

Introduction:

First: how's everyone doing? Used to lockdown? Hating lockdown? Loving lockdown?

...

You are lucky to be working in a creative field. Where you can express the feelings that you are experiencing in these strange and challenging times.

And I think you should be thinking about them, these feelings, not chucking them aside. Because the difficulty is how to express them, both to give them form, as it's normally said—structure: and to make sure that that structure does not suffocate them. That it's not too tight. And not too loose.

And this is the point I will make before we get on to the question of academic writing: it is that writing in view of artistic expression, whether in film, drawing, or just telling stories, means writing about what is there formally expressed. Writing about creative activity, whether as the critic of another's, or as your own critic, is exactly *critical*. Its first question involves separating the feelings put into the creative work and their expression in it. So it asks: What do you show me?

Not quite the audience. And not quite the author. And never the judge. As we will see.

So, how to write, how to write *positive* critique, comes from reading critical writing. And this is what you have time to be doing now. I suggest reading on paper... it sticks in the head better. Books, articles, about the fields you are interested in, the ones in which you invest your feelings about what's going on with you. A lot.

...

I always remember the advice of an American Studies lecturer I had in my first year. He said, you should not leave university, in fact you *cannot*, without at least having read Darwin, Freud and Marx. All three critical writers. All overturned our conception of who and what we are.

I would add, if I can, Nietzsche. As to why you should, before you leave university read Darwin, Freud, Marx and Nietzsche: *Find out!*

...

Now, the lecture:

I think you should interrupt me ... if what I'm saying is not making sense to you.

As in the previous lecture—and I refer repeatedly to the first lecture throughout this one—I would love it if you can interrupt by saying, *When you said blah blah ... what did you mean?*

There will, I'm pretty sure, be time for questions afterward as well—but I'd rather you didn't save your questions up, I'd rather you asked at the time or soon after I've said something ridiculous:

When you said analysis is case history what did you mean?

Or, a term, like “didactic” or “heuristic”—please ask what they mean, when they come up in the lecture.

What's the best way to interrupt?

In an online forum: turn on your mic; interrupt!

Or open a chat.

As I said, there will be time to discuss the lecture at the end... but I'd rather specific questions, questions of specifics, were asked along the way! So: Interrupt!

1. What is academic [writing]?

To start with, What is academic?

In the last lecture, the one about reflective writing, we reflected on the question of writing... So you *know*, you remember what writing is, and we don't have to think about this any further.

What is writing?

Out of all the available options, we opted for writing as a new technology, invented by the Greeks around the 5th century BCE (Before Christian Era)... That is: writing as we understand it. Meaning, so that we *understand* it.

You remember the uncommon sense we gave understanding: NOT this is what we cognitively deduce writing to be: and...

there are a few more NOTs:

NOT in the moral or good sense of: this seems to be the best way to get what writing is—for you, or, for me, this seems to be the best way for me to *describe* writing;

NOT because understanding writing to be a technological invention of the 5th century BCE (Before Christian Era—note the Western hypothesis) is what every lecture will tell you because it is commonly understood this way, around here: that is, in this institution;

NOT because our understanding is the better for it—or as an *heuristic* (a tutelary image or idea) or out of any *didactic* sense—but we have said this already: I don't tell you to understand writing this way or to understand *understanding* this way to be a better teacher or for you to be better students...

No. I want you to understand what writing does. All writing. (And you remember here that we distinguished between *performing* a practice, such as writing is, and acting, doing the practice—and of course the huge help to any practice theory gives—, performing we said was letting the words do the work, mean their meanings, without actively choosing for them... in much the same way as we do what we are told...)

No. I want here to give you power over writing—and, eventually we will come to it, academic writing.

So that I want you to understand understanding as supporting. The example I gave was the unsupported statement. I said, and you agreed, at least you didn't do anything to interrupt the lecture, the reading, so I understood you to agree, that we (we is a sign of our agreement and therefore debatable) don't choose our authors, our authorities, to support us. We choose *these ones and not others* because we support *them*. And that is how we show our understanding—*of the statements we make*!

This is worth a brief explanation: You write the statement, just like I wrote, "You write the statement," and so it plays out in your head... Ah, yes, there it is, the statement.

Now what does it do?

It already lays down the law, performs what it says, which we can choose to support or not, so that we say, "Ah, yes. I write the statement."

