Becoming-teacher:
A partial and experimental account of Western native English-speaking teachers in Vietnamese international schools.

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**Abstract**

This thesis explores being a White, Western, native English-speaking teacher in encounter with students perceived as different. Conducted as an interview and observation study in three international schools in Vietnam, it focuses specifically on the constructions of difference in representations of teacher and student, Westerner and Asian, and Self and Other in teachers’ discourse. Plugging in to the works of Gilles Deleuze, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Homi K. Bhabha among others, it argues that the position of the teacher is ultimately paradoxical and paranoid, constituted by the desire for an Other who both desires the teacher and concomitantly expresses the constant threat of the erasure of the teacher through the very act of being taught.

Inspired by the deconstructive critique of enlightenment humanism, the thesis also explores the problem of how to think and write about subjects who are not given as such. That is, rather than autonomous, integral, agentic individuals, teachers and students are represented as heterogeneous elements entangled in an assemblage of forces and intensities in which the individual cannot be reliably individuated, interviewed, observed, and subsequently analysed, interpreted, and discussed. Thus the thesis is an attempt to think and write within the flow of forces and intensities that comprise the assemblage, and of which the researcher and thesis are also a part, resulting in a text which may strain at the limits of recognisability as thesis per the conventional expectations of humanist qualitative inquiry.

Consequently the thesis also represents an experiment in and with writing, an exploration of the limits of what is possible within the constraints of the thesis text, and an attempt to do something other than the methodical application of the conventional. As such it is only ever a partial representation of the real, or rather an experiment in contact with the real. An attempt to write when writing is thinking and thinking is the creation of something that may not have previously existed. Not to say definitively what is or what it means, but to bring something to life that will produce its own effects and affects far beyond any authorial intentions of recognition and representation.
Declaration by author

This thesis is composed of my original work, and contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the text. I have clearly stated the contribution by others to jointly-authored works that I have included in my thesis.

I have clearly stated the contribution of others to my thesis as a whole, including statistical assistance, survey design, data analysis, significant technical procedures, professional editorial advice, and any other original research work used or reported in my thesis. The content of my thesis is the result of work I have carried out since the commencement of my research higher degree candidature and does not include a substantial part of work that has been submitted to qualify for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution. I have clearly stated which parts of my thesis, if any, have been submitted to qualify for another award.

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Publications during candidature

Refereed journal articles


Conference abstracts


Publications included in this thesis

No publications included.

Contributions by others to the thesis

No contributions by others.

Statement of parts of the thesis submitted to qualify for the award of another degree

None.
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Keywords

Deleuze, difference, English, Foucault, identity, postcolonialism, postqualitative research, poststructuralism, subjectivity, teacher identity

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Fields of Research (FoR) Classification

1302 Curriculum and Pedagogy, 50%
1303 Specialist Studies in Education, 50%
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For Hậu
We are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be.

-Kurt Vonnegut Jr

Mother Night
1. they are born …

I preferred not to say the rest that had come to my mind: that just like us they are born and die, and in the journey from the cradle to the grave they dream dreams some of which come true and some of which are frustrated; that they fear the unknown, search for love and seek contentment in wife and child; that some are strong and some are weak; that some have been given more than they deserve by life, while others have been deprived by it, but that the differences are narrowing and most of the weak are no longer weak. I did not say this to Mahjoub, though I wish I had done so, for he was intelligent; in my conceit I was afraid he would not understand.

-Tayeh Salih

Season of Migration to the North

This is not a thesis. Ce n’est pas une these. Đây không phải là một luận án. Though it may, at times, resemble one. The map is not the territory. My thesis, my real thesis, the one I wrote after ‘I knew what I wanted to say’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 924), the thesis that spoke of what it knew: knowledge and truth and methods and validity and conclusions and implications hasn’t been written yet. This is a map, not a territory, and the map is not the territory. The territory exists, folding and unfolding, de- and reterritorialised and de- and reterritorialising continuously in encounter with its others: inevitably, unceasingly becoming. This is a map and not a tracing. It disobeys the ‘law of reflection, the One that becomes two’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5). It is not oriented towards a tracing of the real, but rather ‘an experimentation in contact with real’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). It’s a map of the territory as it was, or rather might have been. It will never return to the same.

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1 Deleuze writes, in his Letter to a Harsh Critic, that there are two ways of reading a book:

- you either see it as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies, and then if you’re even more perverse or depraved you set off after signifiers. And you treat the next book like a box contained in the first or containing it. And you annotate and interpret and question, and write a book about a book and so on and on. Or there’s the other way: you see the book as a little non-signifying machine, and the only question is “Does it work, and how does it work?” How does it work for you? If it doesn’t work, if nothing comes through, you try another book. This second way of reading’s intensive: something comes through or it doesn’t. There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. It’s like plugging into an electric circuit. (1995, pp. 7-8)

How will you read this thesis that is not a thesis (and not a book, for that matter)? How will it work if it works at all? What, if anything, will come through, I wonder?

2 In Lewis Carroll’s Sylvie and Bruno Concluded, Mein Herr observes:

‘That’s another thing we’ve learned from your Nation,’ said Mein Herr, ‘map-making. But we’ve carried it much further than you. What do you consider the largest map that would be really useful?’

‘About six inches to the mile.’

‘Only six inches!’ exclaimed Mein Herr. ‘We very soon got to six yards to the mile. Then we tried a hundred yards to the mile. And then came the grandest idea of all! We actually made a map of the country, on the scale of a mile to the mile’

‘Have you used it much?’ I enquired.

‘It has never been spread out, yet,’ said Mein Herr: ‘the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight! So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well.’ (Carroll, 1893, p. 169)

What map could claim to actually represent the territory, without shutting out the sunlight? And what would happen if we acknowledged this at the beginning of a thesis? Would, as Lather and St. Pierre (2013, p. 630) ask, ‘the goal of our work continue to be “to represent,” to tell it like it really is out there in rich, thick description?’ Or would it become something different? Could the thesis, or map, become an event in its own right? Could it be simulacra and not copy (Baudrillard, 1994), irreducible to the territory it purports to represent, and capable of generating its own concepts and possibilities? What might the map be capable of, other than mere representation? What might it do?
Here all is static and sedentary. Words are unmoving and unchanging, rooted to the page. It is knowledge (re)presented. Though, of course, these signs will subsist, pursuing their own effects free of interference from this subject who inscribes marks on a page, or at least zeros and ones on magnetic media (Derrida, 1988). But the territory is no more; it has passed into memory. It has changed, transformed, and continued becoming different. It moves at the speed of light, and sometimes rock. What does it all mean? Better not to ask. This is not a thesis. This is still figuring out what it wants to be. Or what it might become.3

***

All of this happened, more or less. I remember it all. Or I think I do. Or I read it somewhere else, or heard it, or dreamt it, or borrowed it from somewhere like the first sentence of this paragraph, mostly unaware that ‘enunciation in itself implies collective assemblages’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 80).4 And so I wrote it down and rewrote it, and read it again. I showed it to my advisors, my panel of readers, the writing group I joined, friends I trusted. I saw it or heard it or felt it or read it and wrote it and rewrote it and rewrote it. Always assuming that ‘language begins with individuated statements and determined subjects, and never understanding that ‘the statement is individuated, and enunciation subjectified, only to the extent that an impersonal collective assemblage requires it and determines it to be so’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 80). Now it is fixed. It is finished. It is. I submit. It has to be.5

It’s all pretty much true, as far as that goes. I really did spend four years teaching in Vietnam. I really am married. I really did work with a young American teacher who used to call Vietnamese people, in general, ignorant peasants and say things like the French colonisation of Indochina was the best thing that could have happened to Vietnam, because croissants! And an Australian teacher really did tell me that Vietnamese kids, like Blackfellas (he guessed) couldn’t think freely in reality but could do it in a dream and write it down. Or at least that’s what I heard. And I also worked with really great teachers, like my friend Mary, and we used to joke that we worked at the third best international

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3 I have toyed with the idea, like Sellers (2009), of placing ‘thesis’ sous rature, indicating both its necessity and its fallibility. Spivak writes that Derrida’s notion of sous rature points to:

the strange “being” of the sign: half of it always “not there” and the other half always “not that.” The structure of the sign is determined by the trace or track of that other which is forever absent. This other is of course never to be found in its full being. (1976, p. xvii)

So it seems to be with this thesis, determined by the trace of that which is absent, that which it is not, that which it will never become.

4 It’s the opening sentence of Kurt Vonnegut Jr’s Slaughterhouse Five. Why did we both write that? What does it mean that ‘a subject is never the condition of possibility of language or the cause of the statement: there is no subject, only collective assemblages of enunciation’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 130)? ‘When one writes,’ write Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 4), ‘the only question is which other machine the literary machine can be plugged into, must be plugged into in order to work.’ Why this machine and not that? I don’t know why.

