An innovative approach to teaching the art of critique in writing

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Citation

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Juliet Henderson

This paper considers whether and how what is known as 'the art of critique' (Foucault 1997) in writing might be taught in the humanities and social sciences. The centrality of this question is based in the idea that education lacks vigour without an understanding of how to play with as well as respect the rules. A practice of playing that generates something new that is beyond 'use-value' (Derrida 2006: 201) yet can also be used to signify 'use-value'. Fundamental to this idea is the question of the 'agency' of the subjectivity of the individual. In order to conceptualise the dynamics of interrupting the historical traditions of academic writing more closely, Foucault's notion of 'care of the self' and Derrida's field of analysis, deconstruction, are briefly interrogated. Examples of such dynamics in student writing are then tentatively presented as possible heuristics for indeterminate teaching of the 'art of critique'.

Keywords: art of critique, agency, subjectivity, transferable skills, academic writing

Introduction

As a lecturer on an undergraduate course in Communication, Media and Culture steeped in critical theoretical perspectives I am always impressed by how students on the course seem to have a passionately critical attitude towards othering of any subject on the grounds of difference, and towards what they perceive as social injustice. This openness to diversity shapes their relationship to others. Yet, when I ask them what they understand by a critical attitude in academic writing I first get hesitation, and then perhaps a second guess that it relates to using more than one author to define a term, or to building a good argument. So, whilst apt at exercising a critical attitude towards social and political rationalities, they struggle to articulate how this translates into critique in writing. Instead, they reach for conventional notions of argumentation and reasoning, bracketed under the conventional study skill of 'critical thinking' foregrounded by countless university writing centres and marksheet criterion. In other words, they have little explicit awareness of what Foucault calls 'the art of critique' (1997) in writing, a 'virtue' (Foucault 1997: 43) which he characterises as 'the art of not being governed quite so much' (Foucault 1997: 45). An ethical stance that is practised through momentarily desubjugating the self from the 'politics of truth' (Foucault 1997: 47), or highly regulated regimes of disciplinary knowledge that call us to order. In sum, though having a critical attitude towards hegemony in the broader context, when it comes to questioning the traditions and authority of university norms in the local contexts of their assessment writing, the core technology used to legitimate them as graduates, they are more inclined to stick to the rule book. Fair enough. And such discontinuities in critical approaches can be explained as a response to institutional and pedagogical relations of power. Yet it remains evident that there is an unmet need to teach our students about the art of critique in writing, to provide tools and perspectives that nurture their freedom to engage with theory as praxis.

This paper considers whether and how the art of critique can be taught as a constitutive feature of academic writing in the humanities and social sciences. Taught as an additional perspective towards 'the critical' that means it is not simply understood as forms of argumentation built from the neutral medium of language by the subject of reason, but also as a kind of insistent, internal reinvention of given ways that is not 'amenable to measurement' (Seery 2016: 55). Whilst almost inevitably when techniques are taught they become part of the tightly administered teaching and learning machine, might there be ways of alerting student subjects to practices of the art of critique in writing which resist the normative

gaze and procedures of governance: ways that engage students in bringing the diversity and difference they support in the social world into the materiality of their own productions? It begins by contextualising the relevance of this question in contemporary neoliberal conditions of knowledge. As an explicit tactic for aligning with yet disturbing these it proposes conceptualising the 'art of critique' as a transferable skill, so acknowledging Foucault's understanding of the embodied individual subject as a 'prime effect' and 'vehicle' of power (Foucault 1982). It then tackles the question of why it is theoretically problematic to teach the art of critique in writing given the nature of governmentality practices. Following this, examples are presented of what I tentatively qualify as 'the ethical capacity for critique and creativity in the student subject of academic writing': a capacity inspired by Derrida's notions of free-play, différance and *poiesis*. It is argued these go some small way to identifying the 'how' or 'what' of the 'art of critique' in student writing. Finally, using the epistemological stances implicit in Foucault's characterisation of the conscious practice of freedom (1984: 286), I suggest ways these could be used to interrupt hegemonic writing pedagogy practices whilst using the examples of student *poietics* as heuristics for construing critique at the level of the written text.