AND—the important bit—just as the drawing does that you did for your last assignment, the statement turns away from you: Now you've got to get its attention back. NOW you have to understand it. ... and if it is an unsupported statement you have to show you understand the statement you just made by citing an author, an authority, another writer, one, two or many, as many as you like, whose words, whose academic writing, whose artistic or scientific expression, you also understand.

Who supports my statement that *you write the statement*? I could name the police or your lawyer, who, attending your arraignment says to you, No. I know you want me to write the statement, but you have to. You write the statement.

And if you think of this situation: I'm in trouble. I call in a famous lawyer. Or my parents pay for one. And I want her to do the work for me. After all, that's what she's being paid to do. ... if you think of it, it is the situation you are faced with when you support your own statement by invoking a source, and so doing not only show you understand-support your own statement but show understanding-support of the cited text, author, and so on.

OR: I'm in trouble. With the police. They say, OK, write the statement. And everything will go well for you.

OR: I have an assignment to do. For the course. My lecturer says, OK, write the statement. Cite the text in support. And everything will go well for you. You might even get a good mark.

In this case the police and the lecturer are the same.

The lawyer on the other hand: If I go ahead and write the statement, I show my understanding of her. And I know that in court I have her support. She will defend me.

Now, the Greeks invented writing, so we understand, around the time of Plato. 5th century BCE, Before Christian Era, and having revisited the question what is writing we can move to the question, What is academic?

2. What is academic...?

Every test, every assignment you are on trial.

Luckily your legal advice comes free. The first bit of advice is annoying:

It is: You commit to it: you write the statement.

Deleuze will say, We get the problems we deserve. And we can say the same about the statements we commit to.

Sometimes we may be asked to commit to statements that are untrue. This is why it's worth keeping in mind the legal situation, because it is the institutional one: because what that statement does, what it means *is* what it does. It means these are my words. And I have of my own free will committed to them—after all, it is a signed statement. And these my words can either set me free or... the other thing.

So we understand the legal advice. And we show understanding not only by making a statement we can commit to—even if it is committing the crime: the two amount to the same thing and are in this sense performative. We show understanding by citing our legal advice...

And who do we choose to support us? Wikipedia? Google?

We've made the point that our writing like our drawing doesn't care about us, but Wikipedia, Google, and any number of sources, really really don't: and then we are committed to *them*, as if we paid for the advice, we owe *them*.

We've also made the point we choose to support. A good lawyer is what is called a no-brainer.

What makes a good lawyer? If we think in terms of legal representation, what makes a good lawyer is ... what? power? prestige? letters after the name? the size of the legal fee? the promises she makes?

That she says, just follow my advice. The lecturer says, And you'll get a good mark. Sign the

statement I've prepared for you. Copy the formula that I've taught you. And... you'll be held accountable for every word. But this is what you've paid for, isn't it? In the justice system as well as in the system of education.

What makes a good source...? Yes, one you can support. One, two or many, whose advice you support, by following, writing your statement, because, yes, you trust them, putting the name, date of publication and page number in the brackets at the end, before the punctuation mark, the full stop, the cited work in the reference list, but not because he, she or they *represent* you.

What he, she or they represent is the system. Whether it's the system of justice or the education system. That is, the institution. The *academic* institution. BUT...

You can't trust her or him or them because of that. That would be foolish.

As foolish as calling on extra-institutional criteria, like gender, race and class profile... because aren't all these as much institutions as the academic one?

Pushed to the wire, you can't even be sure you have his, her, their full support... It's a gamble whether you're going to be let off, get a halfway decent mark, or ...

So you have to do your research. Some of it will be how many trials has she won. And if you are in fact guilty, how many criminals has he managed to get pardoned. Either way, it will be *case history* ... Yes, research into the specifics of previous cases, successes and failures ... and understanding both ... and she may win your trust ... you may put the money intended for your ongoing education behind him, or them.

In the academic world as in the legal community case histories are written. Books and books, often on one case ... where to start? Pick any one up but the good one will advise you first to write your statement.

You will in fact have to know your own case and case history well enough—and you should, you're in the middle of it—this as we said in the first lecture was the purpose of reflection and reflective writing—you will have to know your own practise and its history—this is called analysis—well

enough, well enough that you are only ever accused of what you have already done. So that the verdict, when it comes, is no surprise: you deserve it.

3. How does it work in practice?

How does it work in practice?

This is the question we should be asking at every stage.

