lucky escape. Perhaps, these ten-dark-years was the price one has to pay for enlightenment. Perhaps, those ten years were the real education.

precisely why you weren't allowed to ask questions. And, that's why you shouldn't be asking any now."

"I have a question," my therapist asked. "Can you please, for the love of fucking God, stop moving?"

He was dressed in a silk Kimono, standing behind his easel smoking a thin cocktail cigarette. I was stretched on the chaise longue as usual. The light from the picture window cut a wedge of space between us. Lump stretched, circled and followed the sun to a new spot.

"You can't listen to them," he said. "Dorian listened to Lord Henry.³⁹⁹ Othello listened to Iago.⁴⁰⁰ Marty McFly listened to Needles.⁴⁰¹ And look what happened to them. The same rules apply. They were all trolled. They were all triggered. You must close your ears to their insanity. Or better yet, chop them off like van Gogh."⁴⁰²

"When will this portrait be done?"

"When will your book be written?"

"Nothing's ever finished," I said. "Not really."

"The narrative continues," he said. "The reader interprets. The critics ruminate. The observer concocts a series of opinions. Prequels. Sequels. Spinoffs."

"All opinions exist in the quantum state," I said. "All interpretations are valid/invalid simultaneously."

"Ones are zeros," he said. "Schrodinger's cat is a zombie. Light is a wave and a particle. The Universe is schizophrenic. And so is the academic diary you're constructing."

"Do you have to smoke it here?" I asked. "It's not the seventies."

He ignored me and continued to blow thought bubbles towards the ceiling fan.

I shook my head. A toaster popped. A kettle whistled.

"Fiction and nonfiction all merging in your head," he said. "And then spewing forth into your diarised reflections. Do you even remember what's real anymore? Do you even know what reality is?"

"It's the construction of narratives," I said. "We construct our world via language. We construct ourselves via stories. We mould it into what we desire."⁴⁰³

"Or despise," he said. "Or hate."

399 Wilde, 1890.

400 Shakespeare, 1623: *Othello*.

401 Zemeckis, R. (Director). (1989). *Back to the Future Part II* [Motion Picture]. Universal Pictures.

402 Vincent Willem van Gogh (1853–1890) is a Dutch post-impressionist painter.

403 Bruner, 1991; 2003; 2004.

"This isn't a Rimmer fantasy,"⁴⁰⁴ I said. "This isn't Frankenstein's Monster."⁴⁰⁵

"What exactly is it you want again?" he asked.

"To pull back the veil," I said. "To finally see the Wizard and his levers."⁴⁰⁶

"What then?"

"I can get back to Kansas," I said. "I can climb back through the looking glass."⁴⁰⁷

"Drink?" he asked, moving to his well-stocked wet bar. "Oh, that's right, you don't drink. Why is that again?"

"I made a deal," I said. "We've been over this."

"Superstition," he said, clinking ice cubes, pouring scotch, smiling to himself. "Magical beliefs. The occult. False deities. The Matrix."⁴⁰⁸ The Simulation."⁴⁰⁹

"You're an asshole," I said.

He sipped his drink, sighed, and collapsed into his Edwardian club chair. He eyed me over the rim of his glass, smiling.

"You're a fucking cock,"⁴¹⁰ I told him.

"I know you are," he sang, "you said you are, so what am I?"⁴¹¹

404 Grant, R., & Naylor, D. (Creators). (1988-). *Red Dwarf* [Television Series]. BBC. In the episode *Better than Life* (season 2, episode 2) Rimmer plays the VR game 'Better Than Life'. In this game, players can have whatever they desire. But rather than doing this, Rimmer conjures a living hell for himself and eventually the other characters as well – hence, the pejorative: a Rimmer Fantasy.

405 Shelley, 1818.

406 Fleming, V. (Director). (1939). *The Wizard of Oz* [Motion Picture]. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

407 Carroll, 1871.

408 Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (Directors). (1999). *The Matrix* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers.

409 Bostrom, 2003.

410 I am acknowledging, through this insult (you are/have the cock/phallus), that he has/is the knowledge I am seeking.

411 Here the insult is turned back upon itself like a mirror – you have/are the knowledge I say, to which he replies: no, you have are/have the knowledge.

Part Two: Self-Examination

In individuals, insanity is rare; but in groups, parties, nations and epochs, it is the rule.

— Friedrich Nietzsche

Chapter 5: I know You are, You said you are, So what am I?

On a spectacular December morning in 2019, I took the ferry from Downtown Auckland to Waiheke Island. I was attending a Business School conference at Waiheke University (WU) – New Zealand’s premier seat of learning – not because I wanted to, but because my supervisor had, he said, hatched a cunning plan to get me in front of potential examiners. That way, he reasoned, my work wouldn’t be a complete shock when they were finally introduced to it. That way, he said, they can see that you’re mostly normal even if your writing is batshit crazy.

I wasn’t keen on this idea. I, just like the introvert I am, wanted to stay at home and keep writing. Fuck potential examiners, I told my wife, and fuck conferences. And, well, fuck all of it. It was a giant waste of time, I raged. A pointless box-ticking exercise in futility. But, of course, she knew the truth: I didn’t want to stand in front of the class and read my story. I’d been there, done that, and had the scars to prove it.

“Don’t be a fucking pussy,” she said. “And get your shit together.”

But this was going full circle. This was returning to the scene of the crime. And that crime scene taught me a great deal. It taught me how the real-world functioned – and I hadn’t liked what I discovered. This new, unpalatable knowledge was the first shot fired in what would become for me an elongated, endless war against authority. That’s when I pulled the trigger on normality and pulled on the court jester’s robes. That’s when I realised that all the bullshit rules and controlling social norms could go and fuck themselves.

“I would prefer not to,”⁴¹² I said.

⁴¹² Melville, 1853. This is the famous line uttered by Bartleby when asked by authority figures to carry out activities. This line is explained best by Slovenian philosopher and Lacanian scholar Slavoj Žižek (2006), where he points out, “In his refusal of the Master’s order, Bartleby does not negate the predicate, he rather affirms a nonpredicate: what he says is not that he doesn’t

“Just suck those imaginary feelings back up into your arsehole,” she said. “Put the genie back in the bottle and put your Game Face on. You’re not seven anymore. You’re fifty for fuck’s sake. I thought that dickless⁴¹³ therapist was sorting this shit into manageable boxes. What the actual fuck!”

Regardless of her award-winning motivational speech, I was still not convinced that standing in front of a bunch of suit-wearing disciples of the master and reading my story was a good plan. It was simply too far outside their wheelhouse. The response would be one of collective uncertainty laced with confusion. The room would grow icier the longer my story progressed until it was the Arctic tundra. They’d wonder if they were in the right room, at the right conference, in another dimension where it was permissible for maniacs to talk about things other than wealth maximisation and new ways of psychologically controlling people.

The ferry was littered with business school academics – they lugged their briefcases, sipped coffee, and buttoned and unbuttoned their suits against the warm summer breeze. They wore Agent Smiths⁴¹⁴ to camouflage their hangovers and cosmetic surgery scars and laughed loudly at each other’s lame jokes like the Hoorah Henrys they aspired to be. They moved in synchronised clumps and were, basically, variations on a theme. It was like being surrounded by a bunch of defective clones.⁴¹⁵ I, on the other hand, was decked out for summer like a non-business-wanker - in a bowling shirt and a pair of shorts and jandals. Thankfully, I was ignored. I didn’t fit, clearly. I didn’t float about in a cloud of cologne or have a hundred-dollar haircut or talk loudly about shit that was irrelevant.

I found a seat on the upper deck with an excellent view of Auckland’s skyline and tried to read the itinerary. I was expected to attend an assortment of workshops on all sorts of shit that I wasn’t interested in. It was expected that I would meet and interact at these workshops and be accepted by these suited and booted dipshits. I found this all highly unlikely and much more likely to blow up in my face. Rather than accept me, as my

want to do it; he says that he prefers (wants) not to do it. This is how we pass from the politics of ‘resistance’ or ‘protestation’, which parasitizes upon what it negates, to a politics which opens up a new space outside the hegemonic position and its negation...” (p. 393). See also: Agamben & Heller-Roazen, (1999), who state: “Bartleby does not consent, but neither does he simply refuse to do what is asked of him; nothing is farther from him than the heroic pathos of negation” (p. 256).

413 I am, therefore, pointing to the therapist’s lack here. S/he desires to know/help the patient yet can never truly understand what is going on. As Brooke (1987) rightly states, “The fact that we can never finally say, once and for all, what it is the patient/subject desires without also wrecking therapy means desire is always plural, always fragmented, and hence always experienced as lack” (p. 684).

414 Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (Directors). (1999). *The Matrix* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers. Agent Smith, the antagonist in the film, wore dark, rectangular shades.

415 Wachowski, L., & Wachowski, L. (Directors). (2003). *The Matrix Reloaded* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers. In the movie, Agent Smith has the ability to replicate himself. In doing so, he is able to battle Neo with multiple copies of himself.

supervisor hoped, they were more likely to try and have me lynched or banished or worse.

I read the seminars on offer and sighed. There were three streams I could opt for. None seemed appropriate. Perhaps I should, I thought, just dive overboard and end the madness right here and now. The afternoon's A-Stream: *Success through Profit Maximisation*, kicked off with the disturbingly titled workshop: *The Importance of the Exploitation of the Environment & Indigenous Peoples*. This paper was run by a bunch of white, middle-class academics from the Finance department. To propagate their bullshit ideas, if the glossy brochure was anything to go by, they used skewed graphs and fake data and random numbers to equate (conflate) their fucked-up thesis with dubious ethical positions. *When the Other sees the colour-coded pie chart with the 3D segments, their abstract read, they understand that their exploitation is not only required but absolutely necessary for the betterment of society. They understand that profit before people is key to a successful company.* This stream was proudly sponsored by accounting firm KGPM, whose tagline read: "where people are always allocated the appropriate dollar value dependent of their exploitable worth."

Fuck the bean counters. That was a clear NO from me.

Alternatively, I could attend the B-Stream: *Masculinity is not Toxic it's Leadership - proven strategies for herding & controlling workers*. This stream was opening with a keynote address from world-renowned leadership guru Dame Jane Caine. Her paper was titled *Dominating Beta Servant Males* (DBSM). This paper, apparently, would recount a series of interviews she had undertaken with uber popular, lithe, leather clad, twenty-something Instagram models who, according to the photos, dressed in requisite thigh high boots and brandished bullwhips and held studded dog collars aloft for their broken subjects. I was urged to register my interest early, as this class was expected to be oversubscribed by film school students looking to branch into less well-served pornographic niches.

Auckland was just a series of distortions on the horizon now. The ocean was a calm Tiffany blue. A gull landed on the rail in front of me and cocked its head. The suits were drinking beer even though it was only 8.30am.

Or, finally, I could opt for the C-Stream: *Deleting the Other - how to stamp out diversity in the workplace*. This stream opened with a paper titled *Homogenising Diversity via Compulsory Workplace Uniforms*. The abstract cited various military leaders – most of them evil and thankfully dead. I don't care how successful you are at running a company, but quoting Hermann Göring and Kim Jong-il is just not a good look. *That way*, the abstract concluded, *all the people who don't look like you - but you are forced to hire*

because of ideological laws, inappropriate regulations, left-wing public perception, and exploitive wages that don't attract the sort of people you would like to hire - will at least appear to look like you. That way, they will conform to your ideal and you will also get your Gold Star for being a diverse workplace and a responsible employer. Compulsory workplace uniforms turn a lose-lose into a win-win.

Well, that was just peachy. Bigots, sexual deviants, or Nazis. What a choice. I would, I decided, be spending a lot of time avoiding people, workshops, the entire venue, and instead spend my time running about the island, drinking coffee, and reading novels – of which, my bag was full.

I met my supervisor at the resort later that morning. He had flown in earlier in the day with Fabian Quin,⁴¹⁶ one of his ex-graduate students. Fabian had written a brilliant master's thesis on how rock music was the cornerstone of any stable economy. He had been tutoring the popular *Making Moola with Music* while he vacillated on whether or not to embark on a PhD. For some reason he was paralysed with indecision and just couldn't commit to a course of action. He, I could tell, just wanted to play the guitar and make music, not write, talk, teach, or mark essays about it.

They were lying in the sun by the wave pool, opposite the golf course, and directly beside the all-new, purpose-built and fully immersive VR Masturbatorium that WU was very proud off.

"I heard a whisper that an actual Lacanian is going to advise the boffins in the business school about your speech," my supervisor said, sipping a fruity cocktail. "And seeing as we're the only Lacanians in the Business School, they must be drafting someone in from the Humanities. Even though they won't really want to. Even though it will breach half a dozen clauses in the BDSM. But they don't have any choice because they have no idea who Lacan is or what he was talking about. Can you believe it? An actual Lacanian is inbound. My nipples are tingling. I'm getting a boner just thinking about it."

"Actually," Fabian said, rubbing coconut scented sunscreen on my supervisor's back. "I think I might have seen her on the plane. She stood out like a red M&M in a bowl of blue ones. She wasn't wearing a suit. And she was reading a French novel without moving her lips. Her bag was made out of natural fibres and not dead animals. She waited her turn when we disembarked and used old fashioned manners. I thought she looked out of place."

⁴¹⁶ I am alluding to Quintus Fabius Maximus Verrucosus (c280-203BC) a Roman general and statesman. His name was used for the Fabian Society – which was set up to disseminate socialist ideas.

“That’s a bingo,”⁴¹⁷ my supervisor said. “So, just a heads-up, you’ll need to make sure you know your Lacanian shit inside out and back to front. Otherwise, she’ll rip you a new arsehole. Don’t forget to do the backs of my thighs, Fabian. We don’t want another burnt circle scenario.”

But no one knew their Lacanian shit. Not really. No one had a fucking clue what he was talking about. If I am honest, I don’t even think Lacan knew what he was talking about. That’s why he was so vague. That’s why his seminars were littered with asides and blind alleys. He was just turning up and letting his brain hole run riot. He had no idea what was going to unfold. He just did words. It was not important if they connected or formed coherent sentences. He was the Ann Quin⁴¹⁸ of psychoanalysis. The William Burroughs⁴¹⁹ of the lecture world. His chatter was so chopped up you needed a shake & bake machine, you needed scissors & glue, you needed an open bottle of scotch & a bag of Henderson’s Finest Green just to try and put it back together, to strip away the noise, to understand what he was trying to convey. His mind, then, was a four-dimensional street map. To find out how to navigate Lacan Town you had to first understand that there were limited street signs, and that all the historical roads still existed, and that all the future paths also existed, only these were littered with faceless workmen holding detour signs. There were road rules, of course. But to understand them you had to read a giant pile of unreadable books that were housed in the Lacan Library at the very centre of his ever-changing mind space. I have been trapped in this library for years. I have been sifting through these books. I have been cutting and rearranging his words. I have been trying to find some calm amongst the anarchy. I have come to the conclusion that the first rule of Lacanian Book Club is that there are no rules.⁴²⁰

I tried to simplify Lacan for the students in the tutorials at the tapestry school where I taught business planning. They were all Korean or Chinese nationals. They took notes. They seemed engaged even though they couldn’t understand a word I said. So, fuck it, I thought. Let’s teach them something important for a change. Instead of that useless SWOT bullshit from the 70s, I taught them about the Other.⁴²¹ About not trying to appease them. That trying to work out who you are and what you want via the detour of

417 Tarantino, Q. (Director). (2009). *Inglourious Basterds* [Motion Picture]. Universal Pictures. Hans Landa, the Jew Hunter, utters this line incorrectly towards the end of the movie.

418 Ann Quin (1936-1973) is an experimental British novelist.

419 William Seward Burroughs II (1914–1997) is a US writer and leading figure in the Beat Generation.

420 Palahniuk, 1996. I am parodying/repurposing the famous line from *Fight Club* - “The first rule of Fight Club is: you do not talk about Fight Club.”

421 I would argue that blending education and psychoanalysis is not only logical, but crucial. Unfortunately, this approach is not well-supported in Management Schools – even though there have been many calls for it over the years. See Bettelheim, 1969; Taubman, 2012: As Bettelheim (1969) points out, “Psychoanalysis has a great deal to offer education and much also to learn from it. Unhappily the relation between them has been most neurotic up to now, like a marriage where both partners are aware of their mutual need but do not really understand one another and therefore cannot pull together as one” (p. 73).

the other, although mostly unavoidable, is a very bad fucking idea. Fuck the Other. It is far better to work out, I ranted at them, who you are and what you desire by blocking out the other and just letting your insanity flow. By doing what I am doing here. By constructing a Self via a self-centred, fictional narrative that closes the other out in the cold where they belong. By smashing those Lacanian mirrors and then rebuilding the mosaic of you the way you really want. But to do this properly it is also important, I told their blank faces, to simultaneously read great writers who also don't give a shit about the Other.

When Russian playwright and short story writer Anton Chekhov⁴²² was young, he was praised by Dmitry Grigorovich,⁴²³ a very famous Russian writer at the time, who has since, not surprisingly, nosedived into obscurity. However, this praise was laced with a command: slow down and produce less. It appeared that this speed at which Chekhov banged out his stories was frightening those who liked to pretend that they worked on their manuscripts for years, that good work, like wine, took time. Chekhov's response⁴²⁴ was to shrug his shoulders and admit that he didn't have a clue what the old, famous writer was talking about, that he just dipped his quill and started writing, and out the words came, ready or not. He let his unconscious flow. He had no idea what he was going to write about or why the general public loved what he produced. His work, as a result, was not contrived. It was fresh and had a ring of authenticity about it. Writing, for Chekhov, was as easy as taking a stroll in the Nevsky Prospect.⁴²⁵ Grigorovich, not surprisingly, was not impressed with Chekhov pulling back the veil and exposing writing for what it can be. He wanted Chekhov to reinforce the myths that swirled around artists and authors.

A century later, when actor Russell Crowe⁴²⁶ was asked how he had prepared to play Maximus in *Gladiator*,⁴²⁷ he looked confused, and replied that he didn't prepare.⁴²⁸ He just read his lines. He had no idea why the public loved what he was doing. This, of course, was the wrong answer. He, like Chekhov, was supposed to participate and reinforce the accepted story. But Crowe didn't give a fuck about what he was supposed to do. He was only interested in providing the Truth as it was for him. He didn't consider

422 Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860–1904) is a Russian playwright and short-story writer.

