

Inaugural address: Prof. Adrian Konik

Date: 29 April 2019

Title: Discourse, cinema, and desubjectification: From Foucault to Deleuze and beyond...

Good evening everyone, and thank you for coming along tonight to share with me what is, in many respects, one of the most important events in my career at this University. To be honest, when I first started working here almost twenty years ago, I never imagined that I would ever stand here in this context, and as I do before you tonight; on the contrary, I was only supposed to be back in South Africa, and at the then-University of Port Elizabeth, for one year to do a quick postgraduate qualification in journalism, because that was the career I thought I would like to pursue. However, one of the first courses that I had to register for was a philosophy module taught by Prof. Bert Olivier – who in his capacity to evocatively introduce students to new thinkers, remains a veritable force of nature – and accordingly that was about as far as my journalism aspirations got, because I rediscovered there the same thing that had so powerfully animated my undergraduate studies.

To be clear, this was not philosophy as a discipline, which like all canonical edifices can come across as weighty, dusty and extremely boring; especially when it rather arrogantly assumes the position of arbiter of truth, and tries to determine what everybody else can or cannot think, or what they should or should not say. Rather, what I encountered again in that Honors-level philosophy module was something that I had glimpsed during my undergraduate studies, but which I had yet to fully appreciate, namely an approach to thinking that was also an approach to life, on the part of certain people who, in their time, had to a large extent philosophized privately as they carried out their many other duties, or philosophized outside of the academy, or remained on the margins of academic philosophy – men like Marcus Aurelius, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Benedictus Spinoza. And in following the University's standard brief for an inaugural address, I feel it would be thoroughly remiss of me not to mention the three profound lessons that these three authors respectively taught me. This is not only because I owe each of them an immense debt which I will obviously never be able to repay, but also because in reflecting on my current work – as I have been asked to do this evening – I realize just how immensely important all three of them continue to be both in my ongoing research activities, and indeed in my personal life.

Firstly, Aurelius's poignant observations on the perennial madness of existence (2006: II. 1; VIII. 1), taught me not to expect constant sanity either from myself or from those around me, because of the powerful contrary forces animating us all, which we all tend to remain blind too until it is too late. Secondly, Nietzsche's all-too-incisive remarks on issues that for most people are too deep for words (2004; 2006), taught me not to be cowed by the intimidating phenomenon of hallowed silence, the aura of which – in its overarching demand for veneration – can all too often stop critical thought in its tracks. And thirdly, Spinoza's ironic laughter in the face of weighty conceptions of being (2007), taught me perhaps the most important lesson, namely that of the salvific power of humor, which can so easily shatter the heaviness of life just before it succeeds in crushing us. Three lessons, so simple, but so life-changing: accept the madness of life, but don't ever revere it, and when others do don't forget to laugh – because there's a great emancipatory power in that which derives from laughter's resonance with the 'unbearable lightness' of being itself (Kundera 1980; Kundera 1984).

The first lesson in particular continues to serve me very well in the field of Cultural Studies, which is one of my two disciplines, and where I have accordingly been partially situated for the past two decades, because madness in many ways is the medium of Cultural Studies. That is, the madness of the modern city, in which people – alienated from their traditional life and the grounding beliefs and *mores* that this previously offered them – find themselves adrift in an ocean of competing discourses and simulacra, which moreover tend to pull them in thoroughly incongruous directions, while they, by way of response, constantly conjure up for themselves new fictions about who or what they are. Each time believing that the role they cast themselves in will last, and desperately seeking out others who are willing to play along by agreeing with them in this regard. Of course, they also tend to get deeply annoyed with those around them who refuse to indulge them in this way, or those who – even worse – conjure up for themselves antithetical roles that run counter to the hastily-constructed and half-hearted cosmology of the would-be actor in question. So if this is the culture of the modern city, then madness really is the medium of Cultural Studies, which takes as its object of focus metropolitan-scale insane asylums, as it were, where there have never been any directors, only the occasional inmate who has temporarily assumed such a role. And what is true of Cultural Studies is even more true of Film Studies, my second discipline, which takes as its object of focus the collective dreams of complete lunatics writ large on silver screens, before which all the other inmates sit *mesmerized*; laughing and clapping and crying and being afraid, before they trundle off to bed to lose themselves in miasmic dreams of their own. Dreams that tomorrow will inspire them to create brand new roles for themselves, which they’ll act out in the dim morning light, on some imaginary stage in an empty auditorium in their mind, to the rousing applause of a nonexistent audience, before they smile to themselves and think, “How good life is...” Considered in this way, if you are involved in Cultural Studies and/or Film Studies and you do not accept the madness of modern city life, you’ll likely end up going quite insane. But if you do accept the madness of such existence and you do make your peace with it, then it becomes possible to see in even the most bizarre, sad, random, pathetic, and/or terrifying cultural gesture or film, the drama of contemporary existence playing out poignantly, through the respective desires for recognition, for love, for meaning, for power, and for sacrifice.