The present relevance of critique in writing

Along with most other aspects of the human and social domain, the site of the university has been organised for a while now by a neoliberal governing rationality that structures and disseminates the norm that 'all conduct is economic conduct; all spheres of existence are framed and measured by economic terms and metrics' (Brown 2017: 10). On the basis of this, all 'formative or educational relationship, in the widest sense of the term' (Foucault 2008: 244), for example that between parent and child, or educator and student, is now analysed not in terms of the social good, but in market terms of capital investment and returns (Foucault 2008; Harvey 2005). By extension, one of the primary images offered of the productive subject, be they student or lecturer, is that of the entrepreneurial self, 'held accountable for his or her own actions and well-being' (Harvey 2005: 65) in relation to their efficiency in investing in their own human capital. Thus, as Readings argued in 1996, the grand narrative of the publicly-funded university, whose educational goal was framed as the production of critical, humanist citizens who played active roles in the democratic functioning of society, has been replaced by flatter stories of the techno-bureaucratic, ahistorical 'university of excellence' (Readings 1996: 118), in which the student is 'situated entirely as a *consumer* rather than someone who wants to think' (Readings 1996: 27), investing in their own cultural and social capital.

Whilst we must necessarily embrace the logics of this regime if we are to produce ourselves as legitimate subjects working within institutional contexts, we also acknowledge

they are neither fixed nor stable. Though our singularities are homogenised and categorised by logics of marketization, bureaucratisation, and commodification, there is a potent complexity to the spaces and subjectivities of the university, and to the heterogeneous, indeterminate dynamics of power and desire. This is because subjectivity is the terrain of dynamics of both conformity and resistance (Ball & Olmedo 2012) which are co-catalysts of the immanent production of knowledge. Knowledge, which incidentally Foucault argues is 'really only an activity of writing in the first case' (Foucault 1972: 228).

These conditions of knowledge lead me to suggest a double coding of the usefulness of teaching the art of critique in writing, both of which are provisional. The first, which explicitly aligns with current dominant discourses in the university, and is intended to make 'the art of critique' more accessible and desirable to students, is to frame it as a skill, one that can be transferred to the changing realities of the public sphere or workplace (Sokhi-Bulley 2013). A skill which engages students in opening open up innovative spaces in thinking and writing (Bray 2018: 57) and acting upon the world in individual ways. The second, which is a marginal discourse in the university, sees the agency of the subject in the discursive fields of university governance, that I contend is synonymous with the virtue of critique, as 'an open question' (Foucault 1977: 299), a multitude of practices which in writing 'only applies each time it is evoked' (Manghani 2017: 66). This coding recognises the complexity and contingency of the subject's embodiment or performance of knowledge that ensures it always exceeds and disrupts its structural and social function (Foucault 1984). As such, it invites reflexive practice of work on the self in our games with truth, and a care for others, or in the case of writing, for other forms (Foucault 1984: 287). It is a practice of openness to diversity and difference at the level of the text which can never be transferred or measured since, as Foucault argues, the subject is a form not a substance, and as such 'this form is not primarily or always identical to itself' (Foucault 1984: 290). In both codings of critique in writing, the student subject is agent of their own production, both challenging and conforming to disciplinary norms, not simply a docile body, or consumer.

Introducing undergraduates to critique in academic writing understood in this manner, as both learning and playing with the rules, could also arguably have doubly beneficial effects. By questioning the taken-for-granted standards of academic writing, realizing they can make personal choices within the broader constraints of the discursive context, and appreciating the agency they have as a writer in negotiating the rules of the game, they might feel less like passive recipients at the receiving end of task instructions and feedback. In a context in which increasing numbers of students experience mental health issues in relation to assignment writing and report anxiety, reluctance and wish to postpone (Hughes et al. 2018), legitimating active playfulness within the rules might help students deal with their anxiety at the difficulties of work-

ing within the tightly monitored spaces of disciplinary rhetoric. In addition, using more innovative approaches to the development of writing competencies could allow them to negotiate the tensions within knowledge's historical dimensions with more confidence, and perhaps curiosity. After all, critique is a 'curious activity' (Foucault 1997: 42) which brings not only 'some stiff bit of utility' (Foucault 1997: 42), but also 'the movement by which the subject gives himself the right to question truth' (Foucault 1997: 47).