423 Dmitry Vasilyevich Grigorovich (1822–1900) is a Russian novelist.

424 Actually, Chekhov was humbled to receive praise from Grigorovich. He admits in his letter of reply that, for him, he put little effort into his stories. He goes on to suggest that, in future, he will work harder and take more time. Thankfully, this didn't happen. Chekhov could not change his style. See: Chekhov's letter to Grigorovich <http://www.thethepoetry.com/2010/04/anton-chekhovs-letter-to-dmitry-v-grigorovich/>.

425 A common setting for writers during the golden era of Russian literature (C1830–1900).

426 Russell Ira Crowe (1964–) is a New Zealand actor.

427 Scott, R (Director) (2000) *Gladiator* [Motion Picture] Universal Pictures.

428 As Crowe says, "How did I feel connected to Maximus? Well, you see, I'm an actor. I read the script and learn my lines and put on the costume and Bob's your uncle." See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R3sMML4P7dA> (Time: 1:16–1:32).

the audience. Chekhov didn't consider his reader. To do so was a form of artistic death. It's when you shifted from being an artist and became a tradesman. Did Anne Frank⁴²⁹ write her diary worrying about what the other would think if they ever read it? Did she worry about giving them what they wanted? No. No she fucking didn't. She wrote the diary to try to make sense of the insane situation she was in – to work out who she was in that dark world. This is why asking writers to care about and accommodate the reader is always the desire of the non-writer. This then, was my conundrum. To make this book work, I had to write about what I wanted and hold the reader, the other, at arm's length, but to pass I had to, apparently, write what the business school and, by extension, examiners desired – even though no one really knew what that was. I think we have all guessed by now that I'm never going to fulfil that requirement, that I was never going to bend to that bullshit. Let's be honest, the business school/examiners actually don't know what the fuck they want anyway. And, to be honest, I don't care about what they want. They are paid to read my book. They are paid to interrogate me. They will then make a decision that is out of my hands. They will either be a Grigorovich or a reader. They will come with all their preconceived ideas and there is nothing I can do about it. Afterwards, they will go back to the lives and forget all about me.

Late that afternoon, my supervisor presented a paper on Freud & Dora and the sheep milk industry titled *Freudian Nipple Play: Dora the Explorer milks Shrek the Sheep*. He pulled off his Merino t-shirt and rolled out his sheepskin rug on the stage of the lecture hall. He lounged upon it in nothing but a thong and chugged a milkshake. He started with a reworking on the classic nursery rhyme – *Baa, Baa, Black Sheep*.⁴³⁰ Only, this time, all the bags were for the master - something, he pointed out, we needed to stop. He argued that sheep were, like Dora was with Freud,⁴³¹ silent hysterics,⁴³² that they were giving the bird to the dairy industry, that they were anti-status quo, that they were shaking up dairying in New Zealand. He talked about the anxiety inducing *A Dog's Show*,⁴³³ from the 1970s – explaining how the dogs represented the ISAs, that the master watched silently at arm's length, whistle clenched between teeth, silently conducting the performance, while the sheep were funnelled through the course and finally into pens. He talked about

429 Annelies Marie "Anne" Frank (1929–1945) is a Jewish writer.

430 English nursery rhyme. C 1731.

431 Ramas, 1980; Dane, 1994.

432 Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the Lambs* [Motion Picture]. Orion. I am mirroring/conflating Dora's silence (refusal to acknowledge the patriarchy) with Clarice Starling's (Jodie Forster) desire to save the lambs (her father from his death) from their inevitable slaughter (Dora's inevitable domination by a man via marriage). Thus, Dora's father seeks to save her, while Clarice seeks to save her father.

433 Kemp, M. (Director). (1977-1992). *A Dog's Show* [Television Series]. TVNZ.

well-known everyman Fred Dagg,⁴³⁴ the King of the She'll-Be-Right-Norms, and how he conditioned the masses to shun education and embrace a common sense, rural-centric rustic knowledge. He talked about *Footrot Flats*⁴³⁵ and shearing gangs and world champion shearers. He said all of this had a deep impact on our collective identity. He concluded by pointing out his concern about the continuing decline in sheep numbers, how they had been falling for years, that the humble sheep was an integral part of our psyche and that it was being systematically pushed out by Big Cow. When the last sheep is shorn, he said, when the last sheep is culled, he warned, we will no longer be Kiwis, we'll simply be part of the bovine supply chain, we'll have gone bovine.

He first told me about us ultimately going bovine⁴³⁶ when we were at the mid-winter Chancellor's Ball. The university has Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, he said. Moo Moo Moo. I was holding his bottle of champagne in one hand and a plate of golden chicken wings in the other while he snorted fat slugs of Freud's favourite condiment off the cistern of the executive bathroom in the Ivory Tower. Afterwards, he slapped his jowls and drunk champagne from the bottle and told me with a wink that understanding sheep was the key to understanding the Business School. He nodded knowingly and tapped the side of his powered nose. And he was right. Here we were, the sheep, being rounded up by the yapping dogs (HODs and assorted bureaucrats of the business school) and forced to produce milk (papers) for the university (knowledge/milk factory).⁴³⁷ We were being milked, literally. For those, like me, who didn't produce the milk the university liked, they would seal their own fate. They would get sent to the works, would be slaughtered, would be turned into dog food and mince pies.

Early the next morning I went for a gentle jog around the island with Fabian. Fabian was employed, he told me, to do all my supervisor's marking and teach all his classes. That way, he said, my supervisor could be free to write as many papers about sheep as he wanted, attend meetings and do many other things that were absolutely necessary and absolutely a waste of time simultaneously. Fabian was a highly intelligent young guy in his mid-twenties, who had completed his aforementioned master's two years prior, but had been unable to break away from the gravitational pull of the University. He had

434 Fred Dagg is a fictional Kiwi farmer (AKA: real Kiwi bloke) created by New Zealander John Clarke (1948-2017), who was a comedian, in the 1970s.

435 Ball, M. (Creator). (1976-1994). *Footrot Flats* [Comic Strip]. *The Evening Post*: Wellington.

436 I am referring to Libba Bray's (2009) young adult novel *Going Bovine*.

437 Alakavuklar, Dickson, &, Stablein, 2017: Ruth, Wilson, Alakavuklar, &, Dickson, 2018.

wanted to, tried to, had considered government jobs down in Wellington, but hadn't been able to get enough traction to make the change.⁴³⁸

We jogged down the warm and sunny roads and talked about his plans, about his directionless pondering. He reminded me of my younger self – although, to be fair, he was far smarter, academically. I told him that I had finally reached the decision that I would never, ever, work in the University, that it was just a little too similar to my job of teaching high school English, that it was an imminent disaster that I would avoid, that the place was a pit of despair run by conservative arseholes that I had no interest in turning into. He didn't really believe me. He thought I was just posturing, protecting myself from the possibility that no job offers would come. And, here's the kicker: no job offers would come. This had become blindingly obvious to me when I'd applied for a job as a tutor in the Business School a few months prior. My assumption was that my teaching and marking experience would place me as a good candidate for this role. I also tutored in the first semester and, as mentioned, taught business planning at the tapestry school. A few days after I applied, I received an email inviting me to an interview. I was also given instructions to provide an in-depth answer to a teaching puzzle – which I solved by explaining how this bullshit scenario should, if you did your job properly, never happen. This, of course, was the incorrect answer.

I was forced to meet the panel via skype, even though they were in the next room. The panel contained various faceless, forgettable bureaucrats all dressed in the colours of the Business School's administrative branch. Within a few minutes of the interview, immediately after pleasantries, I was coldly informed by the Head Filing Clerk that I couldn't accept the job even if they offered it to me, because I would be in breach of regulations. And that I should make it a priority to inform myself of these important regulations as soon as humanly possible, so these sorts of potential breaches didn't repeat moving forward. Apparently, this whole regulation breach was a giant problem because, according to the PDC's flowchart, I wouldn't be finished my PhD until 2022.

"I'll be finished way before then," I said.

"No you won't," I was told. "You will be finished in 2022. I've just double-checked. It says categorically that completion cannot occur before December 2022."

"And," the head bureaucrat continued, "you're not eligible to apply for this job because we have just made a new rule that forbids non-completed PhD students from working as a tutor."

438 Fabian represents my alternative future – the future I would have had, if I hadn't suffered the dark years as explained in chapter four. I am suggesting I would have ended up in basically the same place, only a lot sooner.

"Two questions," I said. "1) Why are you interviewing me and 2) Who will do this job?"

"We are interviewing you because you were the most qualified candidate," I was told. "And we felt obliged to see what you had to say."

"But I haven't said anything," I said. "And I am already discounted. I am already dismissed."

"We are planning to recruit someone who couldn't get a job post PhD," I was told. "We are planning to get someone cheap and pay them as a tutor to basically do a lecturer's job. It makes a great deal of financial sense."

"And, anyway, PhD students have got other commitments," I was told, "that would interfere with the crippling workload we have in mind. We're basically looking for someone who has no family or hobbies or semblance of a life. That's why we ruled them out."

"But I have a family," I said. "I have hobbies."

"That's why you are not getting this job," I was told, "or any other job we might offer."

The truth about why they were wasting their time, and mine, interviewing me was far simpler. They had to interview a minimum of two candidates as per their own stupid-as-fuck regulations - the one they wanted (already picked and working) and a box-filler. I was the fucking box-filler once *again*. Thus, I was forced to answer their questions for the next thirty minutes even though no one was listening or paying any attention or gave two fucks. And, even though they had made it clear I would never ever be getting this or any other job, I was still sent a rejection letter anyway informing me that a candidate with superior qualifications and/or experience had been selected from a talented field. But, not to worry, they'd keep my details on file just in case a job came up matching my skills and experience.

We jogged past a water tower, a stand selling strawberries, a school with empty classrooms. A dog panted at the side of the road.

"Why haven't you started your PhD?" I asked, curious as to why he was unable to make a choice, why he was doing a Hamlet. "Why haven't you escaped? Why are you fucking around?"

He told me stories as we puffed our way up and down the undulating empty roads. He told me versions of the situation that made sense to him and sounded acceptable to most listeners - perhaps his grandmother, or parents, or dear old uncle Tim. But I wasn't buying the shit he was selling.

"Are you planning on staying at the university forever?" I asked. "Because, to be honest, there is a lot of cool shit you could be doing before you settle down and give up."

He shook his head. He didn't have an answer.

"Why are you even considering doing a PhD?" I said. "Are you mad?"

Women in activewear were out walking their dogs in synchronised pairs. Children road past on bikes. Cats slept under trees in the dappled sun.

"Why are you doing a PhD?" he countered.

I didn't know. I told him that he was young and that he should take his time making decisions, that he had plenty of time to fuck up his life without starting now, that he should get the fuck out of Dodge as soon as possible and see the world, that he could worry about the future in the future, that the books could wait, that Hegel and Lacan weren't going anywhere. And even though he seemed to agree with me, I knew he was never going to leave, that he was destined to remain, that he was never getting out.

They sold gluten-free mince pies at a beautiful, ornate café nestled within a cluster of shops beside the shoreline. For lunch we munched down on shepherd's pie and drank good, strong coffee. We had just exited a workshop on how to successfully run workshops. Unfortunately, the AIC was unable to get the lights or screens to work – so the whole show was presented in the dark. It was like a bad dream that you couldn't wake from. The speaker kept referring to slides we couldn't see on handouts we weren't given. About halfway though, a student tripped trying to sneak out and tumbled down the stairs and cracked their head open on the side of a desk. It was decided that it was best to wrap up the show early so the paramedics could deal with the carnage without having to listen to the nauseating monotone that was emanating from somewhere at the front of the room. A good call.

Fabian was hunched over his laptop as he munched on his pie. He was writing my supervisor's next speech.

"Is he talking about sheep again?" I asked.

Fabian sipped his coffee and considered the calm ocean, watched the gulls circle.

"This one is about fat and keto and how carbs are trying to kill us," he said. "This one is about the ideal self v the ugly fat fuck that hides deep inside all of us, this one's about suppressing your appetites, denying your desires."

"The bogey man," I said. "The shadow self."⁴³⁹

"Interestingly," he added, "The shadow self also has its own reflection, has its own mirrored image. Only this one has a prim and proper, thin little fucker hiding deep within

⁴³⁹ I am referring to Jung's theory of the Shadow Archetype. In this case, I am attempting to make a connection between the Jung's shadow and my hysterical doubling. This is discussed in part by Rollin (1999) who interestingly points out connection between doubling/the shadow-self and the fear of mirror/portraits (p. 79).

it. Only this one doesn't deny its desires. It seeks to sate its appetites. It desires to be plus-sized. It gets a sense of calm from additional girth, a sense of stability and permanence. This one fears downsizing."

"No man's pie is freed from his ambitious finger,"⁴⁴⁰ I said. "To eat the pie or not, that is the question."

"There is an endless, fruitless war going on between the shadows," he said. "Just like between Noel and Liam."⁴⁴¹ This causes all sorts of neuroses. What we are looking for is balance. What we are arguing for, is a realignment of the two shadow-mirrors. We are suggesting that they should face each other.⁴⁴² This way, we can get some kind of eternal mirroring, some sort of perpetual harmony. The Self can multiply. Can be many things simultaneously. Can delete its binary, oppositional nature."

That morning, post jog, we attended a workshop designed specifically to indoctrinate PhD students into the discourse of the university. Fabian and I had been put in a group with a trio of human resource students from the University of Dunedin's Dirt and Earth Research Sciences (UDDERS) department. They were all very proud of their research proposal and were awaiting ethics approval. The gist of the research involved experimenting on call centre employees with various drugs to increase performance. They were excited about a bladder/bowel suppressor that was being designed in their incubator. Although, one admitted, much to everyone else's disgust, that it had caused all the mice to explode.

"It's the mice's fault," one argued. "It has nothing to do with the drug."

"Those mice were defective," the other argued. "We got them cheap from Animates."

They had, initially, they said, really wanted their adult diaper to take off, but admitted it had a perception problem. Workers, they said, just think it's their God-given right to go and take a shit whenever they want. Like they own the place. They are so selfish. They just don't get how it cuts into profit.

"When we suggested at the call centre bootcamp organised by the BRT that they wear the diaper there was pandemonium," one said. "They wouldn't even try it. They just folded their arms and stamped their feet like a bunch of fucking babies."

"And when we suggested that they'd have to get used to it when management took up our idea of doing away with bathrooms entirely," another said, "so they could install more desks, that profit before poo should be their goal, they lost their shit entirely."

440 Shakespeare, 1632: *Henry VIII*.

441 *Oasis* (1991-2009) is an English rock band formed by brothers Liam and Noel Gallagher. The hugely successful band broke up because the brothers – each assuming that they alone were the primary reason for the band's success, actually needed each other's talents to be successful – could no longer stand each other. I would argue that this is because they are far too similar – that they could see their Self reflected in the mirror the (br)other provided and it drove them both crazy.

442 I am referring to Lacan's double mirror experiment. Vanheule, 2011.

“So, reluctantly,” the last one chipped in, “we’re moving away from diapers and moving towards a solution involving chemicals that have been banned in the OECD – chemicals that were used quite successfully on racehorses – that will guarantee that no one ever needs to take a shit on company time ever again. Or, if the warnings on the label are anything to go by, perhaps never.”

They high-fived and drank another can of speights, roared in each other’s faces, and went back to sourcing superior rodents on the internet.

“What are you researching?” one asked Fabian.

“I’m thinking about arguing how Split Enz⁴⁴³ is the origin, the template, for all financially successful businesses in Aotearoa.”

“Split what?” one said.

“Who cares?” another asked.

“What about you?” I’m asked by the Third Little Pig.⁴⁴⁴ “Aren’t you a little old to be doing this. You’re like way over 30. Are you what? 40?”

“I’m writing about how the business school should be dismantled and all the idiots in it redistributed to insane asylums.”

“Oh,” he said. “So, it’s you. You’re that guy.”

“We’ve being given a series of questions to bombard you with at your speech,” one laughed. “I’m in the group dedicated to screwing with your self-esteem.”

“I’ve got heckling,” the other said. “Whatever that means.”

I turned up early for my speech and turned off the big screens and drew a tennis court on the whiteboard.

“But I’ve just got all the tech working again,” the AIC said. “Why don’t you want to use it. Everybody uses it. How will we see your slides?”

“I don’t have any slides.”

“Did you forget to bring them?”

Rather than present a paper on something boring about leadership, as expected, I read a story about my fucked-up childhood. I told them about my father’s need to paint the roof of our home in the summer of 1978. This story will come up again during the examination (see below) and is central to not only my thesis but to who I am. I explained how this story was an appropriate window through which to view the discipline of Management.

443 *Split Enz* (1972-1984) is a New Zealand rock band formed by brothers Tim and Neil Finn. Only, this time, unlike with *Oasis*, both brothers got along.

444 Halliwell-Phillipps, 1886.

They were not convinced.

I had been placed in the *Masculinity is not Toxic it's Real Leadership* stream and was arguing that when a man embodies the discourse of the hysteric, they shift from the culturally allocated masculine position to a profoundly feminine one.⁴⁴⁵ I was arguing that my inherent hysteria ran counter to the dominant masculine position that permeated the business school^{446 447 448} - that the Norms who inhabited the business school had an unhealthy obsession, a fetishisation, for the scientific method, demanded papers that were saturated in numbers, had simple right and wrong answers and, of course, included individual testing.⁴⁴⁹ Everything, therefore, that was wrong with the place. These students, I argued, who embraced this toxic masculine position, were happy presenting themselves as strong leaders who were solitary, logical, and silent – who presented as completely and utterly self-sufficient, who appeared to have all the answers, who didn't ask questions like the maniac hysteric. They were the weird bastard children of Dirty Harry and Captain James T Kirk, and were happy to frolic in the echoey, empty shell of the master's discourse, happy to repel real knowledge (because if they didn't already know it, it wasn't worth knowing) with a firm handshake and neutral expression.