So, the court is in possession of your statement, defense, prosecution, judge, all three—and perhaps even witnesses to the proceedings, that is, a jury. A jury is like a public forum. And unlike defense, prosecution and judge, they are **our** equals.

Who is here the teacher, the course convener, the one who gets to say Pass, Fail, Go Down, Go Free?

And what if something goes wrong? what if new evidence is brought not included in your statement... that your lawyer was not aware of? Cannot, then, defend or support?

In practice, we have said, you choose to support your lawyer—who is your **source**. That is, your source is usually, not always, drawn from your reading—of the case histories: the written context in which the course is conducted, the trial.

The truth is, you don't know who is hungover, who's having a bad day, whose lapse of judgement will lead to your, let's say, getting a bad mark. A mark against your name.

Unless the lapse of judgement is yours. Your fault. And couldn't it be just a matter of opinion?

Isn't that what the jury is for? To show their common understanding of what is right or wrong?

Students are always being asked to do things they don't want to do. Listen to this lecture. Read this book. Write this now. Citing as your support this author from that book... Or, make a choice...

but aren't you being asked to take advice, legal advice, from lawyers you don't trust to support you? as if the court were appointing your defense... and you, in fact, had no choice! ... let alone being able to say, In choosing this source, this passage, this quote from this theoretical text, this case history of a practice, in choosing him, her or them, I am supporting her, him or them! and this support shows my **understanding**. Not only that, you have no power!

All you want to do, all we want to do, is return to the situation where we don't need to understand our opinions to express them. But this is not where we are.

And you have to choose, because this is the assignment, even when only one choice is given. There she stands, standing on her own statements about her practice, that together comprise its case history, the book, the source you have to choose to support, to show your understanding. Or more often it is he, although in the sciences *they*, and, because it is, you cannot feel sorry for him. Cannot bring yourself to support him.

Unless... unless... You do understand him. Or her, why not? ... We have to be careful here.

Of course, you are free to disagree with what the author you have been asked to read is saying. And it's not because it's in a book, that you have to agree with it, because she wrote the book. And it's not that it's just his opinion—the opinion of a dead white man. Because these are not matters of opinion, but neither are they matters of fact. Nor of superior, super-powered brains; nor superior from the positions they hold, have come to hold, have sacrificed their common humanity to hold, have even died to hold. No.

Let's put it this way: Imagine you would rather give up, maybe out of disgust. Maybe out of resentment at what you are being asked to do, you choose to fail.

I protest the lack of female representation in the reading list. I protest the non-representative nature of the authors, filmmakers, gamedesigners, makers, artists, writers, creatives, ad-men, we are asked to read, watch, discuss, analyze and learn from.

I choose to fail rather than learn about another non-indigenous methodology.

Is this choosing? Does this express what I earlier asked that we take on as the power to make the choice? Isn't actively to choose, not to resign oneself to the opinions of others, but even when failing, as Beckett wrote, choosing to fail better?

Isn't the best part of failing, failing taken all the way? Isn't the best failure the one who even fails at failing? The most complete failure, the one who fails even here?

Still, that's sad. It has a similar sadness to saying I don't need to like sentences to write, I don't need to like scenic composition, montage, nonlinear editing, to be a cinematographer.

The point is, I am not asking you to like sentences, or scenic composition, montage or nonlinear editing. I am asking you to choose for the sentences you write—and to continue in that spirit, a spirit I would call a happy, positive one, all the way to the authors that you cite, in choosing for them too.

Back to that care we spoke of: In every author, in every text, as we discussed in the last lecture, there is another: the subject who writes, the subject of the sentence, "I write," when I write it. You recall that this was the subject of reflection. The one in the mirror.

On the one side, I am saying choose for the reflection—like the students at the Russian art school.

On the other side, I am saying that the reflection is in another space than the subject who looks at it, who sits nude every day for six weeks staring at the reflection in the mirror before being allowed to make a single mark on paper.

In film, that space is a technical achievement—or failure, a question of knowing *how to*, or not... Just as it is in writing. Consider a mirror that doesn't work... or one that shows only your best features. Impossible!

Now, you will always find, even in an author you detest, or film-maker, sentences, scenes, sometimes whole passages and compositions, that you can read differently and understand to go against the way they were intended. Understand in the strong sense of support. Without changing a word you can put them in the position of saying something they never intended: and, to be able to, adds something: not only do you understand what they intended to say, you also understand what they have said. Like in a mirror, their words, sentences, their scenic compositions, their nonlinear editing have opened them up to being misunderstood in the best possible way.