The subject and substance of critique in writing

As has been clarified thus far, the student subject of critique is conceptualised in this paper as a constituent dynamic of the social practices of academic writing. Like all subjects, they are produced through normalising forms of power in which they are imbricated, but yet also their own producer (Henderson 2018b). This is accomplished through practices of subjectivation, or care of the self, by which the subject internalises particular understandings of legitimate ways of knowing that form the matrix for their individuality (Foucault 1982; Foucault 2008; Hannam 2009). In this explanation of the practices by which the individual institutes themselves through multiple dynamics of alignment and resistance, largely through rhetorical action within disciplinary genres, the 'subject' for Foucault has two meanings. Both of these convey a 'form of power which subjugates and makes subject to' (Foucault 1982: 781). The first meaning is being 'subject to someone else by control and dependence', the second being 'tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault 1982: 781). Thus, an important feature of the complex configurations of power/knowledge which produce academic writing and its subjects is that power and resistance are not binaries, but coterminous, fragmented and constantly shifting operations, that are always internal to the contingent governmentality practices in which they are located (Foucault 2008). In this paper, I contend that a conceptualisation of the student subject as a historicised biographical subject and also an ontological practice of freedom and diversity which simultaneously form and disrupt the telos and givens of academic rhetoric comprises a first step towards teaching the art of critique.

By making explicit to students our local imbrication in the dynamic materiality of power relations, and the pleasures, capital and virtue to be established through the reflexive pursuit of critique in the institutional frameworks of the university, we are laying the groundwork for diversity and autonomy in truth, and possibly more meaningful experiences of academic writing. In addition, such a model of the student subject might serve as an analytical notion for identification of ways their writing conforms to and breaks from the pre-coded fields of disciplinary writing (Henderson 2018b).

However, whilst Foucault's perspective on critique as 'care of the self', comprising jujitsu like moves to carve out spaces of freedom in an ongoing struggle with and/or pleasurable submission to the dominant, provides a useful matrix for understanding student individuality differently in the 'textual universe' of the university (Luke 2013: 70), it stops short of a sharper focus on the qualities of knowledge's textual system which might subvert its main message. For this, I turn to Derrida's field of analytical inquiry, deconstruction, which allows us to think about writing and reading differently (Peters & Biesta 2009: 8), and to fix 'upon the peripheral and accidental aspects of the system' (Peters & Biesta 2009: 8–9). As such, it allows us to go beyond humanist and Enlightenment doxa and ontological notions of origin and presence that sustain the myth there is an outside to language inhabited by the centred empirical subject, and to assume instead there is no ultimate origin to meaning, but only 'a never-ending play of differences' (Hans 1979: 890) in the system of human sciences discourse. A play of differences which I contend in this paper affords ways of thinking forward diversity as an intrinsic effect of this system.

A critique of the metaphysics of presence and 'the structurality of structure' (Derrida 1970: 1) in our logocentric worlds is pivotal to Derrida's work. To apprehend the absence of the subject and structure Derrida uses the notion of freeplay. This denotes both a relation of alterity to the other and the disruption of presence (Derrida 1970: 12). More specifically, freeplay is 'a field of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble' (Derrida 1986: 15), whereby the surplus of signification always disrupts the presence of intention in writing: intention that has traditionally held 'teleological jurisdiction [over] an entire field' (Derrida 1988: 15). Since there is no outside to the text, meaning can never be completely present. This does not mean that Derrida is denying the specificity of effects of speech, consciousness, presence and discursive event, which he equates to the speech act. Nor is he suggesting the category of intention disappears or is entirely abstracted from human reasoning and activity (Derrida 1988: 19). Rather, using the concept of différance, Derrida unsettles teleological premises of knowledge production by asserting stabilised, singular meaning is, from the outset, 'broached and breached' by iterability, or the condition of writing. By using the term iteration, Derrida wishes to convey that for a word to be potentially comprehensible in the context of communication, where mis- or multiple interpretations are always possible, it must be repeatable, or re-iterable (Derrida 1988). In this sense, iteration necessarily includes some conformity to the code but also modifies or alters the same (Derrida 1988: 61), so ensuring it is 'incommensurate with the adequate understanding of intended meaning' (Derrida 1988: 61). For Derrida, this foundationless space between old and new gestations of knowledge is a space of *poiesis*, a making or bringing into being that in some small way allows subjects to realise themselves autonomously, despite the 'formative conditions of their inception' (Whitehead 2003).