I concluded my speech by comparing Lacan's theory of Sexuation to a game of tennis, where the university and the hysteric stand on either side of the net – the university on the masculine side and the hysteric on the feminine. Then it was game on. One served up some knowledge – smacked the ball (sans/avec a prosthetic cock) over the net to the other. The receiver then either added to, deleted, or reconstituted this knowledge (by removing, reattaching, or rearranging a prosthetic cock) to fit with their preferred narrative, and returned serve. For the university, this meant ensuring dry as all hell facts continued to be presented as an absolute and sacred source of scientific knowledge that confirmed what they already knew. For me, the hysteric, that meant following through on my desire to not only produce fiction as a window through which to observe, and consider, management and leadership, but to also question the traditional modes of delivering and acquiring a business education. Unfortunately, the university didn't care

445 Micale, 2008; Dickson, 2015.

446 As Simpson & Ituma (2009), state, that within the MBA "...the unreflective reproduction of masculine values and ways of working as well as an over-focus on "hard" analytical skills not only create a "chilly" learning environment for women, but may also limit the growth potential for men..." (p. 311). Moreover, Simpson & Ituma (2009) conclude by pointing out that, the consequence of this is that, "...men are emerging from their MBA with attitudes and values largely intact and with a limited awareness of social and political cultures around them..." (p. 311).

447 As mentioned above, The MBA is designed and structured, taught and delivered, and marketed and sold in such a way as to attract and serve a 'preferred' cohort within society - the very same cohort that has, and still does, control industry: white, middle-class, heterosexual males (Simpson, Sturges, Woods, & Altman, 2005, p.241).

448 As Fotaki & Harding (2012) point out, "...critical management studies...is riddled with casual sexism, racism, ageism or homophobia..." (p. 154).

449 Sinclair, 2007.

what I wanted or desired. It just let the ball I returned glide past and disappear. My returns were ignored, were completely irrelevant. The university simply sat down and had a cool drink and let the ball machine (the phallus) fire (ejaculate) at will. They had an endless supply of balls to pummel me with. I had one shot. You do the math.

When I finished presenting my bizarre tennis theory to the bobble-headed, suit wearing audience, I passed around a prop: a pair of tennis balls with a dildo attached. It had the word knowledge written down the side in lipstick. No one wanted to touch it. There was fear and shock. There was moaning and groaning. There was writhing and shuddering.

The AIC threw my prop in the bin in disgust and sanitised his hands and asked for questions. There was complete and utter silence. The mysterious Lacanian we were all expecting was nowhere to be seen. My arse, it seemed, would not be receiving a fresh, new hole. The HR lunatics from UDDERS were also absent. There were no questions, just blank looks. The AIC, who looked bored and confused, cleared his throat, straightened his tie and demanded at least one - even though, he admitted, he was unable to formulate one himself. Finally, I was asked by a rather confused looking postgrad, to explain what tennis balls, broken windows, and sexual aids had to do with leadership? It was in that moment that I realised that I might as well have been talking to my deaf grandmother. That I had, in fact, read my story, just like dear old Hans had longed to do, to an empty room.

"There's a very real possibility you will fail," the AIC told me, again, between mouthfuls of roast beef and red wine, between insane stories about what he believed leadership was. His repeated mantra was just another in a long series of shots fired, was just another clear signal that I was being conditioned for the inevitable, that perhaps I was doomed after all, that each time I dismissed the university's desires I took one more step towards the abyss. This was the fortieth time, that evening, he had told me this. Each time, I had successfully ignored him. Had successfully discounted him for the fool he was.

It was the final night of the conference and we were eating dinner at Le Dôme Café ⁴⁵⁰ an exclusive winery on Waiheke Island. This dinner was organised to provide the keynote speaker a final opportunity to bore us with more of his broken-record ideology before we could finally escape. My supervisor chewed his lamb chop and sucked down his milky Kahlúa and eyed the AIC suspiciously. Fabian played his guitar and ignored the

⁴⁵⁰ Le Dôme Café is a famous eatery in Paris. It was the centre of intellectual thought in the 1920s, becoming a second home to the likes of Ernest Hemingway and Pablo Picasso.

AIC completely. I sipped my club soda and suppressed the urge to upend the table and wring his scrawny neck.

But, it occurred to me, there was something off about his unusual insistence, about his smug gaze, about the small smirk he maintained even while chewing. There was, I realised, something else going on here. This was, I realised, different to the usual faecal matter that seeped out of his mouth. This, then, was new. My gut feel was that there had been conversations about my presentation with the mysterious Lacanian, who I had only glimpsed in the shadows, entering and exiting doors, in the distance like a shimmering mirage. To be honest, I didn't give two fucks. I was too far down the rabbit hole to turn back now. It wasn't going to happen. Anyway, I reasoned, if they fail me it would make for an excellent final chapter.

"I don't give a fuck," I told the AIC, shrinking his smirk to a puckered arsehole. "I couldn't give two figs about getting a PhD from this screwy department."

He pulled a face and shook his weirdly shaped head and swallowed. He looked angry and relieved simultaneously. I realised that the AIC was most probably on a probing mission. That he was testing my resolve, was pushing me to confirm my craziness wasn't an optional mask, that I wasn't a faker, that I wouldn't bail on the project at the last minute and go all normal, that I was in fact the hysteric. That any paperwork he submitted on me wouldn't end up making him look paranoid and delusional.

"If you fail me," I told him, "it will, ironically, confirm my thesis. It will confirm that business education does in fact snuff out alternative voices."⁴⁵¹

He opened his mouth to speak but shoved in more food instead. He looked confused and narrowed his eyes on his peas in an accusatory manner.

"If I pass," I said, "it will create a Lacanian paradox."

Fabian sung songs from the seventies. He was surrounded by simpering graduate students gazing at him with wanton desire.

"If I pass," I said, "I will be proved wrong and right and wrong again ad infinitum. The cycle will go on as it always has."

My supervisor ate his lamb chop and watched on unconcerned. He sipped his drink and wiped his creamy moustache.

"If I pass," I said. "I will be both vindicated and vilified. You will have won and lost. And I will have lost and won."

"What," he said, snorting, "nonsense."

"We're mirrors of each other," I said. "You and I."

451 McLaughlin & Thorpe, 2000: Grey, 2002.

"We're nothing alike," he stammered, unwittingly agreeing with what I had just said. "We're complete opposites."

"You need me and I need you," I said. "Even though we hate each other. Even though we're in an unhealthy, cyclical, co-dependent relationship. There's no escape. So get fucking used to it. I have. I've accepted you all these years like one accepts a hideous birthmark. And you've always begrudgingly passed me and you always will. This is a dance that has always, and will always, play out."

"Not this time," he said swilling more wine. "This time it's over. You're done. The insanity must stop. Word has come down from the Ivory Tower."

"That's not how it works. Those are not the rules of engagement. If you fail me, you will cease to exist, you will lose shape and definition, you will finally have no purpose. The university and the hysteric are inseparable. There is not one without the other."

My therapist chuckled.

"Here we go again," he said. "Adding unnecessary ornamentation. Making shit up as you go. WU? Really?"

I looked down over the campus. The walkways were empty. An autonomous lawnmower spiralled in concentric circles on the quad. It was Christmas break. Only a few summer school classes were running. Most of the student body was at the beach. Yet, here I was, still marking course work, still telling my therapist stories, still trying to get to some understanding of what the fuck was going on and who the fuck I had become.

His image shimmered and popped. He crossed his legs. The ice cubes in his scotch clinked. He smiled.

"It's time," he said, looking at the clock above the door, removing his beret, his Mavericks.

It was time. But, fuck it, I was happy here on this plush chaise longue. I was happy frolicking in the fictional world I had constructed. But, just like Neo,⁴⁵² I had to swallow a bitter pill and return to reality for a short time. I had to, like it or not, pay homage to the discourse of the university. It was time to leave this warm and comfortable room and walk across the quad, just like all the other sheeple that had come before, and follow the bright yellow line on the cement flagstones that would eventually lead me to the Primary Interrogation Terminus (The Pit), which was housed in the secure wing of the examination suite right next to the suicide booths,⁴⁵³ morgue and crematorium. It was

452 Wachowski, L & Wachowski, L. (Directors). (1999). *The Matrix* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers.

453 Groening, M. (Creator). (2003-2013). *Futurama* [Television Series]. 20th Television. Suicide booths were placed upon the streets at various intervals and were presented much like 20th Century telephone boxes.

time to make my bones, to have my mind dissected by a twinset of ancient robed Dons, who were hired, no doubt, against their will, but would, nevertheless, go out of their way to explain to me what it was I was actually trying to achieve and what it was that I had, unfortunately, failed to say. My words would be probed for inconsistency and hidden meanings, they would be twisted and taken out of context, appropriated and repurposed. Eventually, they would be played back to me, dubbed and overlaid with an alternate soundtrack, like some hideous Kung Fu movie from the 1970s.

I took the last cookie that lay on the silver tray at my elbow. I eyed it narrowly. It was a clichéd chocolate chip. It was an in-the-box cookie. Nothing weird was to be found here at head-shrinking command. I popped it in my mouth and chewed. He shimmered again. His edges lost their sharpness.

“Come and see me when you are done with this chapter,” he said. “We’ll talk it out. It’ll be all good.”

I swallowed. The walls bubbled and melted and fell away. And he was gone. I closed my eyes and tried to focus on my breathing. I tried to think about what I had to do. I tried to imagine this whole chapter finished and squared away, the diploma on the wall, the job at some ancient, European university. But it was hard to maintain a positive mental attitude when you are equipped with a positively mental one.⁴⁵⁴

454 Hill & Stone, 1960. In referencing and inverting the title of Hill & Stone’s famous self-help book, *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude*, I am suggesting that in order to be a success in a creative field you also have to be, in the eyes of the everyman Norm, a little nuts. Hill, Stone, Carnegie et al, all argued for pleasant, hard-working conformity – they were trying to help you rise to the top in 1950s corporate America. I am arguing for animated, hard-working non-conformity – that fitting in is not a recipe for success, but for your ultimate demise and irrelevance.

Yes, it's fate's inscrutable law that clever men are either drunkards or pull faces horrible enough to shock the saints.
- Gogol

Chapter 6: Positively Mental

Months ago, as I taught undergrads about the unconscious and psychoanalysis, even though I was supposed to be teaching them about shit-that-didn't-matter, I was constantly thinking about the inevitable examination. I was worrying about what sort of horrendous academic ornamentation they would insist I inflict on this this book, what savage pruning of my personality in the name of academic necessity (conformity) and, ultimately, self-betrayal I would have to undergo if I wanted to pass.

I knew if I wanted to get out the other end of this shit tunnel unscathed, I had to add a thick layer of icing, of academic candy-coating to my thesis as if it were a child's birthday cake. I knew I had to sweeten it up for the examiners, that I had to sate the appetites of those pointy headed gorgons by telling them shit that they already knew so they would know that I knew the shit that no one needed to know, even though I didn't want to, even though I have always been a savoury kind of guy and despised all things sweet. The rules of the game were simple: I had to convince them that I knew what I was talking about. I had to unfold an ancient tapestry and point to the pictograms and explain what they meant. Then everyone would be satisfied and I would finally receive the golden key to the Doctors' Bathroom in the Ivory Tower. Then I could, if I was extremely fortunate, get a job banging out propaganda for A journals in a broom-cupboard-sized office next to the toilets in the basement of some epsilon campus in a remote part of the country, between hours upon hours of indoctrinating students into the glorious giant pyramid scheme called business education. Or I could simply say fuck all that shit and write the unvarnished truth sans ornamentation. I could simply alienate everyone right from the get-go. I could simply give the middle finger to my potential employers before

I was employed, rather than afterwards, for a change. To be honest, I didn't give two figs about this shitshow. I couldn't care less about the diploma, the stupid fucking letters beside my name, or any of that fake fucking gamified bullshit they were currently peddling as education. I only gave a shit about writing a book that reflected who I was and helped me articulate what I actually believed. That was my core desire. Everything else was just piss.

The students in my tutorials were also stressed about their upcoming examinations. This anxiety manifested in their wide-eyed attempts to clarify just exactly what would and wouldn't be in the exam. They would've preferred it if I'd just presented the questions and answers with a nudge and a wink like their other tutors. All this presenting of ideas that may or may not be in the exam was new to them. It was unexpected. They'd been through our broken high school system, after all, where it was almost illegal to deviate from the curriculum – as a teacher you quickly learned to stay firmly in your lane.

The school system, let's face it, was not designed to teach anything. It was designed to indoctrinate the children into the dominant ideology – AKA capitalism.⁴⁵⁵ ⁴⁵⁶ Interestingly, my cousin's husband, who was the principal of a large state high school located in the sprawling metropolis of Oban, on Stewart Island's rugged east coast, actively resisted this knowledge when I presented it. At family events, when we were all happily tucking into the homemade salads and burnt sausages and sipping cool drinks, when others were politely talking about sport and the state of the Christchurch rebuild, I would casually lean over and remind him that, thankfully, industrial education, like the internal combustion engine, had had its day, that it was living on fumes, that the brainwashing would soon stop and regular transmission could resume. He was never happy to hear this. He would go all red in the face and chew much more aggressively and angrily knock back his generic beer. His face would tremble slightly as he sat there listening to my diatribe. The veins on the side of his neck would expand and threaten to pop. His eyes would roll about their sockets as he sought a mental respite, a mental sanctuary from the truth I was inflicting upon him. Eventually, after I had presented my iron-clad case, after I had placed my paper-plate on the lawn and licked my lips and thought the whole matter concluded, he would unexpectedly detonate like a shaken

455 This, of course, is nothing new – and was the plan all along. As Morris (1888) rightly noted, "People are 'educated' to become workmen or the employers of workmen, or the hangers-on of the employers, they are not educated to become men. With this aim in view the conditions under which true education can go on are impossible... In short, our present education outside its uses to our enemies, the masters of Society, is good for one thing, the creation of discontent" (p. 5).

456 Barton (2001) considers three key arguments, "... (a) that the relationship between capitalism and urban education has led to schooling practices that favor economic control by elite classes; (b) that the relationship between capitalism and science has led to a science whose purposes and goals are about profitability rather than the betterment of the global condition; and (c) that the marriages between capitalism and education and capitalism and science have created a foundation for science education that emphasises corporate values at the expense of social justice and human dignity" (p. 487).

champagne bottle. I'm not kidding. He would lose all reason. He would rant and rave and wave his arms about. He would pound his chest and, fuming, pace up and down the lawn. He didn't, I'm guessing, like to be presented with this truth – he wanted things to go on as normal until the end of time. He felt he was a solid, contributing member of society, that he was good at his job and making an important difference. He didn't want to hear about how he worked in an industry that, just like religion, was pointless. This easily triggered, thin-skinned, close-minded, conservative, middle-aged guy was a stubborn barrier to change, was the quintessential Fat Controller⁴⁵⁷ of the status quo. At least I knew that what I was doing in my tutorials was a waste of time. I wasn't deluded. That's why I ignored the course requirements and taught them what I wanted. I was doing my best to get them to think – there was no way I was just going to turn up and phone it in, that I was just going to run the boring slideshow that Dr X had plagiarised from the internet.

Not surprisingly, I was constantly questioned about the relevance of the information I was presenting - about just how old British sitcoms fitted in or whether they actually needed to know the difference between Patrick Bateman⁴⁵⁸ & Hannibal Lecter⁴⁵⁹ or if it was essential to do further reading on Kant⁴⁶⁰ & Marx & Adam Hand-Job-Selfie Smith.

"But Dr X told us at the leadership lecture that leaders are appointed," I was told. "That the cream always rises to the top. It's the Law of Nature."

"Yeah, nah," I said. "I'm with Shakespeare on this one. And here is what he had to say about leadership: some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them.⁴⁶¹ In other words, we have no idea why some choose to follow others."

But we do know, don't we? It's fucking obvious. They are followers because they are lemmings, a fucking flock of migrating geese, a stampede of wide-eyed wildebeest crossing the Savanna, a convoy of wide-sided pick-up trucks coming down from the hills to vote for the very first time in the 2016 American election. We shouldn't be studying leadership - we should be studying what turns rational people into gullible, robotic followers.

"As I mentioned in my Dogs & Humans tutorial," I told them "the one that took the place of the scheduled and completely irrelevant Greed is Good⁴⁶² portion of the course, that obedience is most probably an inherited predisposition,⁴⁶³ and that mass

457 Awdry, 1946.

458 Ellis, 1991.

459 Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the Lambs* [Motion Picture]. Orion.

460 Immanuel Kant (1724 –1804) is a German philosopher.

461 Shakespeare, 1623: *12th Night*.

462 Stone, O (Director) (1987) *Wall Street* [Motion Picture] 20th Century Fox.

463 Ostro & Arato, 2019: Bouchard, 2009

conditioning to follow authority figures is almost guaranteed thanks to the compulsory education that was forced upon you,⁴⁶⁴ that free will, sadly, is a myth.”

They actively resisted this knowledge, and anything else I offered that was outside the narrow boundaries of the exam, in favour of the facile shit that this course offered.⁴⁶⁵ They wanted it all to be nice and easy. They wanted a join-the-dots education. They wanted the boring, paint-by-numbers shit that the business school normally provided, the shit that fits nicely into a multiple-choice test, the shit that is telegraphed to them as examinable weeks in advance.⁴⁶⁶ They didn’t want an actual education. Not really. Otherwise they’d be reading books in the Humanities or the Social Sciences and not jacking-off over Excel spreadsheets, Jordan Belfort⁴⁶⁷ monologues, and the PowerPoint presentations that this school was famous for.

“Will this be in the exam?” the less open-minded ones (everyone) asked, pulling faces, flicking through the course outline, the textbook. “Do I need to know this?”

No. No it fucking wouldn’t. Not in a million years. This knowledge was utterly examination free. The trick to telling the difference, I informed them, was that it was interesting. If it was boring, if it was laced with pointless jargon, it would be in the exam. They nodded in time to this universal truth.

“And yes,” I said, just to confuse them. “You do need to know it.”

Because let’s face it, to get a degree, to be university educated, without encountering Shakespeare or Marx or Plato,⁴⁶⁸ or considering the work of Aristotle⁴⁶⁹ or Descartes⁴⁷⁰ or Freud, or knowing the difference between Locke,⁴⁷¹ Hume,⁴⁷² and Hobbes⁴⁷³ was kind of an indicator that you took the wrong degree, that your degree is actually bullshit. And, yes, I am pointing an angry finger at you, Business School.

“When will we getting our assignments back,” I was asked, randomly, during a pause in a long, rolling monologue about how we can learn about the fate of the individual in

464 Once again, I am stating nothing new. As Tuttle (1943) points out, “Of all undemocratic traditions in school or home, the hardest to escape is the worship of obedience as a virtue” (p. 343). I would argue that nothing has changed. When I trained as a high school teacher in 2003, the majority of the teaching time was allocated to classroom management – getting the kids to shut up and listen. When my supervisor would observe me teaching, he would be confused as to why I had the kids in groups working and interacting. The room was loud, I was moving about and chatting with each group. “But how can you tell if the other groups are doing anything?” he would say. “They might be talking about anything while you are busy elsewhere. It is a little unorthodox to say the least.” He, then, wrongly believed that education was the delivery of knowledge to a quiet student by an authoritarian teacher. I thought this was crazy then and I still do now.