The latter point on sacrifice is particularly significant for me because in many ways my research in Cultural Studies continues to be linked with Religious Studies, which should not be confused in any way with Theology or confessionalism of any sort. Rather, I understand Religious Studies to be couched in the idea that we are far less *homo sapiens*, or wise beings, as Carolus Linnaeus would have us believe (Ereshefsky 2004: 200), and far more *homo religiosus*, or beings who believe, interminably and irremediably, as Mircea Eliade suggested us to be (1987: 202). I must, however, qualify that statement by explaining that I nevertheless have many problems with the way in which Eliade extrapolates upon this issue, to draw connections in support of a notion of religiosity as definitive of some human essence; on that account we part company. But this is because I instead understand such tenacious belief as a form of madness that can manifest just as easily in the construction of religions, as it can in the creation of secular discourses and cultural practices, which are then reified to a level equivalent to the sacred by the people involved, insofar as they believe that through them they will attain some semblance of lasting peace and fulfillment. And what continues to interest me about the madness of such belief, at a cultural level, is both its centralized augmentation in the modern period – from the eighteenth century onwards – in the belief that industrial productivity, science, and progress are the way, the truth

and the light, respectively, and the cultural dispersion this subsequently precipitated among more marginal figures, who in response established for themselves contrary beliefs that happiness lies elsewhere; for example, in traditional rather than modern practices, and in other parts of the world where the development agenda has not yet taken hold as a guiding vision, or where its tenets have been resisted. The corollary of all this, though, is that the madness of such belief is today ubiquitous, such that we must accept it, if only because all of us are in some or other way under its influence for large parts of our lives – save only for those moments when we are at our most jaded.

Yet it is one thing to accept such madness, but another thing entirely to revere such madness, or the products of such madness, and it is for this reason that I continue to feel such a resonance with Michel Foucault's work, because I always encounter in his writing a singular capacity to underscore the second life lesson I learned from Nietzsche. That is, not to revere the madness around one – even if one does accept it – but rather to engage critically with a belief whenever it becomes subject to growing veneration, because of the very real danger of such reverence rapidly congealing into dogma that can stop critical thought in its tracks. Indeed, for me, Foucault takes things further than Nietzsche in this regard, by drawing attention to those many contemporary concepts and institutions – which Nietzsche could only have guessed at – that have become so imbued with the aura of credibility that we tend today to consider them as given, even natural, features of our life-worlds. Features which we then often fail to see for what they are, namely constructs arbitrarily cobbled together in piecemeal fashion by discursive artisans who, in most cases, never consulted each other either on the paradigm they were thereby giving birth to, or on what its features might entail for the beings who would thereafter find themselves caught up in, and defined by, such terms and categories.