5 I have determined that I like footnotes and I am determined to use them even though I think I am probably not supposed to. I like the way they allow me to run off at tangents that seem less important because the text is smaller and suppressed down here at the bottom of the page but that just might turn out to work better than what I’ve written up there. I know they are disruptive, but goddamn it why shouldn’t they be? Sooner or later I’ll probably have to quote someone important to justify why.

Continued on next page
But what if there is another way? A third possibility, which, of course, Deleuze (1998, p. 107) suggests there is: ‘when saying is doing’:

This thesis is written doubtfully. As such, it seems I have this choice to make (of course there are many others – but this one seems significant from the outset): do I state that it is doubtful, and leave it at that? Or do I attempt to do it doubtfully? To make the thesis, or its narration, or its content, or the terms themselves doubtful? Or both? Do it and say it? Could I open a quotation here, begin with “He stammered, doubtfully …” and close it up on the last page before my reference list?

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What does this mean: to make the language as such stutter? For the words to no longer exist independently of the stutter? What would it look like? In writing? In a thesis? Could I say it when saying it is doing it? Would that work? And why? And what difference would it make? Buchanan (2000, p. 112) writes that ‘stuttering breaks the natural seeming connection between words or images in a sequence with the effect of rendering both the relation between the terms and the terms themselves problematic.’ This is my intention: to make the language of this thesis stutter, to interfere with the sequence of words, problematising the terms and the relation between them. I can’t say if it is affective or mere affectation. Or if it works.

Deleuze (1998, p. 109) writes that when authors proceed along this third way, like a Prague Jew writing in German, or an Irishman writing in French, they:

invent a minor use of the major language within which they express themselves entirely; they minimalize this language … they make the language take flight, they send it racing along a witch’s line, ceaselessly placing it in a state of disequilibrium, making it bifurcate and vary in each of its terms. (1998, p. 109)

A minor literature, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 1987), is the deterritorialisation of a major language, immediately connected to the political and collective in value. A minor literature is ‘less a product than a process of becoming minor, through which language is deterritorialized immediately social and political issues are engaged, and a collective assemblage of enunciation makes possible the invention of a people to come’ (Bogue, 2010, p. 171). A minor literature, then, is not a minority language, but rather a different use of the major language ‘which a minority constructs within a major language’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 16). It is political, asubjective, collective, and revolutionary, existing ‘only in relation to a major language and [as] investments of that language for the purpose of making it minor’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 105). Lecercler (2002, p. 195) writes that the aim of a minor literature as the enunciation of a collective assemblage ‘is not to foster or extract meaning, but to give rise to intense, and intensive, expression … the point of minor literature is not to make recognisable sense, but to express intensities, to capture forces, to act.’ Thus, if the major language of the qualitative doctoral thesis is one of disinterested and objective (and, at least in this case, English) Enlightenment humanism (St. Pierre, 2011), then could this thesis be an attempt to make a minor utilisation of the major language in a way that opposes the ‘oppressive quality’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 27) of an ‘overdetermined qualitative inquiry’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 611)? To act against the structures and strictures of the thesis? To act rather than to make sense? To express intensities rather than to mean?

And so what about the footnote? It is merely a strategy to minorise the language of the thesis, to disrupt the sequence of and the relation between terms, even though ‘no typographical, lexical, or even syntactical cleverness is enough’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6). A way to fragment the text and language of humanist qualitative inquiry. To use the language differently. To disturb the unity of the thesis, its composition, and its pretence of an orderly, sensible, linear and coherent narrative. To interrupt and interfere with and perhaps even escape from humanism’s logic of mimesis and representation (St. Pierre, 2013). To map and not to trace: all this happened, more or less, but ‘what distinguishes the map from the tracing is that it is entirely oriented toward an experimentation in contact with the real’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 12). To trouble the presumption that ‘language (secondary) can stand in for the real (primary)’ (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 631). A minor way to disrupt and undermine the ontological status of the introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. To bifurcate the terms and send them below the line. To resist the ‘most classical and well reflected, oldest, and weariest kind of thought’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5): that this writing imitates the world. So this is an attempt to say, and do, when saying is doing, when writing makes academic language stammer or wail. It’s a collective enunciation of incredulity – an intense expression that ‘we made it up’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613) and that ‘everything is dangerous’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 256) including this. The footnote is employed as a line of flight, a cutting edge of deterritorialisation, a rhizome, revealing itself under close scrutiny to be as ‘anthills, swarming with constructive and combative activity’ (Grafton, 1997, p. 9). Each is an act of escape from the major language of the thesis, no mere metaphor but literally minor, below the line, a smaller font, metamorphosed. A way of saying when saying is doing, because it seems not enough to be content with the varied and simple indications of a ‘bad novelist’ (Deleuze, 1998, p. 107). Mere typographical cleverness, yes, but also part of an attempt to write doubtfully when writing is doubting: not just to write about doubt but to embody incredulity in writing, to make writing not the representation of a real questioning but the very activation of such a questioning (Vivian, 2005). Does it work? I can’t say. Or rather it is not for me to say.

*Okay, here’s why: In the essay He Stuttered, Deleuze (1998) writes that the author seems to have only two choices when representing the intonation of voice. The first of these is to do it; to make the character stutter, or scream, or mutter on the page. The second is to say it without doing it; to be satisfied with a simple indication of “he murmured,” “he stammered,” and so on. This thesis is written doubtfully. As such, it seems I have this choice to make (of course there are many others – but this one seems significant from the outset): do I state that it is doubtful, and leave it at that? Or do I attempt to do it doubtfully? To make the thesis, or its narration, or its content, or the terms themselves doubtful? Or both? Do it and say it? Could I open a quotation here, begin with “He stammered, doubtfully …” and close it up on the last page before my reference list?

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school in Hanoi, back when there were only three.\(^6\)

I really did work in a school that paid English-speaking Indian and Filipino teachers half of what they paid White teachers.\(^7\) And paid English-speaking Vietnamese teachers even less than that.

I really did see a man dying in the middle of the road, his face turned away from me, his bleached white socks contrasting with the dirty black road, and his shoes sitting absurdly beside him.\(^8\)

I guess I don’t know what it all means, but it’s all true, as far as that goes.

I really did go back for two months at the beginning of 2013. This was my ‘data collection’ for my PhD, an academic road trip backed by academic money and academic methodology. I really did take a Sony digital voice recorder and watch a whole bunch of teachers teaching and ask them questions like ‘Can you tell me a little about your background and qualifications?’ or ‘Tell me the story of how you ended up teaching English in Vietnam?’ or ‘Why is English important to these kids?’ because these seemed like the kinds of questions I should and was supposed to ask.\(^9\)

I really went back, on my own, leaving my wife and son in Brisbane. I stayed with my wife’s parents in Kim Giang, by the Tô Lịch River and rode an aging Honda Astrea\(^10\) to different schools to ‘collect data,’ whatever that means. It was a tiny old motorcycle with a punishing seat that once

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\(^6\) All names in this thesis are ’clever pseudonyms to prevent recognition’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3). Except those that are neither clever nor pseudonyms.

\(^7\) Native English-speaking or otherwise.

\(^8\) One afternoon, when I was nearly home from school, I saw a body lying in the street. A man neatly dressed in a mustard shirt and black trousers. His black leather shoes sat on the road, near his feet. His bleached white socks looked strangely out of place resting on the grey road. He lay on his stomach, on the road, in the middle of the road, with his faced turned away from me as I rode slowly past. A thick red pool spread from under his black hair. As I looked and rode slowly past I thought of my wife and son in Australia, my parents-in-law waiting for me at home, just around the corner. A crowd stood around, on the road, slowing the traffic, watching quietly: the black shoes, the white socks, the red blood drying on the dusty grey road. They murmured softly, watching, waiting. We watched. I watched. He died. I remembered General William Westmoreland, sitting by some green river, neatly dressed in a light grey suit, softly explaining that ‘the Oriental doesn't put the same high value on human life as does the Westerner. Life is plentiful, life is cheap in the Orient; and uh, as the philosophy of the Orient, uh, expresses it, life is not important’ (Davis, 1974). I stopped and stood and watched, just as I stopped and watched the teachers and students I observed in class, forming notes and phrases and sentences in my mind. “The man lay on the street, his face turned away from me. His shoes sat on the road. His red blood pooled under his head.” I thought of my mother and father, waiting at home for him, just around the corner. A crowd stood around, on the road, slowing the traffic, watching quietly: the black shoes, the white socks, the red blood drying on the dusty grey road. They murmured softly, watching, waiting. We watched.

\(^9\) Formally, at three different schools, I observed and interviewed six non-Vietnamese teachers. I also interviewed a further nine non-Vietnamese teachers, five Vietnamese teachers, two non-Vietnamese administrators, and two Vietnamese school administrators. I also held a focus group with four of the observed teachers.

