What's new?

An exercise in hyporeality

Address to
APSS 3rd. Postgraduate Students Conference

Novelty/Theory

Research without theory:

Questioning ingrained practices and the pursuit of novelty

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What's New?

(Slide1)

In academia, as in life generally, things are not always quite what they seem. A review of what we mean by theory and innovation in research suggests we need to question some of our most cherished presuppositions. Such a critical exercise invites the question: How else might we proceed? Examining precisely what it is we do—what are the actual practices we engage in while researching[1]—proves to be far less neat and tidy than the ideal models suggest. Although theory is notionally neutral and objective, we should perhaps ask: Whose knowledge this is? And for what purpose?

Why go to the trouble? For those working in the applied social sciences the practical problems often loom so large that issues of theory seem a luxury for people with nothing better to do. However a momentary consideration of that most applied of fields—economic and social development since World War II—gives grounds for pause. On balance, it seems that poor nations might well have been better off without any development aid.[2] Apart from being ineffective or counter-productive, the idea of development is hegemonic. (Slide2) And the dichotomy of theory and practice is commonsensical and so ideological (Gramsci 1999a: 773, 1999b: 432). Far from practical solutions being realistic, imperative, rational and well grounded, as the history of development shows it is all too often a self-serving excuse to avoid critical reflection and carry on domination as usual.

A clue that we need to interrogate the seemingly obvious lies in the title of the conference. Novelty, or newness, is inextricably entangled with, and is axiomatic to, not only ideas of evolution, but also capitalism. Few notions are less innocent. Mind-boggling sums of money are invested in making progress, and so newness, appear natural, normal and objective. (Slide3)

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[1] As this talk touches on a wide range of topics that cannot be covered fully in the text, I have added more footnotes and references than normal should you want to explore any of these themes further.
Granted the immense effort that goes into finding structure, system and order, and in marginalizing what does not, it is perhaps not surprising that the counter-arguments are mostly fragmentary. These latter tend to cluster round notions of 'practice' (Bourdieu 1977, much of Foucault's work), the everyday (de Certeau 1984; Lefebvre 1999, 2002, 2005; Roberts 1999, 2006), contingency (Laclau 1990), assemblages and practical metaphysics (Latour 2005) or the rhizomatic (Deleuze & Guattari 1988). Tongue-in-cheek I have subtitled this talk 'an exercise in hyporeality' in recognition of the organizers of the conference who were kind enough to cite an old piece of mine where I used the term hyporeality (1999: 136) as I way of addressing the problem of how to talk about what people do—and what they do not do—in ordinary life that effectively defies explanation.
The piece, *As they like it*, is available at: http://www.criticalia.org/Bibliography_Mark_Hobart.html.

[2] An early critic was no less a figure than the vice president of the World Bank for policy, planning and research, David Hopper (cited by Timberlake 1988). The insistence on the urgent need for practical intervention tries to sidestep and cover up economic and epistemological imperialism (Hobart 1993; Escobar 1995). The dichotomy of theory *versus* practice in its modern form is a hangover from the monastic concern with detachment from worldly matters in the European Middle Ages (Collingwood 1939: 147-67), a curious ancestry for the practice-minded to embrace.

Far from this impetus to mythicizing the new and the news being made evident, it is presented as objective.
(Slide4)
It would be comforting to think that academics stand aloof from such goings on and that the new is untainted by the news. However universities and research funding are inextricably in hock to corporate interests and government agendas. If knowledge was once a strategic resource, it is now increasingly a commodity. And objectivity is what underwrites particular class, corporate and other interests. You might recall that Althusser linked education and the mass media as key Ideological State Apparatuses (1984). It would seem that newness is not quite what it seems.

What's Theory

'Hold on', you might retort, 'you are ignoring the amazing accumulation of knowledge. We formulate and test hypotheses to produce theories which, when universal, become laws. You cannot just dismiss it like that'. But as knowledge is abstract, the image of knowledge as (ac)cumulative is itself a metaphor drawn largely from capitalism. Anyhow what is theory? It may be
(Slide5)

Until we can answer that question, talk about theory is largely empty waffle. So what is at issue?

(Slide6I)

What does the history of science tell us about theory and knowledge? Rather than a neat picture, we find a procession of ferocious disputes. The grand narrative runs that, since the Enlightenment, knowledge, driven by the rigorous application of reason, has been growing continuously. However this (ac)cumulative vision has to ignore alternative accounts. If knowledge is revolutionary, by definition it destroys what went before. Feyerabend showed that the vision of natural science as progressive or as working by the consistent use of reason according to methodological rules is a convenient, but erroneous, idealization (1975). In any event, it is questionable how far and under what circumstances you can apply assumptions about theory and method in the natural sciences to the human, or social, sciences.[3] The reason is that the latter's object is mind or, as we would now say, culture. To the extent that human thinking and acting are not reducible to natural

[3] Whether you prefer the phrase 'social sciences' or 'human sciences' tends to depend on how natural scientific you are trying to appear. As the debates relevant to this discussion emerge from Dilthey's work on *Natur- versus Geisteswissenschaften*, and as *Geist* is better glossed here as culture rather than society (on why, see Latour 2005), it seems sensible to speak of human sciences.

phenomena, then explanation must give way to understanding through interpretation: that is 'hermeneutics'.

The distinction is significant. However grand it sounds to speak of formulating and testing theory in the human sciences, quite what would it look like? What we usually do is impose some dogmatic straightjacket that poses as theory. If theory is supposed to apply universally and, if our concern is with historical or cultural variability, the search for—or, worse, the imposition of—universals, is either trivial or hegemonic. This difference in approach, even dichotomy, runs as an uncomfortable split through the human sciences, most obviously as quantitative *versus* qualitative approaches. As the implications will doubtless surface during the conference, perhaps it is as well to appreciate how incompatible their respective presuppositions are. For these are (Slide7)

(Slide8I)

Not only do we have a systematic, statistical model of information *versus* a contextually sensitive philosophy of the subject, but we live in an increasingly mediatized media world in which representation is reworked as simulation. Quantitative approaches deal in probabilities, distributions, correlations etc., which are invaluable when dealing with large populations, provided you recognize that they are models—simulations. Although it is easy and common to slither across the dichotomy, they can never tell you what any actual person or group thinks or does. Conversely, you cannot infer from knowledge of particular people or groups, however detailed, trends in a population at large. They address different questions. Whichever approach you prefer, it is best to know what its limits are.

In either case a problem arises: Whose mind is studying whose? In the human sciences we are always working across two mutually irreducible discourses: that of the researchers and that of the subjects of research. So the crucial question for any interpretive or qualitative approach is: How do you recognize and represent your subjects' discourse without reducing it more than necessary to your own? As quantitative approaches need to generalize, they have to negotiate the difficulty that they cannot easily cope with social contexts of use and culturally specific presuppositions about mind—*alias* human nature.[4] That this suits politicians as well as universities and corporations (now virtually identical) should set off alarm bells. This is where Cultural Studies' stress upon cultural differentiation according to race, class and gender (and potentially generation, religion etc.) emerges not as a sociological quibble, but as revealing fundamental issues of knowledge/

[4] 'By reducing any quality to quantity, myth economizes intelligence: it understands reality more cheaply' (Barthes 1973: 153).

power. In its strong form, it requires us not only to recognize the multiple differences that divide our subjects of study, but also what is presupposed by those who are doing the understanding. Who speaks for whom?

The answer is that, overwhelmingly, Europeans and those trained in the tradition (after all this conference is in English) decide the terms of participation. Perhaps the most developed critique of this European epistemology is from the so-called post-structuralists. Knowledge and its objects—humans, society, history—are no longer self-evident. We must ask: what are the purposes of knowledge? And whose knowledge is it of whom and for whom? What does it do?

(Slide9)

The familiar fundamentals of social scientific method—system, structure, regularity, discipline, reason, objectivity, impartiality, communicability—emerge as what intellectuals impose on the world rather than how the world is.[5]

English-speakers tend to dismiss such arguments as what you might expect from a loony Frenchman. So consider this from a hard-headed American philosopher: (Slide10)

Bearing this in mind, how would we re-read popular arguments against theory? 'Don't bother me with theory. I just want to get on with the research.' Run through Goodman, this becomes: 'I can't be bothered with what frame of reference might be relevant. I prefer to muddle along.' Run through Foucault, it reads: 'Don't ask me to think. I just want to get on being mindless violent.'

As all this is fairly abstract, more light-heartedly how does it bear on how people choose a theoretical framework?

> *Chance*: (Slide11) Chance plays a distinguished role in research, for instance Fleming's discovery of penicillin. The more rigid your framework, the more likely you are to miss revelatory contingencies. Recognizing the significance of chance events may be an imaginative way to break the stranglehold of theoretical closure.[6]
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> *Bottom feeding:* (Slide12) This common option consists of carrying on and assuming that something will come along. The theoretical stance behind this is 'realism'.[7] The philosopher R.G. Collingwood summed up this position trenchantly

[5] While Foucault concentrated on the history of practices through which certain kinds of knowledge were declared authoritative, his friend Deleuze offered a philosophical critique which, significantly, showed how thoroughly capitalism permeates what we imagine as objective knowledge (Deleuze & Guattari 1983, 1988).
[6] The role of contingency in scholarly thinking is fascinating (Peirce 1892). The European insistence upon ignoring chance in favour of system and structure dates back to Aristotle (Laclau 1990).
[7] In Roland Barthes's terms, it enshrines two of the key figures of bourgeois myth:
Tautology: 'Drama is Drama', kinship is kinship. (Barthes 1973: 151).

(Slide13)

The bureaucratic: (Slide14) Ordering and classifying are part of organized thinking. However events, actions or statements can be understood in different ways depending on the context and who is speaking. 'Order' in English means either 'the disposition of things' or 'to regulate'. In either sense ordering is an act of power. So discourse is controlled, while seeming open. Foucault listed among the procedures of classification:
(Slide15)

Pick and choose so the facts fit the theory: (Slide16) All inquiry involves selecting what shall count as evidence because you cannot study everything. (Slide17) However it is easy to pick evidence that supports your argument and to ignore or downplay what does not. (Slide18) The downside is that you never get to discover anything that is not already anticipated by your framework. This leads to:

Requiring a framework for your materials still leaves you open as to which framework to choose. There are arguably always different possible frameworks or translation manuals to explain, interpret or describe any set of events.[8] That puts the onus not on finding the right framework, but on deciding between different ones.

Depicting what you want (have learned) to see:
(Slide19)

Two of Barthes' figures of bourgeois myth are about this:
(Slide20)
(Slide21)

Be Trendy: (Slide22) It is fine to use sophisticated arguments so long as you know what you are doing. Examiners tend to become irritated though when students are trendy without understanding what is at issue (Deleuze is a favourite here), as students often invoke incompatible arguments or use terms, like 'discourse' that are meaningless without specification.

Dialogue: (Slide23) Dialogue explicitly recognizes the co-existence of two discourses, but their inseparability in research. [9]
(Slide24)

The Statement of Fact: 'The foundation of the bourgeois statement of fact is *common sense,* that is, truth when it stops on the arbitrary order of him who speaks it' (Barthes 1973: 155).

[8] The American pragmatist philosopher, W.V.O. Quine, developed this argument in a famous critique of empiricism (1953). In its full formulation, there are necessarily multiple 'translation manuals', each of which can explain the same set of facts in different ways (1960). This shifts the onus from an imaginary 'correct' way of explaining or interpreting to how you choose between different translation manuals, that is explanations or interpretations (Hesse 1978). The connection between Quine's translation manuals and Goodman's frameworks is not coincidental. Both were leading pragmatist philosophers (on which more below) at Harvard.

[9] To Bakhtin dialectics was part of abstract theorism, which foreshadows Deleuze & Guattari's criticisms of arborescent theory and system as rigid, empty and ossified.

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness—and that's how you get dialectics. (Bakhtin 1986b: 147).

(Slide25)

Examples from Anthropology

How do these possibilities work in practice? I confine myself to what I know, namely Social Anthropology and Media & Cultural Studies. No doubt you can think of parallels in your own disciplines. (Slide26I)

Traditionally, paradigmatic cases in Social Anthropology were worked out on kinship, because it was assumed to be key to social organization; and because understanding complex systems like asymmetrical prescriptive connubium was an advanced professional rite of passage. So, for decades, anthropologists went out and mapped the globe with patrilineal, matrilineal and cognatic systems, using certain early African examples. Unfortunately the early examples, often of poly-segmentary lineages, were atypical. So young researchers had to impose these or do intellectual summersaults. The distinguished Oxford professor Rodney Needham's PhD thesis was under lifetime lock and key in the Bodleian Library because he identified lineages among the Penan, who had none. A more general example of acrobatics occurred when John Embree, whose first research was on Japan, studied Thailand and, unable to find any structure, dismissed it as 'A loosely structured social system' (1950) because it lacked structure as he had been trained to imagine it.