465 Parker, 2018.

466 Taubman (2010) suggests that, “...education h[as] increasingly been abstracted and recoded as numbers such as test scores, numerical data generated by various measuring instruments, and most of all dollar amounts. These numbers give the impression that what happens in classrooms—extraordinarily complex, psychically tumultuous and potentially both ecstatic and maddening places of teaching—is best understood as objective, transparent, and measurable” (p. 2).

467 Scorsese, M. (Director). (2013). *The Wolf of Wall Street* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures.

468 Plato (C428–C 348BC) is an Athenian philosopher.

469 Aristotle (384–322 BC) is a Greek philosopher.

470 René Descartes (1596–1650) is a French philosopher.

471 John Locke (1632–1704) is an English philosopher and physician; considered the Father of Liberalism.

472 David Hume (1711–1776) is a Scottish Philosopher.

473 Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) is an English philosopher.

the capitalist system via the situation comedies *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin*⁴⁷⁴ and *Only Fools and Horses*⁴⁷⁵ – that Del Boy and Reggie are both symptoms of a diseased system. After all, the students had gone to the effort of either purchasing these essays or writing them at the last minute. Virtually none of them complied with the formatting requirements or word limits or gave two fucks about APA conventions. Trying to decipher what they were trying to say required Olympic level mental gymnastics, required a contortion of the cerebral cortex that caused endless nosebleeds, required me to learn Klingon⁴⁷⁶ and play Black Sabbath⁴⁷⁷ albums backwards.

The vast majority of the students in these tutorials turned up with a wafer-thin headline understanding of the world. Their knowledge was arranged in discrete soundbites, which they would spit out in little five-word-brain-farts when questioned. I found this surprising. Here I was, someone who grew up without the internet, without all of human knowledge at my fingertips, with nothing to go by but a budget-magazine-version of an encyclopaedia that came out weekly, that my parents reluctantly purchased at the dairy, because Judy Lancewood did, and yet, somehow, I managed to find shit out. Yes, I basically moved into the town library. I become a fixture. But what choice did I have? I could read books or I could join the other kids, the ones who spent their afternoons and weekends lighting fires and breaking windows and stealing shit from the dairy while the rugby coach wasn't looking.

When I was in primary school and the teacher asked us a question on some new topic, I would happily provide my new-found knowledge. This was unexpected and unwanted. No one was supposed to know anything. The teacher was supposed to provide this learning widget, like your drunken uncle delivering the punchline from a Christmas cracker, with a knowing smile and the satisfaction of holding you in suspense for two minutes. Now they were fucked because I had just provided not only the answer but gone well beyond the paragraph of understanding they had about this subject. I had well and truly burst their bubble. The teacher would pull a face and shake his head and disagree with me because my knowledge couldn't be verified by his single page of handwritten notes, even though I was right. The kids would burst out laughing and call me retarded while the teacher stood silently at the front and enjoyed the psychological kicking I received. No one believed a thing I was saying even though they knew less than shit. I wasn't at school, I realised. Not really. I was at an idiot convention. I was in a mind-

474 Nobbs, D. (Creator). (1976-1979). *The Fall and Rise of Reginald Perrin* [Television Series]. BBC 1.

475 Sullivan, J. (Creator). (1981-1991). *Only Fools and Horses* [Television Series]. BBC.

476 A fictional language in *Star trek*. It should be noted that fans do actually learn Klingon – that it has its own dictionary.

477 An English rock band (1968-2017). There was an urban myth in the seventies that *Black Sabbath* recorded satanic messages on their albums – but that you had to play them backwards to hear them. This, I think, is either the result of the establishment trying to position them as evil or an excellent marking ploy.

shrinking, commodification factory. I was getting shaped to work at the freezing works like all the other sad little fuckers in the class, like it or not.

"These fucking kids!" I would rant at my wife. "Their essays are absolute gobbledygook! These kids write worse than those ten-year-olds we taught in North Korea.⁴⁷⁸ None of it makes sense."

"Stop exaggerating," my wife would say. "Stop being so invested. Just mark them. Move on."

"I think I am having a stroke," I would tell her. "I think I might be developing Tourette's."

The kids in my tutorials were a mix of distance students from the provinces (about 25%), assorted international students (about 70%), and a handful of Auckland locals/mature students (about 5%). I am not sure if this mix was replicated in the other departments, nor am I sure if these segments were actively targeted by the accountants in charge of this bastion of higher learning. Nevertheless, this was the mix of ingredients I was forced to work with.

The distance students had, for the most part, left school early and worked in retail or for local councils or the sole corporate in their town. In other words, they had real world experiences and were quite knowledgeable about how things in their town functioned. Their mistake was conflating this knowledge to the rest of the world. This crowd was seeking the Golden Ticket to get them either a) their boss' job (what most wanted), b) an escape to the Big Smoke (anywhere but Auckland), or c) some concrete proof that they weren't actually as stupid as their high school teachers suggested (very rare – the segment I am from).

Unfortunately, the aforementioned teachers in these tiny towns had never taught them how to write a sentence properly - and there had been little call during their professional careers to do this in anything but block letters on the specials' board. This, of course, was a major handicap. Their education had basically ended at the end of the fourth form (year 10) – they had switched off and sought employment. They had never read books and never intended to. They had a concrete set of views on the world. They equated success to being better than the Lancewoods. In other words, I knew these people well. I grew up with them. Thankfully, they were happy to slog it out for a B or C. They weren't expecting miracles. They knew full-well that 'A's were not coming their way, unless by accident.

⁴⁷⁸ My wife and I taught English in Seoul, South Korea in 2002.

The international students, conversely, were well-educated. It wasn't their lack of knowledge that was the problem. It was their serious lack of language skills. I should point out that this was not their fault. They had met the entry requirements of the university and had the framed certificate to prove it. But none of that mattered. Because, for the vast majority of them, the hard reality was that they couldn't understand a word I said. I'd ask them a question and they'd look at me blankly just like the kids at the tapestry school. They tried to use google translate on my random pictograms on the whiteboard without much success. They'd demand I put the drawings online. But, of course, I couldn't. They were on the whiteboard. It didn't have a download function – and, anyway, there was no point. None of it would be tested. And even though I told them this, they still pulled faces, they still pulled their hair out. I was not competent teacher, they wrote on the course evaluation. I was not helping them pass. I was stupid teacher and didn't understand their needs.

This outrage induced a visit from a high ranking official from the Cultural Communications Council (CCC).

"These students have paid a lot of money to pass this course," he told me. "We have a duty of care. We have a duty to teach them properly, so they pass. You need to work on your course materials and delivery. I've heard a rumour you are deviating from the slide-deck that Dr X provided you. I've heard that you only speak one language."

"Their English is limited," I said, "at best."

"Impossible!" he said. "They have passed the English entry requirement. Are you speaking clearly? I note you have a weird, small-town South Island accent. I'm having trouble understanding you. Perhaps if you spoke with Received Pronunciation like the rest of us it would make a difference. It's not the students' fault that you can't enunciate properly. None of the other tutors are having issues. Only you. Do you have an agenda against international students?"

"No," I said. "And the other tutors teach in Galaranise."⁴⁷⁹

"Well that's to be expected," he said, "they're from the Republic of Galar. The students are Galaranise. I'm Galaranise. We're all Galaranise. What is your point?"

"That the course is supposed to be delivered in English."

"Their tutorials always score well in the course evaluation," he said. "And that's what's important. You should sit in on some of them to see how it's done."

"But I don't speak Galaranise."

⁴⁷⁹ This is a fictional town in the Pokémon world.

“Yes,” he admitted. “That’s a problem. When does your contract come up for renewal?”

Interestingly, while my rural students struggled through their assignments producing work that my fifteen-year-old kid would wipe the floor with, they nevertheless, did enough to fall over the line. But the international students were a whole other ballgame. They were binary. Some of them would hand in work so unreadable that it would cause a cerebral haemorrhage, while others handed in work so polished that they must have been channelling a Nobel laureate. It was either complete shit or perfect – they were targeting both tails of the normal curve, while my rural friends hugged grimly to the middle for dear life. When I questioned these students about their perfect assignments, they would shrug their shoulders, casually brush the hair out of their eyes, and look at their phones.

“Can you please show me where you found this obscure paper you cited?” I would ask. “It sounds very interesting. I’ve never heard of it. I’d very much like to read it. The only problem is, our library doesn’t subscribe to that particular journal.”

Blank looks.

“Library,” I was told. “Website.”

“Can you please show me exactly where you found it?”

Blank.

“Forget login. Can’t remember. Not problem. I pass. You must go to library. They help you.”

“Can you explain to me what the author you cite here,” I said, pointing to a pristine passage, “was meaning when he said that Leadership was XYZ?”

Blank.

“I have very poor thoughts today,” I was told. “I can’t think now. Library website has answer. I google on Library website. Library website is answer.”

Yes. The magical library website. What was I thinking? How stupid of me.

“And,” the high-ranking official said, “it has come to our attention that you are quizzing the students about their assignments. And this is making them feel very uncomfortable. They have clearly passed, yet you are going out of your way to try and fail them regardless. You are going outside the parameters of your authority to attempt to label them as cheats. It’s just not acceptable. We need our tutors to help the students pass, not ensure they fail. What is wrong with you?”

“Some of the rural students also fail,” I said.

“Yes, but they don’t complain,” he said. “And they’re paying domestic fees. Not to mention that we’re the only university servicing the distance market and, let’s face it,

that particular student would never get into a regular university let alone any of the Big Four. Basically, they're a captured market. I'm not interested in the rural students. I'm only interested in the continued enrolment of international students. If word gets out that we might fail them because of some rogue, potentially racist tutor, they'll go somewhere else en masse, somewhere that will happily take their money in exchange for their diploma."

"So?"

"So, we have buildings and infrastructure to pay for," he said. "We need their continued support. We need to give our customers what they need and want. It's Marketing 101. It's how things work here."

He was crystal clear: I was to cease failing them. They were, from this point on, unfailable. Failing the kids who were in the cash cow segment of the Boston Box was unacceptable in modern business schools.

"If I pass them," I said, "when they have clearly failed, and I get audited by the Ministry, I'll be fucked ten-ways-from-Sunday. I'll end up flying cargo planes full of rubber dog shit out of Hong Kong."⁴⁸⁰

"That's exactly why we hire tutors on contract," he said. "That's why our lecturers don't do it. You're collateral damage, an anomaly, a built-in failsafe. You're plausible deniability. I'm here to demand you do something that I would never put in writing, so that if it blows up in our face, you're the one going down for incompetency. The University is blameless. It's business as usual. This is why we pay you. It was all in the tiny print in the contract that we forged your signature on."

Naturally, I wasn't going to play ball. My autism wouldn't allow me. I had to pass my degree in the normal manner and so did everyone else. No one on my watch was going to pass a paper they had failed. It wasn't going to happen. And this was why I was quickly kicked out of running anymore tutorials and the job was given to others for whom ethics were optional. They could happily turn a blind eye. They could point out the best deals from the Paper Mills. They could mark the very papers they had written and sold to the students. That's capitalism at its finest. That's vertical integration. That's a value chain. That's understanding the needs of your customer. That's what we teach in business schools. Cash is King.

The examiners were posing with props in an overtly sexual manner when I arrived. Cameras flashed. Makeup crews fussed. The PDC was being removed on a stretcher by

480 Scott, T. (1986). *Top Gun* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures. Maverick (the hysteric) is threatened with this potential future if he fails to conform to the will of the Flight School (University).

paramedics. He looked at me with pure hatred. The CCCP was frozen behind the glass door in a catatonic state.

“What the absolute fuck?” he asked.

As it turned out, I was not being examined by aged has-beens-never-weres, which was the norm. Instead, I was greeted by a carnivalesque spectacle of which I was about to become the main event. CP,⁴⁸¹ the primary inquisitor, was a transgender ex-philosophy lecturer, who had abandoned the constraints of classroom to take up chiromancy⁴⁸² and phrenology,⁴⁸³ and deliver her readings in digestible, easily understandable, jargon free, short movies on YouTube. She was considered the leading authority on all-things-considered-bullshit-by-the-establishment. The secondary examiner was Joe Elliot,⁴⁸⁴ the former frontman for rock band Def Leppard,⁴⁸⁵ who had abandoned his music career to investigate real world hysteria and hysterics via a Ouija board and post his findings in long-form singalongs on YouTube. I was overjoyed. They were just the team we needed to get this show on the road. The Knowledge Factory, I quickly discovered, had opposed this examination team. But their hands were tied. HAL had run the numbers. There was no one else. The dusty academics that he had originally come up with were either dead or irrelevant or both. As soon as HAL had published the examination team, his eyes had crossed and he kept repeating “Stop, Dave. I’m afraid”⁴⁸⁶ over and over. He had been removed and shipped to the Engineering department at Canterbury for analysis.

In the Pit I was laid upon the operating table. Scores of academics looked down from above eager for the show to begin. They shook the chicken-wire, they chugged beer, they ate buckets of buttered popcorn. The lights were blinding. An assistant wired me up to the monitors. The anaesthetist put out his cigarette and coughed. CP juggled scalpels. Joe was playing his guitar and singing to one of the cameras about Today’s Sponsor, about coupon codes for 20% off haemorrhoid cream.

“Just use promo code JoeBoil,” he said. “for a less broken arse in three easy applications.”

And then the anaesthetist told me to count backwards from ten in German.

481 CP is based on Natalie Wynn, an American YouTuber who runs the channel ContraPoints. See: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ContraPoints>. She mainly deals with topics on gender and identity.

482 Palm reading.

483 As with palm reading – only with the skull.

484 I chose Joe Elliott because he is a controversial figure. He doesn’t appear to have a filter and says whatever is on his mind – as do I. While I don’t agree with much of what he has to say, I think it is interesting that people continue to be shocked when he goes off-script.

485 Def Leppard (1977-) is an English rock band. I chose this band because of its bestselling album *Hysteria* (1987).

486 Kubrick, S. (Director). (1968). *2001: A Space Odyssey* [Motion Picture]. Stanley Kubrick Productions. This is a famous line from the movie. I include it here, because I believe that the University tries to silence alternative voices because it is afraid. However, I would tell them that “Everything they desire is on the other side of fear” (George Washington Adair, 1823 – 1899).

Buckle in my academic colleagues. Stow your tray-tables. I suggest an assortment of airline vomit bags be kept at the ready. You're going to need them. We're about to enter Wonderland.⁴⁸⁷ We're about to go through that fucking mirror.⁴⁸⁸ We're about to go to someplace no Management doctoral thesis has gone before. We're going down the rabbit hole and it's going to get dark, intense and more than a little claustrophobic. Everything up to this point has been delivered with the handbrake firmly on. I am about to drop the clutch and let the hammer out. There are no holds barred from this point on. Look away now if you're a conservative asshole. Look away now if you think everything is just peachy because things are going to get really fucking crazy. You have been warned.

"You have scars on your palms," CP stated. "They look like stigmata. How did you get them?"

"My childhood was a battleground," I said. "I was bound to get the odd scar. We all have our own cross to bear."

The scar on my right palm runs the length of my hand. I received this when I was four. There are variations of this story, but this is the way I remember it. We were at my maternal grandparent's home. My grandmother was recovering from a stroke. She had her right arm in a sling, her hand formed a tight fist and would never straighten again. There would be no more rides on the back of her bike. On the day in question my sister and I were drinking bottles of RR. I was drinking a lime one. And even though we had been told not to run with bottles in our hands, I decided to demonstrate to my three-year-old sister that the practise of running with glass bottles was completely safe. Only no one told my grandmother that my running out the backdoor was just for demonstration purposes. She grabbed for me as I ran past and, unfortunately, knocked me off balance and I plunged head-first down the concrete steps – my hand was sliced open like a nice, ripe grapefruit on the shattered bottle. My grandmother was praised for this save. It could have been his face, they said. Or worse. It was off to the hospital for me. I would return with a matching sling. When I tried to tell my parents that I was completely safe, that my stroke-afflicted grandmother had knocked me off my feet, they weren't buying it. They had formed a narrative that involved a naughty kid who didn't do as he was told and suffered the consequences, that would have suffered far worse if it hadn't been for his quick-thinking grandmother. We all knew this was bullshit, but my narrative was completely overwritten with a false one. Thinking about this now, I can see where my hatred of being unjustly accused stems from – it is one of my chief triggers.

⁴⁸⁷ Carroll, 1865.

⁴⁸⁸ Carroll, 1871.

This sort of reality-morphing, this bending of the story to fit the dominant discourse, was why I decided to use narrative therapy for this thesis. It was my chance to make sense of all the stories of the past and re-interrogate them in a way that was consistent with who I now was. Narrative therapy, for me, was about taking back reality, the truth, about resisting the dominant discourse, and recovering and reclaiming the truth from all the bullshit that had gone down over the years. It was a sieve through which I shook the fiction of the Self, to find small nuggets of truth. But I was also acutely aware that these recovered fragments of reality that I had chosen to share, my memories of the truth, were also nothing more than a fiction.⁴⁸⁹ But that fiction was my new, reimagined story. It was my reality. It was an unavoidable paradox that I was happily using to not only work out what the fuck was wrong with me but also the business school.⁴⁹⁰

The second scar ran across my left palm from the top of my thumb and ran far deeper – both physically and psychologically. I got this one in the late 1970s during perhaps the longest and hottest summer of my childhood. It was Christmas 1978. My father had knocked off for the year. He had stocked the garage with crates of beer and boxes of RR and decided to finally paint the roof of our home. The bitumen was melting on the streets, the footpaths would burn your skin, ice-creams lasted about thirty seconds before they melted all over your fingers. It was during this ferocious summer that my mother finally lost it completely. This had been brewing for some time. She had been getting progressively more hostile and unpredictable over the weeks and months leading up to that summer. She had always been highly strung. She had a very short fuse and was prone to unprovoked acts of violence. I had witnessed her slapping random children in shops, threatening my father's mother and sister, dragging my sister around by the hair, the tearing of her own brother's shirt in an unhinged rage – the same brother who would eventually fist-fight my father on a drunken afternoon a few months later at the rear of my grandparent's home, because my uncle had called my mother a stupid little insane bitch for taking it upon herself to smack one of his kids for spilling their drink. And, even though it was pertinently true, my idiotic father, felt obliged to get his head kicked in, while we all stood horrified in a semicircle and watched, by my much larger and angrier uncle. Naturally, I was often the recipient of many of her random attacks. A word out of

489 I am well aware that memory is not always reliable. Loftus & Pickrell (1995) suggest that entire memories might, in fact, be false – that the subject might have been led to this fictitious conclusion. As Loftus (2003) points out, "Research on memory distortion has shown that postevent suggestion can contaminate what a person remembers. Moreover, suggestion can lead to false memories being injected outright into the minds of people" (p. 867). However, Christianson & Loftus (1987), temper this somewhat, when they suggest "...some information (the essence, the theme) of a traumatic event might be relatively well retained in memory, while memory is impaired for many of the specific, and especially peripheral, details" (p. 225). In other words, high emotion/arousal helps to retain 'big picture' memories (LaBar & Phelps 1998).