Whilst the university establishment barely recognises these dynamics of knowledge production and distribution, I argue that as a concept they afford one way to address the silence surrounding creativity and critique in the language of 'truth' and knowledge, and to keep us alert to possibilities of altering the place of factory inspectors of students' written capital we are guided to as pedagogues by our conformist, corporate systems and discourses. In order to align praxis with theory, such an approach would necessarily acknowledge the dominant assumption there are no alternatives to the existing social order while concurrently stressing the dynamic capacity of the performative 'as if' (Derrida 2005: 53). This capacity makes it thinkable to cut through the predetermined contexts of university knowledge-making protocol using the incomplete power of the performative 'I may' or 'I can' (Derrida 2005: 54). Such cutting through to beyond the sovereignty of historically-sedimented, and often formulaic, objective knowledge constructions of the disciplines, such that we 'rethink the concepts of the possible and impossible' (Derrida 2005:31) is for Derrida one of the ethical responsibilities of the university educator, and writer. One in which we must always perform the role 'both of constitution and deconstitution' (Derrida 2004: 88). Trifonas (2005: 211) interprets these two approaches to the value of language as the 'instrumental' (informative) and the "poietic" (creative), with their semiological effect being respectively 'representation' and 'undecidability'. In making the language of the informative 'our own', and resisting it robustly in a mode of creativity and resistance, critique can function in a manner akin to freedom of speech (Derrida 2002: 56).

Seen in this light, whilst the subject of critique cannot avoid the governmentality practices which actualise the authoritative status of the university as conferrer of economic, social and cultural capital, nor would wish to do so, the creative potential of the writer to hold back presence in writing might present students with ways of understanding both the *why* of critique and the *how*. A methodology for writing if you wish, that can be used to bring questions about diversity and openness to other into the materiality of the text.

What might *poiesis* in student writing look like?

In this section of the paper I invite the reader to read a selective sample of micro formulations of *poietics* excavated from student materialisations of knowledge, seen in this paper as evidence of dynamic responses to the constraints, aporiae and discontinuities of disciplinary knowledge and power. I tentatively qualify these as 'the ethical capacity for critique and creativity in the student subject of academic writing' in my doctoral thesis which explores resistance and production in pedagogy and student writing (Henderson 2018a). To identify them, I conducted a close reading of eight undergraduate assignments produced for an advanced undergraduate course I teach in intercultural communication. As a module, it is part of a joint applied linguistics and culture and media studies programme where critique of praxis and discourse is fundamental. The assignment used for my analysis is a research paper in which students analyse and discuss findings from an ethnographic-style interview conducted with peers about their cultural identity. There is no assumption that these *poietics* have a cause and effect relationship with the aims, content and pedagogy of the course, despite brief mention of qualitative research practices of bringing figurative and creative writing styles into knowledge when discussing ethnographic methodology. The eight papers were selected from across grade levels, and my close reading specifically focused on identifying discrete, felicitous instances of the poietic which deconstruct 'dry thematical representation' (Nealon 2008: 98) by introducing a discontinuity that cuts through into new spaces of knowing to produce qualitative change (Osberg 2010: vi). In this reading, my reader/re-searcher gaze was directed specifically towards use of metaphor, word choices, and figurative turns of phrase that form part of the heterogeneous, shifting complexity of human sciences discourse.

A practical and principled driver in my re-reading of student papers to identify glimpses of *poietics* was the understanding that these correspond to the two adjectives almost universally found in descriptors of 'excellence' in UK undergraduate feedback sheets, namely 'creative' and 'innovative'. Adjectives generally only related to more abstract notions of 'knowledge' and 'understanding' which implicitly reference the Cartesian cogito, and very rarely applied to the materiality of the text and its always already historically contingent subjects.

