
Anthropological Reflections / Réflexions anthropologiques

Weast of Eden

Clay McCann

the *Other* speaks: "I think people tend to put researchers up into the political categories---or any form of academics up into that category. Here's someone who's got maybe the power or the intellect to do something but they're not doing anything about it. All you want to do is research us." [Cameron and Gibson 2005:315-331]

1.
Custodians,
Chancellor, Waste
Management, President & Vice-Chancellor, Catering,
Rector,
Principal, pizza and alcohol delivery drivers,
Provost, TAs, Vice-provost,
House-cleaning, Housing,
faculty, esteemed
drifters & servers,
students,
Sessional Instructors,
tutors,
Presidents and Vice-presidents Academic,
Security, Parking, leaders
of the sundry academies, Research
Services, receptionists, secretaries,
Deans, Assistant Deans, Tim
Horton's, Starbucks, Department Heads,
Counsellors, friends:
it is an honour to speak with you today.

2.
I would sing the academy, bills attendant,
laid green eternal,
cross-cut lawns stretching the fence-line,
a place of mind.
Let us be mindful of place.
A place, for example,
which has no agreement
with the First Nations

upon whose land this
global-thinking place
does its thinking,
its globalizing.
Let us be mindful, then,
of where we step.

I would sing
so the private
might be made public,
so industries of knowledge
might find a modern home—
for in the *postmodern*,
where nothing is fixed,
but the game seems rigged,
we have seen the decentring of ethics,
of morality, the privatization of
the academy,
of thought itself,
so even Nancy Olivieri¹
would think twice
about another university gig.

3.
I speak of imaginings.
do not imagine that we are not
distracted, that what is
spoken *here*, *advocated* here,
thought here,
is spoken almost *only* here
and not *loudly* here,
not enough is *spoken of* this place.

Do not imagine that *here* is not connected
so greatly to *out there*,
that there could even be a *here*
without all the world
which makes this place
shapes it, pays for it
in taxes, pried tributes
from the oppressed
whom we have sworn to guide,
to lead out of the morass;

Do not imagine we are not
purposefully distracted,
our endless running for awards
and honours
our *ceaseless* scribblings and debates
are not, in part, designed
to *contain* us, to *fix* the gaze

in such a manner that
misery, fraud
and war; real chaos,
(check usage here)
lies
cloaked in periphery;

Do not imagine all we do is *good*,
or the millions of academics
have yet to stem the *tide* of starving,
frantic billions; do not imagine
the halls themselves are above scrutiny,
rather, *under* it,
with their cafeterias,
exercise yards
and cells—we *penal* colonists;
so, too, the suburbs,
the condos
more so;

Do not imagine the pay, the office,
gowns, the silly hats,
will in any way compensate
for the growing mass
of troubled and confused,
nor will such honours
ease conscience vainglorious,
as, on that fateful day, even *we*
are stopped at the check-point,
taken from coteries, epaulettes removed, very like a
Beria;²

Do not imagine the *state*—the *very one*
we help to build—
do not imagine it will love you,
for in any great upheaval the *learned*,
too, are washed away down Gulag drains,
Treblinka trains, anonymous, vanished, forgot;

Do not imagine the state
will *mourn* you; and, please, do not imagine
any passing over a great honour; for if in its
spiteful threshing the state
(or whatever it has become)
does not erase our papers,
our lecture notes,
our very faces from the faculty photos,
why, then, our tenure is guaranteed
—we will have long since failed to matter
as bearers of the light of knowledge
and complicit be in torture, the snuffing of the light.

4.

I speak as I was taught.
we gather in such places
for this very purpose—we are the risk
power takes each September:

Will we be swayed by position,
money, office? or lacking these, swayed
by desperation? Or are we the moment when
the wager falters, when lettered women and men
begin to piecemeal construct
a different sort of machine?