All this presupposes we know what kinship is. Regardless, generations of anthropologists were dispatched to document it, until it was given the *coup de grâce* by a chastened Needham in a critical piece when he noted that kinship 'does not denote a discriminable class of phenomena or a distinct type of theory' (1971: cviii). Anthropologists, of course, mostly carried on happily as before. Should you think I was exaggerating about the bureaucratic, consider the famous battle between the Professor of Anthropology, Meyer Fortes, and the Reader, Edmund Leach, at Cambridge. The former had stressed the centrality of descent in kinship systems (Fortes 1959). The latter retorted that it was the alliances formed by marriage that mattered (Leach 1961).[10] Hold on! Do humans submit to structure so uniformly and unthinkingly? Does it not depend in part on context and what the participants think that they are up to? Another set piece reinforces the point. Another celebrated anthropologist, John Middleton, had advanced a classical structural-functional argument: there was a neat correlation between witchcraft accusations with points of tension in the kinship structure in East Africa (Middleton & Winter 1963). In his review of the book, Victor Turner pointed out that, if you examined what happened carefully, accusations simply did not come about that way (1964). When people were seriously ill, there was anxiety, confusion, uncertainty out

[10] The argument is not as trivial as it might seem, see Deleuze & Guattari 1988: 208-231.

of which an accusation might or might not emerge. In other words, it is easy to produce a correlation. Whether it amounts to a hill of beans is another matter.

Now let me examine one obvious way of relating quantitative and qualitative approaches using my own PhD research on a Balinese village. I did a 100% survey of kin and marriage ties and used basic statistic tests to highlight the relationship between cultural ideals and actuality. The preference was for close in-marriage with the father's brother's daughter—so within the patrilineal descent group. However its incidence was only 1.4% and marriage to almost anyone else was preferred in practice, including 5% for marriage by capture. In short, simple statistics raised questions for further examination. What was going on? It emerged that close in-marriage was largely restricted to powerful families as a public reputation-building exercise. By contrast, each marriage by capture told a different story, indeed at least two different stories. Detailed investigation—and it takes years before people will talk openly about such matters—suggested that was a different kind of public political statement: 'I can successfully defy the law and the risk of violent retaliation or death'. In the anthropological canons on Bali, such Big Man roles were unthinkable until over 30 years later.[11]

At that point however the categories themselves began to melt. It was not just that they were negotiable and contextual. In using academic ideas of structure I was committing a category mistake because Balinese were using quite different criteria to organize their lives. It was a matter of different—and incommensurate—translation manuals.[12] What makes for academic success is the approval of your peers who expect argument in familiar terms. They do not want to be told that these are largely irrelevant to how people actually set about organizing their lives. Any such acknowledgement would

[11] Only after the resignation of Suharto did scholars really acknowledge the widespread gangsterism throughout the archipelago (e.g. Schulte Nordholt 2007). As a tight reading of Balinese literature showed this to be a long-standing and obvious theme (e.g. Vickers 2005), we are reminded just how much supposedly cutting edge research depends upon what is accepted by, and acceptable to, an academic community at any moment.

[12] Worse still, it emerged that kinship might not be kinship—not just in the familiar sense of it being an idiom for something else. Long ago David Schneider had pointed out that American ideas about kinship involved singular presuppositions about nature *versus* law, substance *versus* code (1968, 1984). Balinese kin practices fitted neither the rules nor supposed structure. A close analysis of what Balinese said about 'kinship ' suggested they used a different and distinctive ontology, which juxtaposed the shared attributes by descent with a more fluid recognition of similar life experience, wherewithal, concerns and ways of behaving. If rules and structures are inherently contextually interpretable or ignorable, fundamental institutions may be ways of thinking through and arguing out who Balinese are. To reify all this as kinship, let alone quantify it, risks becoming the art of measuring mirages (Hobart 1991).

destroy the academics' sense of superiority.[13] Welcome to the violence of discourse.

Examples from Media Studies

Media studies offers a cornucopia of traps. I shall highlight three.

Confusion over the object of study (Slide27)
Omission of what does not fit (Slide28)
Closure/suturing to hide absences, weaknesses, awkward evidence (Slide29)

What is the object of media studies? Is it the media as industries, as a source of information or entertainment (whatever they are),[14] their economic impact, their roles in politics, their insinuation into public and domestic life, their supposed 'effects' as opinion-makers? Or is it as the necessary condition for modern societies, as a false public sphere, which furthers consumer capitalism? Or is it as a means for élites to reach mass audiences, as a means of interpellating people into ideology or what? The mass media being inextricable from social life, to isolate them for study requires studiously ignoring how people understand, use and articulate them. So the key terms of media studies are so vague as to be effectively empty signifiers, which are then used any which way. Without a coherent object, experts and commentators can—and do—claim whatever they like.

The resulting confusion hides how much is omitted. A good example is audience studies. If television viewers are so easily knowable and tractable, why do media corporations continue to spend large sums of money 'desperately seeking the audience'? (Slide30) Producers and commentators however need to represent something scandalously amorphous and

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[13] Research grants and promotions are rarely handed out for questioning whatever is the current hegemony. The study of pre-modern, ethnically, socially or sexually marginal people and so on usually involves what Barthes called inoculation

> which consists in admitting the accidental evil of a class-bound institution the better to conceal its principal evil. One immunizes the contents of the collective imagination by means of a small inoculation of acknowledged evil; one thus protects it against the risk of a generalized subversion (1973: 150).

A hidden evolutionary agenda is often smuggled in by which anthropology, psychoanalysis and social work function to tidy up malfunctioning parts of the project of modernity. Anthropology deals not just with the pre-modern or pre-rational and how to overcome this through development, but also with pre-modern or pre-rational residues in the modern world. Psychoanalysis deals with personal failure to comply with accepted standards of rationality. My guess is that social work, of which I know less, is again about coping with failures of the project of modernity. More dangerous is the neat naturalization of an élite whose task is to know, understand and manage the population at large under asymmetrical conditions, because the possibility is ignored that different groups within this population should interrogate what the élite is up to. Foucault's work, in his own retrospective account, consisted in 'a history of the different modes by which in our culture, human beings are made subjects'. He singled out 'three modes of objectification': objectivizing of the speaking or productive subject, 'objectivizing of the subject through 'dividing practices' and how people turn themselves into subjects through recognition of their sexuality (1982: 208).

[14] Remarkably, the term 'information' has largely been accepted as an unproblematic positivity (cf. Gleick 2011), so that the vexed issues of who represents what as what to whom on what occasion for what purpose is neatly dismissed. Entertainment is another questionable term that has been naturalized and normalized (Dyer 1992; Inden in press).

undecidable as tangible and measurable. Surveys and focus groups are arguably about masking and suturing this unknowability so as to transform audiences into the quantifiable currency of the industry.[15] A popular means of ordering the unorderable is through diagrams. (Slide31) Amusingly these tend to place what Deleuze & Guattari (1988) called arborescent—tree-like—structure on a rhizomatic maze of practices. However the discursive problem remains of what viewers and readers make of, and do with, what they watch and read.

To prevent these problems being obvious requires closure. This is where classification, quantification and the authority supposedly conferred by expertise, established canons of excellence etc. come in, wrapped up in mystifying talk of methodology[16]. (Slide32I) But whose knowledge is this? It is the account of the media producers in collusion with mass communications' researchers. How do they gain their knowledge? Researchers cannot be everywhere. What can they actually know of the practices of production, reception and use of even a single edition of a magazine or television broadcast? Intensive ethnographic research shows different people involved in production give different descriptions; while practice deviates wildly and in unexpected ways from the participants' own understandings (e.g. Kwek 2010; Chowdhry 2013). Existing representations only work by ignoring how production works in practice according to those involved in it by getting rid of the audience except as a simulacrum and by ignoring how people actually use the mass media in daily life. Welcome to hegemony on an industrial scale.

What's new?

Research students are expected to be both theoretically novel and to advance knowledge in their discipline—demands which can be confusing and stressful. What is at issue stems from perhaps the grandest of European narratives. Conventionally the Age of Enlightenment was an intellectual reaction against the authority of religion and tradition, which advocated the use of reason. It led to, or overlapped with, the rise of the European nation state, capitalism and industrialization. This narrative of evolution, progress, development and modernity[17] is widely taken as self-evident and

[15] Far from inhibiting the political and industrial manufacture of audiences, indeterminacy of representation is its enabling condition.

[16] If we treat, as I would argue we should, '-ology ' terms not positivistically, but as historical, discursive and critical, methodology means something like discourse upon knowledge about method. As generally used in the human sciences, it just means method, but sounds much grander.

[17] Modernity has different senses in history, politics, economics, sociology, let alone in the arts, sciences and religion. So speaking of modernity before explaining which discipline and set of debates is confusing and empty. In Appendix A, I note some perhaps less familiar usages. Significantly the etymology of modern is from Latin *modernus* 'of the present mode or fashion' (Skeat 1963: 382).

unquestionable except among religious fundamentalists. However it conflates different ideas. Evolution merely implies change, not progress. Darwin himself confused them when he wrote:

(Slide33)

> As Steven Jay Gould remarked, that statement 'expressed Victorian social preference more than nature's record'.[18] Evolution-as-progress is much mythologized. Consider: 'Free-market capitalism, based on private property and peaceful exchange, is the source of civilization and human progress' in a piece entitled 'Why capitalism is worth defending' (Gregory 2011) or the title 'Why There Is No Human Progress without Capitalism' (Powell 2012). Both, from right-wing American institutes, read as declarations of belief.

This articulation between capitalism and progress is key. (Slide34)

As capitalism becomes increasingly consumption-oriented, the pseudo-commodity being transacted is newness in a

(Slide35)

Lipovetsky's point is the 'new' is a synonym for ephemeral.[19] As universities, research and scholarship is increasingly co-opted by, and becoming a branch of, corporate capitalism, what exactly are demands for novelty and innovation about?[20] (Slide36I)

Much hangs on a word. 'New' in English implies recent, modern, unused, fresh, unaccustomed. Its antonym is 'old'. 'Novel' suggests 'a new kind or

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[18] Gould effectively dismisses many of the misunderstandings about evolution as well as the anthropocentric conceit that humans are central to the process.

> Three billion years of unicellularity, followed by five million years of intense creativity and then capped by more than 500 million years of variation on set anatomical themes can scarcely be read as a predictable, inexorable or continuous trend toward progress or increasing complexity (Gould 1994).

[19] The original title of Lipovetsky's discussion of the rise of consumer capitalism was *L 'Empire de l' éphémère* (1987), which translates as *The Empire of the ephemeral*, a far more ironic and thought-provoking expression than its prosaic translation as *The empire of fashion* (1994).

[20] Just to clear the air at this point, research students may be intimidated when people talk authoritatively about contemporary society as 'postmodern', as if it had some clear referent. While attributions of being postmodernist are rife, like witchcraft accusations, they are almost always made about someone else. To date, my colleagues and I know of only one person who admits to the charge: Gayatri Spivak. Slavoj Zizek once neatly summed up the issue by noting that *Film Noir* and Postmodernism comprised a perfect Hegelian dialectic. *Film Noir* was an American cinematic practice theorized by the French; whereas Postmodernism was a French intellectual practice theorized by the Americans. French scholars, he argued, had no idea what the Americans were talking about. Consider Baudrillard's response to being asked if he were the 'high priest of postmodernism'.

> Before one can talk about anyone being a high priest, one should ask whether postmodernism, the postmodern, has a meaning. It doesn't as far as I am concerned. It's an expression, a word which people use but which explains nothing. It's not even a concept. It's nothing at all. It's because it's impossible to define what's going on now, grand theories are over and done with, as Lyotard says. That is, there is a sort of void, a vacuum. It's because there is nothing really to express this that an empty term has been chosen to designate what is really empty. So in a sense there is no such thing as postmodernism (Baudrillard 1993: 21-22).

Let us leave it, like witchcraft, as what others do, an accusation.

nature; strange; hitherto unknown' (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Another relevant, but complex, term 'original' implies created or invented by someone, not imitative or derived. Whatever its other possible senses, 'new' is widely predicated of purchasable goods[21] and carries consumer capitalist connotations of value, desirability and progress. New cars, new electronic devices and so on are either just recently produced, previously unused or a modification within a template, as in: 'New, Improved'. They are not novel though and certainly not original. So we might ask in what sense we are dealing with the new rather than a novelty effect—i.e. a simulation? (Slide37I)

If modernity presupposes progress as its ideal, it follows creativity is about imagining something new. This is not universally the case. The Amerindian Piaroa, by contrast, treat an original dreamtime as ideal; so creativity consists of shamans re-imagining this former time through dreams. Indian cosmology depicts not progress, but degeneration, from an age of order and virtue to social breakdown and vice that characterizes the present *Kali Yuga*. It would be facile though to dismiss such accounts as the nostalgia for tradition against which modernity struggles. At least in Indonesia, the point in portraying an ideal world, for example in theatre or film, is not whether it is the past, present or future, but that it sets a standard against which to evaluate the conduct of present rulers and populace. So creativity involves reimagining the past more perfectly. What is portrayed is not new, but it may well be highly original. Creativity and originality is a function of a cosmology, not an unproblematic essence.

