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Philosophical Writing: Prefacing as professing

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Abstract

If you do not wish to construe philosophical discourse as simply a discourse of cognition, a theoretical discourse; if you think it is also a practical, ethical discourse: how should you write? How should you frame the ethos, the authority of your discourse? This article re-presents an extended preface I wrote and rewrote obsessively over a period of nearly two years in an effort to forge a voice and mode of address adequate to my sense of philosophical discourse as a practical discourse, whilst also being accountable to the generic requirements of a PhD. As the textual record of this struggle, the value of this text must remain primarily in its capacity to evoke or provoke similar generic memories or ambitions in the reader.

Keywords: philosophy, genre, prefacing, Cavell

Introduction

The following text documents the product of two years of compulsive writing and rewriting, work which was not so much intent on enacting a standard genre as it was a desperate effort to find/forge a range of appropriate and appropriable voices for writing a PhD, voices which whilst feeling 'real' to me could also meet the requirements of academic discourse It was only *after* this seemingly irrelevant work of 'prefacing' that I finally felt able to undertake the writing of the PhD itself. Much later—when the final thesis needed trimming—I was about to cut this entire Preface, when my supervisor intervened, insisting that 'it was the best part'! I was both shocked yet secretly pleased. To me there is a certain truth lodged in this Preface, even though—or perhaps—because it flouts the generic conventions of a standard preface. Certainly, it does grapple I believe with a liminal experience that is increasingly common, a profoundly cross-cultural, or rather cross-sectoral experience that is fraught with ambivalence, ambiguity and tension, an experience that I now observe in many other 'mature-aged' PhD students also returning to academe in order to reflect on their more 'worldly' life-worlds and domains of practice.

Actually, it was precisely this tension that shifted the ground of my thesis from applied linguistics and social theory into the clutches of philosophy. Only philosophy, it seemed, would allow the play of discourse voices necessary for exploring and articulating the issues I wished to explore, and yet as an academic discipline, philosophy, and as a genre, the PhD—both seemed to threaten this very play of voices.

Hence this extended Preface, grappling with questions of voice and genre, issues of 'ethos' and ethics, in an effort to find a 'pitch' (Cavell) that would discipline and support the writer whilst delimiting the strategies and expectations of the reader—all in the hope of beginning a fruitful conversation.

Preface[1]

> A preface provides an author the opportunity to address the reader from the point of view of his authorship. Although etymologically a preface is a prefatory statement of the motivations and circumstances that surround the beginning of a project, there is a widespread practice of using the preface also to inform the reader about what is achieved in the end. A preface is thus at once a 'foreword' preceding the text and an 'afterword' following its completion; a curious combination of prologue and epilogue; a peculiar mix of promissory note and its redeemed cash value. Although a preface is placed first in the format, serialized by roman numerals so as to mark it off from the Arabic pagination of the main body of the text, it is written last. The writing of such a preface, binding beginning and end, becomes a burdensome task in the moment that the author becomes aware of the elusiveness of all beginnings and ends. Unable to surmount this elusiveness the author gravitates into a quandary as he deliberates on what is to be included and what is to be left out. (Scrag, 1989, p. vii)

A quarter of a century ago I purchased a book by an American philosopher whom I had earlier concluded was the only 'true' interpreter of Wittgenstein, the only commentator who 'really' understood Wittgenstein. This long-awaited text was a Harvard PhD thesis that had taken 20 years to reach publication. I learnt much later that it was probably the most photocopied PhD thesis in the history of analytic philosophy and had circulated widely in that format. Unfortunately I had not encountered any of these photocopies, and had been privy to only the vaguest of rumours concerning the significance of this unpublished work.

In excited anticipation I tore the wrapper open and began to read. Two pages later, I threw it down overwhelmed by anger and disgust. It would be many years before I revisited the writings of Stanley Cavell. And yet, time and again over recent years I have been drawn back to these very writings, always to the same uncanny ambivalence of repulsion and fascination.

The Rhetorical Tasks of Prefacing

According to Quintilian, who speaks from within the *sensus communis* of the theoretical and practical tradition of the 'art' of rhetoric:

> ... the sole purpose of the exordium is to prepare our audience in such a way that they will be disposed to lend a ready ear to the rest of our speech. The majority of authors agree that this is best effected in three

> ways, by making the audience well-disposed, attentive and ready to receive instruction. (Quintilian, *Inst*, IV.1.5)

Yet, the task of cultivating the good will and receptivity of an audience is especially difficult if one is intent on disrupting taken-for-granted protocols of listening and reading. In such a case the congeniality of the audience must be earned in face of an initial hostility and alienation, even 'anger and disgust'. Unfortunately, this thesis is intent on subverting the assumptions and conventions of the discourse of which it is part.

In this exordium or Preface I will work at distancing the tenor of this work from what, of course, in an institutional sense, it really is—a PhD thesis. As a genre, the PhD is defined by its centrality to modern academic disciplines as 'Fächer', which posit themselves as cultivating disinterested and true bodies of knowledge representing their respective referential fields or domains of reality. Yet, this preface works hard at voiding, avoiding and evading this condition of its own existence. It works at throwing away the institutional ladder it has deployed in order to reach a perch from which to sing its song.

In fact, although I have headed this first Part of the thesis, 'Clearing the Ground', it may have been more apt to adduce a musical metaphor and to have titled it: 'Clearing the throat, finding a voice, establishing a key', because this thesis is endlessly prefaced by extensive preparations and prefacings heralding, deferring and displacing the actual moment of utterance. However, insofar as the task of this thesis is to teach a new and different mode of 'uptake', these prefacings are not simply neurotic or narcissistic efforts to forestall misunderstanding, but efforts to conjure a different ideal reader, to invite actual readers to take up a new stance towards the games of knowledge and truth.

The PhD and Practical Discourse

The reason for the obscurity and tortuousness of this Preface in accomplishing its work is that the shift from a modernist discourse of representation with its 'knowledge' and its 'objects of knowledge' to a practical discourse of articulation with its 'interpretations' of practical life and their convergences, is not easy to attain nor to maintain. Because the dominant discourse is the discourse of representation, it is easy, especially when writing within the generic constraints and affordances of the PhD genre, to lapse back into claims to superior knowledge; for the research PhD genre evolved precisely to enact this modernist discourse of knowledge, not the practical discourse of interpretation. Thus, for this thesis, the question of style is not just a matter of textual surface, of adding a dimension of rhetorical persuasion or aesthetic frisson to a self-same underlying prose of concepts.

Queering One's Discourse

To impale the reader on the issue of the differing genres within the prose of ideas and of which reading protocols we as readers adduce to our readings, I will adduce a

lengthy and notorious passage from Stanley Cavell, the very passage that occasioned my anger and disgust, a passage which was Cavell's calculated effort at queering his discourse and thereby instructing his reader's reading of him away from a cognitivist reading and towards a more practical, perhaps even existential protocol of reading.