I am speaking, for example, of the concept of the 'human' – which still receives so much unselfconscious thematization today as though it were something natural, with scant regard for its status as an inadvertent product of certain historico-discursive dynamics. There have, of course, been several fascinating theorizations regarding the origins of this concept, and how it became so imbued with credibility that we now construe it as a nonnegotiable feature of our discursive landscape (Bloom 1999; Stuurman 2017); one around which we build all manner of ethical frameworks, moral imperatives and legal injunctions. But of these critical engagements with the concept, Foucault's archaeological approach in *The Order of Things*, in which he identifies the human as the unintended consequence of relatively unrelated shifts in the eighteenth-century discourses of life, labor and language, remains for me so evocative. This is because his irreverence for this otherwise hallowed belief goes so far as to imply the possibility, and indeed the importance, of desubjectification – which I have referred to in the title of this evening's lecture – and which amounts to pursuing relative freedom from the burden of this concept. In short, on the one hand, the changes Foucault highlights took place in the eighteenth-century discourses of life, labor and language, when they all increasingly re-orientated themselves around notions of 'depth' and 'enigma;' but because human beings live, work and speak, they too, around this time inadvertently became imbued with the same collective aura of 'profundity' and 'enigmatic density' (Árnason 2018: 21-22). And this has haunted us ever since, because of the accompanying obligation for us to account for who and what we *really* are, deep

down – as though such a thing were ever possible.¹ Yet, on the other hand, the corollary of Foucault’s analysis, as he so beautifully writes in the last lines of *The Order of Things*, is that if these three discursive “arrangements were to disappear...then one can certainly wager that man” – or the concept of the human being – “would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea” (2003: 422).

This last line holds immense significance for me, because it so powerfully links to the trajectory of thought that eventually became my book, *Buddhism and Transgression: The Appropriation of Buddhism in the Contemporary West* (2009), and that continues to inform my theoretical engagement with Buddhism, which I still conduct mostly through the lens of Foucauldian discourse analysis. This is because, in all of this research, the issue at heart remains for me critical processes of desubjectification – or the tracing of the means by which certain types of subjectivity have become instantiated and normativized. A process of critical enquiry that is necessarily indissociable from an erosion of the particular subjectivity in question, because to hold out at arm’s length, as it were, and to problematize (Foucault 1984: 117-119), the very discursive mechanisms that gave birth to you as a concept, as an identity, is also to watch those mechanisms begin to unravel and fall away. And why this is so important to me, is because it dovetails with my own enduring interest in Buddhist philosophy, which is similarly predicated on the possibility of radical desubjectification to the point of ultimate emptiness, as alluded to through the Buddhist terms of ‘enlightenment’ and ‘nirvana,’ etcetera.

In this regard, though, what I tried to show in my book was that, while due recognition must still be given to the Buddhist moral considerations that greed, anger and delusion lie at the heart of the six senses – sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, and mind – where they collectively precipitate the ego, which we all cling to and feed as time goes on, in the modern era this is no longer the only basis for suffering. On the contrary, a great deal of suffering has since the nineteenth century sprung from the thorough disconnect between the various aspects of what Foucault calls disciplinary and bio-power; a disconnect which has received relatively little thematization, but which has nevertheless contributed to the constitution of contemporary subjectivity as something rather twisted. For example, on the one hand, the panoptically-enforced disciplinary regimentation of space and time (Foucault 1991: 141-156, 200-202), demands heightened autonomy on the part of the subject, and reacts punitively to deficits in this regard, and this sees us all racing to work on time, and clocking in, and working under the watchful gaze – actual or virtual – of some or other form of surveillance. But on the other hand, psychiatric discourses, which emerged under the auspices of what Foucault calls the deployment of sexuality (1998: 65-67), at the same time advance the impossibility of anyone ever being thoroughly autonomous in perpetuity, on account of the latent or unconscious forces which are supposed to underpin all our thoughts, words, and actions, and which we are ostensibly powerless to understand without the guidance of some therapist – who also just happens to charge by the hour.