With the intent to present the results of my close reading in a manner congruent with epistemological messiness and openness, I avoid neat, tidy, finite data findings' categories imposed by the researcher. Instead, I offer these as heuristics essentially sufficient in themselves for exposing the 'lively conceptual mutation' (Nealon 2008: 98) present in student writing. Readers may consider some of them more felicitous than others in their borderline capacity as micro-praxis which irrupts into the smooth, ahistorical surface of scientificity and rhetorical techniques of reasoning, or prefer to interpret them from the epistemological terrain of 'error', located in a philosophy not open to discourses of improvisation (Rancière 1991). Yet I would argue that these snatches of textual enactments of critique, which technically deploy *inter alia*, alliteration, metaphor, intertextuality, addressivity, innovative adjective-noun combinations and verb choices, and elements of literary and subjective register are *poietics* that produce diversity and innovation in the regimes of governmentality in which they are located. Literally, at the micro-level of textual academic literacies practice, they demonstrate what Pennycook (2007: 77) sees as a non-foundationalist 'refashioning of futures' that adds to discourse new notions of what is possible. In this sense, such subjectivities speak back to the supervised same. Reading them afresh, I would also argue one can almost feel the 'jouissance' students experience in these local, creative struggles and en-

gagement with knowledge's materiality that are evidence of their agency to (re)organise thought's diversity. This is not to deny the 'plaisir' students may also find in performances of more instrumental learning and writing praxis, but to spotlight the freeing sense present in bodies of student meaning making that reveal the kinesics of always already critique, historically present in the shifting folds of (intercultural) disciplinary rhetoric.

In order to make more visible the notions of critique in writing theorised in this paper, I juxtapose the actual words of students next to alternative versions I have specifically written in a more essentialist, 'dry' referential mode, to which they are dynamically tied by the exercise of power, and yet which they exceed and cleave: the distance between consent and critique is fragile and porous. Hence this juxtaposition does not imply a quid pro quo relation between the one and the other. To more clearly distinguish between the student *poietics* in the right hand column of the tables and my own improvised 'dry' alternatives, student work is presented in italic font (Fig. 1–7). Furthermore, I also specify the parts of the research paper in which these moves of critique are located to facilitate potential contextualised use of these examples as heuristics in teaching the art of critique in writing.

Arguably, the otherness of these excerpts salvaged from normative readings of student writing for an undergraduate, ethnographic-style research paper, could be seen as straightforward examples of the textualisation practices of the cultural interpretation genre which 'translates experience into text' (Clifford 1986: 115), leaving traces of the lived, oral experience of dialogue with others in what is written. Yet there is always already more than that given the arbitrary nature of grammatical and discursive positioning and our subjectivation to the coordinates of power. From a Derridean understanding of différance and deferring, time is not the measure of the progress of existence that translates experience into textual traces 'over' time (Derrida 1982). Rather, it is the internal dynamic of continually changing time which parses, or maintains for a moment, a different future-to-come within the utterance, which is always to be envisaged as an 'X without X', such as critique without critique, or *poiesis* without *poiesis*. Whilst this may not appear to be much of a solution for constituting critique in student writing, this is perhaps because our interpretive perceptions are always already bracketed to commonsense understandings of time and being. These are haunted by an ontology of presence which appears to be 'welded to an orthodoxy' (Derrida 2006: 115) where the event of being is welded to what 'constitutes the whole history of the world' (Derrida 2006: 116) – or at least the history of Western knowledge and reason. Indeed I would argue the normative reconstitutions of 'dry' academic writing in the left-hand column evoke precisely such a convergence with ahistorical temporalities.

Fig. 1: Poietics in Sub-headings

Challenging the binary	*'Deconstructing the Dichotomy'*
Subjective and objective identity	*'An Identity for the Head, and identity for the heart'*
Scales of individualisation in cultural identity	*'My own cultural identity – degrees of individualisation of cultural identity'*
Evaluating different discussion contributions	*'The coins put in the discussion: value and quantity of the coins'*
In-depth investigations	*'Behind the mask'*