This Preface, however, also functions as an exorcism, as a frantic banging of lids and beating of drums, a cacophony intent on banishing once and for all the ghosts of 'representation' secreted within the pores of my own discourse, not just in the reading protocols of my reader. And yet I know that this is a forlorn hope: we cannot so easily evade the fact that we are constituted by what Gadamer terms 'the effects of actual history'. Just as we cannot make words mean whatever we like, so too we cannot control which realities or meanings are at play in our discourse and practice. I cannot predetermine the tenor or fate of this text simply by prefacing it with protestations of 'good intention' or by insisting on 'calling it (by my) names'. And yet I find myself compelled to attempt this very pre-determination.

That the discourse of modern knowledge and the PhD as a genre are mutually constitutive historical actualities is a fact, a fate. They encompass me, not me them. This I acknowledge: not with passive resignation, but as a historical reality and personal *habitus* to be continually re-worked, re-interpreted and resisted. In one sense the writing of this text is an extended Wittgensteinian therapeutic 'exercise' aimed at extirpating the metaphors of representation at work and at play within its author. This Preface is thus my impassioned (quixotic) attempt to forcibly, even violently, contribute to a re-figuring of both my own *habitus* and the conventions of the PhD as a genre by contributing to the emergence and legitimation of a different tenor in academic discourse, a tenor that is different from the 'normal' (Rorty) academic mode of address.

Ethics and Analysis

Recently I discovered that I was not alone in my response to the first two pages of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*: apparently many readers had had the same reaction. We had all experienced this passage as a calculated assault. In those days, like most of Cavell's readers, I was a student of analytic philosophy possessed by a Cartesian dream of rigor, by its ruthless exploration of essence and its obsession with necessary and sufficient conditions.[2] Yet, even though I threw myself into this game of analysis with a passion, there was another reality to which I attributed even more seriousness—the domain of the ethical. This was a domain of such seriousness and personal significance that I refused to allow it to mix with academic discourse. There was the domain of the *fach*, of theory with its commitment to the rigor of the universal and impersonal concept; and there was the domain of ethics with its commitment to personal authenticity. These two regions were so at odds and so incommensurable that I refused to study any courses in ethics, aesthetics or politics at university. The thought of sitting in a tutorial with strangers debating ethical or political issues filled me with horror. Serious 'practical' discourse was for friends, not for anyone who happened to turn up to a tutorial. I therefore only read and wrote in the fields of general philosophy and philosophy of language.

As a further illustration of how deeply internalized the split in my life between the theoretical and the practical then, was: Towards the end of my schooling I decided that religion was a matter of personal conviction, not propositional knowledge. I concluded that it was immoral to learn the answers to religious questions: they should come from the heart or not at all. They certainly should not be rote learnt from the catechism the night before. I therefore refused to 'study' for Religious Instruction exams with dramatic effects: I plummeted from the top of the class to the bottom and was hauled before the principal of the school to be rebuked. It was, if you like, my first effort to confront the public world with the higher truth of 'the self', my first conscientious objection. (Cavell would see it as perhaps no accident that I was devouring *The Collected Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* that year.)

Two Orders of Accountability

This clash between two orders of accountability was exacerbated by the culture of conviction cultivated by the student protest movement, the counter-culture and the New Left in the 1970s. Eventually I abandoned academic life. (For the record: the final straw was a shift in the paradigm from the analytical rigor of British Aristotelianism and Kantianism [think Ryle and Strawson] to the bizarre interweaving of logic, behaviourism and constructivist pragmatism of the Americans [think Quine]. In fact I found the prose and reasoning of Quine so arbitrary and strategic, that is, so pragmatic, that I realized the philosophical culture had changed into something in which I could no longer find myself.)

Clearly, my habitation with these competing orders—an order of the objective and an order of the subjective, the domain of persons as end in themselves and the domain of persons as institutional instruments and roles, between culture and society, between the private world of creativity and freedom centred on 'the work of art', and the public world of 'the system' of convention, rules, obligation, norms, regulation, and law—was not a personal psychic idiosyncrasy, but my inhabiting of the social order of liberalism itself. This *habitus* was intensified by a schooling that created a 'doubled subject'. As someone being initiated into literate modes of colonial and cosmopolitan forms of life far beyond the ken of my immediate family and community, and as a boy in a boarding school conducted according to the disciplinary (Foucault), the sense of an alienation between the charged and meaningful world of the individual on the one hand and the mundane, arbitrary accommodations of institutions on the other, was absolutely palpable to me. Crudely: the only place you could be free was to invent a personal world in your own head and inhabit it. These worlds were to be found in the worlds of books. By entering the world of books you could escape the determinations of place and time anchored to the institutional body.

Reprise

Twenty-five years later I find myself still worrying at these same issues, but now Cavell's prose looks differently to me. Now that I too am trying to knead my

thoughts into the protean generic constraints of a PhD, I find myself 'understanding' what Cavell was worrying at all that time ago. Wittgenstein once said of his own work that his writings were probably only understandable by someone who had already had similar thoughts. Let's take 'similar thoughts' to mean 'similar worries' and say: I now understand Cavell better because or insofar as I now share what he was worried about back then.

So, what are these worries that Cavell had back then and that I now also experience? They are issues to do with mode of address in philosophical discourse. They are issues such as: is philosophical discourse merely academic discourse, the discourse of a *Fach*, or is it something different? And if (like Cavell or myself) you don't wish to construe philosophical discourse as simply a discourse of cognition, a theoretical discourse—if you believe that it is also a practical discourse, a discourse of ethics, of politics, of responsibility, of living, a discourse that is claimed by and projects a claim that is 'more than' the expression of a doctrine or theory within a discipline within the academic division of labour that is the modern university—how should you write? How should you present yourself? How should you frame the authority of your discourse? In short, *who do you think you are?* And *what do you think you are doing?*

Cavell's Opening Passage

So, let's look back to that passage that was so offensive to me along with so many others—the first two paragraphs of Cavell's *The Claim of Reason*:

> If not at the beginning of Wittgenstein's late philosophy, since what starts philosophy is no more to be known at the outset than how to make an end to it; and if not at the opening of *Philosophical Investigations*, since its opening is not to be confused with the starting of the philosophy it expresses, and since the terms in which that opening might be understood can hardly be given along with the opening itself; and if we acknowledge from the commencement, anyway leave open at the opening, that the way this work is written is internal to what it teaches, which means that we cannot understand the manner (call it method) before we understand its work: and if we do not look to our history, since placing this book historically can hardly happen earlier than placing it philosophically; nor look to Wittgenstein's past, since then we are likely to suppose that the *Investigations* is written in criticism of the *Tractatus*, which is not so much wrong as empty, both because to know what constitutes its criticism would be to know what constitutes its philosophy, and because it is more to the present point to see how the *Investigations* is written in criticism of itself: then where and how are we to approach this text? How shall we let this book teach us, this or anything?
>
> I will say first, by way of introducing myself and saying why I insist, as I will throughout the following pages, upon the *Investigations* as a philosophical text, that I have wished to understand philosophy not as a set of problems but as a set of texts. This means to me that the

contribution of a philosopher—anyway of a creative thinker—to the subject of philosophy is not to be understood as a contribution to, or of, a set of *given* problems, although both historians and non-historians of the subject are given to suppose otherwise.—And is the remark about texts and not problems itself to be taken as a philosophical text? It seems argumentative or empty enough, since obviously not all texts are philosophical ones, but only those that precisely contain problems of a certain sort!—The fact that the remark is short would be no bar to that status. Many philosophical texts are short, like the tattle tale told by a Cretan, or the story about the tree falling in the forest for no one to hear. Some philosophers are able to make about anything into a philosophical text, like a preacher improving upon the infant's first cry; while some people are not even able to start a quarrel with God. Some texts are as long as long books, but generally treated as though they are sets of given problems, something between conundrums and formal arguments, e.g. Hume's *Treatise*, which few seem actually to believe but which many feel compelled to try to outsmart; as if so *much* argument just oughtn't to stand unanswered; as if to contribute a text were a kind of defacement; as if argumentative victory *consisted* in spoils. Some philosophical texts are as short as short books, e.g. Descartes' *Meditations*, which so refines our essential options for philosophical belief that thinkers have seemed, since its appearance, and whether invited or not, compelled to reply to it; as if so *little* argument just oughtn't to stand unanswered. When its conclusions have seemed more or less disreputable its repliers have focussed on its 'methods', hoping to head the conclusions off, or outnumber them. But I think one feels the knack of the methods (call it the arrogance) to be missed, which is no doubt something that perpetuates fascination with this text; as though its repliers find it incredible that one could, truly and legitimately *use oneself* (clearly and distinctly) in arriving at conclusions so strange and so familiar. But in philosophy to find that position incredible may well amount to disbelieving that one could oneself contribute a philosophical text. Some philosophical texts are for practical purposes as unending as the writing of, for example Kant or Hegel, where the problem resides largely in mastering the text itself, hence in commentary; as though if one could believe *all* of it there would from then on be no isolating problems of belief left. (So Kierkegaard condemned the system; so Nietzsche condemned it). Here contribution consists in opting to be marginal (which is of course not the only way of *being* marginal.) (You may think of these instances as beginning a budget of philosophical genres or paradigms. Then someone will think that I have been arrogantly neglectful of the genre of the academic paper, modest in its aims, content with its minor addition to a subject greater than itself. About the comparative greatness of the subject over its subjects I have no doubt. But I would be more than convinced of academic modesty had I not seen many who are daily surprised that, for example, Descartes or Pascal or Rousseau, or the

> spirit of religion or of rationalism or of romanticism, has survived the criticism fashioned in their essays on the subjects a few years back. I speak of professional lives, frightening matters.) (Cavell, 1979, pp. 3–5)

As you can imagine (if you survived the reading of it), this opening is deliberately crafted as a provocation to the tradition of analytic philosophy, which at the time was smugly ensconced in English-speaking universities. It provoked the predictable response. 'Anyone writing like this is obviously a poseur, an amateur, someone displaced from a literature department; they are clearly not a philosopher within the modern progressive discipline of philosophy.[3] If this is meant to be serious academic writing, where is the overview? Where are the Topic Sentences? Does this Professor of Philosophy from Harvard really know what he is talking about?'

Provocation, not Propositions

At first blush, such a mode of writing is outrageous—it is common knowledge that that first sentence consists of two hundred and sixteen words—yet on closer examination it is absolutely faithful to its own understanding of what a philosophical text is. If we glance back to the dedication page of *The Claim of Reason*, we find a citation from Ralph Waldo Emerson:

> Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul.

'Provocation' not 'instruction': a discourse that does not so much try to tell the reader what to think, but one that *makes them think*, provokes them into thinking (their own thoughts). Dialogue: not as agreement or consensus but as mutual provocation. Discourse: not as excavating the same ontology but as provoking the reader into grasping their own subjectivity, their own responsibility, their own world. Obviously we have here a mode of address from the same family (of philosophical genres) as Socrates' dialectic or Kierkegaard's mode of indirect address, a form of address intent on provoking subjectivity rather than imposing system or dogma.

Generic Constraints

I have often wondered at my 'cruelty' in subjecting the reader to this long and torturous passage from Cavell. This insistence I initially experienced more as a compulsion than as a rational or justified choice. My feelings fluctuated widely and wildly: sometimes taking the form of resentment ('Take that, you academically ensconced PhD marker!'). Even so, I felt that citing the passage was not merely a matter of personal feeling or private revenge. My reluctance to cut the quote was vindicated by a recent reading of Amelie Oksenberg Rorty's 'Experiments in Philosophic Genre: Descartes' *Meditations*' (Rorty, 1983). In this article Rorty explores the contrast between philosophy as a 'precision of argument' and philosophy as a 'rhetoric of persuasion'. She marks a distinction between academic philosophy written 'like scientific writing ... in the "article" mode' and 'those of us who realize

that any serious philosophic enterprise is, whether we like it or not, implicitly a moralizing one'. But these latter (which includes of course Cavell and myself):

> ... place ourselves in a delicate and ambiguous position. Though normally addicted to self-referential issues, we philosophers have avoided openly discussing our own problems of style and genre, taking evasive action to assure respectability by following pervasive fashions. And not without reason: To whom can we speak about the difficulties of stylistic choice, and in what voice. (Rorty, 1983, p. 547)

Need I say that Cavell's opening paragraphs precisely are intended to plunge the (philosophical) reader directly and inescapably into the question of genre, style and voice. And I have adduced *his* beginning as *my* beginning to also openly foreground these issues of style, voice and address, rather than evade them in the interests of respectability.

The Ancient Genre of Meditation

Rorty interprets Descartes' *Meditations* as an appropriation of traditional meditation genres. She notes how Descartes re-works the genre in order to substitute an intellectual transformation for the older Stoic transformation of the self. But what interests me at this juncture is that there is a common narrative movement in meditations as a genre, whether they be what Rorty terms 'ascensional' or 'penitential'. Ascensional mediations draw on neo-Platonic metaphors regarding light and illumination and the gradual clarification of a mind that has 'forgotten' what it somehow already knows. Penitential meditations, by contrast, construe the reader as not merely confused or uncentred, but as 'fallen', as 'perverse'. Such a condition calls for more radical provocations on the part of the writer. 'When the reader-penitent is unaware of his fallen condition, he must first be brought to a state of despair'.

It is with this insight that I now understand my compulsion to include such a cruel quotation. Rather than simply an exercise in resentment, my use of this quote is a move in a traditional philosophic genre. It was this compulsion I was subject to. The quotation is intended to bring the reader to 'a state of despair'. It is the modern counterpart to ancient *ascepsis* as an essential hinge in the transformation of the self through philosophic practice (Hadot, 1995).