Then this is what you should choose.

4. the academy...

Each time you are called on to answer ... the question ... you are on trial.

What is the question? Well, it's different each time, isn't it? Not only that, the question is a discussion question, a reflection question, an analysis question, a question of a review, of a report or of a summation or summary, a question of contexts, going beyond what we understand texts to be—unless we support Derrida in saying, **il n'y a pas d'hors-texte**, all is textuality—there is no 'outside the text'... and what might this mean?

because it can also go the other way: there is no text outside; as we said before, we are in the middle of it.

Each time we are called on to answer ... for our practice ... we are on trial.

I before you, given my practice involves reading and writing and reading the writing that is the lecture. You before me, and your fellow jurors, before the court, the court that asks you to answer in a written statement... for your actions. Note:

- 1) it does not ask you to answer for your will;
- 2) it does not ask you to answer for your intentions, with the exception of those your actions intended:

this takes the familiar formula: Malice aforethought:

in the course of practice you were committed to did you intend to commit... no, I'm not going to say it.

Or: and this goes to our first point: was the commission backed up by any ill will? ... towards film, for example, or game design, or writing.

Was this the reason you murdered that scene, but not in a good way? Was that the reason you killed it in your last assignment, also not in a good way?

No, no, we say: or we admit our crimes against, for example, town-planning, civic design, something the leaders of our city will never do.

No, no, we say: it was never our intention to commit the crimes against any sort of aesthetic that the

entire built environment accuses us of. The crimes against the city that we are called on to answer for now. No, please read our statement, in the report. It's all in there:

we meant to cut costs.

Anything further is an honest mistake. Our plea is not guilty!

Yet we are free in our will. Again it comes down to the power to choose:

by all means choose for the crimes you choose to commit.

And it comes down to expressing that will in the representation we make of it in ... hold on a second, did I say court?

Having said lawyering up—whether in the sense of supporting the sources and examples we choose for in our written statements or in the sense of trusting the lawyer to whom we entrust our case—is not a matter of representation, it seems it is: but it is for us a matter of representation **only** in the sense that our will is represented. Well represented (good will and ill will and all moralising aside), that we chose well and understood our choices—still, I can understand:

you are sick of hearing about the justice system when it is the education system you find yourselves in the middle of

here nothing more is at stake than a few wasted hours

not years of life taken away because of a mistake the consequences of which we did not intend

but consider this: academic writing is no less than a statement; the academy is no less an institution than justice; and both are institutional writing; academic writing is no less a requirement of the academy than a statement is a requirement of the court.

What, then, in particular characterises the academy?

And I am not joking when I say, Contestation by trial and disputation of cases are no less characteristic of the academy than they are of justice, that, in fact, this is what academic writing is for.

Do we have a clear answer to the question, What is academic writing?

5. What is the academy?

The 'we' I said at the beginning is debatable. *I* might think we do have a clear understanding of what academic writing is. But *you* do not.

Isn't it a matter of interpretation? You already have a clear idea of what academic writing is. And I have come in with my opinion... which I will support through analysis...

Note that I don't want to say what academic writing is not. Like, Some may say, blah de blah de blah. And I disagree!

As soon as we get stuck with critical interpretation we get stuck with opinions and negative critique. What might a positive critique be?

But wait! Don't we have to start with what academic writing is not and lay out our argument like:

thesis: academic writing is how academics—which is anyone in this institution—fight...

antithesis, or negative critique: academic writing is a form of writing. Just that. Then we can say its formal elements define it. It is defined by grammatical correctness. Correct spelling, complete sentences. And formally it differs in consideration of whether it is an essay, a discussion, a report, contextual review... and so on.

synthesis: good academic writing is characterised by taking the correct form and citing authorities—other academic writing—in support of one's argument. That is, if academic writing is how academics fight, it is about following the rules. Like fencing. Or a dance-off where the contestants all have to waltz and smile politely at their opponents.

Do I disagree? Not really, but if we focus on the rules we lose sight of the reason for it. We lose sight of our argument... and eventually I lose my will to live... This is why approaching an assignment fills me with profound ennui. I am bored to death before I start.

Or we are fearful we will be judged on where we put our feet or how much we smile. Or on our interpretation of the waltz, the form. Anybody can tell us what a waltz is! How could we have got it wrong? So wrong!