Fig. 2: Poietics in the Introduction

Cultural difference in society today can lead to clashes.	*'In today's world, multiple cultures collide around us daily.'*
Cultural difference does not exclude harmonious coexistence.	*'Just because there are differences between people's upbringing, nationality, gender or anything else, does not mean they are incapable of cohabiting comfortably'*
'Seeing me, seeing you' evokes the concepts and theories relating to intercultural communication	*'Seeing me, seeing you' hints at the speaking and thinking around universal experiences between groups.*
'The main premise of this text is to critically capitalize on our reflexivity in order to ...'	*'The coins 'The main premise of this text is to critically capitalize on our reflexivity in order to ...' put in the discussion: value and quantity of the coins'*
Intercultural communication in higher education broadens the education of all	*'Higher education systems are a place of different minds and cultures mixing and engaging in activities for further enrichment of their education'*
... can contribute to a sense of a fluidly defined environment	*'... can contribute to a sense of a 'border-less' environment'*

Fig. 3: Poietics in research methods section

A smaller interview group allowed more personal interaction	*'it would have lacked the intimacy that approaching things as a trio provided'*
Four questions were used to guide discussion	*'they were given four questions to produce discussion'*
the small group interview allows for more openness between participants	*'The interview structure provides a framework of intimacy ...'*
Breaking conventions was seen as challenging, and hence did not often take place	*'it emerged that breaking away from these conventions is not only rare but uncomfortable and even seen as a form of social bravery necessary for cultural development.'*
It is hoped the investigation results will provide useful examples of the ways participants make sense of the 'plurality', 'diversity', and cultural engagement in Higher Education relationships	*It is hoped that the investigation will yield results that are both vivid and real to help participants make sense of the 'plurality', 'diversity', and cultural engagement in Higher Education relationships.*
The focus of the analysis is not on producing generalised claims about cultural identity	*'the focus is on idiosyncratic opinions and thoughts rather than a homogenised notion of what cultural identity represents'*

Fig. 4: Poietics in findings and discussion section

drawing on a variety of works	*'extracting from a variety of works'*
different behaviours exist in different situations	*'different behaviours exert in social situations'*
the aim of the interview was to identify the subjective beliefs and truths of the interviewees	*'The aim of the interview was to capture the truth in the words of the interviewees, therefore capturing an image of their own beliefs'*
decisions taken in an institutional context are influenced by prior experience	*'the decisions made in an institutional context [...] are by-products of all experience that has taken place before'*
Her group members responded politely	*'Her group members were gracious in their response'*
The fact Zoe and I share some cultural identity features cannot be taken to mean we view other cultures similarly	*'Furthermore, including Zoe into the same circle of thought is making an assumption that since we share a fraction of cultural identity we might view other cultures similarly.'*
The ethnographic interview and its findings reflect the changeable nature of cultural identity	*'the ethnographic interview and its findings reflect the protean nature of cultural identity.'*
The influence of culturally acquired linguistic norms appears to dictate and influence identity	*'the influence of linguistic habitus ... suggests a conversational autopilot that can blindly lead and influence identity.'*

Fig. 5: Poietics when referring to Other of interviewee(s) and findings

Given her outsider status, she identified with the 'other' in England	*'Holding a different identity, made her emulate the identity of the 'other' in England'*
They respected local politeness conventions and did not interrupt each other	*'They used polite faces, and did not interrupt each other for a while'*
She feels confused about her identity	*'She feels a confusion of identity'*
She indicates conflict with her parents and her questioning of norms as factors that created and helped her understand her cultural identity.	*'She points also to conflict between herself and her parents and her questioning of the status quo as a path to creating and understanding her cultural identity: (I didn't get along with my parents...).'*
Here clear single identity with multicultural interests differentiated her from others	*'She has multicultural interests by a clear single national identity which settles a certain distance with others'*

Fig. 6: Poietics when referring to Other of authors in the field

This quote suggests new approaches to the topic	*'this quote opens up further explorations of the topic'*
Holliday (2010) discusses this topic in depth.	*'Holliday (2010) delves deeply into this topic'*
Weirzbicka (1997) develops upon the key word, friendship	*'Weirzbicka (1997) lingers on this key word, friendship …'*
There has been a rise of intercultural research into ways of speaking using the approaches of Hymes (1962), in his 'ethnography of speaking'	*Evidence suggests that there has been a proliferation of cross-cultural investigations in recent decades into the ways of speaking which is constituted in terms of "ethnography of speaking" (Hymes 1962).*
Using ethnography as a framework allows for structured investigation into 'ourselves as human beings' (Spencer-Oatey 2008)	*… it is envisaged that ethnography offers a frame work within which the understanding of 'ourselves as human beings', (Spencer-Oatey 2008) can be meaningfully and methodically pursued.*
Understands politeness in broader terms than that of Brown and Levinson.	*'indicates an understanding of politeness beyond the restricted definition offered by Brown and Levinson'*