Theory as practice

My argument so far might seem needlessly destructive. An idealized model of theory in the natural sciences stripped of its constitutive practices cannot simply be exported to the human sciences any more than the new is necessarily good. My purpose is to clear the air. Let us start at the beginning. What do university regulations governing examination say about what constitutes a good PhD? According to the University of London: (Slide38)

> A thesis shall form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power; and be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument (See Appendix B).

The regulations go on to specify what is required, such as a critical assessment of the relevant literature and an understanding in depth of the

[21] *New* is most aptly applied to such things as may be permanent or durable, as *new* houses, *new* buildings, *new* clothes, and the like; in such cases it is properly opposed to the old; the term may, however, be applied generally to whatever arises or comes first into existence or notice, as *new* scenes, *new* sights, *new* sounds (Crabb 1974: 521).

field of study. The thesis should also show satisfactory literary presentation, demonstrate research skills and be of a standard to merit publication. There is no reference to theory in the entire 16-page document. And the only mention of 'new facts' is about showing originality, juxtaposed with 'the exercise of independent critical power'.[22] By contrast, the criterion 'argument' occurs four times and 'critical' six.

So what is going on? Students are bombarded with demands about theory and novelty, but the regulations prioritize skills, not abstract concepts. Are the regulations hopelessly outdated? Are its authors mad or overdue for retirement? Or do we need to rethink what we mean by theory and newness?

An answer lies in how practices of rigorous inquiry—the scientific method, if you like—came about? (Slide39I) Rejecting existing authority and received wisdom, the Cambridge scholar and jurist Francis Bacon insisted on interrogating all available evidence unflinchingly, as in a court of law. He also demanded critical reflection on the biases that we bring to thinking.[23] For the human sciences, this means we interrogate human subjects, directly or through a critical analysis of their actions.[24] So inquiry proceeds by question and answer. An answer to one question—a piece of research –is never the last word: it leads to further questions, so further answers and so on. Rather than an abstract world of theory, we have practices, here of interrogating and arguing critically, perhaps best summed up by Bakhtin's

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[22] The full document of the University of London regulations can be found at: http://www.soas.ac.uk/registry/pgresearch/essential-information/file77559.pdf. The general regulations of the University of Oxford are at: http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/examregs/24-53_General_Regulations.shtml. They are similar, if less explicit, and include no reference to theory.

[23] Bacon, a founder of natural scientific method, wrote almost five hundred years ago. His observations seem as pertinent now as then, which makes one wonder how people can talk about the inexorable progress of knowledge with a straight face. Bacon's text reads:

> Four species of idols beset the human mind, to which (for distinction's sake) we have assigned names, calling the first Idols of the Tribe, the second Idols of the Den, the third Idols of the Market, the fourth Idols of the Theatre (1802: 19-20).

These are respectively:

> Assuming human senses to be undistorted so perceiving order where it does not exist;
> Imposing personal prejudices or received ideas from one's education;
> Applying commonsense usages of words;
> Applying existing dogmas and methods.

In the present context, the idols of the market, the confusion of everyday and analytical usage of terms is apposite.

> There are also idols formed by the reciprocal intercourse and society of man with man, which we call idols of the market, from the commerce and association of men with each other; for men converse by means of language, but words are formed at the will of the generality, and there arises from a bad and unapt formation of words a wonderful obstruction to the mind. Nor can the definitions and explanations with which learned men are wont to guard and protect themselves in some instances afford a complete remedy—words still manifestly force the understanding, throw everything into confusion, and lead mankind into vain and innumerable controversies and fallacies (1902: 21).

[24] The philosopher R.G. Collingwood is perhaps the clearest exponent of this method (1939, 1940). Interrogation of past actions is possible, he argued, through critical re-enactment (1946).

approach to thinking as dialogic. Theory and newness are products of the practices of interrogating and arguing critically.

'Critical' here does not mean censorious. It is refusing to take statements about the object of inquiry—or the objectivity or neutrality of the inquirer—at face value. In the human sciences for instance, it involves inquiring how people's class and other interests affect what they say and do, not accepting these as straightforward and unproblematic. Bacon was no fool. Few have bothered to read *Novum Organum* (written almost five hundred years ago), a third of which is a forensic analysis of biases commonly found among knowing subjects—i.e. scholars. In other words, one of the founders of the scientific method recognized that good practice required rigorously reflexivity about our own social and intellectual habits. Why go to this bother? A short answer is the alternative, among other things, is what Shohat & Stam called *Unthinking Eurocentrism* (1994).[25]

We can now rewrite the idealized model of scientific inquiry in terms of practice. What I propose is hardly revolutionary. Kuhn had described normal science as puzzle-solving (1970: 35-42) and subsequently paradigms as exemplary problem solutions (1977: xix). Academic disciplines then cease to be vast authoritative monuments (a view Foucault furiously opposed) and become genealogies of debates held to be important by its members at any one time.[26] Theory then emerges as the sedimented, but contested, summary of the rules of the game, a by-product of those sprawling assemblages of arguments that constitute discussion and thinking. Note how well this fits with Foucault's pragmatist depiction of 'the progress of knowledge'. (Slide40)

Critical thinking emerges as the antithesis of authoritative enunciation or tamely accepting the established truths of any discipline. Welcome to the real world.

(Slide41I)

What difference does all this make? We can begin to appreciate that, while scholarly research and argument aims at universality, it is necessarily and irreducibly culturally and historically specific. Bacon's strictures alert us

[25] Eurocentrism is merely one form of centrism that turns much scholarship into the organized dissemination of prejudice masquerading as objective knowledge. Apart from other forms of ethnocentrism, there are closures around gender, class, gender and religion. (European scholarship is entangled with Christian theology at times to a scary degree, while pronouncing itself to be neutral and objective. For an example, see Fox 2007.)

[26] This allows recognition of the social and historical aspects of scholarly argument. Even within a single country, different universities and schools of thought emphasize which debates matter and indeed what they were about. Further, we should reasonably expect a degree of difference across countries and languages of study, which widely happens. Disciplines-as-assemblages-of-debates makes better sense of the actualities of much academic life. This account fits Bakhtin's analysis of genres as the ever-changing reflection on past practice (1986c).

to the ever-present inclination to impose our ethnic, class, gender and personal prejudices and predilections on our work. That is one reason for a dialogic approach. It challenges the inevitable tendency to select evidence that fits, which functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy. A problem of interviews, surveys and focus groups is that people inflect their responses to what they think we want to hear, or else more subtly, to what they think we are capable of grasping.[27] Dialogical inquiry requires us to treat the subjects of study as thinking reflective beings who engage with us and who may well disagree with our questions or conclusions. A strong critical approach incorporates this. So our interlocutors and critics are our subjects of study as much as are our academic peers. When we allow the former to change how we think, our research stands a better chance of being original, because the outcome cannot be anticipated by the *status quo*. By contrast, by definition, the new is inevitably old because it is judged by accepted criteria, whereas dialogic thinking is not.[28] Being original—or even revolutionary—may well emerge from critically rethinking the familiar and self-evident.

At this point method ceases to be a mechanical adjunct of theory. The quality of an argument depends on how critically it enables reflection not only on the subjects of study, but also of the researcher's presuppositions. However convenient questionnaires and surveys may be, you restrict yourself because you get answers to the questions you asked under artificial conditions.[29] Less extremely, much the same applies to structured interviews.

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[27] May I give offer an example based on my own experience after five years of field research in Bali? Checking through the transcripts of discussions with a group of Balinese, I realized that inadvertently I had asked the same question three times on successive research trips. People had given different answers on each occasion. So I asked why they had done so. There were some embarrassed glances between them before one explained. First, it depended on the context of discussion. Second, earlier on I would not have understood if they had given the full answer. In their view I was only ready now for that. In other words informants adjust what they tell you to what they think you are capable of grasping at that time.

[28] A critical dialogic approach allows differences of degree according to the nature of the research and the circumstances. So it can vary from sensitivity to what the subjects of study say that inflects the work to a strong version in which the subjects' cultural understandings require the researcher to rethink his or her fundamental presuppositions and to set out to change arguments in the discipline in question. The usual case against so doing is that it threatens to fracture the theoretical unity of the discipline. Put another way, it threatens the hegemony of Euro-American theory to which my response is: the sooner the better. I have argued for such a strong dialogical approach in my writings since 1982 (see http://www.criticalia.org/Bibliography_Mark_Hobart.html).

[29] The media scholar Krishna Sen once successfully undertook to show how inane questionnaires were by producing statistically significant agreement, then disagreement, to the same question on two successive days simply by phrasing the question differently.

Wild as it may seem, Baudrillard's comments on opinion polls and surveys squares quite closely with my experience of their use in both Indonesia and the UK.

> We will never know if an advertisement or opinion poll has had a real influence on individual or collective wills, but we will never know either what would have happened if there had been no opinion poll or advertisement.
> The situation no longer permits us to isolate reality or human nature as a fundamental variable. The result is therefore not to provide any additional information or to shed any light on reality, but on the contrary, because we will never in future be able to separate reality from its statistical, simulative projection in the media, a state of suspense and of definitive uncertainty about reality…

In my experience the more open and less structured an interview, the more it can become genuinely dialogic and so potentially template-rupturing. For this reason, focus groups become interesting directly in proportion to the degree that the participants take over and ignore the organizer.[30]

Although the framing and circumstances of research may not permit it, the method capable of producing depth of understanding and sometimes startlingly surprising results is ethnography, by which I mean not 'ethnography-lite' as imagined in most media studies, but long-term field research by participant-observation. This requires the sort of language skills and length of study that increasingly corporate capitalist universities hate, not least because the findings may well upset their neat models. (Slide42I) Obviously, as an anthropologist with eight years' field research in Indonesia, my preference for detailed qualitative research shows. Such a method is often not possible for all sorts of reasons and should not be fetishized. What is important is to be thoroughly versed in the relevant arguments in your field, to have thought through carefully what exactly is your object of study (not an easy task), then to ask pertinent critical questions, which will inevitably change as the research progresses—if they do not then something has gone wrong. What methods you use depend on the problem, not *vice versa*.[31]

What I have done is shift from what Gilbert Ryle called 'knowing that' (propositional thinking) to 'knowing how' to do, write or say something (1949), precisely the skills stressed by the University of London PhD

> This is our destiny: subject to opinion polls, information, publicity, statistics; constantly confronted with the anticipated statistical verification of our behavior, and absorbed by this permanent refraction of our least movements, we are no longer confronted with our own will…
> The beauty of statistics is never in their objectivity but in their involuntary humor.
> So if one takes opinion polls in this way, one can conceive that they could work for the masses themselves as a game, as a spectacle, as a means of deriding both the social and the political. The fact that opinion polls do their best to destroy the political as will and representation, the political as meaning, precisely through the effect of simulation and uncertainty—this fact can only give pleasure to the ironic unconscious of the masses (and to our individual political unconscious, if I may use this expression), whose deepest drive remains the symbolic murder of the political class, the symbolic murder of political *reality,* and this murder is produced by opinion polls in their own way (1988: 209-212, emphases in the original).

[30] My suspicions about focus groups were confirmed when a tree surgeons assistant working in my garden told me that he made a living from focus groups under thirty different names. He was very popular with the organizers because he could divine from experience what each wanted to hear.
Working on audiences in Bali, I often used something slightly similar to focus groups, in that people would wander in during the evenings after work, watch television programmes together and discuss them afterwards. As people came because their friends came, and I confined my interventions whenever possible to asking what they thought then leaving them to argue, group dynamics were built into what happened. I recorded discussions, so issues of power/knowledge, silence and evasion could be evaluated on playback. I do not suggest these discussions reflected unmediated reality (what would that look like?). As I became more interested in *discours*, that is how things were argued through, rather than startling conclusions that looked good when published, this suited me fine.

[31] Sometimes research students try to put the cart before the horse by starting by asking what method they should use instead of working out what is the object of study and what questions they propose to ask of it. Doing so makes as much sense as asking how to cook before deciding what dish you are planning to make; or whatever the task deciding to use a can-opener, whether or not you are opening a can, mending a fuse, repairing a car or whatever.

regulations. We are invited to *do* theory rather than just talk about it.[32] In other words, you learn a whole raft of skills from how to read and how to write to how to argue, how to examine an argument critically to how to present and defend work. Thinking is an assemblage of activities without end. A thesis does not conclude reflection on a topic: it opens up new questions and so new research.