Of the seventeen non-Vietnamese participants, eight were from the United States, four from the United Kingdom, four from Australia, and one from Canada. All were native English speakers, and all, apart from two, were White. Thirteen of the teachers taught in secondary school: seven were teaching English, two science, one mathematics, one ICT, one business, and one social sciences. Of these thirteen, eight were qualified teachers in their own countries, five were not qualified as teachers, and two did not possess a bachelor’s degree. Two were female and thirteen male. Of the thirteen male teachers and two male administrators, though I did not ask, ten volunteered that they had Vietnamese partners. All of the five Vietnamese teachers were female, and all were teaching secondary English. Both of the Vietnamese school administrators spoke English and had obtained higher degrees in Australia and the US.

\(^10\) Which was really just a Honda Dream with a different name and which my Vietnamese friends and family referred to as a Honda Atech though I still haven’t figured out why.
blessed me with three flat tyres in one day (see Figure 1).

My wife – who really is Vietnamese – and I do go back to Hanoi as much as we can afford, and see the ways it is always changing and always staying the same.

My data does consist of digital audio recordings and transcripts of interviews and focus groups – conversations really – I conducted with teachers and students. And it consists of the notes and observations and doodles I made in A4 notebooks as I watched teachers and students interact in classrooms, watching and scribbling and not really knowing what I was watching for or scribbling about: field-notes. And it also consists of the dreams and memories I have of four years in Vietnam: of staffroom conversations and jokes in bars and teachers being fired and a pain in the arse from a worn motorcycle seat I can still recall (the pain, that is) and a stranger dying peacefully on the road as his neighbours and I stood by and watched respectfully.

So I try to remember all of those two months, and the four years before them, and write this thesis, which, remember, is not a thesis. I have recordings and transcripts and field notes, which are data, but I also have memories, and dreams, and songs I listen to while I write, and feelings, and relationships, and convictions, and doubts, and senses of guiltiness and shame that I am careful not
to spend too much time examining.\textsuperscript{11} And these are not data,\textsuperscript{12} or are,\textsuperscript{13} depending on who you read and how you position yourself as a researcher.\textsuperscript{14}

So I have to remember and write, but for what, exactly? What will writing do? What is a thesis for? What is a thesis capable of? Even, or especially, a thesis that is not a thesis?

I think – I felt – that I was supposed to have an argument; a neat problem and solution dyad, a research question and research answer supported by illustrative data that would validate my argument and problem and solution. It would be linear, logical, and sensible. Valid and reliable. Clear and concise. Focussed, well-grounded, methodologically appropriate. It would mean something.

And so maybe this is what I think I’m interested in: if we take seriously Foucault’s statement that ‘from the idea that the self is not given to us, I think that there is only one practical consequence: we have to create ourselves as a work of art’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 262), then this process creation of self – that is, in Foucauldian terms, the use of those ‘technologies of self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being’ (Foucault, 1988, p. 18) – seems a worthy problem for thought and a problem fundamental to understanding teachers and teaching and learning in this context: How does one create oneself as teacher in a milieu in which one is not given?

Which is not to suggest that there is a homogenous group of Western native English-speaking expatriate teachers that create themselves as a homogenous group of Western native English-speaking expatriate teachers in Vietnam. There are many different ways of being a teacher in a place like Vietnam, even when one is predicated as White, Western, male,\textsuperscript{15} European, native English-speaking, and so on. Some are qualified. Some are not. Some are direct instructors. Some are relaxed facilitators. Some care. Others seem not to. Some learn to speak Vietnamese. Some make friends with Vietnamese people. Some find Vietnamese partners. Others depend on their expat communities and networks. Some stay. Most come and go. Still, it seems, amongst this heterogeneous group there are certain commonalities that can be articulated: all are there, physically, in a certain place for a certain period

\textsuperscript{11} Just in case. Though as Buchanan (2000, p. 196) asserts, ‘all that Deleuze has to say on the subject of ethics stems from a conviction that man is shameful, and he constantly enjoins us to become something finer.’

\textsuperscript{12} Delamont (2009, p. 60) for example, says ‘that there should be demarcation between the ethnographer’s reflexive self when there is a research topic, and the academic who focuses on themselves rather than having a research topic.’ I have a topic; it is Self. Not necessarily my Self, for I am no longer certain in my ability to disentangle and demarcate the many Selves that comprise a research topic.

\textsuperscript{13} St. Pierre (1997, p. 175) identifies ‘transgressive data - emotional data, dream data, sensual data, and response data - that are out-of-category and not usually accounted for in qualitative research methodology.’

\textsuperscript{14} I think you are supposed to make this positioning clear these days, as a practice of reflexivity and validity in qualitative research. Which I think is important, but, like Tierney (2002, p. 391), I am also ‘concerned with the unreflective insertion of the author into a narrative,’ which is to say, I think, I am concerned with the unreflective insertion of an unreflective reflexivity. I can’t help think it would be better to leave some work for you, dear reader, to make your own mind up as to my positioning. Who, after all, am I to say where I do or don’t stand? (Also: show don’t tell, the writing people tell me.)

\textsuperscript{15} (mostly)
of time. And all will encounter people perceived, at least in some way, as different from themselves.\footnote{At least according to that oldest and weariest thought of that which is not self, which is outside and external to self, and which is necessarily differentiated from the self.}

What is it, then, that makes us different? And if the self is not given to us, and so then not given to us as different as such, how do we become different? By what means do we produce this difference? And how is it recognised? And what are its affects and effects? And how is it used? And why? And why does difference appear to be not only possible but perhaps even necessary to those operations we effect on our own ways of being?

I am interested in the ways that the ‘dogmatic image of thought,’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 148) – representational thought – operates with common sense and good sense in ‘determining the indeterminate object as this or that, and of individualising the self situated in this ensemble of objects’ (p. 266). In the ways that common and good sense serve judgement as recognition, which, according to Deleuze (1994, p. 33), ‘has precisely two essential functions, and only two: distribution, which it ensures by the partition of concepts; and hierarchization, which it ensures by the measuring of subjects.’ In the ways, as May describes, good sense:

finds that one object is not like another. … by means of creating stable categories for each. In this way, difference is subordinated to identity. Things are different because they fall into different categories. They are different precisely in not being identical or the same. It is on the basis of the identity of the categories that difference is recognized. (2005, pp. 77-78)

I’m interested in the ways that difference is recognised as difference precisely in that it \emph{is} different; in the ways that things – identities – are not the same. That you are different from me. And in the ways that identity, analogy, opposition, and resemblance – ‘the four heads or the four shackles of mediation’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 29) – are used to recognise and judge difference, to say that $x$ is the same as the same as $y$, or shares something with $y$, or is not $y$, or is in some way like $y$ (May, 2005). To say that teachers are teachers, or aren’t. Or that teachers aren’t students, or share some characteristic with students, or are like students in some way. And to say that \emph{they} are not like \emph{us}, or are, or are in some particular ways, or share some particularity with us. And I’m interested in how judgement as recognition is used to produce this difference which is based on and is the basis of identity; to differentiate among objects, and to individualise a self – but a self which is not given, which must be differentiated, individuated, actualised, and situated amongst this ensemble of objects which are identical, analogous, opposite, or resembling of that self which is always being constituted (as a work of art) through difference, always in relation to difference, to that from which it is differentiated, and which also always fails to account for difference in itself. And I’m interested to
know if it is possible to explore such interests without knowing, while remaining uncertain, open to wonder and to expressing intensities rather than extracting meanings.

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When I first went to Vietnam I was an Australian Youth Ambassador for Development.¹⁷ It was brilliant. Before we went to Vietnam we were flown to Canberra for a few days of orientation: a doctor told us about traveller’s diarrhoea and the dangers of motorcycles and acquiring HIV/AIDS from prostitutes pretending to be university students; a black-belted security consultant warned us not to display any Australian flags on our accommodation, not to live above ground floor in case of fire, and not to wear jewellery in case machete wielding scooter bandits lopped off our hands and caught them (hands and jewellery) in buckets. We met returned AYADs who had completed their tours of duty and gave us advice on what to expect: get a motorbike, say yes to everything, et cetera. We were briefed and met the Foreign Minister and Ambassador. Later we were flown together to Hanoi, and picked up at Nội Bài Airport in a minibus, and deposited at a hotel in the city’s Old Quarter, the Phố Cổ, where we were welcomed by the preceding cohort of AYADs at a neon lit bar right around the corner from our hotel at which we drank cheap beer and saw girls who may or may not have been prostitutes pretending to be university students riding motorcycles. We were driven around the city for a week by our in-country contact, Hương, and shown where to buy electrical goods, where to buy Western canned food,¹⁸ where to live, and so on. We were hosted by the Australian embassy in Vietnam and photographed for a newspaper. Eventually our jobs began and we were taken to our various places of work,¹⁹ and introduced, and feted as experts and foreigners and English speakers.