Fig. 7: Poietics in the conclusion

Each interviewee has world views affected by their own upbringings	*'In short, it is redundant to say that each interviewee in this process has their own views of the world and is affected by their unique nurturing environments'*
Specific analysis of student activities and social circles reveals …	*'Specific references to what each student does at university and in their social circles gives light to …'*
HE could be a an ideal situation for students to have the experience of communicating with diverse cultures without travelling	*'HE could be the best 'foreign road' where students have the ability to communicate with a diversity of cultures'*
The university seems to be an intermediary stage between inherited parental culture and personally chosen culture	*'In that sense, the university culture appears to be a stage between the non-chosen culture of the parents and the personal culture'*

Indeterminate teaching of the 'art of critique'

Pursuing this Other thinking of knowledge production and its *poietic* by-products, I suggest these constitute manifestations of 'the art of critique' and 'care of the self, that involve a reflexive process of work on the self in order to attain a certain mode of being, using the tools available to the individual at the scene of writing. In this sense, the snippets should be understood as a non-intrinsic exercise of freedom, since no writing is strictly active, strictly passive, strictly instrumental, or strictly creative, given truth's heterogeneities and fracturing of meaning. In each case, the writing is as much/more in charge of the writer than vice versa, yet the writer is not completely enslaved. Indeed, given that freedom is a conscious practice tantamount to ethics, since freedom is 'the ontological condition of ethics' (Foucault 1984: 285), extensive work of 'the self on the self' (Foucault 1984: 286) can lead freedom to take shape as ways of being that are 'good, beautiful, honourable, estimable, memorable and exemplary' (Foucault 1984: 286). How then might this freedom read if we transpose these adjectives of a small ethical and political praxis into the field of higher education and its pedagogical practices?

If we appropriate two of these adjectives, 'good' and 'honourable' to first provisionally apply them to our ethos as pedagogues and readers of student writing, there is immediately a sense in which these resist characterisation as standard professional attributes in HE: the ethos of the pedagogue has been rhetorically overwritten by more bureaucratic registers of representation. This does not mean in our self-governmentality we renounce such ways of being, but rather that these ethical practices, which are also political practices since freedom is inherently political, fit awkwardly into hegemonic, secular mobilisations of identity and so are officially muted. However, if we 'unmute' these and read the texts in their own irreducible terms of worthiness, there might be some unexpected reformatting of the ways we are institutionally conditioned to evaluate the critical in student writing.

If we next provisionally apply the adjective 'beautiful' to the student *poietics* in the chapter, a provision I consider valid with quite a few of these examples, an incision is made into the conventional contours of the subject of reason and ahistorical domain of objectivity, from which leaks the spilled blood of the subject's historicity. Yet, whilst the beauty of openness and ethical action in the process of inquiry is the alternating power in knowledge's

technologies of governance, to speak of it as such is analogous to betraying the textual authorities of 'truth' and opening their territory to the wildness of uncertainty and unshared historical origins. Biesta (2013) captures the threat of the designation in his book *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. Yet here I return to my earlier point that the knowledge category of critique in writing be coded as a 'skill', one that points *inter alia* to the aesthetic dimensions of knowledge that mark multiplicities of new beginnings.