An example may help. A very bright Indian Master's student in Media & Cultural Studies wanted to do a PhD on terrorism. I advised against. At that time everyone wanted to study terrorism. So he was unlikely to get a grant. Anyhow the notion exemplifies Bacon's Idol of the Market: it might be fashionable but it was not a coherent object of study. I suggested instead that he research fear or, to be more specific, how fear is articulated by the English-speaking mass media in India. We took it that, for the purposes of research, fear is not a pre-existing universal, but is in significant part the outcome of practices of articulation. Ethnography was the obvious method. Then we had to decide upon suitable research locations. Men's and women's magazines, as well as print and broadcast advertising, offered a neat comparison. The student then had a brilliant idea, namely to train as a crime reporter to see how journalists set about representing crime, who their intended readers were, what effect the writers wanted to have on them, how they inflected the stories etc. The examiners were suitable impressed by the resulting thesis.

My conclusion is brief. The problems of research in the human sciences are different and in many ways more complex than in the natural sciences. Quantum physics apart, their objects of study are relatively unaffected by being studied; they lack intentionality and their own, distinctive ideas about what they are doing and why. They do not endlessly vary what they do historically or culturally; nor is what they do often so undecidable.[33] It is unhelpful to take ideal models of natural scientific method, carefully stripped of all the constitutive social and cultural practices of interrogating, doubting, interpreting and so on as a realistic guide to how human science works. What

[32] In Appendix C, I include the questions and topics that we require PhD students to address in their first year examination and in the final thesis. You may want to consider these in your presentations.

[33] The example of the unconscious shows how messy things are. Either we are committed to deny its existence or we must recognize that we face a major problem with explanation. At issue are more than just the limits of the human sciences.

> Sigmund Freud often remarked that great revolutions in the history of science have but one common, and ironic, feature: they knock human arrogance off one pedestal after another of our previous conviction about our own self-importance. In Freud's three examples, Copernicus moved our home from center to periphery, Darwin then relegated us to 'descent from an animal world'; and, finally (in one of the least modest statements of intellectual history), Freud himself discovered the unconscious and exploded the myth of a fully rational mind. In this wise and crucial sense, the Darwinian revolution remains woefully incomplete because, even though thinking humanity accepts the fact of evolution, most of us are still unwilling to abandon the comforting view that evolution means (or at least embodies a central principle of) progress defined to render the appearance of something like human consciousness either virtually inevitable or at least predictable (Gould 1994: 14).

I have tried to do here is to move from idealized accounts to outline research as an assemblage of practices around questioning, thinking, arguing and understanding. This approach is known philosophically as pragmatism.[34] It has nothing to do with its common sense usage—'Oh! I'm just being pragmatic'. That is the diametric opposite because it does not just flirt with but wallows in ideology, and accepts an idol of the market uncritically.[35] The genius of Gramsci's idea of hegemony is that it showed how people willingly, even enthusiastically, collude in the conditions of their own domination. Novelty all too often imposes a capitalist articulation of progress and improvement, so disarticulating alternatives. Not only is it palpably unsustainable as the earth's resources run out, but this utopian vision is rapidly becoming dystopian. These problems are highlighted by theory, insofar as it means critical argument. However theory in academia, as Deleuze & Guattari argued (1988), almost invariably involves hierarchy, discipline (note the double sense), system, structure, linearity, narrative, closure as against openness, uncertainty, indeterminacy, multiplicity, connectivity and nomadic mobility. By unquestioningly submitting to enunciations about theory, students conspire in their subtle, but effective, hegemonizing.[36] If that possibility does not appeal to you, now might be the moment to start becoming critical. (Slide43I)

[34] Pragmatism is usually associated with the American philosophers Charles Sanders Peirce, William James and John Dewey, and later Quine, Goodman and Rorty. However most of the philosophers cited here have explicitly or implicitly argued a pragmatist case from Collingwood to Foucault and Deleuze.

[35] The etymology of 'critical' is from 'crisis'. Usually only when you hit a crisis do you stop and wonder whether you were approaching things the right way. Insofar as you find yourselves in crisis over your research, this might be a good time to be critical of what you have been doing.

[36] Deleuze & Guattari have argued that what we usually know as theory is closed, hierarchical, exclusive and authoritarian. They use the metaphor of a tree by contrast to a rhizome which is, they argue, how much of interest happens in practice.

> Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers of signifiance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths. This is evident in current problems in information science and computer science, which still cling to the oldest modes of thought in that they grant all power to a memory or central organ.

By contrast

> a rhizome ceaselessly establishes connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles (1988: 16, 7).

Appendix A: the many senses of Modernity

Modernity or 'the modern'—and so, concomitantly, 'the postmodern'—have a variety of different references. So it is important to recognize that assertions about modernity or postmodernity that do not specify which sense or intellectual debate is at issue are pretty vacuous. Among these debates are the significance of the modern considered epistemologically as claims for reason as against religion and superstition, as fundamental to the development of the natural sciences or as styles of thinking about polities and politics. The term is also used to designate distinctive economic, political and social complexes linked to the rise of the nation state, capitalism, industrialization, mass society, mass communications and globalization. In Art, modernity has different senses, among which one—the ephemeral and contingent—is significant because it echoes at least one definition (Lipovetsky's above) of the hypermodern. Many Cultural Studies scholars, however, question such accounts of the grand narrative of Western reason-driven progress and advancement, and the triumph of capitalism, as ethnocentric. Granted how high the stakes are, it is perhaps wise to inquire in any instance into who is claiming such knowledge, its purposes and who its intended audience is.

Some senses of modernity

Arts	Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable.	Baudelaire 1972: 403.
Socio-logy	[Modernity] is associated with (1) a certain set of attitudes towards the world, the idea of the world as open to transformation, by human intervention; (2) a complex of economic institutions, especially industrial production and a market economy; (3) a certain range of political institutions, including the nation-state and mass democracy.	Giddens, 1998: 94.
Philo-sophy	The essence of modernity can be seen in humanity's freeing itself from the bonds of the Middle Ages in that it frees itself to itself… the modern age has, as a consequence of the liberation of humanity, introduced subjectivism and individualism. But it remains just as certain that no age before this one has produced a comparable objectivism, and that in no age before this has the non-individual, in the shape of the collective, been accorded prestige. Of the essence here is the necessary interplay between subjectivism and objectivism.	Heidegger 2002: 66

Philo-sophy	In modernity… religious life, state, and society as well as science, morality, and art are transformed into just so many embodiments of the principle of subjectivity [where subjectivity refers to individual autonomy].	Habermas 1987: 18
Anthro-pology	Modernity comes in as many versions as there are thinkers or journalists, yet all its definitions point, in one way or another, to the passage of time. The adjective 'modern' designates a new regime, an acceleration, a rupture, a revolution in time… the word 'modern' designates two sets of entirely different practices which must remain distinct if they are to remain effective, but have recently begun to be confused. The first set of practices, by 'translation' creates mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture. The second, by 'purification' creates two entirely distinct ontological zones: that of human beings on the one hand; that of nonhumans on the other (Latour 1993: 10-11).	(Latour 1993: 10-11).
Philo-sophy/ History	For the threshold of our modernity is situated not by the attempt to apply objective methods to the study of man, but rather by the constitution of an empirico-transcendental doublet which was called *man*.	Foucault 1970: 347
Philo-sophy/ History	Modernity begins with the incredible and ultimately unworkable idea of a being who is sovereign precisely by virtue of being enslaved, a being whose very finitude allows him to take the place of God.	Dreyfus & Rabinow 1982: 30, commenting on the above quotation by Foucault.
Socio-logy	The true revolution of the nineteenth century, of modernity, is the radical destruction of appearances, the disenchantment of the world and its abandonment to the violence of interpretation and of history.	Baudrillard 1994: 105.

Appendix B: University of London Requirements of a Thesis

4. Requirements of a Thesis

4.1. Thesis for the PhD degree

4.1.1. The scope of the thesis shall be what might reasonably be expected after three or at most four years of full-time study.

4.1.2. The thesis shall:

(a) consist of the candidate's own account of his/her investigations, the greater proportion of which shall have been undertaken during the period of registration under supervision for the degree;

[The part played by the candidate in any work done jointly with the supervisor(s) and/or fellow research workers must be clearly stated by the candidate and certified by the supervisor.]
(b) and form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power;

(c) and be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument;

[A series of papers, whether published or otherwise, is not acceptable for submission as a thesis.

Research work already published, or submitted for publication, at the time of submission of the thesis, either by the candidate alone or jointly with others, may be included in the thesis. The published papers themselves may not be included in the body of the thesis, but may be adapted to form an integral part of the thesis and thereby make a relevant contribution to the main theme of the thesis.

Publications derived from the work in the thesis may be bound as supplementary material at the back of the thesis.]

(d) and give a critical assessment of the relevant literature, describe the method of research and its findings, include discussion on those findings and indicate in what respects they appear to the candidate to advance the study of the subject; and, in so doing, demonstrate a deep and synoptic understanding of the field of study, (the candidate being able to place the thesis in a wider context), objectivity and the capacity for judgment in complex situations and autonomous work in that field;

(e) and be written in English and the literary presentation shall be satisfactory, although the College at which the candidate is or will be registered may make application for a thesis in the field of modern foreign languages and literatures only to be written in the language of study, to be considered on an exceptional basis by the Subject Area Board in the Humanities; in such cases the thesis shall include additionally a submission of between 10,000 and 20,000 words which shall be written in English and shall summarise the main arguments of the thesis;

(f) and not exceed 100,000 words; a College may prescribe a lower number in certain subject areas, which shall be detailed in the relevant College regulations;

[*Note*: the bibliography is excluded from the word count; footnotes are included within the word count; appendices are excluded from the word count and should only include material which examiners are not required to read in order to examine the thesis, but to which they may refer if they wish.]

(g) and include a full bibliography and references;

(h) and demonstrate research skills relevant to the thesis being presented;

(i) and be of a standard to merit publication in whole or in part or in a revised form (for example, as a monograph or as a number of articles in learned journals).

Appendix C: Notes for Guidance of First Year Research Students

Preparation of the Research Report

The culmination of the first year of the Research Training Programme for MPhil students is the production of a Research Report. It is the prime basis on which the Centre authorizes the student to proceed to detailed research (for example, through library research or fieldwork), and recommends that s/he be permitted to proceed to research and to be upgraded to PhD registration.

The prime aim of the Research Report is to present a lucid and cogent account of the proposed research project and the central questions it addresses, as it stands after the research training of the first year.

While it is not desirable to attempt to standardize the structure and content of the Research Report, there are certain topics which assessors would expect to be covered. Below we give a brief summary and a list of questions that you should probably address in some form.

1. All Research Reports should begin with a succinct statement of the topic or problem that is to be investigated. It should explain why the proposed research is necessary and important.
2. Then you should present a review of the relevant existing literature—theoretical, thematic and regional. Any piece of research should be undertaken with a clear sense of the background of the issues and how it is related to previous work. There should also be some indication of how it will advance knowledge of the topic in question, and what contribution it will make to intellectual understanding in the field more generally.
3. After describing the specific questions to be addressed, the Report should explain the methods to be employed in the research. Here the Report should show an appropriate awareness of any ethical, political and practical issues that are pertinent to the project.
4. A final section, entitled Research Proposal, should cover all the practicalities. For library research, visits to research sites, festivals, newspapers, magazines, film or television companies etc., this section should include:
    - a detailed timetable (with dates, time needed for any preparation, time to be spent at each intended location, any anticipated breaks, what links with local universities, researchers or other institutions or sponsors will be set up);
    - contingency plans in case access to resources is not granted for the preferred or necessary sources;
    - what arrangements will be made for keeping in contact with the supervisor, and for submitting a report on the research;
    - an estimate of the total cost, broken down under main headings of expenditure.
5. In the case of planned fieldwork, the final section should be entitled 'Fieldwork Proposal' and should include:
    - a detailed timetable (with date for departure, time needed for any extra language-learning or other local preparation, time to be spent at each intended fieldwork site, any anticipated breaks, what links with local universities, researchers or other institutions or sponsors will be set up);
    - contingency plans in case permission is not granted for the preferred locations;

- what arrangements will be made for keeping in contact with the supervisor, and for submitting a mid-fieldwork report;
- an estimate of the total cost, broken down under main headings (e.g. travel to and within the country, insurance, subsistence, equipment, medical and other supplies, local assistance etc.).

Questions to consider for the Report

Research Reports should give a clear, but succinct, statement as to why the research is necessary and important, give relevant background, state what is the object of study and the questions to be researched, indicate command of the appropriate theory and how you plan to use it, and outline the main anticipated foci of the research.

You may find the following questions useful when formulating your research. These are a guide, not necessarily the structure for the Research Report itself.

