



Sweetman, L. (2017) 'Finding our way in the Upside Down: using creative inquiry to make sense of a changing world', *London Conference in Critical Thought*, South Bank University, London, UK , 30 June - 1 July 2017.

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NOTES

Finding our way in the Upside Down: Using creative inquiry to make sense of a changing world

Definition: Transnationalism

For P. Jackson et al. (2004) transnationalism 'encompasses all of those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers. It includes not just the material geographies of labour migration or the trading in transnational goods and services but also the symbolic and imaginary geographies through which we attempt to make sense of our increasingly transnational world.'

<http://www.institut-gouvernance.org/bdf/en/analyse/fiche-analyse-37.html>

<https://medium.com/@heinemann/your-pedagogy-might-be-more-aligned-with-colonialism-than-you-realize-1ae7ac6459ff>

The Upside Down

A place not just where our values are challenged but where the rules of the game as we understand them have changed, or are simply ignored.

The last 14 months: Farage, Brexit, Trump, Hillary, Theresa, Jeremy, GE2017.

The Question: How do we locate ourselves and find meaning in a world that feels so suddenly and radically changed?

The intention is to write a series of essays that address our personal and public worlds, where they intersect and what they mean to us. Essentially, in a very chaotic period, how do we make sense of the world and ourselves? And what happens between people when we have the time to explore it together?

Or is it that more of us are woke? Situating our questions structurally.

Woke - Getting woke is like being in the Matrix and taking the red pill. You get a sudden understanding of what's really going on and find out you were wrong about much of what you understood to be truth. "I understand the extra burden it puts on you but I still feel everyone needs to get woke."

Inescapable

Using a creative response to find our way

- Transnational Writing
- Unstructured Interviews
- Creative Collaboration
- Can writing creatively in response to pressing questions and events provide routes to new knowledge, understanding and meaning?

The critical element of the project examines, firstly, whether it's possible to create new and useful work or knowledge simply by taking the time to talk and examine ideas together and then translating our response into a creative written output. What does the translation of the discussion into text add to our understanding of the meaning of the original conversation? And what, then, does the text offer to the reader who did not participate in the conversation?

Secondly, the critical element will explore the usefulness of the essay as a form for this kind of creative research. What does the essay allow the writer to do that is different from fiction, poetry, journalism or traditional academic research? Is the essay the natural habitat of the wide-ranging, curious thinker? What can I do to bend the form even more? What will I learn from trying?

Thirdly, the creative work will offer some critical insight into the changing political landscape as we each find it.

It's political landscape that I'm interested in. How do we locate ourselves in a political landscape? What are our anchors? Have they disappeared? Do we imagine ourselves as emerging from a particular political discipline, theory or culture? Difficult times need difficult conversations. Can we help each other in these moments? Can we connect more meaningfully with each other by trying to describe and tackle some of our most pressing concerns now? Brexit and Trump feel inescapable and they are causing profound reactions

around Europe and the world. Do we fall into despair? Or do we *take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing, end them*.

The political is made personal by our ability to share our lives, seeing into each other's worlds. So I know how a section of the US population is feeling because they're posting on my Facebook wall every day. It's not news, it's perspective (and narrative), formed by our current circumstances.

I'm hoping to discover what each of us has to contribute to our shared knowledge and narrative in a moment of profound political upheaval that challenges a seventy-year orthodoxy of international collaboration and social justice progress. I'm interested in systems of power but, in a neoliberal culture, I am not immune to an interest in how we translate those systems as part of trying to understand our place in the world and in constructing our world view. I think we all have valuable insight and experience to share with each other. How do we convert that into something that's politically or publicly useful by describing it?

I also want to know whether my process could be a new creative research methodology. By giving space for reflection, having my collaborators respond separately to the both the experience of the discussion and the narrative analysis, and then responding to their work, what are we creating?

Narrative Analysis, as Riessman (2004) defines it, requires not simply a thematic approach but an interpretive stance based on analysis of how stories are told or ideas expressed. By approaching my analysis of the transcripts in this way, the data will be far richer and will provide a deeper resource to which we can respond creatively.

The Essay is the right tool for the job:

At the beginning of this century Georg Lukacs speculated ("On the Nature and Form of the Essay," in *Soul and Form*, 1910) that the cultural-philosophical essay tends to emerge as the representative literary form **in ages without essence**, in periods of transition when the old certainties have grown questionable. At such times thinkers can no longer write confident *summae* but, at most, the provisional, preliminary, penultimate "attempts" with which the skeptical Montaigne--"Que sais-je?"--gave a name to the genre. Theodore Ziolkowski, *The Age of the Essay* (1996)

What Rebecca Solnit says:

“Public life [through writing] enlarges you, gives you purpose and context, saves you from drowning in the purely personal, as so many Americans seem to.” - Rebecca Solnit

Excerpts:

I still, when I'm in Canada, particularly when I'm in BC, I feel a sense of kind of belonging and also just a sort of knowing that I don't feel here, even now.

What, what, is that feeling of belonging, what is that sense, is it..?

I think it's partly physical, I think it stems from the landscape to...people's bodies. I think Canadians inhabit space in a different way than British people do.

Is that because you're all big and outdoorsy and wrestle bears and things like that?

Yeah, I think it's as simple as that, the scale of the landscape and the scale of the kinds of spaces that people live and work in.

So even after thirty odd years here... do you ever get that feeling here? That affinity with the landscape here?

No, no no. Profoundly not. And I don't think that will ever change.