So in my book, I considered the autobiographies of three Western Buddhists, who are also important Western Buddhist authors, with the understanding that such autobiographies are

¹ Foucault alludes to this burden, and the corresponding yearning to be free from it, in the now-famous phrase from the *Archaeology of Knowledge* in which he asserts: “Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order. At least spare us their morality when we write” (2002: 19).

inextricably intertwined with the disciplinary technology of the dossier, through which individuality is documented as “a ‘case,’” which then functions simultaneously as “an object for a branch of knowledge and a hold for a branch of power” (Foucault 1991: 191). But what fascinated me was not only how all three authors in question used the autobiography format as a mechanism of resistance – to oppose their respective disciplinary identities by advancing new identities of their own making. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, what intrigued me was how they all, in various ways and to different degrees, articulated their mystical experiences in the Far East in terms of, firstly, *open* time and space, or the absence of rigid disciplinary spatio-temporal regimentation; secondly, panoptical *empowerment*, insofar as they became the watchers rather than the watched; and thirdly, *silence*, or the absence of imperatives to confess. And for me, what this intimated was that the suffering which all three authors experienced, and which precipitated their embrace of Buddhism, had precious little to do with the endless rounds of death and rebirth, which Buddhists have traditionally sought to escape from through pursuing enlightenment. Rather, these three authors’ suffering had almost everything to do with both the disciplinary/bio-power discursive matrix within which they were born and grew up, and which they experienced as oppressive, and the discursive incongruities of this matrix that I alluded to a moment ago, from which they so much desired to escape that they were prepared to literally journey to the other end of the earth to do so.

In particular, these considerations continue to feature prominently in my ongoing work on Buddhism, in which I ask admittedly difficult but nevertheless important questions about the extent to which Western Buddhism is a response to modern forms of discursively-induced suffering; about how such status renders it significantly different to more traditional forms of Buddhism – which emerged much earlier in thoroughly different contexts and as responses to very different problems; and about the need to begin recognizing such differences in order to move away from what I have termed ornamental forms of Buddhism in the West, toward eminently political forms. In this regard, my work resonates to some extent with the politicized forms of Engaged Buddhism that emerged in South East Asia around the time of the Vietnam War (Nhat Hanh 1999). But it also differs from them in that, where they today largely target global capitalism and the consumer subjectivity it is inculcating to disastrous socio-environmental effects (Sivaraksa 2005; Loy 2008; Kaza 2005; Stanley, Loy and Dorje 2009), I take as my object of focus the discourses of disciplinary/bio-power and the type of tortured subjectivity inadvertently produced through them (Konik 2012). Correlatively, I have also become very interested in how, in certain historical instances, Buddhism has not only served the ends of state power, but has also been rearticulated so that it becomes a means of either exercising power against the state, or countering certain discourses that inform overarching state or cultural practices (Konik 2016). Of course, to consider things in this light is to treat with unavoidable irreverence not only the avowed beliefs of certain Buddhist practitioners, but also the very uncritical way in which Buddhism has been construed in the West through an Orientalist lens – from the perspective of which it is believed to be an entirely spiritual panacea, utterly detached from the world of politics and cultural struggles, and single-mindedly orientated instead around the pursuit of enlightenment. But it is arguably important to persevere in this regard, because to allow such beliefs to congeal into dogma, is to do a great disservice to the myriad cultural forms that find expression in the many variants of Buddhism, all of which – much like Edward Said’s ‘Orient’ – comprise not an extant, static reality, but rather an ongoing series of

works in progress, on the part of different communities of interpretation (Said 1997: 44-45; Said 2003: 870-871), as they move through, and pass in and out of, time.