Yes, we have so much learning to do before we start. Before we can even start we have to know what a waltz is! Worse we have to be polite! Polite to the anybodies that know.

That is all you want to know, right? How to start.

Let's start with analysis:

Analysis is no more or less than a history. A case history.

And this is where we depart from interpretation. We depart from the start from criticising others' points of view. We go straight for the positive: what can we support, confronting an assignment, when the thought of it is *insupportable*?

In the case of academic writing, its history goes back to what we understand to be the birthtime of writing itself: writing begins at the same time as the academy, with Plato. The fifth century BCE.

Yes, the Western hypothesis. Yes, the Western tradition.

But it is not a rule of academic writing that we have to support the tradition—or just dance around with it. Since:

our records show that the Platonic academy—our source is Plato himself—was for disputation.

Dialogue. Dialectic.

The teacher, Socrates, wrote nothing himself.

According to his student, Plato (Aristotle was a student of Plato), Socrates asked questions like,

What is justice? ... And Plato's favourite, What is the Good?

Oranges are good. Olives are good. No. What is the Good in itself?

What do you mean the Good in itself does not exist? How could I ask what it is if it doesn't? And: how could I separate it out from the examples that you want to give, except by writing?

The writing itself is the fight for the Good. For Plato.

How does he fight? The answer: Academic writing.

We start by debating the 'we'—when we are able, given the opportunity by writing, academic writing, to separate it off, and ask Who? Who is 'we'?

Is 'we' the Western tradition—behind academic writing, that following the rules simply hides?

Is 'we' those in this room? or has a technology other than writing intervened to separate it off? Then are 'we' the laptops and technical apparatus maintaining this discussion? Or that of the academy? A place of disputation, where 'we' are on trial?

There are lawyers who we can ask to separate ourselves out from the Western tradition, from Plato, from thinking being about the good in itself or the common sense that makes us say 'we', because anybody can tell us what good is, but it's not.

Not according to Plato, whose fight, you might say is unfair, not because he is representative of the Western tradition, not because he is its first representative, not because he's a he or a Greek, but because he is the first academic writer.

He is the first to use academic writing to fight the opinions of those who were not writers, who were not writing, who often did not know how to write. And he used a non-writer, Socrates, to fight.

We can put Plato on trial: Nietzsche did. Deleuze did. And he is not even bound to win on the territory of academic writing that originates with him (our analysis, case history). But in our trial, in this lecture, it is academic writing that is on trial and we are in the middle of it.

Always assume you are in the middle: academic writing at its best, and we should always choose for the best, is not a fight over territory or between territories—or, the most pathetic, *for* territory: This is my territory! My sandpit! And, *You shall not pass!* No.

It's yours not to defend but to be worthy of. You don't have to fight for it. And you don't have to defend your position or to fight from it. You only have to assume it, to show that you are worthy of it and to understand it. Then you can lawyer up, cite authorities showing your understanding, do the case history, the analysis, write your own statement. And own it.

Even when this is exactly where Plato, because he is the originator of academic writing, as our analysis has shown, seems bound to win, Plato loses in the trial of academic writing.

Because we have come to the conclusion that it is the fact he was writing that allowed him to put the question, What is the Good. In itself. And even if it is the first word and the one academic writing starts with, it is no more than that: It is a word.

legal counsel

[those not named whose presence is assumed are in square brackets]

Aristotle – philosopher – 384-322 BCE

[J.L. Austin – philosopher – 1911-1960]

Samuel Beckett – playwright – 1906-1989

[Maurice Blanchot – writer – 1907-2003]

[Judith Butler – philosopher – 1956-]

[Anne Carson – poet – 1950-]

Charles Darwin – 1809-1882

Gilles Deleuze – philosopher – 1925 -1995

Jacques Derrida – philosopher – 1930-2004

[Michel Foucault – philosopher – 1926-1984]

[Félix Guattari – philosopher – 1930-1992]

[Martin Heidegger – philosopher – 1889-1976]

[Franz Kafka – writer – 1883-1924]

[Emmanuel Levinas – philosopher – 1906-1995]

Karl Marx – 1818-1883

Friedrich Nietzsche – philosopher – 1844-1900

Plato – philosopher – 428/427 or 424/423-348/347 BCE

Socrates – philosopher – ?-399 BCE