I worked in a university library for a year. I took a book with me, Foucault’s The Archaeology of Knowledge, but I never got past the introduction where he started talking about Bachelard, Canguilhem, Serres, and Guéroult. I’d never heard of any of them and I figured that ruled me out from the beginning. In the library I would sit at a long wide wooden table in the staff room eating longan or watermelon or sunflower seeds with my Vietnamese colleagues: my friends Hậu, Mai, Huệ, Thạch, Khiêm, Nga, Thiềm, and the rest. Nga and Thiềm have kids now. Thạch, always so skinny and

¹⁷ The Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) was a part of the Australian Government’s foreign aid and development program, designed ‘to achieve sustainable development outcomes through capacity building, skills transfer and institutional strengthening … [and] strengthen mutual understanding between Australia and Asia, the Pacific and Africa’ by sending young Australians to work/volunteer with Host organisations in Asia, the Pacific, and Africa (http://www.ayad.com.au/). The program no longer exists.

¹⁸ At a shop called Western Canned Food, obviously.

¹⁹ They called them assignments.
lovelorn, has grown fat and contented with marriage.  

When my year of being an “ambassador” ended I didn’t want to return to my old life in Sydney, so I arranged for a job at the same university teaching English and did a short English language teaching certificate. I taught IELTS preparation to wealthy Vietnamese teenagers who had failed the country’s High Graduation Examination and were instead paying to study under the imprimatur of an Australian university in Hanoi.  

Hậu and I have now been married for seven years, and are expecting our second child in July.  

I still met up with my friends at the library, and often drank bitter green tea outside in the afternoon with Khiêm. All the other English teachers were Vietnamese, and most had graduate qualifications in Applied Linguistics from Australian and American universities to compare with my meagre four week CELTA. And they were all at least bilingual. And experienced. And they understood their students: linguistically, socially, culturally, and experientially. And they ran extra classes teaching IELTS in their living rooms after school each day to earn more money for their families. And I didn’t because I didn’t have to because I was paid about five times more than them because I was a native-speaker, which really meant that I was White.  

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20 It is quite the complement to call someone fat at the library. Whenever I go back my friends remark favourably on how fat I am becoming.  

21 Arranging for a job was surprisingly easy, apart from some minor haggling over the salary: I simply asked if I could have a job teaching English and they said yes. The certificate I completed was a Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA): one of the most widely taken qualifications of its kind. Thousands of people each year choose CELTA to open up a whole world of exciting English language teaching opportunities. CELTA is for people with little or no previous teaching experience.  

22 The International English Language Testing System. Used for English assessment for education and immigration purposes, IELTS is owned by the British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment. IELTS test results are reported as scores ranging from 0 – 9, with 7 indicating that someone is a ‘good user’ of English. IELTS constitutes an entire global industry: the test itself (which in Vietnam costs VND3,500,000 to take), practice tests, revision guides, general advice handbooks, test preparation courses and so on.  

23 At least, we were when I wrote this, which was not when I finished writing, or even now while I edit (she was born ten months ago) and is certainly not now when you are reading it. What happens to time in writing? Or writing in time? Derrida (1988, p. 5) notes that absence is immanent in writing: first, there is the absence of the addressee; I write now in order to communicate something to you who are not now here; but there is also the absence of the writer, ‘from the mark that he abandons, and which cuts itself off from him and continues to produce effects independently of his presence and of the present actuality of his intentions [vouloir-dire], indeed even after his death.’ The written sign, according to Derrida (1988, p. 9), is predicated by its subsistence beyond the moment of its inscription and ‘beyond the presence of the empirically determined subject who, in a given context, has emitted or produced it,’ but also by its force de rupture: ‘a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription.’ In other words, difficult as it is to conceive and accept, these written marks which I have abandoned and which have cut themselves off from me are no longer tied to that context in which they were written, to the collective assemblage that enunciates, to those effects that I described. Note that it doesn’t matter what I write – expecting, welcomed, getting to know … none will be ‘true’ at the moment of reading. The moment, such as it was, has passed. This sign subsists, irrespective of the context of its inscription.  

24 Despite extensive work acknowledging the benefits and contributions of non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) to TESOL (for an overview, see Braine, 2010, 1999; Mahboob, 2010b; Moussu & Llurda, 2008), the ideal of the young, male, White, native English-speaking teacher (NEST) remains obstinately prevalent (Ruecker & Ives, 2014). The continued growth of English as an international language – which as Motha (2006, p. 496) notes was historically and remains contemporarily intertwined with ‘the international political power of White people, English and Whiteness’ – accompanied by the privileging of the ideal White teacher within an expanding ELT industry continues to draw White native English-speaking teachers to TESOL. Just like me.
Sometimes I think maybe this thesis, which remember is not a thesis, instead of having a problem and solution might instead have a plot and a climax – something like a novel – but I can’t decide what it should be. Maybe the man I saw dying on the street. Or when one of the teachers I worked with was fired. Or the crisis meeting the expat teachers held when it was announced that yet another teacher had been fired and might not get paid and they all got a chance to say what they really thought. In truth, however, these were all a little anti-climactic, in the end. I’m not sure if any of them would really work. Maybe there wasn’t really a climax, maybe climaxes are just the stuff of fiction and story-tellers. Maybe herein lies the irony of the thesis: a realistic ethnographic account, all rich ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973), must be artfully contrived in writing. By way of analogy, Vivian (2005, p. 255) comments on the irony of cinema: ‘films appear natural or realistic because they have been fabricated … convincingly natural or realistic films are, like all others, exquisitely fabricated … the more dramatically lifelike a film appears to be, the more artificial it is.’ What to do? The more realistic and coherent my narrative appears, the more dramatically lifelike I can craft it, the more artificial it must necessarily be. Paradoxically, then, would it be closer to real if crafted less exquisitely? If the doubts, inconsistencies, contradictions, and failures were represented accurately? And what would it mean if I was craftily fabricating the incoherent real only to appear as if I hadn’t exquisitely fashioned an artificial text in order to appear real?

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I taught for a year at the university and returned to Australia. I had decided I wanted to become a real teacher. A real teacher for me, then, was someone qualified to work in an Australian school. Someone with a Bachelor of Education or a Diploma of Education, or whatever it was you needed to work in a school in Australia.

This idea of being a real teacher was neither completely my own nor completely stupid, depending on what your concept of a teacher is. One teacher told me:

There is a distinction, yeah. Of course the … you know … real, you know, real teachers are ones that have gone through the process of getting credentials and … learning ah, theory and methodology and all that. Whereas ESL teachers can literally be anyone with a BA in anything

25 Or was asked to leave – I’m not sure which really happened.
26 Though as my friend, Bryan, asks, might I have felt differently if the man dying in the street was a White native English-speaking teacher?
27 Throughout this thesis the following transcription conventions are used (adapted from Silverman, 2004, pp. 368-369):
   … ellipsis to indicate periods of silence,
   - hyphen to indicate an abrupt cutoff or self-interruption,
   ( ) parentheses to indicate transcriber’s comments.
that is just thrust into a classroom and is expected to ... teach. Um ... I- I- I'll be honest I had to
review a lot of grammar in order to teach it (laughs). I'll go home and do some research, and then
relearn and make sure I've learned it before ah, going out and teaching it. Just because we are
native English speakers doesn't mean we ... you know we learn grammar a bit differently from
how they're learning it ... because we've learned it sort of ... intuitively ... just growing up with
the language. Now we ... you are expected to teach it, some complex grammar point ... you freeze
and then ... you know, it kind of looks like you're a bit of a dolt. So ... um ... whereas a real teacher
already has that content knowledge and experience in that field, so they're much more ... I guess
... fluent in their, in their um, in their field. Whereas an ESL teacher is just any average Joe ...
plucked, you know. And the joke in Korea and Vietnam is if you're Caucasian and pretty, you're
hired (laughs). Whereas you don't get that hiring criteria at an international school. They look at
your ... your qualifications.28

A four week CELTA, I think, might not always be a sufficient process of training or qualification to
become a teacher: to be really fluent in the ‘theory and methodology and all that.’29 One guy I worked
with in Hanoi always made sure to tell people he was a history teacher, lest they assume he was a
mere English language teacher. Another teacher, properly schooled and credentialed told me:

You can tell when you walk into a classroom, by the way these teachers act, the ones who aren’t
certified, who don’t have … didn’t go to school for teaching. You can tell quite quickly by the
way they manage their classroom, and a lot of little things – not to say they’re not good teachers,
they could be good teachers- But …