However, while the subtitle of this evening's lecture is "From Foucault to Deleuze and beyond," by this I did not wish to imply that I have somehow 'moved on' from Foucault. Rather, what I meant by this was that, after several years of more or less exclusive focus on Foucault's work, I began in 2010 to read Deleuze, and have since then found myself being drawn ever more into his ambit of influence. Yet, this has by no means entailed my abandonment of any recourse to Foucault's work; on the contrary, as I have already indicated, my work on Buddhism continues to be informed by Foucault's conception of power and knowledge. And beyond this my partner, Dr. Inge Konik, and I are currently completing an article for the journal *Angelaki*, in which we render a critique – again through the lens of Foucauldian archaeological and genealogical analyses – of certain types of eco-subjectivity. But there are a number of reasons for my shift towards Deleuze, including Foucault's own contention that the edifice of disciplinary/bio-power society had already begun to break down after the Second World War (cited in Deleuze 1990: 3), such that, while so many of its vestiges remain with us today, there are also other powerful forces now at play, from the juggernaut of neoliberalism to the digital technology that is such an increasingly pervasive, and indeed invasive, part of our lives (Deleuze 1990: 4-6). And these forces were not things that Foucault dealt with exhaustively, or in the case of digitality, at all. Correlatively, at a certain point I also began to doubt the continued validity of Foucault's conception of the modern world. This is because the idea of it as a domain of over-arching spatio-temporal regimentation and ubiquitous surveillance, in which resistance to homogeneity – while so important – can also at times be both difficult to imagine and even more difficult to achieve, no longer rang as true for me as it once did. And this was not least because of Deleuze's (and Guattari's) concept of 'leakage' (2005: 204), which speaks instead of a world in which all manner of top-down efforts to corral and canalize desires, interests or behaviors, tend sooner or later to fail,² not least because they entail trying to herd beings who can only ever recall things creatively rather than verbatim, even when they *want* to do exactly as they have been told to do. Indeed, on account of this wonderfully fresh perspective, Deleuze became increasingly important in my research, and I must acknowledge that it was through him that I became reacquainted not only with Spinoza, but also with the third life lesson that Spinoza taught me so long ago, concerning the salvific power of ironic laughter in the face of weighty conceptions of being. As Deleuze points out with such diabolical humor in his "Letter to a Harsh Critic" in the book *Negotiations*, immense difficulty is faced by anyone who sets out, with all the seriousness and honorable intentions in the world, to advance a particular way of thinking or speaking or acting, because no sooner is their book or article published, than a process of reading them against themselves begins (1973: 6). Indeed, in terms of this, they are likely to be thoroughly misunderstood by their readers, who then proceed to compound the confusion not only by misquoting and miscommunicating their ideas, but also by building such misrepresentations into new conceptual assemblages, which are in turn misappropriated and misused by others – even as all of them try to be faithful to the primary author. One can only imagine the horror of the

² In "Foucault and the Prison," Deleuze explains that after the publication of Foucault's *The Will to Knowledge: The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, he "realized...that [they] did not share the same view of society," before advancing that: "For me a society is something that never stops slipping away...Society is something that leaks, financially, ideologically – there are points of leakage everywhere. Indeed, the problem for society is how to stop itself from leaking...[F]or me society is a fluid...or even worse, a gas. For Michel [Foucault] it was an architecture" (1986: 21).

primary author who, one unfortunate day, happens upon the contorted and mutated vestiges of their original ideas demonically imbricated with a multiplicity of conceptual fragments and doctrinal debris they would never have imagined possible, even in their worst nightmares. But this is the phenomenon of leakage, and it is effectively the key to escaping from the prison house of Foucault's conception of the modern world.

The reason for much of this is the dynamic of memory identified by Bergson (1962: 210-212) – which continues to play such a large part in my current work – and a moment's attention is enough to clarify the associated cryptic phrase that “the present...does not cease to pass” while “the past...does not cease to be...present” (Deleuze 1991: 59). In short, as the present seconds of this lecture pass, the past – in which I introduced myself and provided the context for this evening's discussion – remains present, and this allows you to make sense of my words. But each time you recall that past, memory inflects it differently, adding some features here and eclipsing others there, or emphasizing certain points while displacing other aspects. And this is the creative nature of memory, whose playful processes are both interminable and in keeping with the durational movement of life itself in the universe (Bergson 1960: 10-11; Bergson 1965: 44-45). Accordingly, this leaves us with no choice but to repeat things differently, each time, so that difference becomes deeper and broader with each attempt at repetition, until we can scarcely even recognize in our repetitions the original thing we are trying in vain to emulate (Deleuze 2001: 1-4). The reality of this is so beautifully evinced in the disintegration over centuries, or even decades, of religions, of cultures, and of traditions, by the very hands of those who try so hard to keep them together through their acts of deep reverence. A reverence to which we must respond with the salvific power of humor, to shatter the heaviness of such life before it can crush us.