Two Forms of Penitential Meditation

However, Rorty addresses something further that is pertinent to the endless prefacing enacted in this thesis. She writes:

> [T]here are two versions of the penitential meditation. In the first, all the stages leading to the true self are transcended, the ladder is kicked away at the end. The new person bears no continuous relation to the old, not even to the self who undertook the penitential quest: everything about the past self, even his motives for seeking the Way, is suspect and must be

> abandoned. Even when such a penitential meditation is intellectual rather than passionate or spiritual, skeptical cleansing is only provisional. Once truth has been found, and skepticism reveals itself as self-destructive, skepticism can be abandoned. But in the second version of the penitential mode, all the stages of the penitential quest are continuously preserved, continuously reenacted. Even the mediating skeptical ascepsis, the cleansing of error, is always still required, even after the self is transformed, fully realized. (Rorty, 1983, p. 552)

The inability of the second mode of penitential meditation to throw away the ladder of epistemological scepticism and to get on with the task of picturing the true, perfectly captures my own compulsion to keep the question of textuality alive, my inability to pass beyond it to the 'self-certifying criterion' of modern philosophical discourse. It also accounts for my ambivalent nods in the direction of Derrida. Clearly he is lodged inextricably in this second version of penitential meditation: he spends his entire effort demonstrating that we cannot step off the ladder onto stable or common ground. We are forever 'in process', climbing the ladder of sceptical *différance*, never to arrive. Again, what can I say? I recognize myself hovering (stranded?) between these two versions, or uses, of scepticism: one, as a preliminary purging phase in a larger movement of thought; the second, as an unavoidable condition inf(l)ecting all human thought (and action).

The Language of Cavell

Now for some comments on the language of this passage from Cavell. Surely you could not have missed all the appositives (the 'as if's); all the bracketed asides and Cavell's own strange use of the dash at the beginnings of sentences; the sheer length of some of the sentences and the shortness of others; and the systematic ambiguity of the deictic in phrases such as 'this work', 'this book': is it our reading of Cavell or Cavell's reading of Wittgenstein? and so on. Here, we have a prose that straddles the boundary between philosophy and literature, between a discourse of reason and a discourse of life, between the grammar of writing and the grammar of speech. In writing of this order the difference between a reality existing prior to the writing (writing as *Nachbild*) and a reality being enacted (produced, provoked) by the writing itself (writing as *Vorbild*) seems to blur.

Notice also the liberal deployment of 'I'. There is nothing impersonal, no offer of a universal subject position for the reader to assume or take up here. Rather, the self of the text seems deliberately 'provocative' and challenging. Clearly, Cavell is insisting that we are not going to come away from reading his text with any 'clear and distinct' propositions or professional concepts. Right at the beginning he is giving us a reading lesson about how, or rather how not, to read his work. This reading lesson is not a matter of communicating facts about the reading process, nor a matter of specifying a theory of reading, but more a matter of forcing a mode of reading on us by blocking our familiar strategies of reading such as looking for the concepts or the causal relationships between the facts. Cavell disables our

normal modern modes of reading, let's call it factual or cognitivist reading. It was this that provoked my refusal to continue reading twenty five years ago.

How to Read

Instead of expounding or justifying a theory of reading he thematizes the very issue of 'how to approach or begin reading a book' by talking about how to read Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. But of course this is allegory, an indirect way of instructing us how to read his own book, *The Claim of Reason*. In both cases, 'the way this work is written is internal to what it teaches, which means that we cannot understand the manner (call it method) before we understand its work'. In other words, both texts are intent on teaching new modes of discourse, new ways of reading and writing, and thus new ways of being (who we are) by recalling (re-collecting, re-finding, remembering, reaffirming, rearticulating, revisioning, revising) what matters most to us (the contours of the world we live in). Both want to teach us, want us to learn, 'how to be' as much as 'how things are'. Both want to teach us that 'how things are' is a matter of 'how we are'. The world disclosed to us is internally related to our mode of Being-in-the-world, and this is not a matter of Consciousness. These matters are not amenable to straightforward deliberation or will power. We cannot change our modes of reading and writing just be trying. We have to be drawn, seduced, provoked, into the play of these reflective modes of literacy, usually by a teacher or writer.

But notice the careful staging of all this. The first paragraph does not have a single 'I' in it. It is all 'we', 'we', 'we':

> If not at the beginning of Wittgenstein's late philosophy, since what starts philosophy is no more to be known at the outset than how to make an end to it; and if not at the opening of *Philosophical Investigations*, since its opening is not to be confused with the starting of the philosophy it expresses, and since the terms in which that opening might be understood can hardly be given along with the opening itself; and if **we** acknowledge from the commencement, anyway leave open at the opening, that the way this work is written is internal to what it teaches, which means that **we** cannot understand the manner (call it method) before we understand its work: and if **we** do not look to our history, since placing this book historically can hardly happen earlier than placing it philosophically; nor look to Wittgenstein's past, since then **we** are likely to suppose that the *Investigations* is written in criticism of the *Tractatus*, which is not so much wrong as empty, both because to know what constitutes its criticism would be to know what constitutes its philosophy, and because it is more to the present point to see how the *Investigations* is written in criticism of itself: then where and how are **we** to approach this text? How shall **we** let this book teach **us**, this or anything? (Cavell, 1979, my bolding)

We are seduced into a community of consensus, although we also feel as if we are being spun around too fast and getting dizzy. We suspect we are being bullied. Suddenly, in the second paragraph, Cavell dramatically shifts footing and takes up

a new subject position: he backs off from speaking on our behalf, on behalf of a community and institutes a distance between himself and the community in general. He becomes an 'I'.

Community and Responsibility

Yet notice the irony in the way he uses 'I' four times to 'take shots' at academic discourse:

> About the comparative greatness of the subject over its subjects **I** have no doubt. But **I** would be more than convinced of academic modesty had **I** not seen many who are daily surprised that, for example, Descartes or Pascal or Rousseau, or the spirit of religion or of rationalism or of romanticism, has survived the criticism fashioned in their essays on the subjects a few years back. **I** speak of professional lives, frightening matters. (Cavell, 1979, my bolding)

Again, provocation! In the very act of insisting that the community of philosophy is prior to the individual philosopher, even to Wittgenstein, he uses the first person! He could have written:

> Undoubtedly a subject is greater than its subjects.

Instead he writes:

> About the comparative greatness of the subject over its subjects **I have no doubt** (my bolding).

Using Halliday's (1985) linguistic categories, it is clear that the normal unmarked word order of this sentence has been reversed to place the 'I have no doubt' in the NEW position at the end of the sentence. The focus of the sentence is thus on *his* assessment, *his* judgement, *his* playing 'critical subject' over against the impersonal and anonymous *Fach* of philosophy. What the one hand gives, the other takes back! In the act of acknowledging the priority and authority of the discipline (objectivity, the universal), he simultaneously makes it clear that it is he, *Cavell*, who is saying this; it is he, *Cavell*, who makes this judgment. He is playing with us! What does he really think? He is toying with us! What do we think? He is just being provocative! But: is it or isn't it? Is the community of philosophical discourse prior to its subjects or not? What do you think? What do *you* think?—Gotcha! This is a prose intent on provoking its reader into thought, not just in the sense of entering into a discourse community but even more in the sense of taking up a new stance towards oneself and one's ways of discoursing. It is a prose of discomfort, a prose that sets out to disturb and disrupt 'where you're at', rather than seduce (persuade, reason) you seamlessly into a new view.