So I did a Graduate Diploma of Education and became a real teacher of English.30 I returned to Hanoi
and taught at a private international school for mostly Vietnamese kids, a school that mostly looked
at your qualifications as part of the hiring process, except when they were desperate for a teacher
because someone hadn’t turned up for work mid-term on a Monday morning after pay week and was
later discovered to have fled the country. I’m not sure at exactly what point the becoming became, so
to speak. Perhaps it never did because I still felt like an imposter even after I had my qualification,

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28 Which seems true enough – as far as that goes – except that he was working at an international school without qualifications because
he was Caucasian (and, presumably, pretty).
29 Though many others would disagree. For a more recent example see Stanley and Murray (2013).
30 Instead of being … ? What is a real teacher, anyway? What is it differentiated from? What permits the recognition of this
indeterminate object as teacher?
though faking it certainly seemed easier in a *real* school.\(^{31}\)

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So it’s all true, see? I really was a teacher and I really did teach in Vietnam with other teachers and now I’m back studying them as objects and trying to make sense of it all except without *making sense* because I’m no longer sure that there is any sense to be made. Nevertheless my graduate school website informs me that my thesis, which is not a thesis but that will have to stand in for a thesis at least as far as the graduate school is concerned must:

- provide a contribution to knowledge with a level of originality consistent with 3-4 years full-time study for a PhD and 1-2 years full-time study for an MPhil;
- reveal your capacity to relate the research topic to the broader framework of knowledge in the disciplinary area in which your research falls;
- be clearly, accurately and cogently written, and suitably documented;


I’d like to quarrel with whoever over in the grad school wrote that. What is knowledge?\(^32\) And why should I consent to be governed by norms of qualitative inquiry and writing practices that have developed as a result of humanist enlightenment discourses and the strictures of science based research (St. Pierre, 2011)? Not that I have the answers, but they are – I think – good questions.

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Here’s what really concerns me, I think: the difference between us and them. Between teachers and students. Between Westerners and Asians. Between you and I. Where did it come from? Why does it

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\(^{31}\) Non-state schools, including private ‘international’ schools, have assumed an increasingly significant role in the education system in Vietnam. Although the overall number of non-state schools remains small, growth is significant, particularly in preschool and upper-secondary education (T. B. L. Tran, 2011). In Hanoi, non-state schools accounted for over forty percent of upper-secondary enrolments by 2007 (London, 2011). Nationwide, just over twenty percent of upper-secondary enrolments were in non-state schools (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2010).

An “international” curricular and pedagogical focus is an increasingly important point of differentiation to these private schools in Vietnam, which frequently offer foreign curricula, foreign teachers, relationships with overseas schools, interschool visits, student and teacher exchange programs, and a focus on foreign languages. By 2008 over forty private international schools were established in Hanoi providing international curricula and employing foreign teachers (T. B. L. Tran, 2011).

Among English medium international schools, different emphasis is placed on the local (compulsory to grade 9) and international curricula. In addition to the Vietnamese curriculum (which is taught in Vietnamese language), schools offer anything from an additional English language program to a fully accredited international curriculum and qualifications. Additionally, several schools in Hanoi offer both full international programs for foreign (non-Vietnamese) students alongside parallel Vietnamese/international programs (variously called integrated or bilingual programs) for Vietnamese students.

\(^{32}\) Is it interesting that the disciplinary requirements for a Doctorate of Philosophy (philosophy!) take as self-evident a concept like knowledge?
separate us? What’s it for? What is its nature? How does it work? These, I suspect, are also good questions. Not original, perhaps, but still vital. But how do we think about such questions? How do we really know what a teacher is? Or a student? Or a Westerner? Or an Asian? And what about the difference? How do we think about the difference itself?

What we do seem to know, often all too easily, is what we are not. A teacher is not a student. They are different. There is some distinction between them. And in international contexts teachers teach students whose differences are intensified. A Western person is not a Vietnamese person. They are different: their languages are different; their behaviours are different. Teachers are different from students. Westerners are different from Vietnamese. Vietnamese students are different from Western students and Western teachers. Schools and teaching and learning are different. Society and culture are different. Everything is, as it were, different. As one teacher told me, ‘They do things in a very – not to sound like – a very Vietnamese way.’ They talk differently, act differently, think differently, live differently. The differences for teachers are immediate, lived, and visceral. This is what they told me: They cheat on tests. They cut in. They call people fat. They shit in the lake. They drive crazily. They do all sorts of things differently, right in your face. They are different. They are not like us.

And yet, I thought … they are also just like us; they are born and die.

‘Well,’ a teacher told me, ‘you have to factor in that Vietnam is a country that's been at war with its neighbours for centuries. And modern Vietnam is the vision of a homicidal psychopath.’ He spoke slowly. Carefully, even. ‘And this country is so defensive about their own state of being they cannot even be friends with their neighbours, the most powerful country in the world: China. I mean they have so much hate in this country. If you were to choose a colour for Vietnam it would have to be red: blood and hate. So you have to understand that the only thing you can possibly give these people is something that they ask for.’

Sometimes, I think that what he was trying to tell me was: they are different – they are not like us.

And what I wanted to say – and didn’t – was this: you are wrong; they are just like us. They are born and die. But this was my conceit: I thought that these teachers were different from me. I thought that I was not like them. I thought that they thought differently to me. That they didn’t understand things the same way I did. That they couldn’t. And that I couldn’t possibly say anything to them, these teachers, because they would not understand. They were different – they were not like me. And so this was my great unspoken thought: you are different – you are not like me.

I thought. And I was wrong.

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33 Not to sound like what? A racist?
Deleuze writes that ‘it cannot be regarded as a fact that thinking is the natural exercise of a faculty, and that this faculty is possessed of a good nature and a good will’:

‘Everybody’ knows very well that in fact men [sic] think rarely, and more often under the impulse of a shock than in the excitement of a taste for thinking. Moreover, Descartes’s famous suggestion that good sense (the capacity for thought) is of all things in the world the most equally distributed rests upon no more than an old saying, since it amounts to reminding us that men are prepared to complain of lack of memory, imagination or even hearing, but they always find themselves well served with regard to intelligence and thought. (1994, p. 132)34

But if thought is rare in fact, and not necessarily good, nor necessarily good willed, we instead proceed with an image of thought that may be called ‘dogmatic, orthodox or moral’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 132).35 This is an image of thought that operates as an order of representation that determines ‘what it means to think and what the ultimate goals of thought are’ (Voss, 2013, p. 19). Conservative and moral in character, the dogmatic image of thought uses sedentary and fixed determinations to distribute experience, and does so by judging the objects of experience in accordance with these a priori determinations (Voss, 2013). The model for such a thought, according to Deleuze, is recognition:

defined [as] the harmonious exercise of all the faculties upon a supposed same object: the same object may be seen, touched, remembered, imagined or conceived . . . As Descartes says of the piece of wax: ‘It is of course the same wax which I see, which I touch, which I picture in my imagination, in short the same wax which I thought it to be from the start.’ No doubt each faculty – perception, memory, imagination, understanding … – has its own particular given and its own style, its peculiar ways of acting upon the given. An object is recognised, however, when one faculty locates it as identical to that of another, or rather when all the faculties together relate their given and relate themselves to a form of identity in the object. (1994, p. 133)

Recognition takes the form of judgement, giving thought its moral character, implying its ‘power to judge’ (Voss, 2013, p. 22). To judge an object is to take an object of experience (what is there) and

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34 Descartes’ ‘famous suggestion’ opens Part I of his Discourse on Method:

Good sense is the best distributed thing in the world: for everyone thinks himself so well endowed with it that even those who are the hardest to please in everything else do not usually desire more of it than they possess. (1984, p. 111)

35 Let’s acknowledge that Deleuze’s dogmatic image of thought, drawing as it does upon the intellectual traditions it does, in all likelihood here pertains to a certain Western European White male “we”.

make sense of it according to already possessed categories of representation (*what it is*), ensuring the experience of the object is harmonious across the faculties (*this same wax I see, touch, imagine, remember, conceive of*).

It is common sense and good sense that provide the structure for operations of judgement (May, 2005). Common sense coordinates the distributed activities of the faculties, ensuring that what is seen, touched, imagined, conceived of and so on is coordinated and harmonious. It does so by ‘assuring me that there is a match between what is inside me and what is outside me, and among the various faculties inside me by means of which I approach what is outside me’ (May, 2005, p. 77).