What I continue to argue in my work is that Deleuze's cinematic movement-images (2005a) and time-images (2005b) most powerfully reflect upon the vicissitudes of duration and memory that render all such acts of reverence poignantly empty gestures; and that to laugh at such gestures is not to be cruel, but rather by definition a matter of survival, such that it amounts to *serious* laughter, which is also seriously *necessary* laughter, if the possibility for difference is to remain open. In this regard, since 2010, I have been endeavoring to write film theory on movement- and time-images, through which I seek to render conspicuous the political implications of thematizing such reflections on time and memory in cinema. For me, these implications are immense, and most palpably felt in conservative worlds orientated around establishing some or other new order, based on retrospectively-constructed symbols and hagiographic history, in terms of which, ironically, “the present [i]s seen to be a continuation of a past, that [i]s itself a construction of the present” (Martin-Jones 2006: 33).³

In the face of such madness, and reverence for madness, the time-image responds by shattering the heaviness of such life through recalling, with growing irony, how all such memorializing

³ For example, conservative worlds where people effectively decide in the present who the *past* founders or martyrs of the tradition or movement were, before they instantiate them *as such*, with much ceremony and symbolism, and then seek to defend one corresponding ‘official’ version of history. A version which is moreover recalled with a manufactured reverence so emotive, that the indictment of anyone who does not concur becomes automatic, and the potential justification for all manner of reprisals and atrocities – with the Easter bombings on 21 April 2019 in Sri Lanka, and the earlier Christchurch massacre in New Zealand on 15 March 2019, being tragic cases in point.

recollects pasts that have never actually been present – or never *been* quite as they are recollected in the present – and that the very endeavor to establish and cling to history in this way is akin to clutching a handful of sand so tightly that all the grains escape between your fingers. In this sense, the time-image can also be curatively catalytic, when it succeeds in opening the fingers of such a hand before it can form a fist; a possibility which renders time-images potentially very socio-culturally transformative, when they counter the construction of conceptual walls that threaten to destroy friendships, or make them impossible.

Accordingly, such cinema remains politically valuable in an ordinary sense today, given the rise of neo-fascisms around the world and the associated myopic identity politics, which time-images can help to counter. But in addition, what I try to show in my work is that time-images are also political in an extra-ordinary sense, in relation to the increasingly dogmatic neoliberal worldview, predicated on the founding fathers of Hayek and Friedman, the symbol of the dollar, and the single ‘official’ version of history in which *laissez-faire* capitalism has emerged as the only viable economic game in town, and in terms of which environmental degradation is considered an unfortunate but unavoidable form of collateral damage. And time-images which respond, laughingly, to the revered madness of all of this, continue to hold a particular fascination for me, not only because of their erosion of the digital capitalist subject position, but also because of their correlative opening up of a universal vision – tantamount to what Spinoza calls the mystical experience of *beatitudo* – in which the limits of the human organism are exceeded, and the univocity of being is evoked.

To be sure, theorizing how exactly this is achieved in films such as Perrin and Cluzaud’s *Oceans* (Konik and Konik 2016) and *Les Saisons* (Konik 2017), and Nuridsany and Pérennou’s *Microcosmos* (Konik, *under review*), is in each case an unavoidably formalistic exercise. But for me, such formalism remains both something beautiful in itself, and something crucial for those who teach film theory, or who are involved in film-making, because only through such laboriously methodical analyses are we able to arrive at tentative understandings of how the mechanism of the time-image works – as part of a human-technological machinery, the nexus of which is the screen and the memory that recalls the images reflected upon it. And this understanding is so important to achieve, because it equips us with the means of pushing time-images ever further, in the direction of ever greater desubjectification, and correspondingly, in the pursuit of ever more intense experiences of cinematic beatitudo. Accordingly, this has entailed me focusing less and less on the films and directors Deleuze thematized, in favor of new types of environmental cinema – a genre which he in many ways glossed over, perhaps because the extent of the environmental crisis was not appreciated back then to the degree that it is now.