Disciplining the Reader

Notice that this form of address clearly transgresses both disciplinary boundaries and the border between academic discourse and non-academic discourse. Whether

students (such as myself) can deploy such a prose or discourse—a post-epistemological form of discourse, a discourse that disrupts the pretensions of cognitivist discourse and its claims to expertise, a discourse that is at once provocative yet reasoning, playful yet responsible, a discourse that listens to the other in the self and the self in the other—in their PhDs (outside literature departments) without being failed, is problematic. Notice how difficult it is to read the grammar of some of these sentences—most of Cavell's and some of mine—like that last one. Notice how the passage is sprinkled with commands: 'Call it method'; 'Call it arrogance'; 'Notice …'. Again, these are highly involving and dialogic. They are ways of provoking, not just persuading. (Notice that three sentences in this paragraph—four if we include this one as well—are imperatives, commands, beginning with 'Notice'.) What sort of method is this sort of telling, a telling that uses commands instead of description and reason? What sort of discipline is such an overt discipline?

Writing and Institution

Notice how (but also notice how you noticed the 'Notice …' this time) Cavell's writing is a writing that moves to the rhythms of speech. Its grammar is as sinuous, as subtle and as extended as the grammar of speech (as analyzed by Halliday, 1987). It is a writing that seems not to care about its overall (global, generic) shape, a prose that simply follows the logic of the local, that moves forward by injecting a new spin on the preceding thought. There seems to be no clear linear direction nor transparent hierarchy of principles or levels. The clauses seem to tumble over one another, interrupt one another, compete with one another.

It is as if this writing is no longer answerable to an institutional setting or the constraints codified in the structures of academic genres. It is as if it has escaped from the ordinary institutional imperatives of academic discourse. There is no clear demarcation between language and meta-language, between the world of objects and the interpretations of those objects, between things and discourse. The order of things and the order of discourse are construed as mutually constitutive. There is no clear distinction between the order of concepts and the order of facts, between the order of principles and the order of instances, between the order of universals and the order of particulars, between the order of ideas and the order of examples, between the order of meanings and the order of events, between the order of reality and the order of discourse, between the order of assertion and the order of commentary, between the order of discourse and the order of meta-discourse, between the order of content and the order of logic, or between essence and form.

Philosophy as a Kind of Writing

Whereas cognitivist writing is strictly organized in terms of 'relationships of content'—Halliday's (1985) external conjunction—, and adversarial writing is organized in terms of 'reasons for saying'—Halliday's (1985) internal conjunction—, this mode of writing (whose? Wittgenstein's? Cavell's? mine?) is looser. It is a discourse that constructs its present and future as growing reflectively out of its past. It is a

discourse that does not so much try to discover the new as re-appropriate the past as a resource for making meaning in the present. It does not move on to new topics as an opening up of new worlds but as new ways of making meaning out of its own resources, new ways of weaving the resources of its existing habitat and *habitus*. The emphasis is on adjusting and reworking earlier meanings whether they are the meanings of ego or meanings of alter. The focus is on trying to unpack, to clarify, to articulate, to reactivate, to re-gloss communal meanings. There is no claim to finality or mastery, but rather a claim to awakening which is at the same time a claim to participation. Cavell himself constantly problematizes and thematizes his own prose and its mode of address. He is textually self-conscious. For Cavell philosophy is a mode of address. For Cavell philosophy is a mode of address that turns you, tropes you, that makes you think. Philosophy is a kind of writing, a writing that disrupts the normalizing communicative dimension of language as communicating a taken-for-granted content, grammar, or world. Philosophy wants to disrupt, defamiliarize that world.

Philosophy as Ergon

If philosophy is discourse, a work, that works on the reader, puts the reader to work, makes the reader work, then it cannot aspire to the modern notion of prose as the transparent communication (of facts, concepts or ideas). In a recent text, Cavell has himself thematized the mode of address of philosophical texts under the headings of 'sociability' and 'geniality' in order to open up the possibility of a writer wishing to queer their text and refuse to communicate:

> My use of 'sociality' is meant to problematize the idea of a work's 'audience', to suggest that, perhaps most definitively for romantic writing, the quest for audience is exactly as questionable as that for expression: it is no *given* set (assembly, class) of hearers or readers that is sought, or fantasized. 'Geniality' I mean to problematize the idea of a work's 'intention', or an author's taking of the reader into his or her confidence: author and reader will be like-minded if they are congeners, generated together, of one another. ... A further region of 'sociality' and 'geniality' invites (unlike 'audience' or 'intention') the issue of a text's unsociability or ungeniality, its power to repel, its unapproachability marked as its reproachfulness. (Cavell, 1979, p. 12)

Now we can begin to 'get a bead on' what Cavell is 'up to' in those first two paragraphs of *The Claim of Reason*: he is deliberately repelling, resisting, disarming, disabling a certain mode of reading, reproaching those who construe the reading and writing of philosophy that way; resisting, denying, declining, evading that sort of discourse, that sort of philosophy, that sort of thinking, that sort of life, that way of being with your self, with your life and with others, of living in that sort of world, of being that sort of person. Those like myself who were unthinkingly immersed in that life and world, the world of academic philosophy, felt baffled, hurt, rejected, angry.

Policing the Subject

But: is this mode of writing riding for a fall? Is it deluding itself? Is it dependent on the very institutional conditions it pretends to evade? Is Bourdieu right in insisting that:

> In the beginning is the *illusio*, adherence to the game, the belief of whoever is caught in the game, the interest for the game, interest *in* the game, the founding of value, *investment* in both the economic and psychoanalytic sense. The institution is inseparable from the founding of the game, which as such is arbitrary, and from the constitution of the disposition to be taken in by the game, whereby we lose sight of the arbitrariness of its founding and, in the same stroke, recognize the necessity of the institution. *Esse est interesse*: Being is being in, it is belonging and being possessed, in short participating, taking part, according importance, interest. (Bourdieu, 1983, p. 1)

Can you write like Cavell only when you are (already) a professor at Harvard? Bourdieu, Fish (1990) and Hunter all construe this sort of prose as misrecognising its embeddedness within the *Fach* of modern academic philosophy which is in turn located within that cognitive division of labour which is the modern university. I disagree; and this thesis will follow Gadamer in retrieving an older mode of discourse—practical philosophy—that underpins the disciplines of social science, the humanities and the arts, and even all social discourse and action. The Gadamerian claim for the universality of hermeneutics is at once a claim for the universality of practical philosophy and *phronesis*.