I arrived in the UK in 1982, and I was 20, I arrived during the Falkland's War, you know, so the height of that particular phase of nationalism but I mean as it's become a sort of cliché to say it but, back then, the Union Jack was a symbol of fascism.

Oh yeah. Yeah Yeah.

And I think the way that has changed has been very interesting to watch and quite heartening. You know it's interesting you say that because I cannot...

You can't get away from it?

No, I can't. It's really... Every time I see, you know when there's a royal wedding and there's some bunting out, I still feel that association.

The woke part is that everyone's like, 'Come the fuck on! Are you fucking kidding me?' There's people doing it. There's enough people, like you said, you can't not....

So it's from where I was which was just absolutely, utter shock, but my shock and my grief have always been for the people that thought this was an okay idea...Donald Trump is being who Donald Trump has always been. His personality ... the things that he says... He's not doing anything different that he's always done. The thing that's frightening is the climate in which it has become acceptable for a person of such nature to be the president of the United States of America...My sense of uneasiness has always been about, 'Gosh, there's this many people that feel this way!' You could always look at Donald Trump and see that he was an asshole. That's my opinion of him.

I think maybe all of us have some kind of experience like that in childhood, that's trying to put an anchor down geographically, temporally and spatially.

Yes. And what we mean within that.

Yeah. I think that apart from that fascination with rocks and fossils, it was actually being able to hold things which is why I find it quite interesting that you're fascinated by the stars because you cannot grasp that - there's nothing that you can hold apart from maybe a meteor that you've found on the ground but then that comes into my realm then.

Yeah, that's really interesting.

Yeah the idea that you can actually, physically hold these things and even the rocks now that we're walking on were probably hundreds and hundreds of feet underground at one point. The whole world shifts and changes physically is what I found very fascinating.

It's obviously something fundamental within us. To know what belongs to us.

Yes.

To know what our space is.

Yes, to pitch out your space and say this mine. And then to all be in that space together you all have to agree certain rules and mores by which you will live and then that's you then. That's you bunch living in this space and not them over there living in that space.

Yes, they've got their own rules over there!

Yeah and they're weird. And they like weird cheese.

Neumann summarises these aspects the following way:

Neurotic, persecutory anxiety can lead to ego-surrender in the mass through affective identification with a leader. This caesaristic identification is always regressive, historically and psychologically. An important clue for the regressive character is the notion of false concreteness, the conspiracy theory of history. [...] The intensification of anxiety into persecutory anxiety is successful when a group (class, religion, race) is threatened by loss of status, without understanding the process which leads to its degradation. Generally, this leads to political alienation, i.e., the conscious rejection of the rules of the game of a political system. The regressive mass movement, once it has come to power must, in order to maintain the leader-identification, institutionalize anxiety. The three methods are: terror, propaganda, and, for the followers of the leader, the crime committed in common ([Neumann 1957](#), 293-294).

Neumann's notions of crisis and authoritarianism can help us to understand the political situation in the USA and Europe that has developed since the start of the capitalist crisis in 2008. A *first element* is the alienation of labour. *Neoliberal capitalism* is the ruling class' struggle against everyday people that is fought via the commodification of everything, state-support for capitalist interests, and ideology. Figures 1 and 2 show the development of the wage share and the capital share in the USA and the EU. The wage share is the share of the wage sum in the GDP, the capital share the share of total capital in the GDP. The two variables are inversely proportional:

The higher the capital share is, the lower is the wage share. Since the mid-1970s, the wage-share has dropped by around 5% in both the USA and the European Union.

Authoritarian Capitalism <http://www.triple-c.at/index.php/tripleC/article/view/835/922>

Christian Fuchs

University of Westminster, London, UK,

<http://www.npr.org/2017/04/04/522554630/francis-fukuyama-on-why-liberal-democracy-is-in-trouble>

Catherine Katharine Baker – UCL – politics of performance. Sian sending over.

SLIDES

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Woke

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by [MathPolice January 26, 2017](#)

urbandictionary.com

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In the Upside Down the Essay is my weapon of choice

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And my General is...

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The stories we tell about ourselves position us temporally, spiritually, geographically. They allow us to return to a constant, a lodestar. From this position we view and interpret the world around us and narrate what we see. Our stories situate us in relation to our surroundings. We share them with others so that *they* can navigate *us*.

And then, from nowhere, something happens. A moment, an event, even a short passage of time that shifts everything on its axis and demands of us a new perspective - some new thinking. Occasionally the challenge to the sense of ourselves is so overwhelming that whatever's happened unsettles, destabilises and bewilders. Sometimes the moment the shifting perspective hits is actually the tipping point of a longer, more invisible process. Sometimes the tipping point is a moment that wakes everyone up, even if some of us were never asleep.

Must we rewrite our stories to explain these shifting poles? Yes. We must tell them again. And again.

Trump's journey to the Oval Office surprised and shocked...And this leaves us, trying to make sense of it. It's not simply a need to interpret what's happened or respond to it politically ...it is a matter of assimilating something that challenges everything you thought you knew about how your world functions. A president can stand at a podium and lie; a British politician can stand in front of a racist poster hours before an MP is murdered by a white supremacist, a lie can be painted on a bus and be immediately rejected once the vote is completed. This is different. It says to us 'Where are we now?' and 'How do I fit here?'

Suddenly, we need to tell our stories again. Find new meaning in them, recover and re-tell them to remake ourselves. In the Upside Down we have to recast the world with the stories we tell about ourselves. So we can grasp it back and pull it with us ever forwards.