490 As Sinclair (2010) points out, "...writing about leadership comes from a mixture of internal and external, personal and geographic, places: 'real' and current as well as remembered and reconstructed" (p. 447).

place. A look. It didn't matter. She'd ignite and chase me around with her thin, white belt. She'd eventually corner me and then proceed to strap me until her cigarette needed ashing. And then, sated, send me to my room to wait-until-my-father-got-home. I would spend that time reading and inventing worlds. I loved being sent to my room. My father did nothing when he got home but read the paper and eat his dinner. Looking back now, I can see that she was just young and incredibly fucking stupid. She was just a dumb kid playing at being an adult. She had little education. She had a very narrow set of experiences. She was bound to go postal at some stage. It was unavoidable.

On the day in question, she was inside smoking with my father. But, at some stage, she brushed out through the ranch-slider, through the billowing net curtains, and moved down the path towards the garage. This was where our paths intersected. I was fucking about under the garden sprinkler, trying to stay cool, trying to stay outside like I was ordered to do. I was trying to pretend I was having fun when all I really wanted to do was go to my room and read my book. She walked past me slowly in her printed sun frock with her requisite cloud of cigarette smoke and heavily tinted Elton Johns. As she did so, she turned her head slightly and said goodbye and told me she was going away forever. She smiled sadly and I watched her go into the garage as the sprinkler spat chilly accusations behind me. I looked back towards the living room. I could see my father inside, covered in paint, standing with a glass of beer. He looked destroyed. His drive to paint the roof all summer instead of taking us to Tahunanui motor camp in Nelson, which was the norm, had backfired. I knew it. And he knew it. That roof had become a metaphor. With each coat of paint, the tension had increased. He had been hiding up there. He had been avoiding my mother. This was my father's way when it came to conflict. He was passive-aggressive. He preferred psychological warfare to a full-frontal attack, which was my mother's MO. This roof painting was nothing more than a game.

My mother did not return from the garage. The doors remained closed. I wondered where she was going. She often snapped and packed a bag and fucked off to her parents for days on end leaving my father to sit in silence and feed us fish & chips while we awaited her return. This was the expected, routine pattern of things. When I tried to follow her in, to find out what was going on, I discovered the doors were locked from the inside. I looked through the window, she was sitting in the car with the engine running. I banged on the window and she turned her head and mouthed goodbye. That image is burnt into my psyche. I can't forget it. I ran to tell my father that my mother was in the garage trying to off herself. He just sat there impotently and drank his beer. He didn't even respond.

"Where's the spare key!" I screamed. "She's locked in!"

He shrugged and sipped his beer. I, meanwhile, was freaking out, running around in circles, panicking. I had no idea how long it would take to die in a garage filling with carbon monoxide. If TV was anything to go by, seconds rather than minutes. My idiotic father didn't seem to exhibit any urgency. He didn't seem to care at all. His immovability forced me to deal with the situation myself. I ran down the path in a panic and, picking up the first thing I found, a length of kindling, brought it down in an arc, like Norman Bates in *Psycho*,⁴⁹¹ and stabbed it through my own reflection – my mother's face trapped behind mine resembled Munch's *Scream*.⁴⁹² My mother immediately exited the car and the garage as if nothing had happened, passing my father as he finally wandered down the path with the key. I was bundled off to the hospital with instructions to say I had fallen over with a bottle in my hand, again.

This event would never be mentioned. In recent years, when I have brought it up, the whole thing is denied. It didn't happen, apparently. It had been removed from my past Orwellian-style. Reality was ripped from me and replaced with a story that fit the narrative that my parents wished to present to the world. When, over the years, I have asked my father about this event, he shook his head. He had no recollection of it ever taking place. He could remember painting the roof though, something he was eternally proud of. I gave it three coats, he said. That roof is still as good as new. It won't need painting until the end of time. My mother also refused to accept this event happened. I wanted him to paint the roof red, she said, as if this small acknowledgment will derail my interrogation, but he insisted on army green. He never listened to me. But I had the scar to prove it – a stigmata on my left palm. When I showed them, they pulled faces and moved uncomfortably in their chairs and blamed it on my own stupidity, on my inability to follow instructions and do as I was told.

"I think you got that playing rugby," my father said.

My mother simply lit a cigarette and mixed another Pimms & Coke.

It was not long after this that my mother went on some pills and the relationship between her and my father finally unravelled. My aunt and grandmother would discuss this unravelling in quiet, conspiratorial whispers. They ignored me. I was on the couch reading. My idiotic father, they said, had overstepped the mark, that there was nothing wrong with my mother, that it was all his fault. My father, they said, had forced the doctor to prescribe Valium, and was forcing her to take it. They shook their heads in disbelief. My father and the doctor believed, to their horror, that my mother she was becoming

491 Hitchcock, A. (Director). (1960). *Psycho* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures.

492 Edvard Munch (1863–1944) is a Norwegian painter.

increasingly paranoid, that she believed people were out-to-get-her, that she was suffering from a nervous condition known as hysteria.

“Interesting,” said CP. “But these are not your only scars, are they? These are only the ones you are choosing to display.”

Unfortunately, not. This attempted suicide was just the beginning. It was the first overbalanced domino. Only my mother wasn't the protagonist of these other episodes. She had relocated to the Far North with Some Random Guy and my sister. I made one trip to visit in the late 1980s. It was a disaster. I had to stand and watch, as impotently as my father, as this interloper, slapped my mother around their living room because, apparently, he raged, she had glanced at someone at the pub she shouldn't have. His ego was eggshell thin. She had embarrassed him. He was a bogan of epic proportions. I felt sorry for her, in that moment, as she cowered on the floor, her thin wrist trapped in his clenched fist, the blood running from her mouth. She gave me that same sad smile. It was weird seeing her in this position. This must have been how I had looked to her on all those occasions I had worn the back of her hand, that I had cowered on the floor while she dished out her angry medicine. Weirder still, she had swapped out the passive-aggressiveness of my father for a mirror of her own brutality. Needless to say, all the terror of my early childhood came tumbling back. I was frozen with fear as this scene played out. I had no idea what to do. I couldn't even speak. After the violence subsided my mother and my sister, screaming abuse at Moron Man, stormed out and drove off leaving me alone with discount Tony Soprano. A guy I had known for less than 24 hours. I lit one of my mother's cigarettes with a shaky hand and listened to him tell me what the colour of the sky was in his world. He paced. He drunk dark rum from the bottle. He kicked chairs across the room. I have never wanted to get out of anywhere as badly as I did that night.

In the morning I packed my shit and told my mother that I was off, that I would appreciate a ride to the bus stop. She frowned and asked me why, like nothing had happened, like it was business as usual, that I had only just arrived. I shook my head and told the bogan that I needed to be taken to the bus right now. He could see it in my eyes. I wasn't going to participate in the mass delusion. He nodded his hungover head and got his keys.

“So you're just going to run away,” my sister hissed. “Typical. You're just like the old man.”

My relationship with my mother, built on an unsteady foundation of fear and obedience, would slowly burn down like one of her cigarettes over the next year or so. I was never heading north again and she knew it. Soon the phone calls became less

frequent. The letters more brief. I was not calling back. I was never going to write. I was letting go. I had enough of my own shit to deal with, without adding hers to the mix. That trip had tipped me over the edge. I never wanted to see violence up close and personal like that ever again. It was time to turn the page.

We would not meet or speak again for the next 15 years, not until I had children of my own. On this occasion, she randomly turned up at the door of my home and demanded to see her grandchildren. Not even a hello. Not even a glimmer of remorse. I was the villain apparently. It was my fault that our relationship had turned to shit. How did she know this? Her fucked-up extended family had told her. They were the font of all knowledge. I was too much like my idiotic father. All this was conveyed to me on the sidewalk outside my home. I had not let her have access to my new life. I had told her we had to have a little chat first. This sent her into attack mode. My wife watched on from the window as my mother swore and threatened and blamed at the top of her lungs. What a shitshow. Fortunately, I wasn't a little kid anymore and her vicious bullying, although extremely difficult to deal with, confirmed my suspicions. She hadn't changed at all. There was no way she was getting inside. I didn't want my kids growing up having to deal with the wrath of this sick, demented woman. She had made a very difficult decision easy for me. I chose to spare them that pain.

"I have a right to see my grandkids!" she told me.

"You don't make the rules here," I said.

"Do you know what everyone says about you?"

"I don't give two fucks what your family think about me," I said.

This confused her. Caring about what the extended family thought was her whole life. Realising that I didn't give a shit about what a bunch of bogans in a small town thought about me, silenced her. But not for long.

"You're a can of fucking shit!" she told me.

"It was nice chatting," I said. "I'll see you later."

She screamed obscenities at my back as I walked off. She called me all sorts of nasty shit as she climbed into her car and sped off. When I got back inside my wife was gobsmacked.

"I told you," I said. "She's unpredictable and volatile. You thought I was joking. But I was actually playing it down. You wanted us to kiss and make up. You wanted the kids to know their grandmother. Does that seem like a realistic goal? Was this the utopian reunion you were imagining?"

"What if I was home by myself?" she asked, visibly shaken. "She's crazy!"

"That's what she was expecting," I said. "She assumed I'd be at work."

A few weeks later I received a letter from the Far North. In it, she forgave me for my inappropriate behaviour, for not allowing her in, for being an asshole just like my father, for being a horrible person. Apparently, it wasn't my fault though, it was my step-mother's, my father's, and the rest of my paternal family. As usual, she took no responsibility. She was blameless. I taped the letter shut, wrote Return To Sender upon it, and sent it back.

But, as I said, my mother was not the star of the trauma that the teenage me was yet to experience. It was the cold and dark winter of 1988. I had just returned from up north. I had just left high school with no idea of what I was going to do, no job, and very little hope. The country was reeling from the stock market crash and unemployment was through the roof. My father, who would soon be bankrupt and unemployed himself, was now living with the ex-wife of his best friend and two of her three sons. I hated her and them and they hated me. Not surprisingly, the future looked as bleak as that Mid-Canterbury skyline. My father and his new wife liked to spend the weekends alone. So, I was handed money and beer and told to not come back until Sunday night. That suited me just fine. In a kind of living cliché, I found a dull kind of solace in beer and inappropriate friends. There was a kind of warmth to being accepted. Not a lot was expected of me. As long as I bought the occasional round, as long as I didn't excel anyone, I was golden.

On the night in question, we had been out drinking in a nearby skiing town. There were nightclubs. There were people who didn't know us. There were cheap watered-down drinks and pretty girls with exotic accents. We would spend the evening getting drunk and dancing. Good times. When the place closed at 3am, we all piled out to the cars and headed home as usual. Only we didn't quite make it this time. My friend lost control of his car and hit a pole. Yes, he was drunk. But to be fair, he was a terrible driver and that car was far too powerful for him. He had already had several accidents in it. The whole thing was a disaster waiting to happen. Thankfully, no one was hurt. But, nevertheless, he was arrested. This was when all the trouble started. He had never bothered to get his licence. The police told him he would be liable for the pole, that he'd probably lose his job, that his life as he knew it was over. Let's get something straight here. These were small-town cops who had very little crime to deal with. They blew this whole thing out of proportion. They didn't think about what their words would eventually cause. They just wanted to scare a dumb kid for kicks and giggles. Later that night, after he was released, he stormed off to his room in a furious rage. He basically thought he had perpetrated the crime of the century and would be paying for it forever.

He was punching walls and kicking shit. We all sat around the kitchen table wondering who should go in and see if he wanted a cup of tea. But none of us wanted a random punch in the face. At the Boxing Day races the previous Christmas, he had beaten one of our close friends for accidentally ripping the t-shirt he had stolen from a department store a few weeks prior. This should have been the first clue that he was unstable. He had also punched me in the face on New Year's Eve for singing too loudly when he was tired and wanted to go to sleep. So, yeah, no one was keen to poke the angry lion. Eventually, wondering what the fuck he was doing, I went to find him. To my horror, he was on the floor, blood flowing out of his mouth. I had no idea what was going on. I thought he must have had some kind of stroke. It wasn't until I reached down to pick him up, that I discovered the rifle. And then the terrible reality hit home. He had shot himself. I hadn't acted fast enough. I hadn't grabbed the piece of kindling. I hadn't broken the window. I had sat there like my father drinking beer. I had turned into my fucking father just like my mother foresaw. You ask why I don't drink? If I had not sat down and drunk that beer, if I had followed him directly to his room, perhaps things would have turned out differently.

Years later at a Christmas function, a family friend was telling me that he had run into the little brother of my suicidal friend, that he had grown up to be a king-sized fucking idiot. But, he said, it's not surprising, is it? After all, he had found his brother with a gun in his mouth. That would, he mused, fuck anyone up. This was the bullshit narrative that had morphed in this town since my departure. I told him he was mistaken, that finding his brother hadn't fucked him up, that losing him had done that. He asked me how I could be so sure. Because, I told him, he didn't find his brother. I found him. He didn't say another word. Although, I could see by the look in his eyes that he finally understood – so this was why you left town, and that's why you're so fucked up. Yes, that event fucked me up. I'm still dealing with it today. But I got off lightly. His immediate family not so much. His sister, a few years later, would also kill herself, leaving three little kids and an idiotic husband.

But, back in 1988, things were only just starting to go south. Less than ten weeks later a second friend, traumatised by this event, would hang himself when his girlfriend dumped him. I liked this guy. He had a proper job in an office in Christchurch. He was going places. He was someone I felt had it all going on. Someone to aspire to be like. He was an only child. I knew his parents well. They liked me. They were soft and kind and everything my parents weren't. They were devastated. But I couldn't stay in their home and help them deal with the grief. I was far too broken emotionally. Their son, this guy

who had the perfect life, who had gone to the private school, had died. What chance was there for me?

Soon after, another friend, one whom I wasn't as close with, took a bath with an electrical appliance. It was a fucked-up time in a fucked-up town. As each of these people died, I placed another layer of armour around myself. I became desensitised to it. It was like living in a war zone. I remember thinking, well I'm glad it wasn't one of my close friends. I was grateful. I was relieved when it was his name uttered over the telephone. I had discounted his death. I didn't even attend his funeral. I was distancing myself. I was wary of getting too close. I was learning to keep people at arms-length. That way I could ensure my psychological safety. That way, I couldn't be responsible for their deaths. That way, I was off the hook.

"Your friend, friends, and your mother," my therapist said. "They were all the same person. They were all your mother."

He sipped scotch and crunched tulips. Lump moved in anticlockwise circles. I looked out the window, watched the litter blow across the empty quad, refused to answer.

"Variations on a theme," he said. "Fictional versions of the Big Other. And one by one, just like her, they let you down. They abandoned you."

He was dressed like the Lone Ranger⁴⁹³ from the 50s iteration of the TV show. He had a white Stetson. A pair of nickel plated six shooters. He wore a black mask across his eyes.

"It's the symbolic death of the Big Other," he said. "It's the ultimate separation and the thwarted attempts to reconnect. It's a twisted recurring Oedipal nightmare. Each time you tried to make human connections the garage scene would repeat itself, over and over, like a sick GIF, like a hideous feedback loop."

Out there, I was still in the examination room. I was still fending off questions. In here, I lay and listened passively to the words of anti-wisdom issue forth from discount Hannibal Lecter⁴⁹⁴ as he mind-fucked me.

"With each attempted relationship, with each fledgling friendship," he said, "the shroud of your mother, the template for all your relationships, hung over them, dooming them to their fate."

He called me Kemosabe. He spun his guns on his forefingers. He clicked his spurs.

"You were learning to avoid the other. You were learning that others bring pain and sorrow. You were protecting yourself by withdrawing," he said. "But you were not

493 Trendle, G., & Striker, F. (Creators). (1949-1957). *The Lone Ranger* [Television Series]. ABC.

494 Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the Lambs* [Motion Picture]. Orion.

learning how to change the parameters of the game. And that's why it all kept repeating on you like a food court curry. You had to face your demons before you'd be granted access to the next level. Before you could move on. But you never did. Did you?"

I didn't know what to say. I didn't have a fucking clue. I didn't even understand what he was saying. It was all French to me. Was I, like Michael Douglas in *Falling Down*,⁴⁹⁵ the unwitting problem, the architect of my own demise?

"You saved her," he said. "But she left anyway. It didn't matter what you did. Your actions were inconsequential. They didn't matter at all. You had no agency. You were unable to change the status quo. Like now. This book, this kindling. Do you think it will make any difference?"

"You're full of shit," I whispered. "You don't know what you are talking about."

"She abandoned you and moved north," he said. "And now you never speak to her. Her death was metaphorical. She still died in that garage despite your efforts."

It was starting to make sense. It was starting to worry me. I coughed nervously. I sipped some water.

"We are back at the quantum state," he said. "We have a double ending. Two snakes of history intertwined. Like Ada at the end of *The Piano*⁴⁹⁶ Both options existing simultaneously. A postmodern orgasm."

He was enjoying himself. All he wanted to do was solve the puzzle of me. He was Dr Gregory House (Hugh Laurie).⁴⁹⁷ He didn't care about his patients. Not really. He just wanted to get to the answer. And, as he got closer, the happier he became.

"This is what the hysteric does," he said. "They double. You've created two versions of reality. One where you saved your mother. And another, where you killed her. In both versions you were the protagonist. You were active. In neither version were you just an observer. You didn't just look through the window, did you?"

"No."

"What did you do?"

"I smashed it."