As such, common sense presupposes an inside and outside, a one that becomes two, again reflecting that ‘oldest, and weariest kind of thought’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 5). It is defined ‘subjectively by the supposed identity of a Self which provide[s] the unity and ground of all the faculties, and objectively by the identity of whatever object served as a focus for all the faculties’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 226). Thus, good sense points common sense beyond this Self, ‘determining the indeterminate object as this or that, and of individualising the self situated in this ensemble of objects’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 226). Common sense and good sense together comprise thought, individualising the Self, differentiating among objects, providing the categories by which they may be recognised, and assuring that the categories are stable and harmonious:

Good sense and common sense each refer to the other, each reflect the other and constitute one half of the orthodoxy. In view of this reciprocity and double reflection, we can define common sense by the process of recognition and good sense by the process of prediction. The one involves the qualitative synthesis of diversity, the static synthesis of qualitative diversity related to an object supposed the same for all the faculties of a single subject; the other involves the quantitative synthesis of difference, the dynamic synthesis of difference in quantity related to a system in which it is objectively and subjectively cancelled. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 226)

Thought conceives the world by recognising objects that are already there and fitting these into the categories already provided by common and good sense. But this is the operation of judgement based on a conceptual difference which is subordinated to identity, in which things are different precisely and only because they are not the same, because they are categorised differently (May, 2005). As Colebrook (2002b, p. 8) puts it, ‘representational thinking simply accepts already differentiated terms. On a representational account, men are men, women are women, and from these identities we can then think about all the specific differences between them.’ But, according to Deleuze (1994, pp. 28-29), there is a problem with such thought: conceiving the world in this way misunderstands difference; it fails to think difference in itself, producing determinations that are ‘only empirical’ and
'only extrinsic,' and which cannot account for the genesis of things themselves. In this way, the dogmatic image of thought is a deeply conservative thought, one that as such ‘has never sanctioned anything but the recognisable and the recognised; [and that] will never inspire anything but conformities’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 134).

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This is not a beginning, either, though it may resemble one. Ce n'est pas un début. Đây không phải là một sự khởi đầu. It could function as an introduction, if you were to recognise it as such. But I would be lying if I presented it as a beginning. If I didn’t own up to all the other beginnings I’ve written, pushed away, lost hope with, fallen out of love with, deleted or left in some lonely folder in the outer reaches of my filing system, tossed aside and discarded as so many useless terms. There is no beginning. Really. There is middle, always middle, only middle:

a line of becoming has only a middle … A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get to it by the middle. A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293).

Whenever and wherever I begin there was and will be more. The months I spent in Hanoi in early 2013. And the four years I spent living and teaching in Hanoi between 2005 and 2011; and the month I spent holidaying in Vietnam in 2002; and maybe even earlier, when I visited Thailand and Malaysia. And the years I spent living in Sydney. And the movies I watched growing up: Apocalypse Now, Platoon, Good Morning Vietnam, Full Metal Jacket, Hamburger Hill, Casualties of War; always war, always inscrutable enemies, little men in black pyjamas, outside the perimeter fence, the horror … the horror … . And before me, even. Perhaps it begins in the Geneva Accords and falling dominoes, Hồ Chí Minh and McNamara, Võ Nguyên Giáp and Westmoreland. And before them, with Paul Doumer and L'Indochine française. And before that, with Alexandre de Rhodes. And … and … and? And English in Vietnam begins with English everywhere. In England, yes, but also in Wales and Scotland, in Singapore and India and Africa and Asia and the Americas, in the old world and the new world. And of course, here, in Australia, where English was transported and transplanted with such ruthless efficiency. There is no beginning to be traced. Where and whenever I begin there is only middle.

This beginning is not a beginning, although it may very much resemble one. This thesis that is not a thesis ‘has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overspills’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21). It is centrifugal force fleeing the middle,
through the middle. Impetus and inertia. Trying to ‘establish a logic of the AND, overthrow ontology, do away with foundations, nullify endings and beginnings’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25).

This is not a thesis. It doesn’t know what it is; it is still becoming. I have given up on writing to know. I am writing to become something other. This is a line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), an act of escape or fleeing or vanishing. I am becoming flight-given. But even then I’m bound to follow someone or something. Now it is Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, p. 587) exhortation to ‘experiment, don’t signify and interpret! Find your own places, territorialities, deterritorializations, regime, lines of flight!’ I try to escape the bonds of Enlightenment humanist expectations of thinking, of knowing, of researching, and of writing, exchanging one set of structures for another set of (post)structures. I am free to escape; and bound to.

This is thesis activity that operates in the service of escape from particular ways of knowing. It is oriented towards possibilities for new ways of thinking, knowing, and acting, that are themselves always already dangerous.\(^{36}\) It is not writing as mimesis,\(^{37}\) but writing as a method of inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Not writing to contribute to knowledge, but writing ‘to become someone other than who one is’ (Foucault, 1996, p. 404), writing for the people to come. A practice of self-formation, a means of becoming – an event. An experiment in writing. An attempt to produce an encounter between writer and written and reader. It is a project of re-conception, ‘not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are ... to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries’ (Foucault, 1982, p. 216). Or, perhaps better still, ‘to bring something to life, to free life from where it’s trapped, to trace lines of flight’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141). Will it work? Will it be worthy?

I hope so.\(^{38}\)

\(^{36}\) Precisely because ‘everything is dangerous, which is not exactly the same as bad. If everything is dangerous, then we always have something to do. So my position leads not to apathy but to a hyper- and pessimistic activism’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 256).

\(^{37}\) Deleuze and Guattari write that:

contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can). Mimicry is a very bad concept, since it relies on binary logic to describe phenomena of an entirely different nature. The crocodile does not reproduce a tree trunk, any more than the chameleon reproduces the colors of its surroundings. (1987, p. 11)

This thesis is not an image of the world. It aims to form a rhizome with the world, to deterritorialise the world as it is reterritorialised by the world as it deterritorialises itself in the world. If it is capable, if I am capable, if I can.

\(^{38}\) For it is an experiment that is written, most deliberately, for a reader, to explore what else a thesis might do except mean, ‘what else might writing do except mean’ (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005, p. 969). To work as work:

That which is susceptible of introducing a significant difference in the field of knowledge, at the cost of a certain difficulty for the author and the reader, with, however, the eventual recompense of a certain pleasure, that is to say of access to another figure of truth. (Foucault, 1994, as cited in Rabinow, 1997b, p. vii)

‘If we take Deleuze’s definition of life seriously,’ writes Colebrook:

We cannot read a thinker in order to find what he is saying ‘to us’, as though texts were vehicles for exchanging information from one being to another. A text is immanent to life; it creates new connections, new styles for thinking and new images and ways of seeing. To read a text is to understand the problem that motivated its assemblage. The more faithful we are to a text – not the text’s ultimate message but its construction, or the way in which it produces relations among concepts, images, affects, neologisms

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and already existing vocabularies – the more we will have an experience of a style of thought not our own, an experience of the power to think in creative styles as such. (2010, p. 4)

What problem motivated this textual assemblage? I suspect they were several: the encounter between teachers and students in international schools in Vietnam; my own shame at having compromised with colonialism – ‘This [shame] is one of the most powerful incentives toward philosophy, and it’s what makes all philosophy political’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 172); how to research people when ‘subjectification isn’t even anything to do with a “person”’ (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 98-99); how to write such that writing might foster ‘the pleasure of reading … that peculiar sense of wonder, recognition, chill, or warmth that for no discernable reason a certain string of words sometimes evokes’ (Manguel, 2010, p. x); and how to critique when:

critique doesn’t have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, “this, then, is what needs to be done.” It should be an instrument for those for who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn’t have to lay down the law for the law. It isn’t a stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is. (Foucault, 1986, p. 114)

And so it is my intent here to explore the potentials of writing a thesis for a reader, to experiment in and with writing, constructing a text in response to the problems that motivated its assemblage in spite of the limitations imposed on it from the outset. To produce something ‘beyond the author’s intentions and beyond the reader’s hopes’ (Manguel, 2010, p. x), something that is not presupposed in theory or in nature, and that might yet be called research, or thesis, or some other term, ‘a virtual power to create potentials through contingent and productive encounters’ (Colebrook, 2010, p. 4).

The thesis format, much like a Sumarian clay tablet, is a setter of limits – any given thesis ‘must fit the space allotted to it’ (Manguel, 2010, p. 121). It must contain within its prescribed page or word limits a single unit of self-contained sense. It must finally become a thesis, such that it is ‘no longer be becoming, but would be so’ (Plato, 1961, line 155). It is constrained by institutional requirements, by the ‘thousands of textbooks, handbooks, and journal articles that have secured qualitative methodology by repeating structure in book after book with the same chapter headings so that we now believe it is true and real’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613), by the proliferation of textbooks, handbooks, and journal articles, as well as blogs and websites offering advice and instruction on “writing your thesis,” forming a discursive labyrinth of rules, prescriptions, admonitions, exhortations, and truisms through which the writer must navigate, with the potential to stifle creativity, determining what can be written, and how, forming an edifice of antirectivity that renders the writer out of control, from the very outset, and demonstrating the ‘intellectual process of granting reality to an invention and then applying to that invention the rigid rules of reality’ (Manguel, 2010, p. 117).


As a starting point, it can be suggested that, in developing a research proposal, we need to put considerable effort into answering two questions in particular. First, what methodologies and methods will we be employing in the research we propose to do?

