Making Claims

'how' is writing related to practice?

4th December 2013

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'how' is writing related to practice?

Art and Thought

Practice as Research: approaches to creative arts enquiry

After Criticism: New Responses to Art and Performance

Artists with PhDs: on the new doctoral degree in studio art

Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)

Visual and Other Pleasures

Death X 24 A Second

Dissensus. On Politics and Aesthetics

Art in Mind. How Contemporary Images Shape Thought

Warped Space

Perceptions of Measurement

Every song's the same

The enigma (the mysterious image) carries spectator into his or her psychic structure... and generates introspection.

Arms and legs: in the space of collaboration

The body outside of itself

How do I make work that evades meaning without it being about the evasion of meaning?

Neuroscience for Everyone!

Icebreaker

Tug

This Is Going To Be A Bit Like Watching Paint Dry. That's A Joke For Anyone Who's Used Paint Before

or

I Always Wanted To Go Loco, But Never Had Anywhere To Do It. Then I Discovered Acapulco.

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LITERARY CRITICISM

What do they know?

ore than any other kind of literature, the essay eludes definition. drawing those who seek its name and nature into a labyrinsh of paradoxes. Leigh Hunt had some fun in that maze when in 1819 he named the first of his Indicator essays "Difficulty of Finding a Name for a Work of this Kind", and filled it with a list of abandoned titles: "Some of the names had a meaning in their absurdity, such as the Adviser, or Helps for Composing: - the Cheap Reflector, or Every Man His Own Looking-Glass; - the Retailer, or Every Man His Own Other Man's Wit: -- Nonsense, To be continued". And those were only the most sensible. There was also "the Crocodile, or Pleasing Companion", "Chaos, or the Agreeable Miscellany", "Blood, being a Collection Coffee-Houses" of Light Essays", "the Ingenious Hatband", and "the Hippopotamus entered at Stationer's of the finest modern essayists but also a but "cries of anguish" - sublime stan Half

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It is probably a good thing that not a single one of the writers collected in Carl H. Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French's superbly useful and pioneering anthology, Essayists on the Essay, risks insisting on the essay's outer boundaries, though many identify in Montaigne its sacred spring. Essayists up to the present continue to inhabit the terrain Montaigne first explored and to express the culture he founded there, whose central credo is a defiant independence from professional scholarship and its demarcations.

THOMAS KARSHAN

Carl H. Klaus and Ned Stuckey-French, editors

ESSAVISTS ON THE ESSAY Monitzigne to our time 256ep. University of Iowa Press. \$25; distributed in the UK by Eurospan. £21.50. 9781609380762

Randi Salomon

VIRGINIA WOOLF'S ESSAYISM 184pp. Edizburgh University Press. £65. 978 0 7486 4648 7

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A nineteenth-century illustration of Michel de Montaigne

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> Thomas Karshan 'What do they know?' TLS 22nd March 2013

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A nineteenth-century illustration of Michel de Montaigne

Essayists up to the present continue to inhabit the terrain Montaigne first explored and to express the culture he founded there, whose central credo is a defiant independence from professional scholarship and its demarcations. Montaigne wrote that "the scholars distinguish and mark off their ideas more specifically and in detail. I, who cannot see beyond what I have learned from experience, without any system, present my ideas in a general way, and tentatively". It's a long way from academic articles, in which the argument is linear, the sources footnoted, the proof explicit, and all the theories at work are set out neatly and clearly. Essays will always have to live with the charge of trivial amateurism...

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'We always win'

Obver Stone got so sack of always reading the samitised. Disney version of US history that he decidento write his own for an uncompromising 10-part television series. He talks to Stuart Jeffries



lover Phone has just agreed to take part in the CS version of lamie's Devam School, the TV show that explored the

interesting notion that famous people might educate kids better than teachers. "It was much criticised in Britain but I still think it's a good idea," says Shone over coffee and basels in a Solito botal. He'll be the American equivalent of Jamie's history teacher David Starlery Only, yes'd suspect, more radical.