"Correction," he said. "You stabbed it. You killed it. You shattered that reality. You killed your mother."

Oh, fuck. Oh fuck. Oh fuck.

"You pierced the membrane between the two realities," he said. "By stabbing that kindling through that pane of glass those two worlds collapsed upon one another. The

495 Schumacher, J. (Director). (1993). *Falling Down* [Motion Picture]. Warner Brothers Pictures.

496 Campion, J. (Director/Writer). (1993). *The Piano* [Motion Picture]. Jan Chapman Productions.

497 Shore, D. (Creator). (2004-2012). *House* [Television Series]. NBC.

inside and the out. The conscious and the unconscious. They folded together. Now you can't peel them apart. They are inseparable."

I had brought the kindling down in an arc. I had acted on impulse. I had not acted consciously. I just wanted to save my mother. But he was right, I couldn't save her. She was already gone. She had already moved North. Now she only exists in my memory. A silent face behind the glass.

"And this is why you want to smash those Lacanian mirrors," he said. "You are not only splintering your personality, but you are also shattering reality – the one where she looks back, through your own reflection and says goodbye."

"Stop," I whispered. "Please stop."

He handed me tissues and a glass of scotch. He waited for me to compose myself. But he wasn't done. He was just getting started.

"Why did you use a piece of kindling?" he asked. "Why not a rock or a stone?"

"I didn't think," I said. "I just acted."

"Kindling fuels the fire," he said.

"What the fuck are you talking about?"

"You were stoking that funeral pyre," he said. "You were burning the whole fucking thing down."

He let that sit for a moment. He clapped his chaps. He adjusted his hat. His silver badge glinted under the lights.

"What now?" I asked.

"You switched out your mother, and people in general," he said, "and replaced them with books. You found sanctuary in fictional worlds. But that wasn't enough. Fictional worlds are unchangeable. Juliet dies.⁴⁹⁸ Desdemona dies.⁴⁹⁹ Lady Macbeth dies.⁵⁰⁰ Ophelia dies."⁵⁰¹

They're all dead Dave.⁵⁰²

"These events are unchangeable," he said. "We all know it. And yet we always hope that Cordelia⁵⁰³ will survive. But her fate is sealed. You couldn't cope with that. Could you? So you wrote your own stories. You needed full control of the narrative. And that's why you are writing this story."

498 Shakespeare, 1623: *Romeo and Juliet*.

499 Shakespeare, 1623: *Othello*.

500 Shakespeare, 1623: *MacBeth*.

501 Shakespeare, 1603: *Hamlet*.

502 Grant, R. Naylor, D. (Creators). (1988-). *Red Dwarf* [Television Series]. BBC. This is a line repeated over and over by Holly (an AI computer) when Dave, released from suspended animation, asks him if certain individuals were, in fact, dead. He, of course, soon discovers he is the last human alive. I would also argue that Grant and Naylor are paying homage, here, to 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (Lloyd, 2018).

503 Shakespeare, 1698: *King Lear*.

“But I have no control over it,” I said. “It’s writing itself. I’m just a bystander. It’s just unfolding before me. I can’t stop it.”⁵⁰⁴

“And now you are going to burn the whole business school down,” he said. “Why is that again?”

“Its narrative is false,” I said. “It sells a shiny surface. It has no depth. It’s an illusion.”

“And your plan is to overwrite its narrative with your own,” he said. “Do you think it will make a difference?”

“I don’t know,” I said. “I doubt it.”

“Is the business school simply another version of your mother?” he said. “You destroy one and another pops up in its place.”

“Like Whack-a-mole.”

⁵⁰⁴ Lončar-Vynović, 2013.

And though I can hide my cold gaze and you can shake my hand and feel flesh gripping yours and maybe you can even sense our lifestyles are probably comparable, I simply am not there.

— Bret Easton Ellis

Chapter 7: Whack-a-Mole

CP cocked her head, her blonde hair cascaded into my face. It smelt of lilac and jasmine, her breath was tinged with Cointreau and menthol cigarettes. She was bent over me, my forehead cupped in her hands, my past, present, and future under her fingertips. She was feeling along the length of an ancient scar on the pate of my head. She was working her fingers, pulling back our hair in conjoint strands, making judgements about me based on this historical, mostly self-inflected, cranial imperfection.

“This shit’s getting real,” she said. “If those other scars were anything to go by, this one’s going to be a goldmine of screwy stories. This one is going to be award-winning. This one’s going viral.”

But it wouldn’t go viral. That’s because there was nothing to say about it. I had fallen backwards, drunk, coming out of a friend’s flat, arm-in-arm with a couple of idiots I used to know. We had slipped on the concrete steps and I had split my head open on the ragged edge of the Summerhill stone entranceway. That was it. A trip to the hospital. Stitches. It was just another nondescript red Lego brick of random information that I’d attach to the mosaic I was building of my Self. It was not central to this story despite her hopes. Although, it is not as neutral as I am pretending either.

She paused to berate the camera crew, to instruct them to get plenty of B-roll, that whatever this scar revealed, she needed multiple angles, close-up action, that she needed space in the shots for graphics, asides, and artistic licence.

“We’ll add the moaning and writhing in post-production,” she said. “We’ll add the money shot from found-footage.”⁵⁰⁵

⁵⁰⁵ She is, like me, creating a narrative by splicing truth and fiction into a seamless whole.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"What are *you* talking about?" she repeated, still probing my scalp, still looking down upon me, fluttering her artificial eyelashes.

"I'm not sure," I said. "I have no idea."

"No shit," she said. "I was wondering when you'd get there."

Joe was pacing with his guitar. Shirtless. His aged body was sagging under the weight of his years. His tats were melting off him. He was no longer a rock star. He was a Salvador Dali painting.⁵⁰⁶

"Actually," she said, "now you mention it, there is one thing I'm still unsure about."

"What's that?" I asked.

"I'm still trying to understand," she begun, "how your mother nuking herself in the garage, while interesting, has anything to do with business education. I don't get it."

Joe stopped pacing. He froze for a moment. And then he shoved CP out of the way. He looked at me. And then at her. He resumed strumming the guitar. He was nodding. He looked deranged.

"I'll get this one blondie," he sung. "I understand. I fucking get it. Yeah oh fucking yeah! I fucking understand! Oh, yeah, I get it, I get hysteria."

"If you ever touch me again you CIS bastard!" CP screamed, stabbing a daggered, painted nail in his face, "I'll cut off your old-dry-balls and feed them to my fucking aardvark!"⁵⁰⁷

Joe ignored her completely. He was in the zone. He was on stage. He was in his element.

"Well," I said. "That makes one of us. Enlighten me."

"Don't you see?" he said. "This is what an hysterical thesis looks like. It doesn't follow conventions at all. In fact, it ignores them. That's what the hysteric does. That's what hysteria is."

Hysteria, I thought, as I lay there watching my examiners argue, rather than being some sort of weird dysfunction, was actually the logical endpoint for anyone with an ounce of creativity who comes up against a quintessential bureaucratic institution. In Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*,⁵⁰⁸ for example, the anti-hero, Rodion Romanovich Raskolnikov an impoverished ex-Law student, is defined by all and sundry as being in a nervous hysteria for the duration of the novel. His poverty, combined with his exhaustion at fighting the bureaucratic system he found himself confined within, pushed

506 Salvador Dali (1904-1989) is a Spanish surrealist artist.

507 This is a reference to the aforementioned Salvador Dalí, who had an aardvark as a pet. In fact, he used to walk the streets of Paris with the animal on a leash.

508 Dostoevsky, 1866.

him into a corner from which he could not seem to escape. In desperation he plotted, then committed, a murder in order to profit from his victim's wealth – wealth he believed would set him free. Interestingly, he didn't spend her money. And when he tried to explain why he had killed his victim, he couldn't come up with a straight answer – it changed on each retelling. His victim was a metaphor, of course, for the system (capitalism) that was repressing him. He tried to destroy it (via his hysteria) but only plunged himself into greater difficulties. And, of course, that's why I had experienced difficulties – because this, almost without exception, was the plight of the hysteric.⁵⁰⁹

"You can't separate the Self from this thesis, the business school, any of it," Joe sung. "Just like Tim-the-Tool-Man-Taylor couldn't separate himself from the cars he built in his garage. They were an extension of him. When Jill criticised the car, she was actually criticising him. He was the car. It was a manifestation of his masculine desires, his need to create something from nothing. That car was his Id.⁵¹⁰ This thesis is a manifestation of your feminine desires. It is your desire to not only create something from nothing, but also destroy something and render it nothing. It's a two-for-one deal."⁵¹¹

"Fonzie's jacket,"⁵¹² I said. "Elon's rockets."⁵¹³

"You don't compartmentalise," Joe said. "Your thesis is not a book. It's a manifestation of your need to question. Of your desire for answers. Of your need to be whole."

"V(oya)ger wants to join with the creator," I said. "V(oya)ger wants to know its purpose. What am I to you?"⁵¹⁴

"You were never going to be the faceless author," Joe continued. "The impartial-at-arm's-length-commentator. That was never going to happen. You're far too invested. You're desperate to understand what made you seek out answers at the Academy in the first place. And, then, why you kept coming back even though you didn't get any. Even though the Academy doesn't have any answers. Even though it just posed more questions."

"I have a question," said CP.

"Shut it blondie," Joe sung. "Your time's up."

509 As Gherovici (2014) states, "...no answer can settle the hysteric's question...[and w]hen the hysteric exposes the insufficiency of the answer offered by the Other...the hysteric makes visible the place where the other is lacking..." (pp. 58-59). This pointing out of the limitations of the other is, of course, dangerous ground and can be, more often than not, career limiting.

510 Finestra, C., McFadzean, D., & Williams, M. (Creators). (1991-1999). *Home Improvement* [Television Series]. ABC.

511 As Vidaillet & Vignon (2010) put it, "When individuals define themselves excessively through their work and through the roles their organization gives them, they become prisoners of, and highly dependent on the others' gaze..." (p. 224).

512 Marshall, G. (Creator). (1974-1984). *Happy Days* [Television Series]. ABC.

513 Elon Musk (1971-) is a South African entrepreneur and founder of Tesla & Space X.

514 Wise, R. (Director). (1979). *Star Trek: the motion picture* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures.

According to the aged musician we knew, now, why I came here, why I left my job and entered the university for the first time. We know all about ground zero. About the origin. Why I first signed up.

“We do?” I asked, confused as all fuck.

CP shrugged and pulled a face. Above, the crowd had grown silent. For the first time they were starting to think that maybe, just maybe, this maniac might pass. And if that happened, then the very essence of what a thesis could be would be changed forever - from the stale, prosaic bullshit it had become, and return to what it was first conceived to be: new knowledge. Fuck the delivery method. The methodology and literature review and the fucking discussion. Fuck all of that shit. It was the knowledge that was important, the fucking results, not the clothes they were dressed up in.

“How?” said CP. “And stop fucking singing! I’ll fucking kill you, you fucking clown!”⁵¹⁵

He laid it all out in rhyming, heroic couplets. In iambic pentameter. In one epic power ballad.

Apparently, according to Joe, I was using the university as a kind of changing room, like the one in Barkers, where I was forced to stare at my Self in the mirror, while I tried on the same T-shirt I bought last year, just in case it, or I, had changed. I came to the university, he sung, seeking separation, seeking to remove myself intellectually and culturally from my mother and, by extension, the bogan classes from which I originated, in an attempt to move one standard deviation from the norm, to separate myself by a few degrees – literally.

“I’m calling this song *The Degrees of Steve*,” he told the camera. “Hit like and subscribe and don’t forget to comment below with ideas for the second verse.”

We waited for the commercial break to be over before he resumed.

“You were running away from all those versions of your mother,” he said. “You thought the Academy could rewrite your past and protect you from your future. That it could change the direction of Time’s Arrow. That you’d morph into a middle-class anonymous cog and leave your upbringing behind, overlay it with a stylish new overcoat of knowledge, that you could then wear about as a disguise.”

“Have you been taking drugs again?” CP asked him.

“You thought you’d be someone else in this nice and safe and warm jacket”⁵¹⁶ he said. “That you’d make different decisions, better decisions. That you’d choose not to sit

515 Once again, I am referencing the clown in *King Lear* – he is, as Joe is here, the truthsayer.

516 This is an allusion to Gogol’s famous short story the “Overcoat”, which first appeared in *Sochineniya* (1842) – a collection of short stories. The “Overcoat” is about an individual who desires to own a new jacket. He wrongly believes that once he owns the new overcoat his colleagues will respect him and his life will change for the better. In fact, the overcoat is directly responsible for his demise – he is mugged and killed for it.

passively and drink beer. That you'd be active. That way, you could always protect those who were important to you. That there would be no more mothers to save/slay."⁵¹⁷

I hate it when he starts to make sense," CP said. "It's so annoying."

"But each time you signed up you didn't get what you wanted. None of those overcoats really fit. They didn't really suit you. You were still feeling a little vulnerable, naked, as cold as fuck. So you kept coming back to ask for more of the same, to apply more and more layers. To try on everything in the store. You were fucking addicted."

He was right. I seemed to have some unquenchable desire, if not an unhealthy masochistic bent, for knowledge, and believed, wrongly, that the university, the sadist⁵¹⁸ in this distorted relationship, could sate this longing, but for reasons that were unclear, was choosing not to do so. ⁵¹⁹ ⁵²⁰ Lacan, if he was here, would most probably slap me stupid and tell me, rightly, that I was just turning the university into a pseudo-master – that I was looking to it for some truth that it did not, and could not, hold.⁵²¹

"Unsated desire," I said. "Mirages and false positives."

"But now that you're at the end of the shit tunnel,"⁵²² he said, "now that you've got all the clothes on in uncountable layers, all the horrible truths are reflected back in that changing room mirror. You realise you look utterly ridiculous with all this academic ornamentation, you look bulky and slug-like, you look confused and scared, you look like a fake, fucking idiot. Nothing has changed, you realise, but those fucking clothes. And that's why you have refused to add an academic veneer to this thesis. That's why you are refusing this last gown. That's why, ultimately, you're going to drive a piece of kindling through that fucking mirror, you're going to kill this false desire once and for all."

"It's a placebo," I said. "A lie. The emperor's new clothes."

"So," he said, "you are going back to your tighty-whities."⁵²³ You are peeling away all the layers of academic bullshit you have caked over your Self for all these fucking years. You are finally purging that artificial bullshit and accepting you. Whoever that is."

517 Demme, J. (Director). (1991). *Silence of the Lambs* [Motion Picture]. Orion. I am referring to a conversation between Hannibal Lecter (Anthony Hopkins) and Clarice Starling (Jody Forster). "...you think if you save poor Catherine (Brooke Smith), you could make them stop, don't you? You think if Catherine lives, you won't wake up in the dark ever again to that awful screaming of the lambs." At the conclusion of the movie, after Clarice saves Catherine, Hannibal calls her to enquire if the lambs have, in fact, stopped screaming.

518 According to Lacan (1989), the sadist doesn't simply refuse to answer but, rather, "denies the existence of the Other" (p. 65). In other words, my ongoing questioning of the university might as well be white noise. I am basically, screaming into the void.

519 According to Verhaeghe (1995) the hysteric is always posing the question: "Tell me who I am, tell me what my desire is..." (p. 10), which the university cannot, and, therefore, will not, answer.

520 As Gherovici (2014) states, "...the hysteric's discourse operates by constantly posing a question and, thus...demanding knowledge" (p. 65).

521 Verhaeghe (1995): "When the hysterical students during the May revolt of 1968 interrupted the very seminar in which he was preparing the discourse theory, Lacan gave them a very cold answer: "Vous voulez un maître, vous l'aurez": "you are looking for a master, you will surely find one"" (p. 10).

522 Darabont, F. (Director). (1994). *The Shawshank Redemption* [Motion Picture]. Columbia Pictures.

523 Gilligan, V. (Creator). (2008-2013). *Breaking Bad* [Television Series]. Sony Pictures. I am alluding to Walter White (Bryan Cranston)

"Know thyself first," I said. "To thine own self be true."⁵²⁴

"The PhD is the end of the line," he said. "Now you must either plunge out the end of the shit tunnel and splash into the crystal-clear water and wash yourself clean of that academic muck, or crawl back to your cell, the safety of the womb, and turn into one of those foetal-position-fuckers who you despise."

"I am re-writing my Self," I said. "I am creating my own narrative sans bullshit."

"It's still fiction,"⁵²⁵ said Joe. "But it's your truth."

"I can't exit the store until all the clothes are on the floor," I said. "Until those tightly-whities are also amongst the pile of discarded, ill-fitting identities."

"That's why you are doing this final purge. This is your last chance. You don't want to leave anything on, anything to chance," he said. "You need to finally make sense of who you are and what business education has tried to turn you in to."

"A neoliberal cog," I said. "A better worker drone."

"Can I fucking have a turn now?" asked CP. "Your set is over. It was over in the 80s and it's over now."

He laughed. CP punched him in the face. The academic body remained weirdly silent.

"You simply switched out the kindling for academic scrolls," he said. "The garage window is just another Lacanian Mirror. You were metaphorically dispatching your child-self and your mother with this single blow from the phallus-like object. The academic scrolls are basically placeholders for this piece of wood, for your own wood."

"Kindling," CP said, getting in on the act, "is a metaphor for arousal."⁵²⁶ For the phallus. Knowledge. You were smashing your reflection, your identity, and killing/saving your mother with the phallus, with knowledge."⁵²⁷

"And with each shiny new degree," Joe continued, "you run back up to that window and re-shatter your own reflection once again – you splinter it and create thousands of new possibilities. But rather than take one of these new identities, you always put the puzzle of yourself back together the way it was, that you can't be anyone other than yourself, that you're destined to repeat the whole process until the end of time, because you're trapped in this long hot summer of 1978, that this event was the catalyst for your transition from conforming child to ever-questioning maniac."

"You're the maniac," CP said. "You're the has-been-nut job."

524 Shakespeare, 1603: *Hamlet*.

525 According to Forrester (1997) the "...aim of fiction is pinning down the real while never claiming reality for itself" (p. 27).

526 See: www.dictionary.com – "verb (used without object), kin-dled, kin-dling. to begin to burn, as combustible matter, a light, fire, or flame. to become aroused or animated."

527 As Ragland (1997) states, "In Seminar XX, the positivized phallus refers to a lack in identification that constitutes the sexuated subject as a masculine or feminine position in knowledge" (p. 1103).