1. The definition of the research:
   - What are the topic and the precise object of your research?
   - Why is this research interesting and why is it important that it be carried out?
   - What is the possible significance of the anticipated results?
   - To what debates is it relevant?
   - Are there any particular problems likely to be associated with this research?
2. Background and theory:
   - What is the relevant historical and other background (political, social, cultural, artistic etc.)?
   - What has been written on this topic to date? And in what ways is the existing work inadequate or could be improved upon? In short, how does your work challenge or develop the current state of knowledge?
   - What theory has been used in existing work? What are its deficiencies?
   - What kind of theoretical approaches do you plan to use? And how might these help you to rethink the issues in an original way?
3. Research questions and methods:
   - What are the central questions of your research?
   - How do you propose to set about answering them?
   - What are the relevant methods and why are these appropriate? Does the issue of methods raise broader questions of methodology?
   - What are the political, ethical, epistemological and practical issues which your research might raise?

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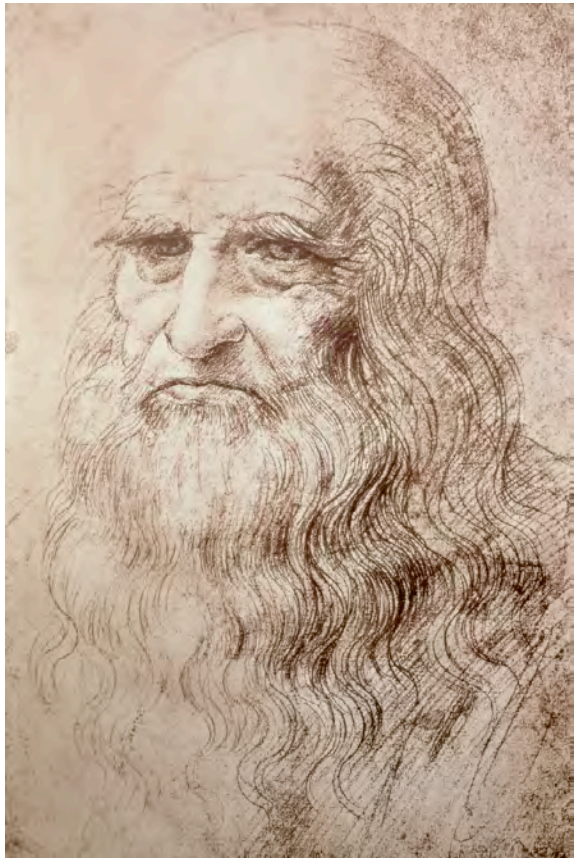
‘Philosophy is not a theory but an activity’ - Ludwig Wittgenstein.

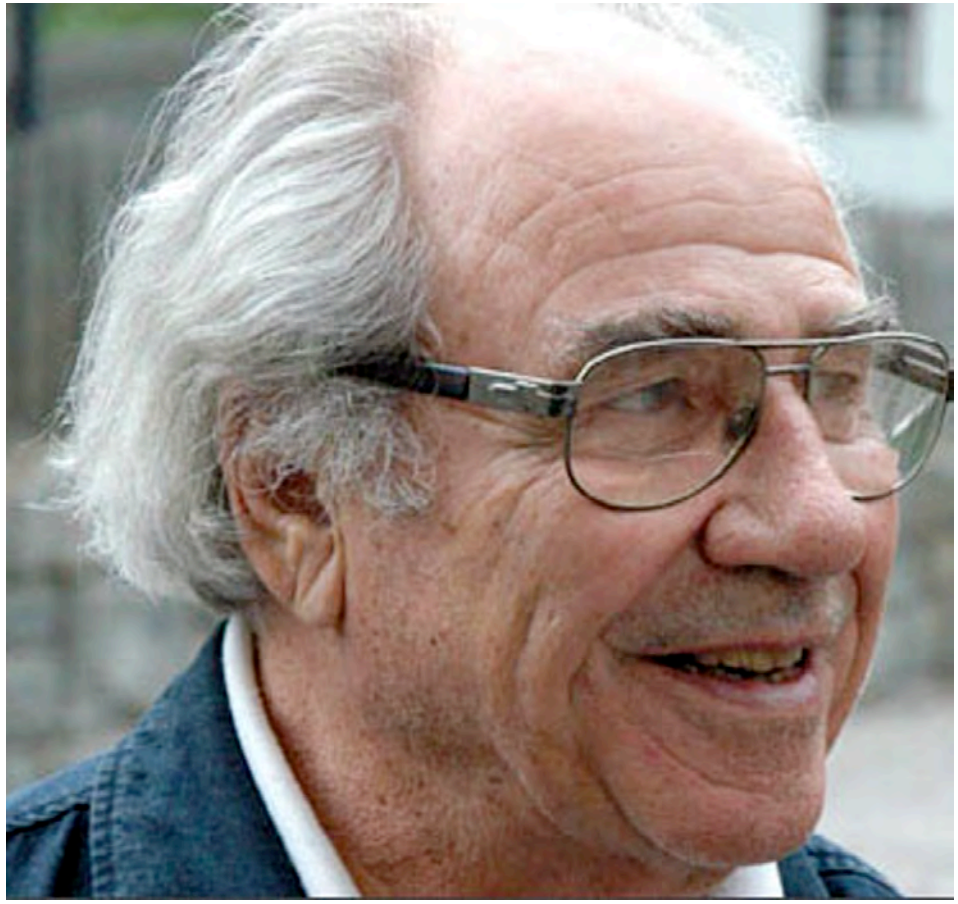
‘He who loves practice without theory is like the sailor who boards ship without a rudder and compass and never knows where he may cast’ - Leonardo da Vinci.



Gramsci on common sense

Common sense is a chaotic aggregate of disparate conceptions, and one can find there anything that one likes. (*Selections from the prison notebooks*)

From what has the certainty of common sense originated? Essentially from religion... but religion is an ideology, the best-rooted and most widespread ideology, not a proof or a demonstration (*Further selections from the prison notebooks*).



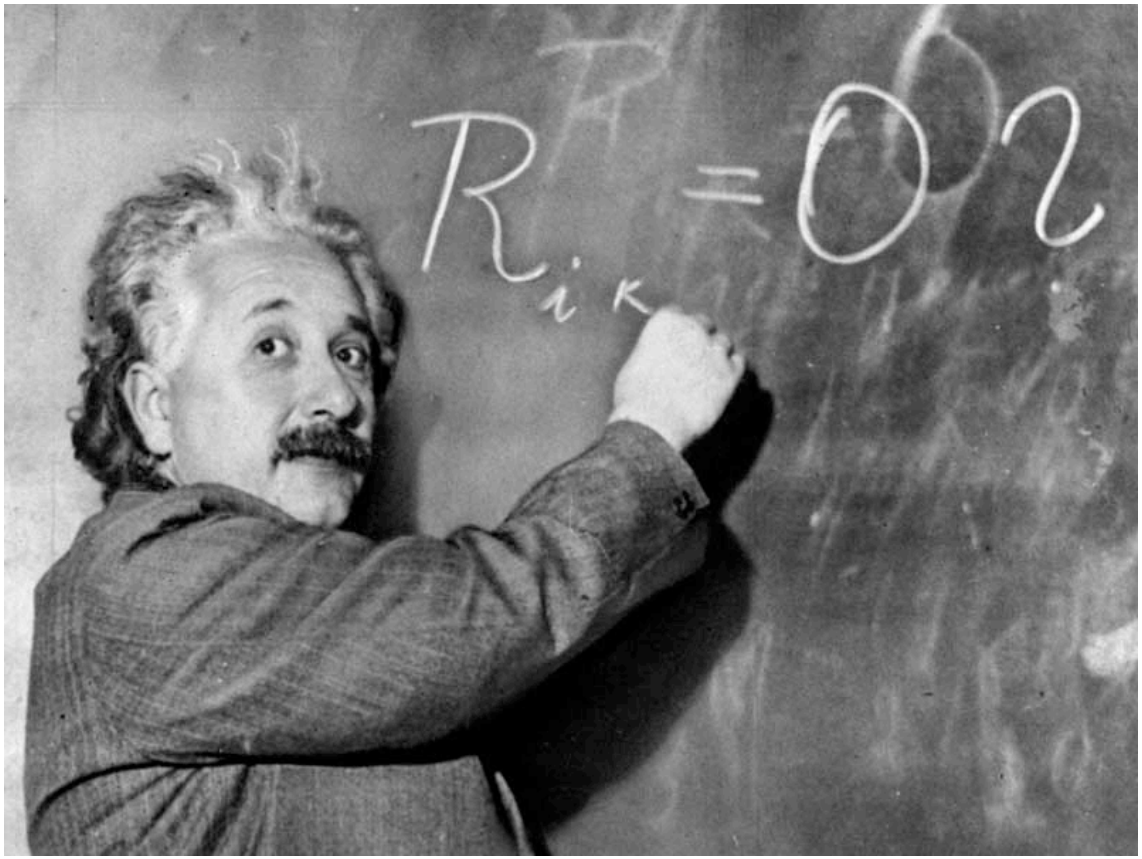
Jean Baudrillard

The whole ideology of consumption is there to persuade us that we have entered a new era... What characterizes consumer society is the *universality of the news item* in mass communication. All political, historical and cultural information is received in the same—at once anodyne and miraculous—form of the news item... The news item is thus not one category among others, but **the** cardinal category of our magical thinking, of our mythology (Baudrillard *Consumer Society*).

Objectivity is an empiricist concept that has been under attack for most of the twentieth century, especially from structuralism, post-Einsteinian physics, and psychoanalysis... Yet news professionals still cling to it as both an achievable goal and a central justification… [However] objectivity is the 'unauthored' voice of the bourgeoisie.

A wider and more confident recognition of this essential fictionality of news… justifies thinking of the news as masculine soap opera. (Fiske *Television Culture*).

What is theory?

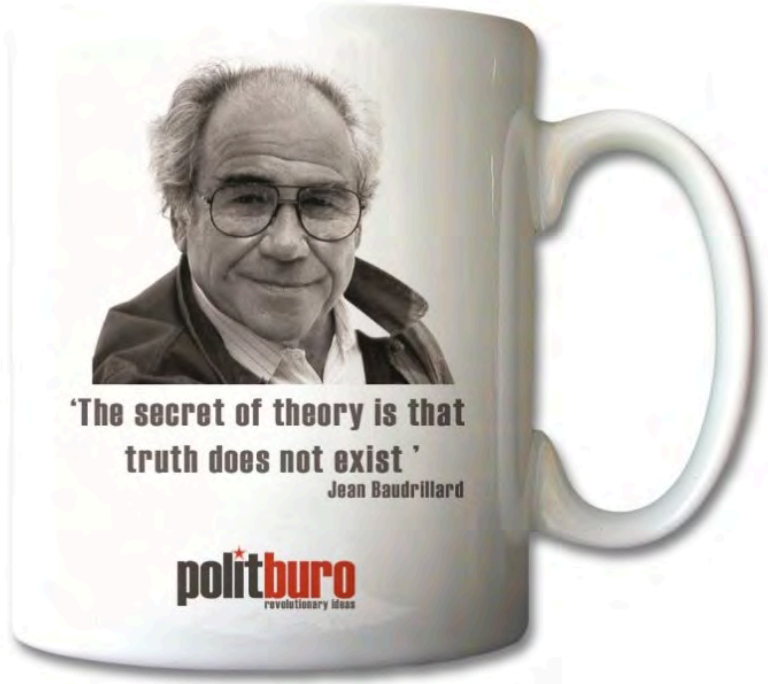


Einstein as the popular stereotype of a theorist

Theory may be 'a hunch, the opposite of practice, an evolving explanation, a practical theory or reflective practice, a hypothesis, a model or heuristic, a clearly developed argument that has evolved under the pressure of rigorous critique, or an interrelated set of propositions or empirical connections between concepts… These vastly different definitions and descriptions beg the question, what really is theory?' (Kezar *To use or not to use theory,* 284).