Second, how do we justify this choice and use of methodologies and methods? (Crotty, 1998, p. 2)

And some more: the chapter ‘Seeking Structure’ in the book How to Write a Thesis begins

The knack for all research students regardless of discipline is to pinpoint what is required and model your work accordingly. (Burnham 1994: 33)

This quotation could be interpreted as a cynical ‘give them what they ask for and no more’ perspective on the course or degree.

However, it is a useful reminder of how important it is to know what is expected of you. You not only have to know what is required, you have to adapt your thinking and writing accordingly. (Murray, 2011, p. 117)

Or this: from the chapter ‘Mastering the Academic Style’ in Writing the Winning Thesis or Dissertation:

Academic writing is a unique genre that has its own norms. One of the implicit expectations of doctoral programs is that you will learn to write like a scholar. This section of the chapter offers some general advice about the sense of self you wish to project and then will deal with more specific applications. (Joyner, Rouse, & Glathorn, 2013, p. 178).

Or consider how Joyner et al. (2013, pp. 179-180) go on to offer the following general suggestions: strive for clarity, project maturity, project a sense of formality, strike an appropriate balance between confidence and tentativeness, and document your assertions. I should very much like to be able to write something Donleavy-ish here, along the lines of “to hell with that shit” (Donleavy, 1975, p. 3). To transgress, as it were. But, to quote Derrida (1981, p. 12), ‘at the conclusion of a certain work, even the concepts of excess or of transgression can become suspect.’ The Graduate School, for example, imposes an 80,000 word limit on the thesis, but specifies that the limit is only considered imposed once exceeded: ‘The word limit includes all footnotes and appendices but not the bibliography, therefore as long as the PhD thesis does not exceed 80,000 words (40,000 for an MPhil), then the word limit is considered to not be imposed’ (http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/word-limit). Thus the limit only exists once it is transgressed and imposed, but at which point it is simultaneously rendered transgressible such that the act of exceeding the limit ceases to be a transgression: ‘there is not a transgression’ (Derrida, 1981, p. 12). So perhaps I don’t transgress, after all. Maybe I simply digress. Perhaps all my carefully cited and documented excesses are not excesses, simply observances of other codes and other rigid rules. My creativity a fiction. A fake. My intention, then, is to write something that need not be read simply as a vehicle for information exchange, or rather something that is opposed to the vehicular exchange of information. Something that demands a contingent and productive encounter between writer, text, and reader:

not making a claim about what the world is, but about the imagination of a possible world. Art is not about representation, concepts or judgement; art is the power to think in terms that are not so much cognitive and intellectual as affective (to do with feeling and sensible experience). We are not reading a work as artistic or literary if we read it for its representation of the world or its presentation of theories. (Colebrook, 2002a, pp. 12-13)

And so this is an attempt to think and write in terms that will be read as affective, to push thought somewhere new, somewhere hopefully productive, that doesn’t presume to know what we are, or what our affects will be, but is open to something happening between us, something new and opposed to bland commonsensical notions, be they methodological, stylistic, representational, or whatever.

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2. one chapter in the thesis

King Milinda asked Venerable Nāgasena: ‘How is the revered one known? What is your name, revered sir?’

‘Sire, I am known as Nāgasena. My companions in the holy life address me as Nāgasena. Though parents give such names as Nāgasena or Sūrasena or Vīrasena or Sihasena, this “Nāgasena” is only a designation, a label, a concept, an expression, a mere name because there is no person as such that is found.’

-Antonymous

The Questions of King Milinda: An Abridgement of the Milindapañha

All of this really happened. I conducted an interview and observation study. I recruited a certain number of individuals for my research project. Some of the people I approached consented to participate and others did not. I asked those who participated certain questions and not others. They responded in certain ways and not others. I observed certain classes, certain teachers, in specific locations, at specific times, and all the other classes, teachers, locations, and times went unobserved. Within these observations I noticed certain things and not others. I heard certain utterances and not others. And of these certain things I saw and heard I noted some and not others, choosing certain words, and not others. I obtained certain data and described and represented it in certain ways, all of it, finally, uncertain. Arbitrary, and contingent, always with the ‘mark of the absence of a presence, an always already absent presence’ (Spivak, 1976, p. xvii).

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The centre of qualitative research methodology has failed in the wake of the deconstructive critique of concepts and categories such as the interview, validity, data, voice, and reflexivity (St. Pierre, 2011). Notions of ‘knowledge, truth, reality, reason, science, progress, the subject’ (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1) have been subjected to the play of différance. Many of our most deeply entrenched ontological and epistemological assumptions have been disrupted and fragmented: reality has become realities, truth – truths, identity – subjectivities; all have been troubled, interrupted, interfered with, opened up to new possibilities of thought and action. The deconstructive critique of knowledge, truth, and the subject – ‘all those things we assumed were solid, substantial, and whole’ (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000, p. 1) – demands radical consequences.

This critique ultimately comprises the deconstruction of ‘one of the most powerful legacies of
Enlightenment humanism – the *human being*, the *individual*, the *self*, the *person* (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). And this is a troubling critique, for our notions of knowledge, truth and especially the self come too easily. As Rose (1996, p. 1) writes, ‘if there is one value that seems beyond reproach, in our current confused ethical climate, it is that of the self and the terms that cluster around it – autonomy, identity, individuality, liberty, choice, fulfillment.’

And so what happens when one self sets out to study other selves, only to find that there is no person as such that is found? What happens when:

one no longer thinks of oneself as “I” but as entangled with everyone, everything else – as haecceity, as assemblage – what happens to concepts in social science research based on that “I” – the *researcher*, the *participant*, *identity*, *presence*, *voice*, *lens*, *experience*, *positionality*, *subjectivity*, *objectivity*, *bias*, *rationality*, *consciousness*, *experience*, *alienation*, *reflexivity*, *freedom*, *transformation*, *dialogue*? … In entanglement, how does one think about “face-to-face” methods like *interviewing* and *observation*, methods that privilege *presence*, Derrida’s bane? (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 619)

What happens next? How can describing concepts like participants and methods and data and identities as if such things were solid, substantial, and real work? When “I” is only a designation, a label, a concept, an expression, a mere name? Or a habit (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994)? Can we be comforted by the deconstruction of qualitative research methodology, remembering that deconstruction is not the rejection of the structure ‘that we cannot not (wish to) inhabit’ (Spivak, 1993, p. 284), but its opening up, ‘the overturning and displacement of a structure so that something(s) different can be thought/done’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613)? Do we keep using the concepts, because we must? Or could we chase something else, something as yet unthought, something still to come?

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It is interesting that despite this ongoing and inevitable critique, the concepts of qualitative inquiry have tightened, standing firm, producing an orthodoxy of qualitative research that is ‘so disciplined, so normalized, so centered … that it has become conventional, reductionist, hegemonic, and sometimes oppressive’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613). In fact, St. Pierre (2011) argues, the structures continue tightening; the ‘disciplining’ (Lather, 2013, p. 636) of qualitative methodology proceeding even as its central concepts and categories are disrupted, reifying a ‘conventional humanist qualitative methodology’ that is ‘overdetermined’ and ‘increasingly limited’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 611). And this would appear to constitute a problem. To quote Deleuze:
What now seems problematic is the situation in which young philosophers, but also all young writers who’re involved in creating something, find themselves. They face the threat of being stifled from the outset. It's become very difficult to do any work, because a whole system of “acculturation” and anticreativity specific to the developed nations is taking shape. It's far worse than censorship. (1995, p. 27)

And so this orthodoxy of humanist qualitative research makes it difficult to do any work because ‘we are being told how we must see and what we must do when we investigate’ (Law, 2004, p. 4), directed to make original and creative contributions through practices of researching and writing that ‘are necessary while at the same time necessarily limiting’ (Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2012, p. 728). It is stifling because:

if “research methods” are allowed to claim methodological hegemony or (even worse) monopoly, and I think that there are locations where they try to do this, then when we are put into relation with such methods we are being placed, however rebelliously, in a set of constraining normative blinkers. (Law, 2004, p. 4)

And it is dangerous because ‘simplistic and mechanistic approaches’ to qualitative research reliant on normative methods may ‘produce knowledge devoid of critical reflection and contextual considerations’ (Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2012, p. 728). Such normativities privilege humanist concepts like researcher and participant, seemingly forgetting that there is no person as such that is found. They trade in interview and observation, identity and presence, forgetting ‘that language is an unstable system of referents, making it impossible to ever completely capture the meaning of an action, text, or intention’ (Denzin, 2010, p. 123). Pretending otherwise in regard to the essential truth of qualitative inquiry: that ‘we made it up’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613). Remaining content to deal in the fictions of pre-existing and ready-made concepts corresponding to a world of knowable, researchable, solvable problems. Dealing in knowledge, subjects, ethics, methods, and so on as if such things were solid, substantial, and whole, and could be determined and comprehended as such. Recognising only the recognisable – a dogmatic image of thought.