Stoney IV history class might well. be named US Heresies (33, "Works going to take these texts from regular history and compare them to triat we think

kappened." He will issuit that the to uniting of Eurosiama was premitted on a lie, that the CLE's secret nor against leftest Central American governments was based on chimerical community threat, that the investment of Afghanization and imp were follies and, perhaps most intoiseaftie of all to patriots, that the United States of America is just as self serving, doplichous, corrops, oppressive, expression of and varies as three's no easy way to say this - the fairish empire

In the 1960s, Stone was invanied a burgene star and a purple heart with oak leaf closter for lancings in Vertram, If he survives lynching by addrescent reality-show neo-cons, he should get another medal.

it will be the latest improbablis chapter in the life story of a man mixed as an Eisenhouser Republican, who fought as a patrick in Vietnam and made his game in Hollywood writing. such splashy, amonal accomplays as tearface for AJ Parino, before becoming an Oscar winning. Chivez-admining. Buddhist when the Observer described very practical reason it's built as "one of the few contained men of the left working in mainstream American cinema". Today he tells me the is looking forward to attending the Subserve film festival in Croalia. Of course he is.

One reason Stone has mutated into conserved TV historium is because inpair the US Beforal government survey reported that only 12% of US high achool students know they country a

history. Why is that? "By thesity initiary is howing because the her securios are left cust. What's left in sectroed Deney venice - a tiken marrorise. We bled of always with see'he alwars right."

For the past from years, the 66 old director has been working u bistorian Peter Kurnick on the desaringed version, complete a horror stories. The second is a 10 TV series called The Unitold Him the United States, and an affed page book. Stone and Rumick i conflocend the abea that the US I the desiring expressed in 16.80 h Wathrop, English Puritan lawy one of New England's founders namely that America's destiny become a divinely ordained "ci

the hill" - a belactor for the rest. would to follow. "I was beying to up with all th manifest destroy multi-when I w kid," says Rome. "I was slowped until I was 40." What cetalysed make this documentary history feating that the samtised versi US history he had settimened w being taught to his children." reasons given for the atomic b in my opinion, astatious and a gemores. But we bought it. No sy-year old daughter goes to a a very good school - where the told that in the textbooks. "Jap not have saturendered. The hot

the war to save Kmerikan Lyre Didn't President Harry 5 To argue that the bombing of His spared the layer of thousands. who would have otherwise di invasion of Japan in 19457 "T buildhil," snaps Stone. "And t (Min't have even mounted)

instantion until November."

His and Karmick's theory. 4 that the promic bornibing of o was almost, not in securing la surrender, but at shaving an Statio, They buileve that, had and Nagasaki not been bomb August 1945 by the US, some decide introlerubie to both lare and American smallelities w

Locating Practice, MFA - Professor Chris Dorsett, Talk Studio Northumbria

arms race and the cold war.

For Stone, the US has, ever since those two fateful days in August 1945, been in the malefic grip of the military and hegemonic delusions. It has postured as extending democratic ideals but rather has extended control across the globe by any means necessary, including covert CIA support for death squads, drone attacks and calamitous invasions.

"We were showing we're as barbaric as we can be. As ruthless as the Russians could be in Germany, we could be more ruthless. We had no problems dropping the atomic bomb on civilians - a devastating war crime. If the Germans had dropped that bomb and lost the war, that bomb would have been stigmatised for all time. There would have been some international agreement to control it." But, Stone and Kuznick argue, because the US used atomic bombs first and was dishonest about why it did so, that international agreement didn't happen: instead, Stone grew up under that threat of nuclear Armageddon.

This account, unsurprisingly, has enraged some US historians. Writing in the New York Review of Books, Sean Wilentz argued that Stone and Kuznick ignore scholarship that contradicts their assumptions. "It is hardly clear. for example, that the Japanese government was close to surrendering on the Allies' terms in the summer of 1945," writes Wilentz, "American analysts believed that, short of a bloody invasion of its shores, Japanese leaders would fight hard, holding out for a much möder negotiated settlement, which negates Stone and Kuznick's contention that Truman was misleading about his motive for using atomic bombs."