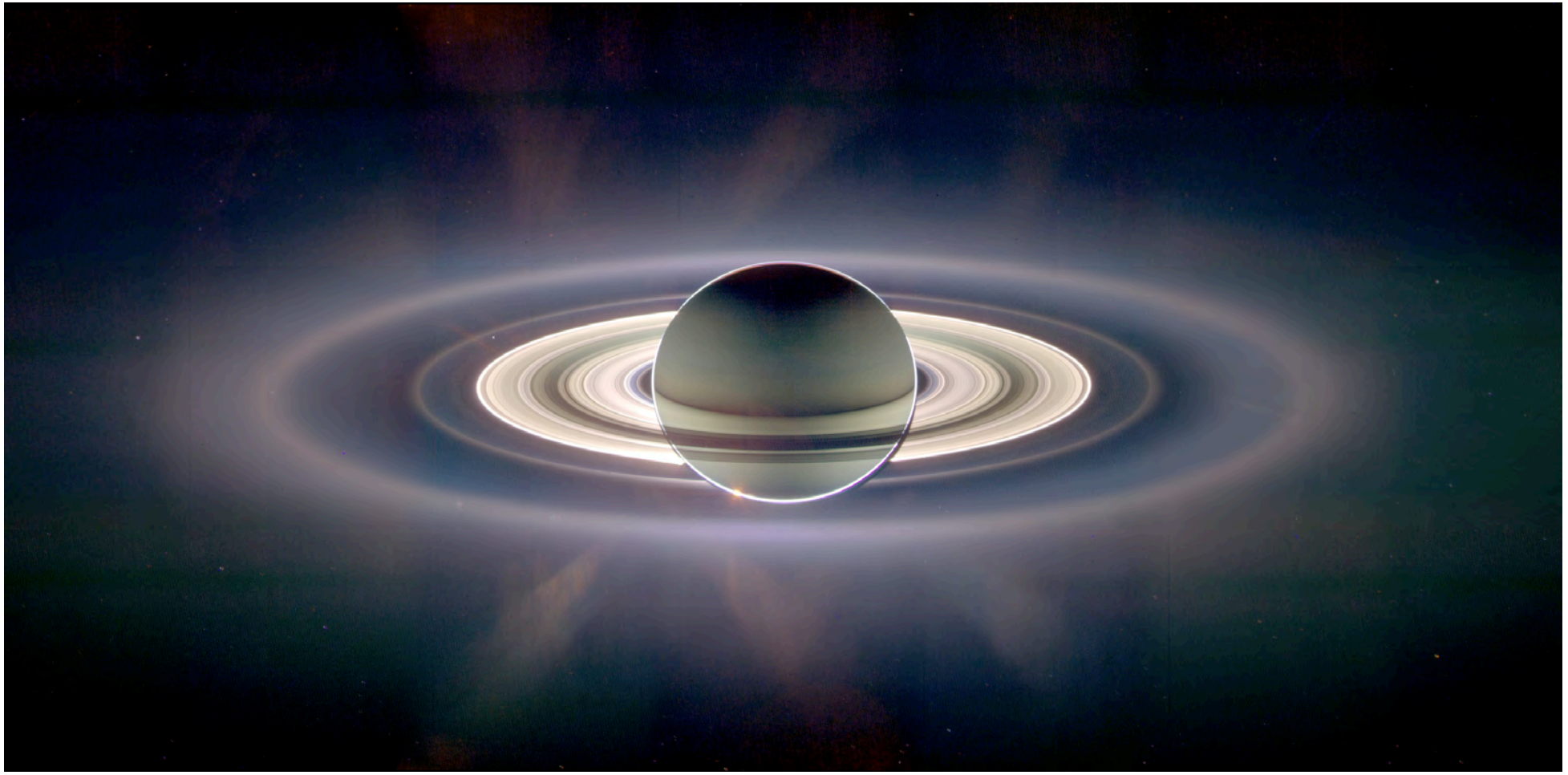
Whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed (Einstein *Unification of fundamental forces*).

two heterogeneous systems whose data cannot be transferred from one to the other. An operational system which is statistical, information-based, and simulational is projected onto a traditional values system, onto a system of representation, will, and opinion. This collage, this collusion between the two, gives rise to an indefinite and useless polemic...for the simple reason that there is no relationship between a system of meaning and a system of simulation...

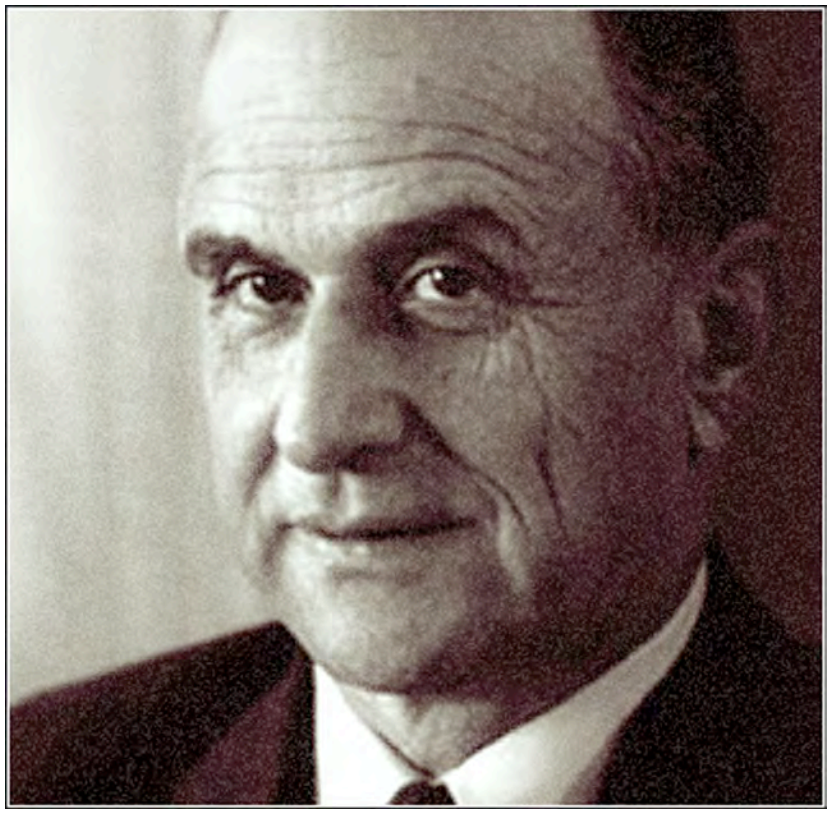


There is and there always will be major difficulties in analyzing the media and the whole sphere of information through the traditional categories of the philosophy of the subject: will, representation, choice, liberty, deliberation, knowledge, and desire. For it is quite obvious that they are absolutely contradicted by the media; that the subject is alienated in its sovereignty (Baudrillard *The masses*).

The scientific theory I like best is that the rings of Saturn are composed entirely of lost airline luggage (Mark Russell)



We must conceive discourse as a violence which we do to things, or in any case as a practice which we impose on them; and it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity (Foucault *The order of discourse*).

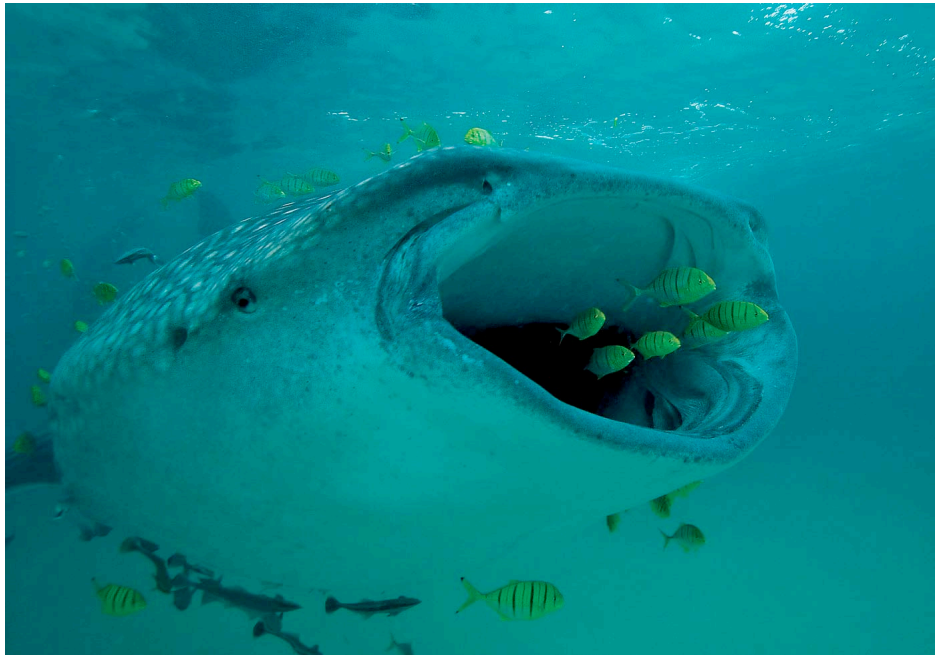


If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say? We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. Our universe, so to speak, consists of these ways rather than of a world or worlds (Goodman *Ways of worldmaking*).

Blind luck

Does it really matter what theory I use so long as I get my PhD?

Bottom-Feeding



I'll just carry along and see what I bump into...

Risks ending up like this!

In low-grade or unscientific thinking we hardly know we are making any presuppositions at all. Because of their tangled condition, the thoughts which come up out of the bottom of our minds present a deceptive appearance of 'immediacy'... And if I never think at all except in this quite

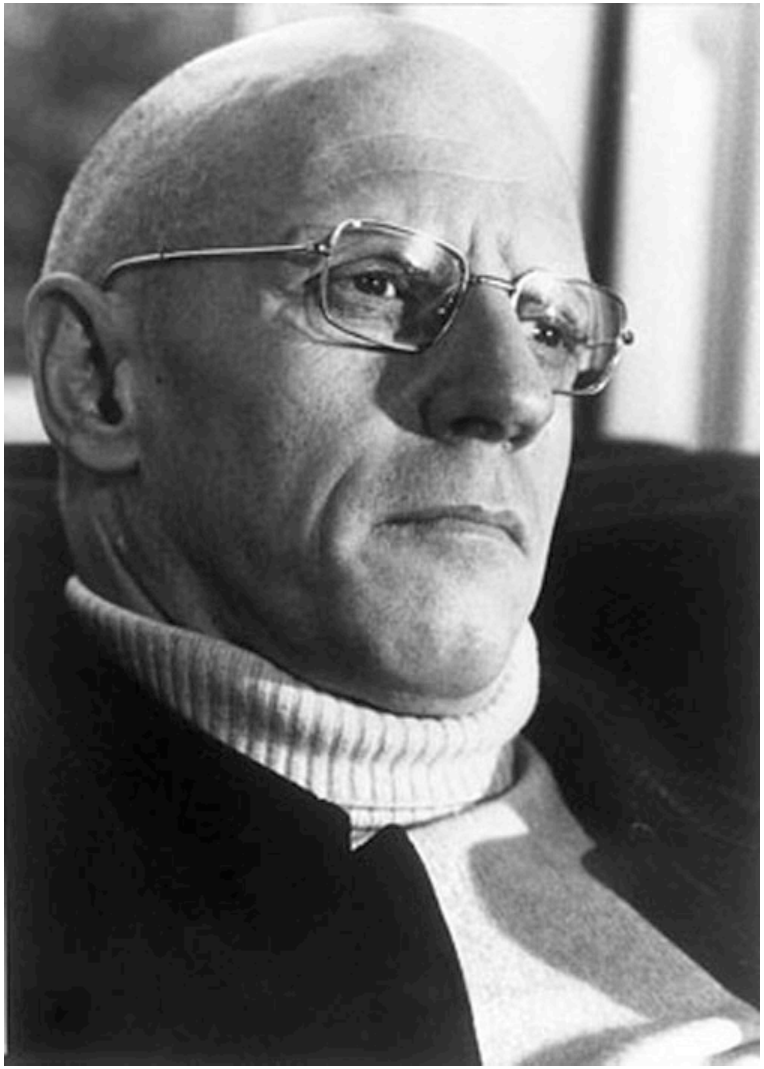
casual and unscientific way, I shall always be content to believe this is all that knowledge can ever be: the simple 'intuition' or 'apprehension' of things confronting us which absolutely and in themselves just are what we 'intuite' or 'apprehend' them as being. Th is theory of knowledge is called 'realism'; and 'realism' is based upon the grandest foundation a philosophy can have, namely human stupidity' (Collingwood *Essay on metaphysics*).

Bureaucratic/Authoritarian

1. Being more concerned with making the data fit neatly than bothering to pay attention to what the evidence actually says.

2. Ordering means imposing your order on things.

From: The order of discourse



Exclusion: What is sayable: 'a will to know which...sketched out schemas of possible, observable, measurable, classifiable objects'.

Rarefaction: Discourse determines the function of the author, commentary and disciplines.