Terrain and Map

I too have been evading a mode of address that conforms with the requirements of an academic *Fach*, a prose ordered by the logical development of a central line of argument within a stable disciplinary frame. I find myself repeatedly setting off down favoured discursive paths. Yet despite my persistence, these paths will not form themselves into a linear route or highway. I feel like Wittgenstein's philosopher who comes to know a forest by continually venturing into it but always by a different path. When you do this, you develop a feel or sense of a terrain, but a sense that is below the threshold of analytic or logical articulation. It is as if knowledge of the territory is a familiarity founded on longevity and intimacy of use, not formal training into analytic modes of representation and discourse.

And, in my case, this is in fact true: I am indeed writing about matters I have not been formally or academically trained into, but they are topics I find myself compelled to revisit over and over for practical nourishment, refreshment and guidance. On these visits I typically read the textual terrain of philosophy by allowing myself to be drawn from one passage or phrasing to another as if my attention or eye is being drawn by the brightness of a flower here or the grandness of a tree root there. A reading of ex-stasis; a reading of submission, a flowing with

the text. A reading in search of what?—the flash of a metaphor or phrase. Elbow's (1981) believing game; Gadamer's *Spiel* (1989). Definitely not the detached distance of the spectator or the academic carefully and consciously noting and discursively formulating their field notes.

Reading as Practical Reflection

Reading as spiritual sustenance; reading as a gentle submission to the 'forceless force of ideas' (Habermas). Reading as the nurturing of a *Sache* (Gadamer); reading as trying to gradually find that you have forged 'natural' connections between disparate regions of meaning. Reading as the gentle interleaving of disparate discourses in mutually illuminating ways, ways that do not violently impose one on the other as meta- or master discourse, a weaving that seems to arise from and 'present' (*darstellen*) a constellation or force field, a common ground that is not purely personal nor merely conceptual, a common ground, that is *there* (*Dasein*) in our practices, a common ground that (now that we can sense it, perhaps even formulate it) allows our practices to be more themselves. Thus, a reading that is both a finding and a forging, a reading that is both a discovery and a fashioning, a reading that discloses the lifeworld of our practices and thereby enables us to reinvent these practices. Reading as reflection on *praxis*, as thinking towards *praxis*, thinking over *praxis*, thinking back across *praxis*, thinking as *nachdenken*. Thinking as reminiscence, as re-visioning, as revising, as going back over what has happened and what was said, re-encountering the contours, the terrain of possibilities and possible paths, the pervading otherness and absence inhabiting the event, its other possibilities and potentialities, its constraints and affordances, its dead-ends and its growth points. Reading as professional meditation, as ethical recollection. But not: reading as academic discourse.

The effect of such modes of reading is that ideas, as it were, can 'well up'; they are 'ready to hand'; part of a *habitus*: part of a life-world. I can speak fragments of coherent abstract discourse. Having immersed myself in a *copia* of philosophical discourse, I do not run dry of ideas. In this sense I am like a Renaissance rhetorician. But, like all Renaissance men of letters, I lack method, system or logic. My discourse is governed by an assemblage of commonplace *topoi* and tropes that 'get me by', that do the job, that allow me 'to go on' (Wittgenstein), that keep the conversation going (Rorty, 1980). Bacon, Descartes and Ramus would, rightly, dis(ap)prove its lack of rigor and clarity, its placid accommodation to the exigencies and contours of terrain and audience, its avoidance of the hard questions, its evasion of the duty to bulldoze these paths and their horizons into a single deductive highway built on unshakable foundations. In short, its refusal, or evasion, of the canons of modernity.

Practical Philosophy

Instead of Habermas' 'philosophy with a practical intent', I am suggesting a '*praxis* with philosophical intent'. Whereas Habermas imagines the relations between philosophy and *praxis* through the Kantian metaphor of the relation between the

a priori and the empirical, in which the Kantian *a priori* determines either constitutively or regulatively, I am returning to the traditional Aristotelian sense of practical philosophy as a cultivation of the *sensus communis*, as a conversation that discloses what is common, what is between us, in which we see ourselves as forming a community of practice and speech. We don't bring philosophy or theory to *praxis*. Rather, in our practicing we find ourselves reaching for theory to make sense of our practice, a *praxis* that always outreaches ourselves and our understanding, that is in its most important moments always other than us.

Later, I will adduce Gadamer's insistence that our insertion in practice (or discourse or life) is more like being thrown into and caught up in a game, a game that is not of our own choosing or making, a game in which we do not know or decide the rules but in which we can only make our moves and try to change the rules as responses to what happens, a game in which we cannot go back and start again,[4] thus a historical game constituted by events and effects that cannot be undone or reversed. I find this a more fruitful image of *praxis* and the driven-ness of our reaching for theory or philosophy as a way of trying to make sense of what we are caught up in.

Theory

But this image also makes clear why we are continually tempted by a theoreticist or cognitivist notion of theory, by a theory offering to reach beyond our situatedness and institute order and discipline for *praxis*. Hence the Kantian project of modernity. Theory as concepts for ordering (putting in order, giving orders). Theory as 'boss man'. Theory as telling practitioners what we really can or should be, what things are (called), how we should experience things, how things are, who we are, and what we are doing. Theory as legislator. Theory as ruler. Theory as 'the Subject'. Theory as and for 'the State'.

This Kantian rendering of theory will be an important locus around which this thesis will circle. It will feature as a marker, a horizon, a project signifying an inescapable temptation within practice. I will be arguing that it is precisely this modernist Kantian account of reason that must be deconstructed and replaced with a more modest, more localized and more 'in process' rendering of reason as a measure of the value or truth of practices and discourse. This Kantian moment of legislation is akin to the Gorgian moment in Plato in which Socrates demarcates between the selfless purity of his own truth-seeking philosophical discourse compared with the interested, manipulative rhetorical discourse of Gorgias. Both constitute attacks on the finitude of vernacular practices, understandings and discourses. Both posit a purer domain of reality which can be used as 'measures of accountability' in order to bring reason, order and clarity to the disorder, ambiguity and obscurity of customary ways which subsist as ontological social practices, as sensibilities and *habitus*.

Will's (1988) development of the concept of governance so that it is not confined to what he calls 'deductive governance', which is narrowly focussed on abstract written or symbolic representations of norms and practices is helpful at this point.

Will supplements the rationalism and textualism of this deductive governance with a more contextual reflexivity situated at the moment of application or use, which he calls 'ampliative governance'. Although he uses the phrase 'governance of norms', Will insists that it is imperative not to confuse what he calls 'norms' with their textual or symbolic representations. His use of the term 'norm' is intended to embody the same range and 'thickness' as such terms as 'rule' in Wittgenstein's language games, 'internal good' in MacIntyre's 'practices', 'custom' in Hegel, or '*habitus*' in Bourdieu. Will also adduces Dewey's treatment of 'habit' (including custom) in *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922) and Kuhn's (1970) notion of 'paradigms' as terms of a comparable order. So, even though a 'norm' is what serves as a guide or standard of thought and action, Will is concerned to demonstrate that norms are practical human realities that cannot be reduced to their textual, linguistic or symbolic representations, and that the governance of norms as a practice extends deep into everyday *praxis*, far beyond the self-conscious and explicitly deliberative discourse of the Kantian tribunal of 'reason' in which norms are subjected to even more abstract norms.