Imagine your art, your gifts, this very heart
set to tasks fulfilling a bloodless reversal,
speaking truth
to power, advocating
evidence-based policy, accountable
government, the nurturing
of community,
phlogistic with hope's
sweet light; imagine
such as the strength of metaphor,
what *must* be
if we are not to prove
ourselves
lesser re-runs
of the falling empire;

Imagine, please, not our tenure-track,
our corner office with the indoor
flourishing tree; imagine not
emeritus, for in such stripped and
impoverished soils
such imaginings seem fruitless;

Imagine the brutish, ignorant wheel
borne down upon the child
—your hand, staying such murder,
imagine the terror in
the single mother, the agéd,
the infirm, and the torch *you* bear to light their way;

Imagine our own academy, flayed of
pseudo-science, rid of untruth
and horseshit; imagine, if you can, beyond the fear
of deadlines, rules, a place
so mindful you are not
breathless with anxiety
but with joy.

I was ecstatic, apothecotic, for the voice was *ours*.
It is a pleasure to
speak
with you
today

In this voice were *many* voices:
among them
the academy, the lay,
the forgone and forgot.

fall in love."
fall in love (again),
get arrested,
break your arm, swallow ayahuasca, lies, and half-truths,
wreck a marriage,
the grand-kids of run-runners,
drive the mountain pass with
these are *your* salad days,
get the everlasting ink stains under your nails,
plant trees to 'make light'
form a student strike,
plug (likewise) parking meters,
submit a thesis (empty pages)
read your poems *rigor mortis*,
repeat a million hubric flaws,
grow your data sets, eyeless in Gaza,
cultivate rooms full of nervous college kids,
hike into the high alpine,

baby-sit the kids,
live with them, as they live, brew Kombucha, bake bread,
erect communities with von epistemic partners,
help build sculpture out of trash,
attend festivals, funerals,
wherein much is revealed;

plenty; scarcity, amity and enmity—
sorrow,
collapse, bliss, worry,
creation, performance,
—that mythic dream of Just, Death,
seek and find the heart of Saturday night
record worker songs, poetry,
and join work parties,

"Go...
said,
Zora Neale Hurston, Eric R. Wolf)
(Ruth Behar, Dan Rose,
I was overjoyed when my better angels

5.

Notes

- 1 Dr. Nancy Olivieri: The case of University of Toronto clinician, Dr. Nancy Olivieri, gained attention when her research at the Hospital for Sick Children led her to believe that a new drug treatment posed dangers to some patients. It is alleged that the hospital and the university failed to come to her defence when Apotex, co-sponsor of the research, objected to her publishing her findings. It is further alleged that hospital and university officials and representatives of Apotex variously subjected her to workplace and other harassment.

The case was reviewed by CAUT's Committee on Academic Freedom and Tenure which concluded that the issues raised are serious and that many questions remain unanswered by reviews conducted by other bodies. In addition to matters affecting Dr. Olivieri, broad institutional policy issues exist. Accordingly, the AF&T committee has appointed an independent committee of inquiry. (<http://www.caut.ca/pages.asp?page=199>).

- 2 Lavrentiy Pavlovich Beria (29 March 1899–23 December 1953) was a Georgian Soviet politician and state security

administrator, chief of the Soviet security and secret police apparatus (NKVD) under Joseph Stalin during World War II, and Deputy Premier in the postwar years (1946–1953). During the coup d'état led by Nikita Khrushchev and assisted by the military forces of the Marshal Georgy Zhukov, they formed an alliance to remove and kill Beria. In that same year, he was arrested on trumped-up charges of treason by Zhukov's soldiers during a meeting in which the full Politburo condemned him. The compliance of the NKVD was ensured by Zhukov's troops, and after interrogation Beria was taken to the basement of the Lubyanka and shot by General Pavel Batitsky along with his most trusted associates.[2] (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lavrentiy_Beria)

Reference

- Cameron, Jenny, and Gibson, Katherine
2005 Participatory Action Research in a Poststructuralist
Vein. *Geoforum* 36: 315-331.
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