Finally, if we provisionally assign the adjectives 'memorable' and 'exemplary to these student instances of *poietics*, and have confidence in their specificity as heuristics for discovering the freeplay in writing, that holds in it the possibility of the impossible event of a different future to come (Derrida 2005), we might 'spook the complacency' (De Caputo 2016: 121) of rule-governed institutional governance and its totalising ambitions, and keep it and our rhetorical 'subjectivities' in 'creative disequilibrium' (De Caputo 2016: 121). Taking heuristics to mean tools for discovery and invention since thy never completely predict in advance what the learning 'income' will be (Dunne 2016), as opposed to predictable outcomes, these 'bits' (Bowman 2014) of *poietics* can perhaps work as heuristics to offer pedagogues and students a subtle sense of the ways they can improvise with power, and conceivably spook the economies of the institution which prioritises different types of income. Thus, whilst an attentive praxis of the 'virtue' of critique as part of a care of the self, premised on foundations of constant change, necessarily proliferates hegemonic economies of knowledge, the excesses of knowledge production also open institutional windows to practices of diversity and innovation at the level of the text.

Staying practical

From the perspective of undergraduate teaching, legitimating curiosity, creativity and openness to difference as a productive element in the regularities of academic rhetoric is a useful tactic for nurturing 'the art of critique' in writing as an unpredictable 'skill' that encourages less instrumental approaches to knowledge production. It also provides an opportunity to discuss with students who often have little explicit awareness of the skills they have acquired during their studies what these might be, and what they understand by 'transferable skills'. I use this term with a certain reticence because of its assumptions of standard expectations and an idealised coherence. Yet, if we read 'transferable' in its literal sense of being conveyable to another place or context alongside the ingenuity, unpredictability and expertise that 'skill' connotes then we have an alternative view of this 'skill' in student study and employment practices whose usefulness students might appreciate. Students need and want to know what they need to do to gain a good degree and go on and find, or create, a living. However, for the purposes of popular appeal to undergraduates, I suspect the term *poietics* is a

non-starter. I would therefore propose re-interpreting the Derridean term 'freeplay' to evoke the agency of the student subject to question and discontinue for a moment the technical rigidities of 'truth'. Finally, whilst in this paper I use examples of such 'freeplay' identified in work produced within my own discipline and institutional context, it would be fairly straightforward for educators interested in such an approach to find examples in the written output of their own students, and so make the heuristics more locally specific.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued for the need to teach humanities and social sciences undergraduates the 'art of critique' in writing in order to extend their openness to other in everyday talk and ideologies into the materiality of written knowledge and 'truth'. To support this claim and make the notion more accessible to students it was suggested its 'use-value' (Derrida 2006: 201) be framed simultaneously as: a transferrable skill; a form of cultural capital; an ethical dimension to knowledge production; a diversity practice; an aesthetic dimension of writing; a non-intrinsic exercise of freedom; a form of subject agency; and a reflexive, care of the self (Foucault 1982).

I outlined a theoretical framework for such praxis premised on Foucault's notions of the 'virtue' and 'art' of critique, and Derrida's concepts of freeplay and différance. This framework suggests that a central aspect to the teaching and learning of 'the art of critique' is the presupposition that student and educator subjectivities necessarily conform to, as well as breach, hegemonic regimes of truth in their writing. In light of this, the force of critique can always and only be performative and fleeting. Whilst this might indicate the impossibility of critique, by turning to the dynamic affordances of the performative 'as if' (Derrida 2005: 53) and the unaccomplished power of the performative 'I may' or 'I can' (Derrida 2005: 54), we 'can' institute new forms of the possible whilst exercising our capacity for autonomy and freedom within the always already delineated boundaries of knowledge – here understood as 'the art of critique'. Furthermore, turning to Foucault's definition of the ethical practice of freedom that includes terms such as 'beautiful', 'honourable', and 'memorable' (Foucault 1984: 286), we have a readymade set of spanners for interrupting the workings of more bureaucratic and ahistorical taxonomies of pedagogical and writing practice.

To give tentatively empirical examples of the art of critique in action, snippets of *poietics* in student writing were presented. Though it is suggested these serve as a corrective to the rigidities and ossification of traditional academic writing, and to over-simplified understandings of the subject of knowledge, I am not suggesting they offer more than one small way forward to confirming the suppositions of regulation and contingency in writing subjectivities as

embodied through the 'art of critique'. However, I do hope that the empirical traces of *poietics* in student writing serve to illustrate the pedagogic possibilities of Foucaultian and Derridean thought for developing writing curricula which (a) conceptualise diversity at the level of the materiality of the text as well as the writing subject, (b) teach both how to conform to and play with the rules, and (c) make more visible the tacit dynamics of academic writing.

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