Philosophy is Unforgettable

Although philosophy may repudiate rhetoric and opinion (*endoxa*) as untruth, this act of rejection is itself an act that is never finalized but instead one of eternal vigilance (and I would suggest perversely that this vigil is now maintained by that wide-awake reader, Derrida). The true philosopher in modernity is the philosopher who attends to this Gorgian moment revealing it as a moment that cannot be completed, a ladder that cannot be thrown away. Philosophy is condemned to discursively articulate itself as both rhetoric and language. But for all this, Derrida does not repudiate philosophy itself, as Foucault and some of his followers have tried: Derrida is not a positivist. We will 'forget Foucault' long before we 'forget philosophy'. But of course even Foucault could not forget philosophy, no matter how far he fled. 'Final Foucault' is in fact Foucault's coming home to philosophy, to philosophy as a practice of liberty. We can never be *after logos*. We can never rid ourselves of the aspirations of philosophy, but nor can they be directly enacted as both Plato and Kant seemed to have suggested. I write 'seemed' because later we will note Gadamer's claim that there is another Plato besides this metaphysical Plato. There is also Plato the author of dialogues that in their very form undercut claims to metaphysical truth. Similarly, some commentators interpret Kant's third critique, *Critique of Judgment*, as his belated attempt to formulate a bridge to mediate between the world of the transcendental and the world of the empirical that were so severely and emphatically separated in his two earlier critiques.

Practical Philosophy: Back to the Rough Ground

The point is to deconstruct the binarisms of metaphysics, not to occupy either pole; to refuse universalizing theory, but also to refuse the monadic intuitions of situated particularity—to mobilize a different 'mixture' of truth-telling; to enact a

voice that is neither solely prophetic, solely scientific, solely bureaucratic, solely procedural, or solely reflective, a voice that reworks all of these into a more practical moment; a voice that attempts to be commensurate and responsibly worldly, without abandoning a horizon of values; a voice that is commensurate with Wittgenstein's observation on the desire for transcendence:

> ... we have got onto slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground! (Wittgenstein, 1963, para. 107)

Practical philosophy is the discipline whose historical charter is the cultivation of this rough ground, the terrain on which the written texts of legislators intersect with the reflective interpretations arising out of the situated *habitus* of practitioners. My hope is to produce a text that walks by depicting literacy practices that walk; I am too old to dream of flying any more. But surely we can walk with dignity, justice, solidarity and virtue. Walking does not only have value or meaning as the fore-runner, beginning of, precursor for, or fallen substitute for—running ... or flying.

Mundane Transcendence: Praxis or the State

Ian Hunter (1994) would insist that my text (or practice) is 'unwarranted' because these different forms of truth-telling are located within different and incommensurable 'departments of life'. Hunter, like Fish, is a high modernist, not as might at first seem, a postmodernist. Both deploy sceptical arguments to erect high boundaries between the different institutional domains of contemporary social life. The difference is that Hunter allows a mundane universal governance to 'governmentality'. Hunter's boundaries are penetrable from the side of governmentality—but not from the side of critique or cultivation. For Hunter, the State seems to occupy a worldly horizon of transcendence, if we could put it in such a paradoxical way. Certainly for Hunter, the State is not simply yet another local region of practices or institutions; it occupies a privileged position. Why? Well, not because of a originary 'social contract', nor does it seem to be because it possesses an empirical monopoly on power and violence.

Committed to assigning a historically contingent and conjunctural existence to 'the State', what can Hunter possibly say about why it possesses this privileged position, about why it should be obeyed, about why it should be able to decide education policy. In fact, what we find at this point in Hunter is a peculiar ambivalence regarding the status and authority of 'governmentality'. On the one hand, he insists its emergence is a historically contingent event occasioned by the religious wars of the seventeenth century and that an understanding emerged to institute a new form of the State that did not implicate transcendental or religious values or forms of reasoning. It was a State committed to the mundane values of life. Notice that this is not the 'neutral state of liberalism' which rejects all notions of the good, but the police state, a state committed to the value of wealth, prosperity, peace and security.

The Paradox of Boundaries

But now comes the paradox: why should we be bound by this historically contingent form of the State? Hunter might reply: because, empirically, these are our practices. But he wants to go further and say: because we can't think outside this form; because we can't be different; and, even on occasion, because we *shouldn't* think or act outside this form or constellation of practices and discourses. Now, there is always a problem with setting limits. Every child knows that a limit institutes a temptation to put your toe across the line. 'You can't think that!' 'Can't think what?' 'You can't think that critics engaged in self-cultivation should be allowed or able to criticize policies and practices of the bureau'. 'Right! Thanks for spelling out what is not thinkable. It obviously is thinkable and does make sense. So, you must really be saying: Don't (you shouldn't) think it.'

Hunter knows that transcendental arguments don't work. So, why try to hold us to some 'understanding' or 'agreement' about how to interpret the State. Of course, Hunter wants to say: 'Because they are simply and empirically the practices we have, and to attempt to leap beyond them is dangerous'. But my reply is that we are not confined to our present practices: we possess well-established reflective language games for evaluating, re-authorizing, rejecting and changing practices; critique is a key practice for examining, evaluating and changing practices of discourse or of institutionality.[5] Practical philosophy is precisely this practice of reflective governance of the interpretation, application and reformulation of norms. Practical philosophy is precisely a concern with the governance of norms when they are problematic and cannot be simply deductively followed or applied. Practical philosophy as the cultivation of practical wisdom, *phronesis*, is precisely concerned with the communal reflective formulation of normative orders and their articulation with the variety of circumstances and situations. Practical philosophy is grounded in the recognition that any symbolic formulation of a norm, especially in written language, is confined to an abstract generality in its formulation such that its interpretation and application, even its understanding, depends on a more situated mediating judgment.

Against Theory

However, what is exemplary about both Hunter and Fish is their attempt to lower the philosophical stakes, to substitute *phronesis* for frenzy, to substitute mundane, practical, and specific forms of reasoning for the constant escalation by humanism into a semi-hysterical and wholly predictable binary between instrumental reason and transcendental reason. As Foucault declared in:

> ... a document written and read by Foucault at a press conference in June, 1981 on the plight of the Vietnamese boat people: 'We must refuse the division of labor that is often proposed to us: between individuals who become indignant and speak out; and governments which reflect and act.' (Miller, 1993, p. 453)

By invoking the tradition of practical philosophy, I too wish to reject this liberal binary between individual and governmentality. The issue is whether instituting a more mundane, 'less critical' genre of discourse about education inevitably leads to a conservative valorization of the status quo. If administrative *praxis* does contain its own mode of being then, does the lowering of the temperature by Fish and Hunter in fact mean repressing or abandoning other modes of being, other values, other social goods? And where are they themselves standing in making these suggestions? Are they caught in a performative contradiction of some sort?