In any event, Stone and Kuznick's more intriguing task is to do counterfactual history. Their American history isn't untold, but rather a meditation on what could have - and, in their view, should - have, happened. What if, they wonder, Truman had not succeeded Franklin D Roosevelt as president in April 1945? What if, instead of choosing Truman - whom the pair psychopathologise as having unresolved "gender issues" and portray as weak, biddable and biustering ("To err is

8 The Guardian 16.04.13



Stone believes John F Kennedy would not have committed US troops in Vietnam; the director admired the late Hugo Chávez (right)

'Kennedy

the Cuban

crisis was

the single

of human

world has

witnessed'

greatest act

courage this

missile

saying no at

Truman," 1940s Republicans sneered) - as Roosevelt's vice-presidential candidate in the 1944 presidential election, the Democratic convention had once more chosen the now littleknown Henry Wallace to be FDR's running mate?

Their contention is that if, after FDR died in April 1945, vice-president Wallace had succeeded, postwar world history would have been very different. "The bomb would not have been dropped with Wallace or Roosevelt as president, in my opinion," says Stone. "Not at all. Not a chance. They [the military] would have opposed Wallace, given him a hard time, but you can't force a president to drop a bomb. You just can't."

Given that Stone and Kuznick's revisionist American history starts from the idea that Truman lowered the US's moral threshold and many of his successors continued that descent. this is no small issue. The drama of that 1944 Democratic convention is one that Stone and Kuznick wrote as a Hitchcockian thriller in the late 1990s before deciding to make it, a decade later, the linchpin of their documentary. "Bush wasn't an aberration," says Stone of the two-term Republican president whom he savaged in his 2008 biopic W, "Bush is the climax to an American mindset that had started

with Tra world w He po could ha debacles "war on get that in 1944. father st needed It's h told this JFK, he as a pear America conspire Commis "We do enemie change had bloc he was t and the peace an Kenned wanted Soviet U If you Stone as you mig relation traumati abrupt d

was awa

Louis, a

'... (W)e are now in a position to explain how our vivid sensory experience arises in the sensory cortex of our brains ... (and is) embodied in a vast chorus of neural activity ... to explain how the (nervous system and the musculature) perform the cheetah's dash, the falcon's strike, or the ballerina's dying swan (W)e can now understand how the infant brain slowly develops a framework of concepts ... and how the matured brain deploys that framework almost instantaneously: to recognize similarities, to grasp analogies, and to anticipate both the immediate and the distant future.'

I do think that is naughty of Paul Churchland. For one thing, none of it is true. We don't know how the brain deploys its concepts to achieve perception and thought; or how it develops them; or even what concepts are. We don't know how the motor system contrives the integration of the lips, tongue, lungs and vocal cords in the routine utterance of speech, to say nothing of special effects like the approximation of dying swans by whole ballerinas. Nor do we know, even to a first glimmer, how a brain (or anything else that is physical) could manage to be a locus of conscious experience. This last is, surely, among the ultimate metaphysical mysteries; don't bet on anybody ever solving it.

Jerry Fodor 'West Coast fuzzy' TLS 25th August 1995

Churchland, P. M. (1996) *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul, Philosophical journey into the brain*, Cambridge MA.: MIT

Entry in:

Macey, D. (2000) The Penguin Dictionary of Critical Theory, London: Penguin Books Ltd.

Metalanguage

In linguistics, a technical or second-order language used to describe and analyse a natural or first-order language or a set of propositions about other propositions. More generally, any descriptive discourse such as literary criticism can be said to function as a metalanguage. According to Jakobson, the process of acquiring or learning a language involves many metalinguistic operations. He also argues (1960) that all speakers of a language also use a metalanguage without realising it in order to ensure that they are using the same code as their interlocutors.

Although linguists accept the need for metalanguage, the very possibility of a metalinguistic dimension is denied by many of the thinkers associated with Poststructuralism, Postmodernism and Deconstruction. Lacan, for example, flatly denies the existence of any metalanguage (1960), basing his claim on Heidegger's contention that language is the 'house of being' and that it is impossible to step outside it (1959). In Heidegger's view, any metalanguage is a metaphysics and a 'technicalization' that destroys the experience of language. Most of the philosophers associated with the linguistic turn take a similar view and argue, like Wittgenstein, that there can be no metalinguistic or extralinguistic dimension because 'the limits of my language are the limits of my world' (1921) or, like Derrida, that 'there is nothing outside the text' (1967).



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