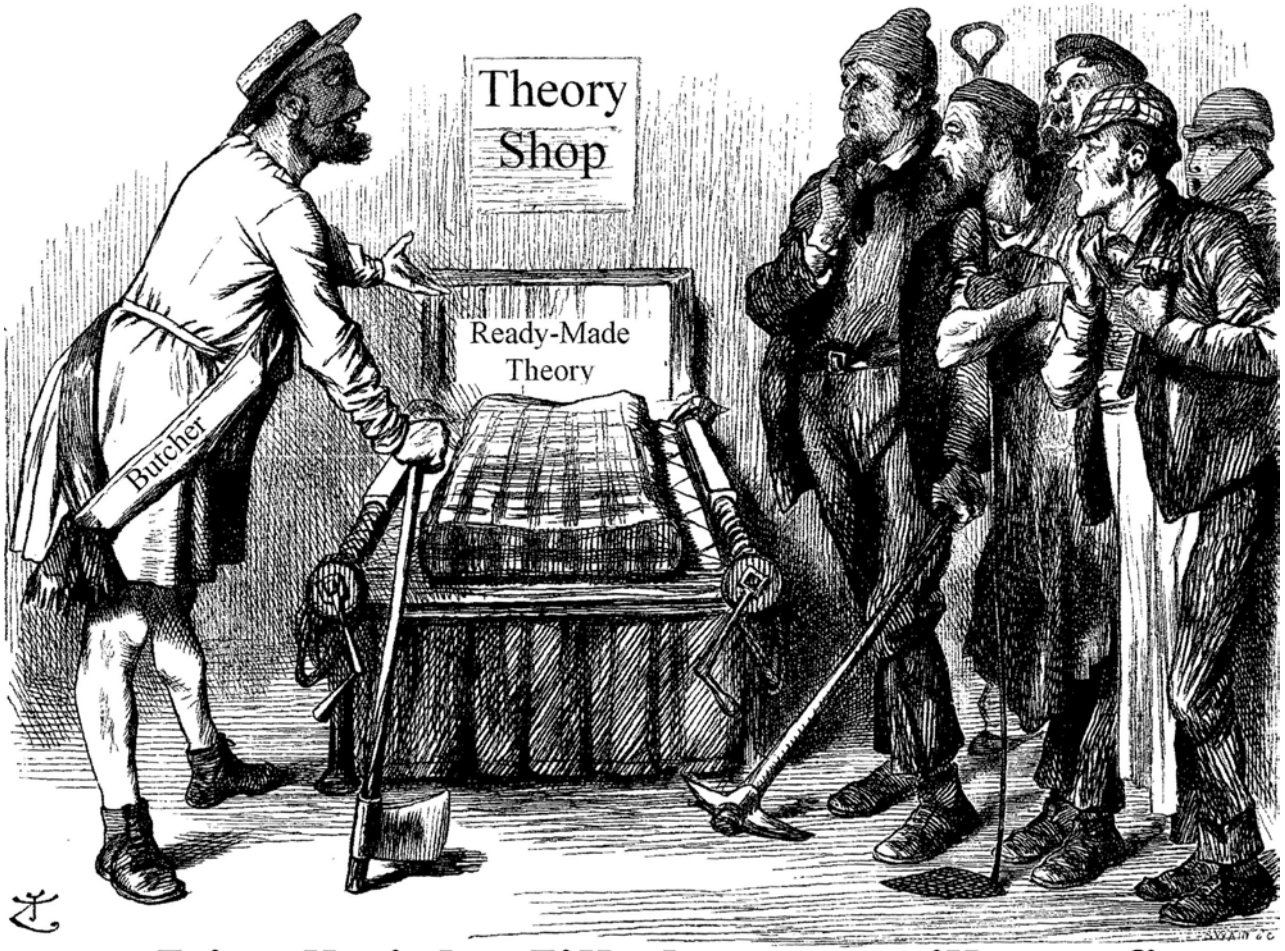
Access: Who is permitted to speak about what?

Pick and Choose

While any research project involves deciding what to include and exclude, it is perilously easy to choose what fits your model. Among the favourites are:

Fit the facts to the theory

Procrustes: chop out any evidence that doesn't support the argument.



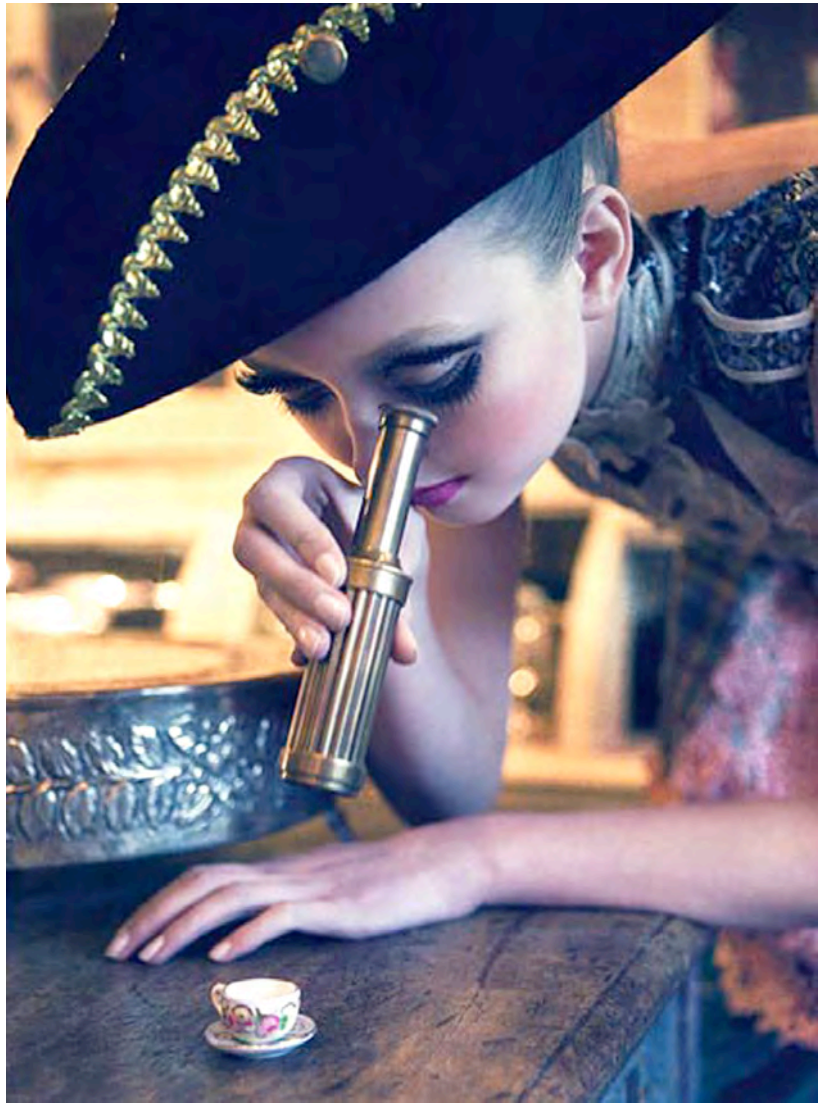
It's all right. I'll chop you till you fit

Fit the facts to the theory

The rack: stretch the facts so they fit.

Depicting what you want to see

Identification. The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself. (Barthes *Myth today*).

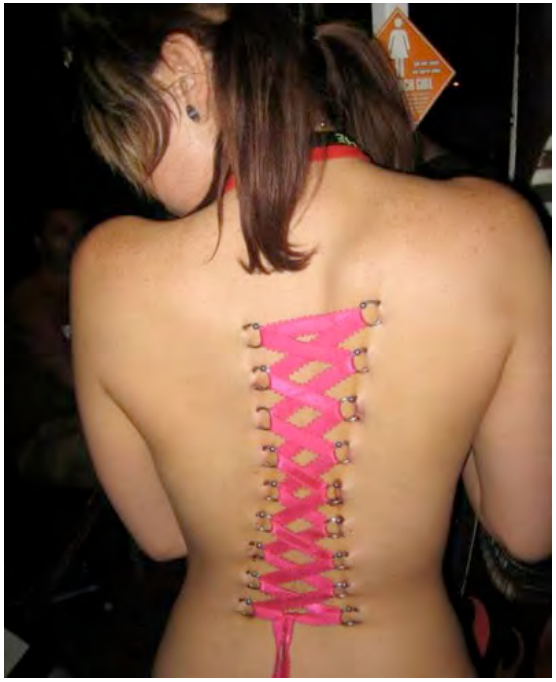


The privation of history:

‘Primitives’ have prepared their dances with a view to an exotic festivity (Barthes *Myth today*).

Be trendy

Theory as a simulacrum which ‘apes the forms...it *repeats the fashion* without having lived it’ (Baudrillard).



A Dialogic Approach

Dialogue is hard work, time-consuming, does not lead to easy generalizations but permits unmatched degrees and depths of understanding.

Bronislav Malinowksi during ethnography in the Trobriands

Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth... Reified images are profoundly inadequate for life and for discourse... Dialectics is the abstract product of dialogue (Bakhtin *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics*).

The person who understands (including the researcher himself) becomes a participant in the dialogue, although on a special level (depending on the area of understanding or research)... The observer has no position outside the observed world, and his observation enters as a constituent part into the observed object (*Bakhtin The problem of the text*)

"On the Internet, nobody knows you're a dog."

The arrival of the anthropologists

"Anthropologists! Anthropologists!"

Confusion over the object of study:

Not what is the immediate object,

but what critically is it that we are trying to study?

Omission

Leaving out something important for whatever reason.

The famous half-bridge at Avignon, France

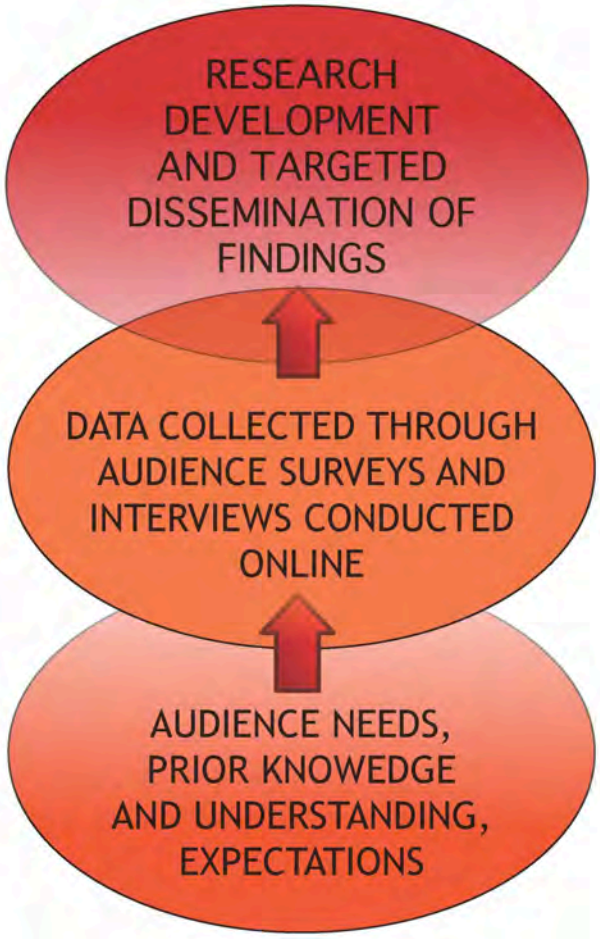
Closure

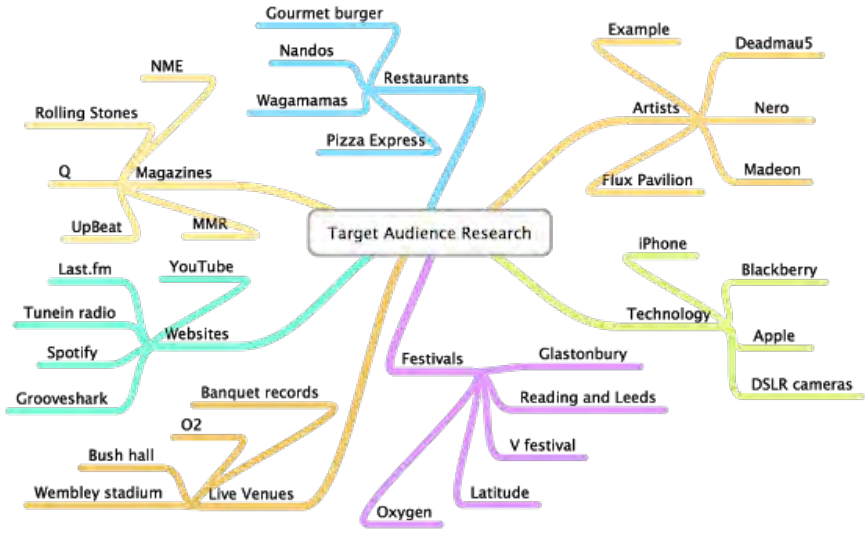
Hiding or disguising absences, weaknesses or awkward evidence.