I had, I realised, spent twenty-five years involved in acquiring the language of the Academy, collecting kindling, building a nice little tinderbox. Now, I was rejecting it. Now, I finally realised, I had to break the cycle. Now, I realised it offered me, the hysteric, nothing. Now it was time to strike a match and burn the whole thing down.

“Congratulations!” he sung, ignoring her. “You are, and always will be, the hysteric!”

“You plagiarised me,” my therapist said. “You funnelled my voice through those cartoon characters. You took all of my original ideas and twisted them. That’s some schizophrenic parodying shit you’ve got going on. I think I need to talk to my lawyer, my literary agent, my priest.”

My therapist clapped tulip fragments from his jacket and crossed his legs, his arms, his eyes. The sun was low in the final quarter of the oval window. Lump snorted and slept on. The clock, I noted, had stopped.

“Well?” he asked. “Don’t keep me in suspense. Did you pass?”

“It’s unclear,” I said. “The decision was delivered a few days after the examination via the campus wide telescreen. But the sound was not synced. We were picking up something cached from the mid-80s – perhaps *The Dukes of Hazzard*⁵²⁸ or *BJ & the Bear*.⁵²⁹ All I could hear was Copy That Good Buddy and the sound of police sirens. The examiners were emotionally neutral. They were blank. They delivered their lines like hostages. High ranking officials from the Chancellor’s office stood behind them with their arms folded. There were no thumbs up or down from the Chancellor himself. The decision was printed via the teletext. But the overzealous PDC ripped it from its birth-canal mid-sentence and the ink was smudged. The whole thing was unreadable.”

My therapist formed an ‘O’ face.”

“No one can get or give me a straight answer,” I said. “CP and Joe have disappeared. They are uncontactable. The Chancellor’s office retained no copies of their reports. My supervisor is running an Ultra Marathon nonstop from Vladivostok to St Petersburg and won’t be back until Putin has become emperor.”

“So,” he said. “It’s not over even though it’s over. You’re in purgatory. You’re wandering the halls like Hamlet’s Dad, like Banquo,⁵³⁰ like Patrick Swayze in a red shirt.⁵³¹”

528 Waldron, G., Rushing, J. (Creators). (1979-1985). *The Dukes of Hazzard* [Television Series]. Warner Brothers Television.

529 Larsen, G.A., & Crowe, C. (Creators). (1978-1981). *B.J. and the Bear* [Television Series]. NBC.

530 Shakespeare, 1623 *MacBeth*.

531 Zucker, J. (Director). (1990). *Ghost* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures. I am referring not only to the movie *Ghost*, but also *Star Trek: TOS* (the original series) – where red shirted security personnel were synonymous with a character’s imminent death.

"No," I said. "It's over. I've been demobilised. I'm just a civilian. My swipe card has been deactivated. The librarians only sneer at me now. The PDC is pretending not to know my name. I had to climb the fence and scale the walls of this building just to keep this appointment."

"Is that why security keep calling me?" he said. "Is that why the kitchen only supplied one plate of cookies?"

"Didn't you think the fake beard and sunglasses were weird?" I asked. "Didn't you wonder about the prosthetic nose and the ninja costume?"

"To be honest I wasn't paying much attention," he said. "I was thinking about how your monotonic voice is sleep enhancing, how I have to take amphetamines just to make it through a session. No offence, but you sound like the teacher in Peanuts' cartoons."

"Can we get back to the point," I asked. "Is that too much to ask?"

"So," he said, pulling a face. "You passed and failed. Well, that's just dandy. This is taking it all a bit far isn't it? This is hysterical doubling at its finest."

"That's the hysteric's fate," I said.

"Let's see if I have this all straight," he said. "You're writing a novel that's also a doctoral thesis. It's fiction while simultaneously being the truth. You say you will never work in the Academy while also telling me you desire a job in an old-world seat of learning in Europe. And, to top it all off, you pass but also fail. Did I miss anything?"

I shrug and sip some water.

"How is this all going to end?" he asked. "This diary? Mid-sentence like Kafka, like the decision? Or will everyone end up dead like in *Hamlet* or living happily ever after like in *Much Ado*?"⁵³²

"The reader doesn't want a satisfying ending," I said. "Where everything finally makes sense."

"But which reader?" he asked. "The academic gorgons or the everyman?"

"Both," I said. "And neither."

"Charming," he said. "Any chance of a non-fluid, non-binary answer from you anytime soon?"

"I receive a pre-recorded-robocall from the university at 10 past 8 every morning," I said. "They are demanding a final chapter explaining why I chose to write the thesis the way I have. They want it all spelled out in minute detail. They basically want me to write a thesis to explain my thesis. I could get another PhD from the English Department if I

⁵³² Shakespeare, 1600: *Much ado about Nothing*.

went through with their insanity. Perhaps I will. I wonder if anyone has ever got a PhD for analysing their own novel.”

“Perhaps you can get one of your assorted personalities to do it for you,” he said. “Delegate it to one of the Steves in your head.”

“Where was I?”

“You were going to tell me why the everyman doesn’t really want the happy ending they desire.”

“The everyman doesn’t want the academic explanation,” I told him. “They don’t want me to talk down to them. And they don’t want everything wrapped up in a bow either. They love the mystery. They want to be left unsure. Unsated. The pleasure is in not knowing. The pleasure is in the journey. Not in the end. Their chief desire is to be entertained. Are you not entertained?”⁵³³

“Not really,” he said. “What about the *Sopranos*? There was collective outrage about the ending. People lost their shit. They wanted closure.”⁵³⁴

“Tony died,” I said. “Cut to Black. He ordered onion rings for the whole table. That’s what he did. He controlled the narrative. It was all from his point of view. He chose the music. Journey’s *Don’t Stop Believing*. One of the lines from that song is, somewhat ironically, *the movie never ends. It goes on and on, and on, and on*. And it does. Because people are still talking about that ending today. If they had have gone for a more traditional ending, no one would care. It would be over. The movie would not go on and on and on.”⁵³⁵

My therapist was not listening. He had fallen asleep, covered in tulip fragments, in his chair.

I sighed.

He snored.

I stretched out on the canary yellow chaise longue. Through the oval window I could see a security team moving in. They were dressed in black and talking into their elbows. The student body didn’t seem to notice them. They were too busy looking at their phones to look where they were going. My therapist started to mutter in his sleep.

“What does the hysteric see when they look in the mirror?” he murmured.

“Shut up you idiot!” I screamed.

But he snored on regardless.

533 Scott, R. (Director). (2000). *Gladiator* [Motion Picture]. Universal Pictures. This line is delivered by Maximus in the colosseum.

534 Chase, D. (Creator). (1999-2007). *The Sopranos* [Television Series]. HBO Entertainment.

535 Corrigan & Corrigan (2012) suggest that, “...the final scene...unequivocally refuses to provide its audience with the pleasurable conclusion it seeks. Here, Chase directs his critique of consumer culture at an audience that is figuratively attempting to use the finale to attain closure or orgasm but is unable...to achieve the desired result” (p. 99).

"They see the alpha and omega as a circle," he said. "It's not a linear story you're telling. It's a snake consuming its own tail. For the hysteric the end is also the beginning and the beginning is also the end. The hysteric needs the university. He can't escape its orbit. This has all happened before and will all happen again. You can't help it. It is who you are. It is what you do. You will keep asking your question: what am I to you? But you will never get your answer."

I thumbed a stick of juicy-fruit into my mouth and chewed. He rambled on incessantly. I considered the pillow under my head. I plumped it a bit. It would do the trick. I slowly wandered over to where my therapist was sleeping.

"You're still here?" my therapist asked, half-waking, looking up at me surprised. "It's over. Go home. Go."⁵³⁶ I pressed the pillow down over his face. I held it there until the blabbering finally ceased.⁵³⁷ ⁵³⁸ I took my portrait and considered it. What a fucking joke. I took the ceramic paperweight of Freud playing paper-scissor-rock with Jung while Sabina Spielrein looked on, and lobbed it, and my painting, through the oval window, shattering my reflection with my reflection, and this trinity of long-dead psychoanalysts, into a thousand deadly shards. Outside, no one noticed. The security team were already in the building. The students were already in class. I stripped down to my tighty-whities, exited via the window, and climbed down the fake façade of the ivory tower, dodged the splinters of glass below, mourned the fact that Freud had now been separated from Jung and Spielrein and lay facing the other way, broken in two, holding his palm up as if to wave goodbye, while Spielrein would forever be left watching Jung shake his angry fist, and started to jog across the campus. This time, even though I knew deep down it was impossible, I was determined not to run in circles, but into an unknown future,⁵³⁹ one that would be defined by something other than the university for a change. This time, unlike on all the previous occasions, I would not look back.⁵⁴⁰ I focused on my breathing, on my cadence, on moving towards the entrance. In the distance, I could clearly see the signs above the gate, the commands painted on the driveway, the flashing red lights.

536 Hughes, J. (Director). (1986). *Ferris Bueller's Day Off* [Motion Picture]. Paramount Pictures. These are the closing lines of the movie. Ferris breaks the 4th wall and reminds the audience (as I am also doing) that they are watching a fictional story and that it has now concluded.

537 I am choosing to silence/kill the analytical side of me in favour of the creative.

538 As Lacan (1977) states, "The analyst intervenes concretely in the dialectic of analysis by pretending that he is dead...he makes death present" (p. 140).

539 I am alluding to Sarah Conner's famous line from the movie *Terminator 2 Judgement Day* – "The unknown future rolls toward us. I face it, for the first time, with a sense of hope..." Of course, as it turns out, Sarah Conner can't change her fate/future – there is no hope.

540 I am referencing the ending of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (Kesey, 1962). But rather than throwing the control-panel through the window, it is my own portrait. In other words, I am finally smashing my actual reflection with my created reflection (much like Dorian does at the end of *A Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890)) and, in doing so, taking control/ownership of my True (deconstructed/constructed/reconstructed) Self.

Each conveyed the same message and provided the same warning: One Way Only. No Exit.⁵⁴¹

⁵⁴¹ I am recalling Sartre's (1944) famous play *No Exit*. In the play, three individuals who hate each other are trapped in a room for eternity. Hence the line: Hell is other people. I would argue that that room is my own unconscious – and in that room, the hysteric the university and the analyst are caught up in a perpetual, never ending discussion. I am also alluding to Brett Easton Ellis' novel *Less Than Zero* (1985). Here, the protagonist is always confronted with 'No Exit' signs. He can't escape who he is – and neither can I. The exit, of course, is also the entrance. In other words, even though I am seeking to escape the university, I know that this is just a game I play, that it is impossible – that I will, like it or not, always be caught in its orbit. This, of course, is why the beginning of the book is repeated/reflected here.

Last Words: The Post-Examined Self

Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; pay it and don't forget.
- Socrates

Schrödinger's Phallus

At the crack of dawn on the 22nd of March, 2021, my eldest son's 21st birthday, I attended my viva voce via Zoom – via the nine disembodied squares of the Brady Bunch format that we have all become acclimatised to during this heinous pandemic. I don't know about you, but I always feel that Zoom should open with *The Brady Bunch's* theme tune – this would send a wave of nostalgic dopamine through me, my eyes would glaze over, my pupils would dilate. *Here's a story/Of a lovely lady/...Here's a story/Of a man named Brady*. I'd be instantly transported back to that burnt orange sofa, to the constant clouds of cigarette smoke, to the wooden veneer square box of the Sanyo with its channel dial and its intermittently rolling screen. Here's a story, then, of a blended family in the 1970s. Here's a story about how it'll be all peachy. Here's a fictional story about how families are supposed to get their shit together post-divorce. This story, the one I'm about to tell you in this afterbirth of a chapter, is also about potential post-divorce blending – the (re)coupling of the hysteric and the university. But for some reason it's not *The Brady Bunch* theme tune I have playing in my head, but the one from *The Mary Tyler Moore Show* – *How will you make it on your own?/ This world is awfully big, girl this time you're all alone/...You're going to make it after all*. I'm not sure what this means, just yet, but I don't think it means that we are in for a smooth ride. I don't think that it means I'm about to turn my Self inside out and become a cog in the Business School machine. I think, if I'm honest, that this is just an overly hopeful fantasy constructed by the discourse of the university and presented to the hysteric as something to be desired.

After the imagined theme tune, and introductions from Alice the housekeeper, I opened my defence by discussing how Lacan, in Seminar 17, explains that if knowledge is to be interrogated, and a truth effect achieved, it must be via his 'little turnstile', his

discourse analysis. It is, he suggests, as we traverse the turnstile,⁵⁴² at the precise moment of its turning, when the sun glints off the chrome bar, that the blinding truth is caught for the briefest nanosecond in the dancing squares of mesmerising colour on your retina. However, the moment you freeze and blink and try to observe what actually caused this flash of light (truth) it is lost and, frustratingly, gone. In other words, we are left with the inverse shape of the Real, an outline, the gap in which it used to exist, the cookie-cutter and, sadly, not the actual cookies. My thesis is my unwavering quest to fill these gaps – in business education and the Self - by constructing a fiction out of my personal experiences and then trawling it for something that I could house in these empty spaces. Something that could, if I squinted hard enough, appear Real to me. I concluded my opening address by explaining that I wanted the ending of my thesis to leave the reader wanting more. I wanted it to mirror the feelings I had at the completion of my MBA. I wanted to evoke the “What now? Is that it?” moment I experienced. The unresolved nature of the text, I believe, forces the reader into Lacan’s turnstile. It forces them to seek to fill these gaps and, in doing so, consider how business education and the Self is constructed, analysed, consumed, and presented within the Business School. That, after all, is the point, isn’t it?

After a heady two-hour dissection of my work the examiners finally reached the conclusion that it had, in fact, fulfilled the requirements of a doctoral thesis – cue the champagne corks and canned applause. It was, I thought, over. It was, I believed, done & dusted. But just as the euphoria began to flow through my charcoaled veins, as the relief wrapped around me like a warm blanket, the examiners paused, straightened their smiles, and sprung the quintessential unexpected final gift upon me. And, just like that, just like the villain in one of those 80s teen horror movies, my PhD journey was magically revived from its faux death state and set into motion once again. I would have to, I was told, slay Freddy or Jason or whoever at least one more time, because, let’s face it, that’s what the audience has grown to expect - this trope, after all, is a trope for a reason. It turned out that, despite my entreaties, they were not satisfied with the ending: it created ambiguity and uncertainty, they said correctly, and posed more questions than it answered (two for two). The text, they pointed out, could be read, understood, and interpreted in multiple ways (yes – that’s the point). The key issue, it transpired, was that my lack of a formal conclusion rendered the work difficult to pin down politically and, as a result, created potential confusion and uncertainty as to its objectives – and subsequent applications. Basically, they wanted me to pin-point exactly where it fitted,

⁵⁴² See: Lacan, 2011 – “A change of discourses – things budge, things traverse you, things traverse us, things are traversed, and no one notices the change...nothing seems to change” (p. 17).

like it was a puzzle piece, on the university campus map. And while I argued strenuously that I wanted the reader to assemble their own campus map, and perhaps create a new one with the pieces I had provided, they were, nevertheless, in nodding agreement: I would have to fill the lack I had specifically left for the reader with a prosthetic phallus, a knowledge clarification appendage, in order to quash any potential interpretations that might run counter to their preferred ones and, thus, quell their misplaced anxiety. The remaining pages of this work will be, therefore, a metaphorical cockerel, a phallus, I offer up to the Business School as a final blood sacrifice – as a deposit, if you prefer, for my key to the Doctor's bathroom in the Ivory Tower, while I take advantage of the semester-long-trial it's currently offering me (more on this shortly). It will be my last attempt to illustrate that pleasure is derived from the journey, that understanding is, in fact, a continuous journey, that to reach your destination, to reach closure and finish as requested, is not the happy ending you are seeking, and it will not make us feel sated like you believe, but simply soiled and used, left with an overwhelming feeling of self-disgust. The question is: how can I fulfil the desire of the discourse of the university and supply this cockerel, while simultaneously letting him fly free and, therefore, be true to my own hysterical desire? How can I, in other words, transform this untamed posturing rooster into Schrödinger's Phallus?

At the end of the novel, I am running from the university – and, hopefully, seeking new ways to understand, and define, my Self. There is a moment of hope, I believe, tied up in this narrative uncertainty. However, somewhat sadly, as of writing, I have not yet been able to make it over the wall or off the campus. Just like for the protagonist in Kōbō Abe's (1962) aforementioned *Woman in the Dunes*, when the long awaited opportunity presented itself to simply walk away, to return to a non-academic life, I found myself jogging in the direction of the library. I was drawn to the books, to the quiet, comforting uniformity of the olive-grove-layout, to the repetitive predictability of the motion-sensor (censored?) strip-lighting blinking out, just as I was reaching amongst the gilt-lettered spines for an interesting title, of potentially finding that coveted and desired next ripe fruit of knowledge somewhere within the rustling leaves. With each great read I uncovered and consumed, another two or three would present themselves, like an out of control version of Heracles' Hydra. I knew that while I could never read all the good books in this building, I would never cease chasing this elusive, perhaps illusive, thing called knowledge – it is, I acknowledge, my crack cocaine.

It was here, amongst the quiet shelves on the library's fourth floor, in my personal Zihuatango, looking out over the lush native bush that flanks the western side of the campus, that I started to digest the demands of the examiners and ask myself: what did

they actually want? And, more importantly, did they even know? On the surface it appeared that they wanted Steve to be 'the good student' and comply, to return to the discourse of the university, to build a clear and transparent final chapter. But I don't actually think this is true. How could it be? That wouldn't make any sense. We have passed your text, they tell me, as is. But at the very end, after the curtain comes down, we want you to come out like Puck at the conclusion of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and explain how it was all a ruse, a joke, that there is nothing to worry about, that Steve is actually just another fully-paid-up member of the Business School. Can this really be what they are expecting? Can that be true? Surely not. Because, spoiler alert, to borrow the percipient words of Rory Breaker (Vas Blackwood) from *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* (Ritchie, 1998), "If the hemlock turns out to be sour, I ain't the kind of Asclepius to drink it." And this, I think, is exactly how the hysteric would/should react to what they are asking. Regardless of what they believe and desire, the hysteric, me, is unable to disentangle himself from not only the university's bullshit, but his own – this is beyond his core programming. Thus, unlike Theseus in the Minotaur's Labyrinth, he has a knotted tangle of yarn that he can't unpick, let alone follow to an exit – there is no exit. In other words, he accepts his fate, even though he doesn't love it, and simply moves in and out of the turnstile in search of truth ad infinitum.