But this move ‘beyond’ Deleuze, as it were, is only fitting, because digital environmental cinema presents an *aporia* which falls to us to deal with as best we can. In short, at the very moment we are able through digital means to draw closer to the natural environment than ever before – through the light-weight mobility and low-light filming capacity of digital cameras – the infrastructural and economic system of which such digitality is part is destroying more of the natural environment than ever before. I have no doubt that Deleuze would have chuckled at length over the irony of this, but part of his laughter would likely have derived from how his involvement with nature – through his concept of ‘becoming-animal’ – seems to have extended little further than the literary insect of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* (Deleuze and Guattari 2003: 5-6,

13-15), or the all-too-human white whale of Melville's *Moby Dick* (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 243-249). To be blunt, I question whether Deleuze's concept of 'becoming-animal' provides us with the sort of ethical approach to the environment which is so sorely needed at present, or whether it was always more about freeing us from the constraining conception of human separateness from the univocity of being. But to the extent that the breakdown of such conceptions of separateness can lead toward more sympathetic and sustainable relations between humans and the non-human world, Deleuze may well have a place in our future, although we will have to acknowledge that he will be a Deleuze of our own making.

In this ongoing and onerous task of reading Deleuze against himself, though, I consider myself extremely fortunate to have the support of my partner, Inge, whose work on environmentalism in general and ecofeminism in particular, so often overlaps with my own concerns and interests. This has allowed us to collaborate very meaningfully, and indeed productively, in the publication of five accredited articles to date, both nationally and internationally, with a current sixth article under way in which we are exploring what ecofeminist time-images might entail. Of course, such acknowledgment does not do justice to all the further support which Inge, as my poor long-suffering partner, has provided to me – from constant companionship and conversation to robust critical debate – all of which I remain eternally grateful for.

Thanks must also go to my colleagues, both past and present, who have accompanied me on this journey: To the late Director of the School of Language, Media and Culture, Prof. Danie Jordaan, who so long ago gave me a chance to prove myself; to Prof. Peter Cunningham, for always offering key strategic advice when it was most needed; and to Prof. Bert Olivier, whom I have already acknowledged, but who I believe deserves a second mention for consistently setting the philosophical bar so high. I would also like to thank the current Dean of the Faculty of Arts, Prof. Rose Boswell, for her ongoing support, and Prof. Marius Crous, the Director of the School of Language, Media and Communication, for keeping the academic project so alive in what are often very trying times. Also, huge thanks must go to Dr. Subeshini Moodley, our Head of Department, both for running our department so wisely, and more recently, for perhaps unwisely, agreeing to collaborate with me on the making of an international documentary film – the funding outcome of which we are keenly awaiting. Of course, so many other people have also contributed to me being here tonight, but if I were to try to mention you all by name, we would be here all night, and I have already taken up enough of your time. But I know that you know who you are, and I trust that you realize just how important all of you continue to be in my life.

In closing, if you have noticed an element of belief creeping cautiously but steadily into what I have been saying, you are absolutely correct; but you must please grant me this plenary indulgence – for which I have paid very dearly – if only because I am no more or less mad than the rest of you, in my belief that what is good, and beautiful, and wise, will somehow prevail over the totalizing forces of our time. In sum, then, and like the dear demure character of Red Peter from Franz Kafka's most poignant short story *A Report to An Academy*, I hope that I have sufficiently presented to you, the Academy, the details of my intellectual transformation into a professor, all the while ready to apologize for any vestiges of my former life which I have not been able to extinguish – notwithstanding the irony that my whole duration in its absolute entirety has led to this moment. I thank you all for your time.

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