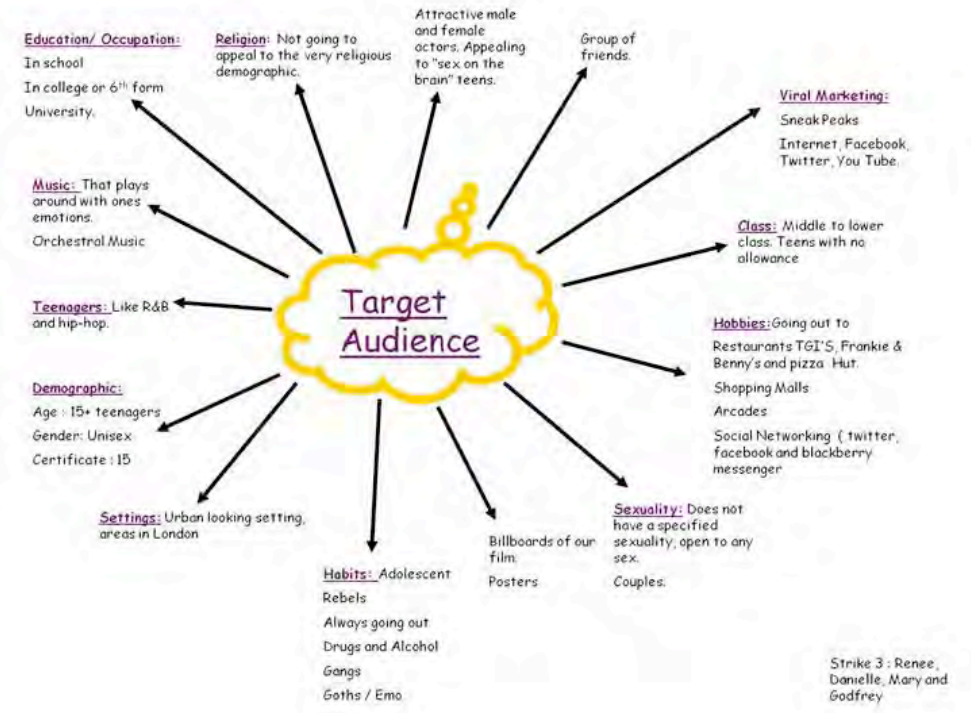
Desperately seeking the audience

The ‘television audience’ is a nonsensical category, for there is only the dispersed, indefinitely proliferating chain of situations in which television audiencehood is practised and experienced (Ang *Desperately seeking the audience*).

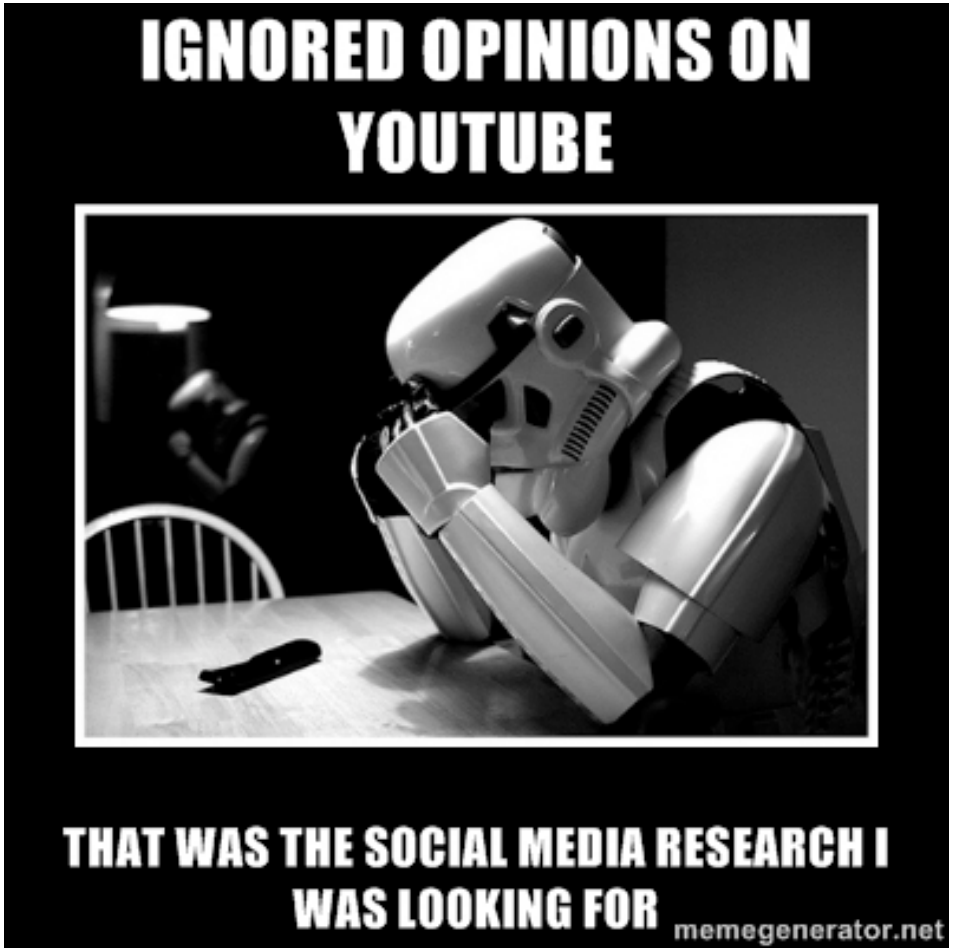
Dreaming of trees

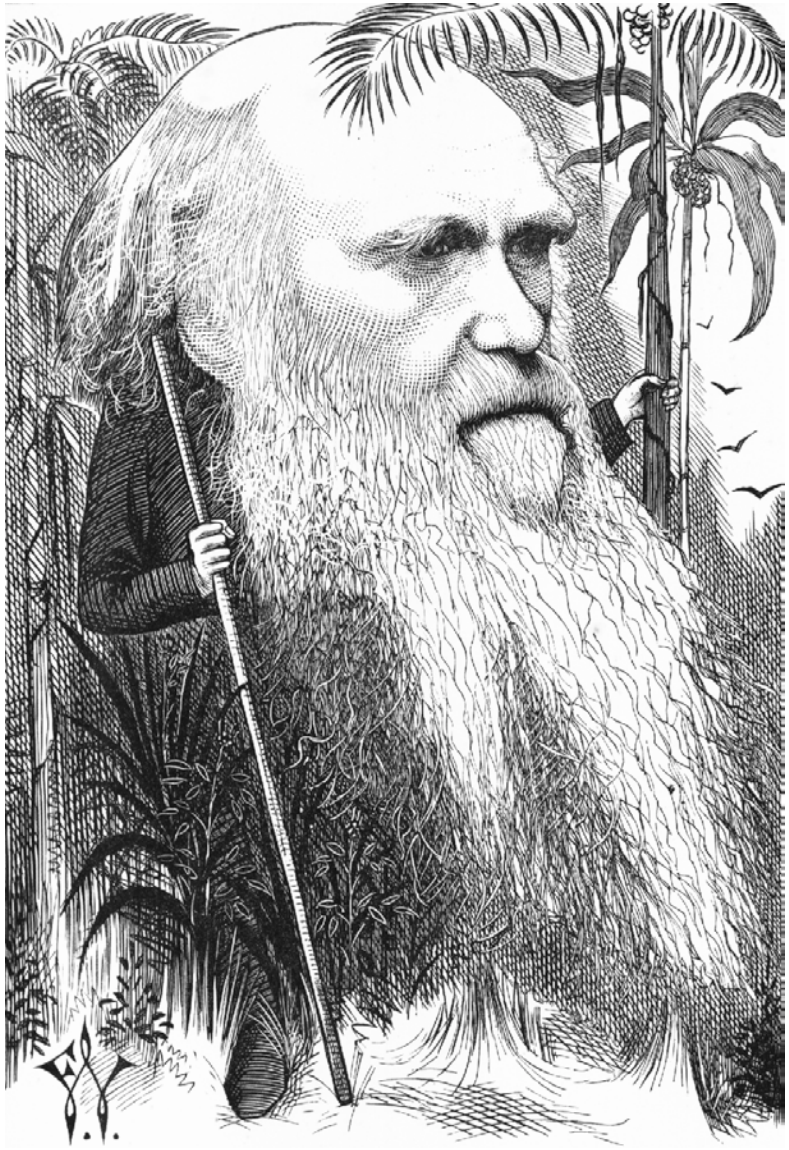






Studying the Media





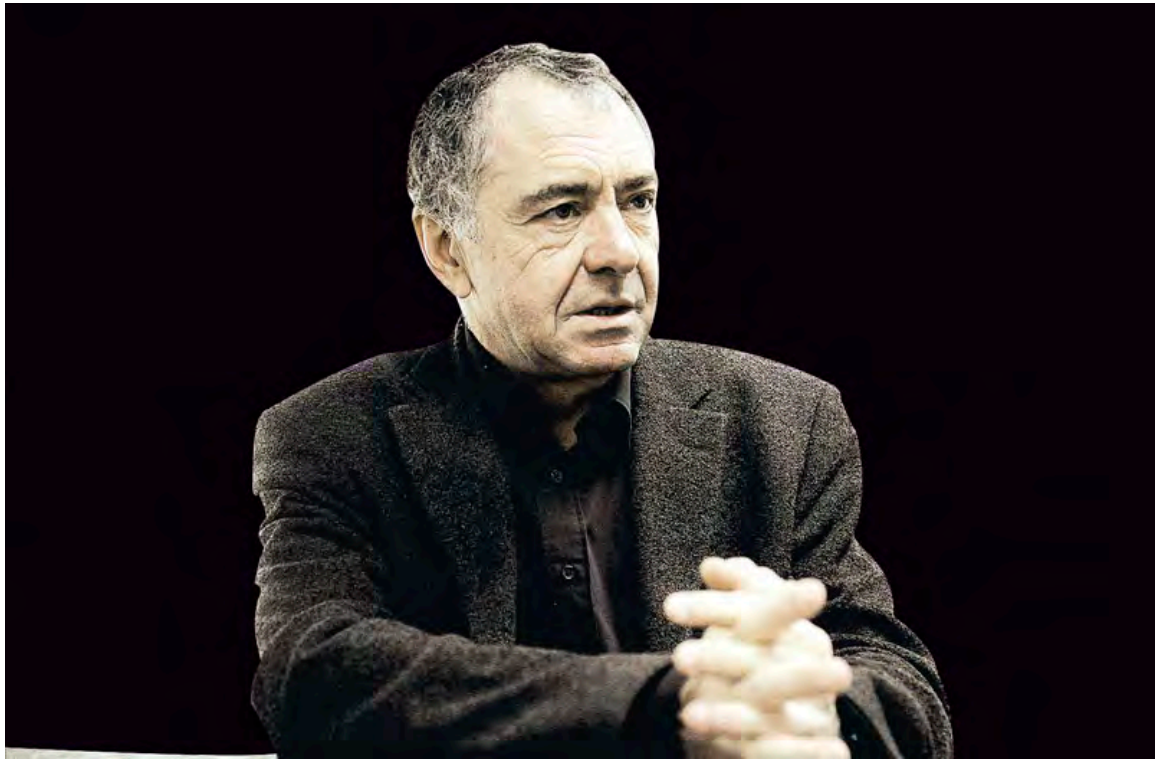
As natural selection works solely by and for the good of each being, all corporeal and mental endowments will tend to progress towards perfection (Darwin *On the origin of species*)

The most plausible basis for explaining the rise and development of modern capitalism…is the idea of *human progress.* Quite late in the history of western culture—

Surviving progress

namely, in the eighteenth century—this idea first fully unfolded as a *faith* in progress (Goudzwaard *Capitalism and progress*).

Hypermodern culture



A ‘culture of the fastest and the “ever more”: more profitability, more performance, more flexibility, more innovation’.

A ‘society of fashion’ in which ‘the cult of the new is asserting itself as an everyday and widespread passion’ (Lipovetsky *The empire of fashion*).

Images of Progress 1

Images of Progress 2

University of London Regulations Governing PhD

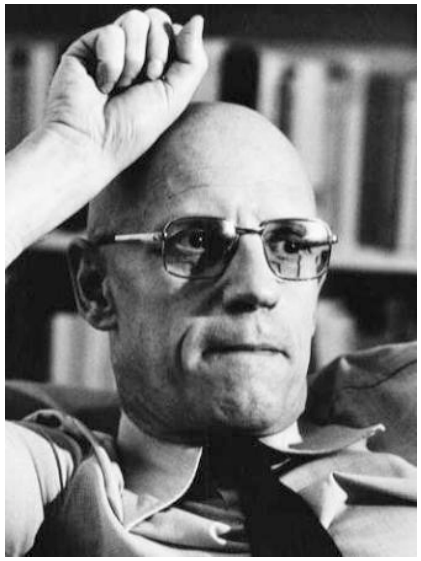
A thesis shall form a distinct contribution to the knowledge of the subject and afford evidence of originality by the discovery of new facts and/or by the exercise of independent critical power; and be an integrated whole and present a coherent argument.

Senate House—George Orwell's Ministry of Truth in his book *1984*

Sir Francis Bacon

Critical method requires interrogating persons and the evidence with the forensic, impartial rigour of a court of law.

If [the genealogist] listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms. Examining the history of reason, he learns that it was born in an altogether 'reasonable' fashion—from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific methods arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition—the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason (Foucault *Nietzsche, genealogy, history*).



Foucault: Theory does not express, translate, or serve to apply practice: it is practice.

Deleuze: A theory is exactly like a box of tools. It has nothing to do with the signifier. It must be useful. It must function (*Intellectuals and power*).

The only true voyage of discovery...would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to behold the universe through the eyes of another, of a hundred others, to behold the hundred universes that each of them beholds, that each of them is (Proust *The Captive, Remembrance of Things Past*)

H. L. Mencken on theory and critical thinking

Democracy is the theory that the common people know what they want, and deserve to get it good and hard.

The most dangerous man to any government is the man who is able to think things out for himself, without regard to the prevailing superstitions and taboos.