In the months since the oral defence, I have been working in the Business School (as alluded to above). I have been teaching Human Resource Management (HRM) at both undergraduate and postgraduate level – this is a bit like asking Indi if she could please teach veganism and preach the message that the postie is actually a good person at the weekly Dogs Anonymous meetings at the park. These roles came about due to the Business School attaining successful government research grants, which meant that the Academic in Charge (AIC) who normally taught these courses was required elsewhere and a warm body was needed to front his papers for the semester. Naturally, due to my precarious financial position, I had no option but to agree. I could tell, though, that I was not the first choice for this role. They had made a lot of calls before holding their noses and dialling my number. But they had been turned down flat. That's because the wages are incredibly low and the job demands are, well, crippling. And, as such, the other potential candidates shook their heads and stopped returning the calls from the Acting Head of Learning & Education (AHOLE). The job title for these roles was 'tutor', yet I would actually be co-ordinating these papers, lecturing them, setting assignments, doing all the marking, answering all the student emails and so on. The irony of teaching HRM while having to deal with this slippery business school HRM illusion was not lost on me.

In fact, I posed a version of this deception as a question to the postgrad class when we were discussing ethics: would it be ethical, I asked, to hire a final year med student as a paramedic and pay them as such, but actually get them to perform all the tasks of, and present them to the patients as, a doctor? Headshakes. Of course not, I was told. That would 'Be Unethical and Crazy' – perhaps this, this moment of truth, should be the new tagline for the Business School.

I met the AIC who normally taught these courses for lunch at the Petri Dish, a vegan café, which is located at the far left of the library complex, behind the boiler and beside the Stack (books the library only rarely loans and, as such, keeps hidden away. Thus, they are never picked up by browsing students and are finally deemed unloanable and dispatched into the waiting mouth of the boiler's furnace). The AIC was wearing an overly tight short-sleeved patterned shirt (crocodiles) and appeared to have spent a great deal of time under a sunlamp. He smiled and looked about confused.

"I normally eat at the Pie Hole," he said. "But it is was shut. I've never been in here before. It took me ages to find the place. It's not even on the campus map."

"The café?"

"No," he said. "The library. I thought they decided to get rid of it ages ago and put in a car parking building. There's a car parking building on the campus map. Have you tried to get a park in this place after 9am?"

"No," I said. "I take the bus."

He shuddered and looked down at his tofu-sausage-roll, gripped the beaker of tomato sauce at his elbow and poured the entire contents upon it.

"This better be Wattie's," he said, eyeing the beaker angrily. "I like my sauce predicable and generic. Like my day. Please pass the sodium chloride."

We sat amongst the incense and ferns at a periodic table. Most of the furnishings and equipment had been acquired from the hard sciences after the university hierarchy had scraped them from campus like a surplus culture in a petri dish and dispatched the whole shooting-box back to Palmy North.

"What's your thesis on again, anyhow?" he said. "When I clicked on your profile, all I found was a spinning algebraic formula. You should probably call ITS and get that sorted. I think you've been hacked."

He hacked the sausage roll with his scalpel and chased it around the plate with a pair of Vulsellum forceps.

"I did note a dollar sign within the blur," he said, sniffing the food on his 'fork', "so I guess you'll receive a ransom demand any day now."

He eyed his coffee, which was delivered in a Würtz flask, unsure how to pick it up and drink it.

"They use good, honest, unrecyclable plastic at the Pie Hole," he said. "It's single use, cheap, and great for the economy. This looks like some sort of contraption that druggies use. No wonder they got rid of science."

I waited while he fumbled with his beverage, finally tipping the majority of it upon his overly tight moleskin pants. He screamed like Janet Leigh in the shower and smashed his crotch with a fist-full of napkins sporting, somewhat ironically, the chemical formula for caffeine, and did the mandatory Dance of the Burning Cock.

"Cock!" he roared at a million decibels. "A-fucking-do-a-fuckin-doodle-doo!"

He pirouetted around on the spot, sighted the bathroom, and sprinted off, knocking people and tables over like the wrecking-ball he was. I drank my coffee like a normal person and ate the remainder of my deep-baked-wasabi-cornflowers.

While I awaited his return, I took the opportunity to rifle through the Stack and rescue some books that were destined to meet their fiery doom. I probably could have read the entire collection in the time it took him to extinguish his scorched groin and re-join our luncheon meeting. In fact, I had built a nice protective cityscape on my side of the table by the time he finally emerged. He was wearing a new pair of pants and had changed his shirt (Komodo Dragons). It appeared he was capable of change after all – even if it was just his clothes - and it only required the uncomfortable yet necessary interaction with something new and strange in order to attain what he desired. He eyed the books suspiciously, like nothing had happened, like he hadn't just gone to the Mall, that he hadn't just had a haircut. He pointed a manicured index finger at Marx and Freud and co.

"What I want to know is why they haven't burnt all this garbage yet? This place is not only wacky, it's inefficient. As long as the students don't get hold of that controversial stuff. We don't want them receiving mixed messages. We don't want them getting confused."

Yeah, it can be very confusing for the students, I thought, when the truth clashes, and gets in the way of, ideological conditioning and pseudo-almost-religious-indoctrination. I mentioned a colleague who used to integrate 'that controversial stuff' into her course work.

"Yeah," he said. "Before she was forced to accept that posting as the sole inhabitant at the research station on Auckland Island, she was always pointing out at smoko how we could use some of that bonkers shit, which always cracked me up. She was as funny as. In fact, I almost choked on my custard square laughing at all her jibber-jabber – she did though, it has to be acknowledged, make an excellent custard square. And I did think

about all of her mumbo-jumbo. Kind of. You know. We need people like her. A good custard square is almost impossible to find up here. It makes you think, doesn't it? Why can't we get good, honest to god, baking in Auckland? Does no one own an unedited 1970s version of the *Edmonds Cookery Book* on this side of Cook Strait?"

Apparently not.

"She's not on Auckland Island," I said. "She's over there."

I pointed to the Interdisciplinary Critical Evaluation of Business Education Reading Group (ICEBERG), which had, as usual, assembled in the far corner, directly behind the wall of arthropod specimens - each suspended in an individual jar of formaldehyde - and adjacent to the recycling station.

The AIC was stunned into silence. He sat there, his mouth agape, his eyes bulging, with confusion. He pointed his finger. He tried to speak.

"That guy in the robe with the dog?" he finally said. "Isn't he supposed to be rotting in the State of Denmark?"

"The Fourierist," I corrected. "Was flourishing in Florence. And now he's back."

The waiter arrived with a selection of cakes and slices and waited patiently for the AIC's diatribe, gaping, and rambling confusion to cool and finally subside.

"But what's Bobby Paulson doing over there?" the AIC asked. "He told me he was going out, that he had some critical study to manage or something. What I want to know is why he isn't in the field with his stopwatch and buckets of ball bearings and a bullhorn shouting incoherent instructions at a bunch of underpaid minions or in the basement of the Tower electrocuting the first years who refuse to follow his vague instructions or changing lightbulbs randomly and demanding increased productivity with a bullwhip? What I want to know is why is he over there with those hippies looking through a cardboard picture book with holes punched in it and not sitting cross-legged under the golden chicken wing studying the BDSM (Business Department School Manifesto)?"

"This week they're deconstructing *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* (Carle, 1994) in terms of its inherent capitalist imperative," the waiter stated, unprompted. "Simply put: you must consume all the available resources at your disposal and, only then, can you transform into the mythical Maslowian-Self-Actualised-Higher-Being that is positioned and celebrated within the Business School as the logical and desired endpoint for all industrious individuals."

The AIC looked at him and then at the cakes and then at the ICEBERG.

"They're exploring how knowledge and understanding is extracted from popular culture," the waiter continued. "They're unpacking how the neoliberal message is pervasive and insidious. That its dissemination and normalisation is unavoidable and

starts in childhood. Next week they're addressing the first season of the British television show *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* (Roddam, 1983-1984) in terms of how it presents work as a form of incarceration – and how the workers and management are tied to these roles due to their inability to converse, to access and understand – or to even share - each other's lexicon."

"What would you know?" the AIC said. "You push cakes around on a repurposed surgical trolley with a squeaky wheel. I'd like that one, by the way. No, not that one. That one. The extra-large one in the kidney dish. The one with the green Lotus Flower icing."

"You co-supervised my PhD," the waiter said. "Don't you remember?"

The AIC squinted at him, tilted his chin, shook his head, and continued to point at his preferred cake.

"I wrote on how the changes in cakes and cake making implemented during the industrial revolution - on how the move away from baking that was nutritious, that was filled with seeds and fruit and nuts, to items that are simply an amalgam of sugar, food colouring, and processed flour – has dramatically influenced and shaped not only food production and presentation today, but also accelerated and perpetuated the move towards the insatiable consumption of empty calories/knowledge, and the surface-only veneer, the icing, that is welcomed and preferred by the Business School."

"I doubt it," the AIC stated, still pointing at his preferred cake. "I don't teach food-tech. And I have no interest in cakes, beyond eating them, or caterpillars, beyond eradicating them. The only thing I know about serving cakes is that you aren't doing it right. Do I have to get it myself or are you going to do your job?"

The waiter sighed, placed the selected cakes in front of us, and pushed the trolley to the next table.

"Anyway," the AIC said, licking his lips and brushing crumbs from his chest, "to teach my course all you have to do is stand at the front of the class and click a button and read the slides. Easy. I made thousands of them, so you'll never have to worry about running out. Some with just one word. Like Batman. You know: Wham! Pow! That sort of thing. I've completely idiot proofed the entire process."

"I'm the narrator?" I asked.

"Just be a reliable one," he said. "No deviations or asides are required."

The ICEBERG, I noticed, was slowly breaking up, each member drifting out onto campus via a different exit. The AIC lowered his head, shoved cake in his mouth, and refused to acknowledge their greetings or catch the eye of his colleagues.

"I'm not an interpreter?"

"These slides have been purposely designed to conform to the BDSM's non-interpretation policy – the one the BRT (Business Round Table) helped us design. They're noneditable, uniform, and produced using a standard black and white font. The conclusions have already been drawn, quartered, and are completely non-negotiable," he said. "Just think of yourself as a talking head reading from an autocue. That way you can't go wrong, right?"

"Otherwise everything might turn to custard," I said. "We need to keep them neatly stacked inside the Tupperware container. That way, they'll all remain the same and won't get spoiled."

He nodded and chewed his wedge of Karma Cake and gave me the thumbs up.

"Just a quick question about the slides," I said. "There's one which says employees are a resource just like any other. To be exploited. Is that correct?"

"Exactly," he said. "Good man. You've read them. Excellent."

In other words, please don't add a layer of rigor and inquiry into how this topic is understood, taught, and performed. Please don't ask questions around the validity and veracity of the knowledge we are offering the students. Please don't challenge or interrogate it. Please don't view it via a number of lenses. Please just stick to the neoliberal one that the master supplied with the pretty textbook. I'm not really sure why the Business School is teaching its content like this, like it's unquestionable and sacred knowledge, or why the academics within it are acting, for the most part, like neoliberal propagandists. I just know that it is. And that they are.

"This perfect custard square you imagine, this mille-feuille iteration, should really though, if we're being honest here, be called a custard cube, right?" I said. "After all, it's not a custard crêpe, is it? It's not a custard pancake. It's not flat. It's got body. It's got breadth and depth and height. It's multi-layered and three dimensional. In fact, this dessert you desire, the one you refer to, only exists in the fourth dimension: the nostalgic past and/or in some imagined future state. This custard square you crave is a simulacrum, is an overly hopeful construction, is a manifestation of the neoliberal fantasy for production-line-perfection."

"Sorry?" he said, looking up from his phone. "It's a message from the AHOLE. He's been desperately trying to push your contract through the system. He's been working on it for days, he says. He's been pushing and waiting and pushing some more. The strain, he says, is real. I guess there's nothing to do but wait until it drops. It's never a good idea, in my experience, to force these things. We don't want to cause a fissure with HR. Once that relationship is broken, it stays broken."

"I won't have a contract?"

"I told him you're completely fine working sans contract, that you're not one of those sticklers for rules and regulations, that you're not doing it for the money anyway, that you're doing it for the experience, for the love of business education, for the good of the Business School, for the hope of a permanent contract one day in the future."

"There's a possibility of a permanent job in the future?"

He laughed almost choking on his rapidly disappearing slice of Karma.

"But I'll still get paid, right?" I asked.

"Don't be daft," he said, tapping a cigarette into his palm. "Please pass the Bunsen Burner."

It is interesting, I think, as I breathe in the calming aroma of dusty books, that I rejected an office in the Business School and, instead, continue to sit amongst the shelving in the library like an undergrad. In some ways, I don't want to be corporatised, to become homogenised by the department – I don't want to join in on shared lunches and compare weekends. I've been there and done that and didn't enjoy it. But this does pose a question: how can the hysteric engage honestly and instigate change amongst, and with, his colleagues, if he is in the library hiding in his book fort? To answer this question, we have to first take a look back at this thesis. For years, CMS scholars have been seeking ways to engage with their blinkered business school colleagues – including, like me, by writing differently. But all of these attempts have been rebuffed, ignored, or simply dismissed with a single flick of the wrist. You can't get the attention of this sort of academic, one that has embodied the master, by being overly polite like *Oliver Twist*. You had to, I hypothesised, get up close and personal, you had to get right under their skin, you had to, I concluded, fight fire with fire. In other words, I imagined my hysterical thesis as a kind of intervention – a pattern interrupt – that would instigate change.

In order to facilitate this, I borrowed some tools from the maintenance cupboard in the Humanities. The door was ajar and, anyway, no one seemed to be using them anymore. I paused at a dusty shelf labelled 'Postcolonial Literature: 1990s' (see: Said, 1978; Fanon, 1994), slipped into some overalls (mimicry – Bhabha, 1984, 2012) and gumboots (hybridity – Bhabha, 2012, 2015), and selected a nice large tarpaulin (the carnivalesque – Bakhtin, 1984) to toss over the whole job, before opting for a chainsaw (profanity), a double sided axe (misogyny), and a hefty sledgehammer (cliche). Basically, my plan was to unsettle the Business School, by appropriating and repurposing the weapons of the colonised subject and giving them an hysterical spin – I was deploying them as a defence, as a site of resistance, against the overpowering and all-encompassing ideology of the Business School. And, if you pause and think about it, the Business School

can, I believe, be viewed as coloniser seeking to overlay their students and, by degrees, the rest of the university, with its neoliberal doctrine, with the master's discourse. Thus, my text, as you will have seen, attempts to mimic the profane, myopic, cliched, and deeply misogynistic tone that permeates the Business School. It is also hybrid in nature – containing, and weaving together, not only the hysteric and university discourses, but also elements of the other two. This book is, put simply, a Lacanian mirror, a mosaic of reflective shards, that I am holding up for the Business School to observe, and recognise, their own grotesque behaviour in. I want those who work in the Business School to experience that uncomfortable feeling one has when they meet or see someone very similar to themselves. As pop-psychologists are apt to point out, we hate to see ourselves reflected in the behaviour of other people. It is through the shock of recognition, this glimpsed moment of (self-)disgust, the horrible realisation that the grotesque image in the mirror is, in fact, you, that change can, potentially, be (self-)initiated. But, to achieve this, we have to assume that the Business School is actually capable of casting a reflection, that is actually capable of seeing, that it is not simply a bloodsucking vampire or as blind as the Cyclops after Odysseus thrust the burning stick into its eye (Copjec, 2015). In other words, we have to suspend (hysterical) disbelief, we have to cease thinking of the Business School as Monster of the Week, and consider it as something capable of self-reflective contemplation, and, ultimately, of real, progressive change.

Speaking of shocks. It came as something of a shock when the examiners suggested that my book could, potentially, serve those with fringe political views. In this, their worst-case-scenario-alternative-reality, my book would be smuggled out of the Academy, like Pasternak's (1957) *Doctor Zhivago* was smuggled out of the Soviet Union, and be passed into the hands of those who would, they imagined, take certain passages out of context and apply them for agendas for which they were not designed – mostly involving the complete and utter destruction of the university, society, and life as we know it. While I find all this highly unlikely, I want to take a moment to discuss these potential dysmorphic reframing(s) of my work and, to avoid any confusion, state my own position clearly. It is possible, I have been told, that I could find myself being depicted in a blog or vlog or in a twitter storm as a nefarious, left-wing-cultural-Marxist, birthed straight from the Frankfurt School, with a covert secret agenda handed down directly from Stalin to undermine the foundations of capitalism and, by extension, the American Dream, through the Sovietisation of university campuses. Alternatively, and I'm guessing simultaneously, I could find myself being framed as a staunchly nationalistic/individualistic anti-hero, as an alt-right-wing-neo-nazi-antiacademic, who

is on a mission to Kill all the Normies and expunge cultural studies and critical theory from university campuses in order to protect the US from the invading commie hordes.

While this kind of Janusian thinking fits nicely with my fascination in quantum superposition, it also highlights what these fringe factions do: they are not interested in transforming ideas into knowledge and then, through connections with additional ideas, into wisdom – they are only interested in selecting out of context one-liners and constructing memes as stones to lob at each other. I'm not interested in this at all. However, it does remind me of what Hegel (1998) said about things lurching from one extreme to the other before settling somewhere in the middle. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that my work could possibly be misinterpreted and/or repurposed and used against its intended purpose: which is, in a nutshell, to force the Business School to look at itself critically. That's all. I don't think that is too much to ask. There are no hidden agendas, trapdoors, or secret codes weaved into this work. You can't read it backwards and transform into a Lizard Person or Foghorn Leghorn (McKimson & Foster, 1946).

It occurs to me that when Foghorn and his rooster friends crow, we always jot down 'cock-a-doodle-doo'. This, however, is not what the cartoon cockerel is saying – it's not even close. This, I think, illustrates the limitations and beauty of language: we try to recreate something we feel or do with words either spoken or on a page. But we never quite succeed. We never quite nail it. It is in the blinking cursor, in the turning of the bar, in the thoughtful contemplation of ideas, in the pauses between what is written and what is about to be written, in those rough and unpolished grooves between the letters – this is where, I believe, the Real resides. In the end, we never create exactly what we want, we create something else, something different. It is this something else, this difference, that's important. That's the art. This then, is my something else, my something different, my cock-a-doodle-doo.

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