Hanna Fenichel Pitkin concludes her *Wittgenstein and Justice* with this reflection on the relationship between accepting the conventionality of our practices and how we should view change:

> Thus, when Wittgenstein says that our forms of life must be accepted, that is not the same as saying that our lives as we lead them must be accepted, that our ways of theorizing about them must be accepted. Rather it suggests, as Cavell says, 'that criticism of our lives is not to be prosecuted in philosophical theory, but continued in the confrontation of our lives with their necessities'. It is not that we cannot change our concepts or our habits or our institutions; but that not every change is possible, and philosophizing will not change them. If they are to change, we must change them in our actions, in our lives; and ultimately that means that we cannot change them in isolation. (Pitkin, 1972, p. 340)

Thus, one of the tasks of this thesis will be to try to forge a voice that is worldly yet does not disavow, deny or repress the desire, need or grounds for change, a voice that acknowledges the contingency and conventionality of our practices and discourses but does not resign itself to this present, thereby ascribing inevitability and necessity to the present. Being realistic does not mean being fatalistic or passive.

Audience Expectations

I am acutely conscious of the way this text must conform to the conventions and standards of academic scholarship, that it can only be responsible to its occasion by 'meeting' these standards—if possible. Yet I am also acutely sensible to the fact that this text does not describe or prescribe nor enact any new classroom procedures for ABE (Adult Basic Education).[6] Many of my colleagues would see it as a self-indulgent 'wank'; a text that is more an act of selfish masturbation than healthy communicative intercourse with a readership. Ah! there's the rub: the readership ... Just who *is* the reader of this text? Perhaps it really is only me! Perhaps the examiners of this thesis are just third parties, voyeurs, looking over my shoulder—not the imagined readership at all. Perhaps this really is just a therapeutic text, an exercise in banishing, discharging the demons, ghosts and obsessions accumulated over years of teaching. Perhaps this text is just a way of unblocking congealed

arteries and re-establishing the flow of good *phronesis* in my own practice. A retreat, a re-tread.

Of course, for ideas to function as reflection, as maxims, as resources for coping and making sense of events, as touchstones for formulating practices or actions, as horizons for orienting evaluations and assessments, as provocations to thinking—all this is one thing. But none of this adds up to a canonic academic PhD text. A modern PhD demands a central metanarrative depicting the growth of knowledge by expounding and justifying a technical metadiscourse (call it the logical form(ul)ation of concepts). So, although continually tempted by the sublime mirage of an a-modernist (pre- or post-modern) PhD, a text that systematically avoids positing an Archimedian point of view, that evades the logocentrism of 'the transparent word', the 'pure word' or 'the final word', I hereby acknowledge and pledge that I will address 'the claims of reason': the claims of coherence, consistency, evidence, and unity—just like Cavell!

Prefacing by Stealth

This thesis is, thus, my effort to 'let be' deeper horizons of answerability for our own *praxis* and discourse and for our students; horizons that are more elusive, not as readily inscribed in the form of institutional rules or boundaries. Already, I hope, you begin to sense the work of my text, the company it aspires (pretends) to keep, the words it fingers and looks to polish for reuse, the conceptual cloth it hopes to weave, the modes of reading it invokes and invites. And so, having begun with the notorious opening paragraphs of a contemporary philosophical text prefacing itself, let's retrieve an even more famous Prefacing of a philosophical text as a way of adducing the conventions and expectations of a preface and at the same time meditating on its status in philosophical prose. Here is the first paragraph of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* in which, drawing on his rigorous training in rhetoric, he discusses the paradoxicality of philosophical prefacing:

> An explanation, as it customarily precedes a book in a preface—about the purpose the author had in mind in writing it, or about the motivations and the relationships that the author sees his work entertaining to earlier or contemporary treatments of the same topic—such an explanation seems not only superfluous for a philosophical text but by the very nature of the matter even inappropriate and counterpurposeful. For the manner and the content of what could conveniently be said about philosophy in a preface—like a historical *indication* of the tendency, standpoint, the general argument and results, or like a connection between the conflicting claims and assurances about the truth—, these things cannot be valid given the way philosophical truth is to be depicted. (Hegel, 1910, p. 1)

Yet, just as Hegel is condemned to write precisely what he insists is superfluous, namely, to foreshadow the general topic, purpose, point, standpoint and relationship to other views and texts within the same domain, so too I hope I have hereby (indirectly and perversely) also fulfilled these self-same generic requirements of prefacing.

Notes

1. Aside from a few minor stylistic improvements, the Preface that follows, was written during 1994–5 and is unchanged from its final version as the preface to a PhD on Adult Basic Education (McCormack, 2000).
2. The feel of that style of philosophizing is re-captured for me in David Woods (1990) laconic remark:

   > Much of what we think of as clarity and distinctness rests on topological hygiene, on good housekeeping: tidying spaces, mending fences, defining boundaries. If it were the business of philosophy to act as an under-labourer, and perhaps site manager, for the constructions of the sciences, it might be that the guidance provided by such underlying schemas would prove invaluable. But. ... (Wood, 1990, p. xvi)

3. Different styles of prose embody different epistemological stances. In ancient poetics, Longinus nominated three prose styles: 'lofty, mean or lowly' ... The lofty prose is a prose of either the sublime intent on ecstasy or exciting and inciting an audience to passionate action. It is a prose of emotional intensity marked by what the rhetoricians call amplification, 'the rhetorical piling up of iteration' (Clark, 1957, p. 105). By contrast the lowly style is plain, simple and unadorned and thus appropriate to the statement of facts and proof. Philosophical texts especially in analytic philosophy are written in the low style, in what we would call a prosaic prose, not in a poetic prose. If we were to classify Cavell's prose (and the aspirations of my own prose in this thesis) in terms of this classical typography of three styles, Cavell is clearly subverting the genre of modern philosophy by mobilizing an elevated style marked by intensification, amplification and iteration.
4. Toulmin (1992, p. 175) notes that this:

   > ... idea of 'starting again with a clean slate' has been as recurrent preoccupation of modern European thinkers as the quest for certainty itself. The belief that any new construction is truly *rational* only if it demolishes all that was there before and starts from scratch, has played a particular part in the intellectual and political history of France. ... The most spectacular illustration of this is the French Revolution.

5. For an exemplary articulation and recognition of contemporary cultural and social movements from a perspective that, like Hunter, draws on Wittgenstein and Foucault, see Tully (1995, 1999).
6. The author was deeply involved in the conceptual, pedagogic and institutional efforts to define Australian adult literacy and adult basic education as 'second chance education', efforts that peaked in the early 1990s (see McCormack, 1991).

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