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The deconstructive critique of qualitative research methodology asks us to question the limits of knowledge, to explore the implausibility of our assumptions about research. It maintains, as Caputo (in Derrida & Caputo, 1997, p. 73) writes, the ‘sneaking suspicions that something may be wrong
with what we currently believe, while keeping a watchful eye that current paradigms not be taken dogmatically, that something else, something other, still to come, is being missed.’ Lather and St. Pierre maintain such suspicions about humanist qualitative inquiry, asking, with a watchful eye on what we believe about methods and methodology:

What about the categories “interviewing” and “observation,” the privileged face-to-face methods of data collection in humanist qualitative inquiry? If we give up phenomenology, we can no longer privilege the immediacy, the “now,” the “being there” of qualitative interviewing and observation that assume both the “presence” of essential voices and the foundational nature of authentic lived experience. Where/how do voices from post-humanist humans fit into the new inquiry? Are they voices after all? (Does that word work?). (2013, p. 630)

I interviewed and observed teachers and students. I was so very, very busy “being there” and recording the “now”. Face-to-face, I spoke as a researcher and induced individuals to speak as participants. I recorded voices, ‘a focus on the sensible words expressed, rather than their becoming, [that] only reinforces identities and relationships made dominant by available discourses and power structures’ (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012, p. 733). I interviewed in empty classrooms, staffrooms, meeting rooms, in roadside teahouses and cafés. I interviewed over coffee and beer and sinh tố xoài. I asked the questions I thought might be useful to my purposes, not really knowing if I would get what I needed, and not really knowing what I needed, except for the fact that what I needed was voice and experience. That I needed, finally, to see and hear the things I had spent the previous four years seeing and hearing. Never sure what my interest was and what was in my interest. I constructed an interview guide but did not hold fast to it, instead allowing the conversations to meander into and out of places I found more or less interesting. I recorded voices in conversation as audio files on a digital voice recorder, focusing on the enunciated, on the signifiers and what they might signify. I transcribed these recorded voices to text, rendering the audible visible, producing static transcripts, reified as the primary artefact of the qualitative interview (Kuntz & Presnall, 2012). A process of abstracting and mystifying the performative elements of interview, infinitely removing them from the “now,” the actual authentic lived experience that took place in my presence on a comfortable sofa in an air conditioned Ba Đình café, or on plastic stools at a dusty and noisy roadside bia hơi in Tây Hồ, each a “method assemblage” that must be ‘understood as a tentative and hesitant unfolding, that is at most only very partially under any form of deliberate control’ (Law, 2004, pp. 41-42). But I did not and could not transcribe the motorbike horns and the rumble of trucks, or the chinking of beer glasses and the half drunken murmur of conversations at nearby tables, or the warm smog filtered hues of a Hanoi afternoon, all those myriad elements that comprised the “now” that seemed so important to capture.
As MacLure puts it:

Method is much less assured in dealing with quasi-linguistic stuff … all the tears, sneers, sighs, silences, sniffs, laughter, snot, twitches or coughs that are part of utterances. Interview transcripts seldom record what eyebrows, hands, shoulders or crossed legs are doing, and if they do attend to such features, the aim is usually to point to what they ‘mean’ – that is, to bring them within the compass of representation. And fieldnotes certainly cannot register the body’s autonomic responses in the unfolding scenario – the slowing or speeding of the pulse, the spasms of the bowel, the changes in skin conductivity and the dilation of the pupils. (2013, p. 664)

Or the silences, the unsaid, or even the saying of what was said.

I observed teachers and students in classes. I created textual accounts that describe the behaviours and interactions and sounds I witnessed while sitting at the back of classrooms watching and listening, and sometimes neither watching nor listening. I shifted in my seat. I grew bored and my mind wandered. I tried to comprehend the rapid paced conversations of Vietnamese students, and then tried to block them out when they grew loud and incessant and exhausting. I watched teachers, listening to what they said in and of and about English. I tried to make notes of where they stood, who they looked at, who they spoke to “now” and then “now” and then “now”, presupposing agency and intention. I watched and listened and wrote, never entirely certain what it was that I wanted or needed, only aware that I needed to observe something to fulfil the requirements of the doctoral research project. Only aware that what I observed was always a selection, conscious or not. I recorded observations as handwritten notes in a journal, and afterwards I wrote up these observations, ‘deliberately choosing the words’ (Reid, Kamler, Simpson, & Maclean, 1996, p. 98) that would interpret, construct, and position the events, actors, author, and readers in my accounts of these classrooms. I found it difficult not to place myself at the centre, separate and superior and prior to the inquiry, the problem, the theory, the methodology, the data, the analysis, and the results (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013). I still find it impossible to write without the authorial “I”.

I remembered all the teachers I worked with, and the conversations I had and overheard, the ones that were not recorded and transcribed, that I cannot quote from, that are not “data”. I think about data and about how:

we are obliged to acknowledge that data have their ways of making themselves intelligible to us. This can be seen, or rather felt, on occasions when one becomes especially ‘interested’ in a piece of data – such as a sarcastic comment in an interview, or a perplexing incident, or an observed

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40 I remembered all the teachers I could remember, at any rate.
event that makes you feel kind of peculiar. Or some point in the pedestrian process of ‘writing up’ a piece of research where something not-yet-articulated seems to take off and take over, effecting a kind of quantum leap that moves the writing/writer to somewhere unpredictable. On those occasions, agency feels distributed and undecidable, as if we have chosen something that has chosen us. (MacLure, 2013, pp. 660-661)

What is chosen and what chooses? All the absent words, said but somehow unsaid. And the really unsaid, the almost said, the never said. Déjà vu and jamais vu and presque vu. The unthinkable. The infinite possibility of each moment of conversation, each word the singular presence of an almost infinite absence, a bifurcation, the possibilities of the utterance expanding exponentially at the occurrence of each morpheme, reducing the actually said to something arbitrary and meaningless, or exact and precise because we can only say what can be recognised and understood. All the unspoken words I never recorded and collected, that I cannot discuss, and that I nonetheless possess as memories, feelings, emotions, affects. I remembered what was said, and nearly said, and never said, just not the saying. I thought of the absolute solitude of data populated with encounters:

You encounter people (and sometimes without knowing them or ever having seen them) but also movements, ideas, events, entities. All these things have proper names, but the proper name does not designate a person or a subject. It designates an effect, a zigzag, something which passes or happens between two as though under a potential difference. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 6)

I encountered people, even when there was no person as such to be found. I encountered all kinds of events and ideas and entities, and all sorts of things happened, between this body and that. All kinds of bodies. All kinds of things happening between all kinds of things. All of this. It all really happened.

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So what happens when one no longer thinks of the interview and observation as the face-to-face collection of data emanating from individual subjects? What happens once you forget that you are a person as such, when each moment of interview and observation becomes an encounter, an assemblage formed by the encounter between the edges of assemblages, each individually formed by the encounter at the edges of assemblages, assemblages all the way down? When the utterance is no longer the utterance of a person as such, but the utterance of a collective assemblage of enunciation? An effect which zигzags between bodies, actualised of the encounter, something happening. What happens when:
Direct discourse is a detached fragment of a mass and is born of the dismemberment of the collective assemblage; but the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice. I always depend on a molecular assemblage of enunciation that is not given in my conscious mind, any more than it depends solely on my apparent social determinations, which combine many heterogeneous regimes of signs. Speaking in tongues. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 84)

When each enunciation is a detached fragment of the mass you can no longer insist on the comfort and security offered by the illusion of method and methodology, the comprehensibility of question and answer, cause and effect, problem and solution, interview and observation, researcher and participant, binary systems wherein each element orbits the other, tracing measurable, knowable, and predictable arcs through a prefabricated sky. What does it mean to incite an individual participant to speech, to induce them to produce a detached fragment, and to assign them a proper pseudonym, and to collate their demographic information, to record their voice, to transcribe it into text, and to code and theme and analyse these words when there is no subject of enunciation? When there is no person as such that is found? When ‘voice [is] thought as an assemblage, a complex network of human and nonhuman agents that exceeds the traditional notion of the individual’ (Mazzei, 2013, p. 734)? What sense does it make to talk of this or that participant, or what this or that participant said?

And what good does it do to observe if to observe is to recognise and to recognise is to judge? When we can only perceive the perceivable, and recognise the recognisable. ‘Better to be a road-sweeper than a judge,’ says Deleuze (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977).41 When each observable pedagogical action is born/borne not of individual agency and free-will but a dismemberment of the collective assemblage recognised as being good pedagogy, or analogous to good pedagogy, or opposed to good pedagogy, or resembling good pedagogy. What good is our analysis when our analysis will:

no longer be able to appeal to a fundamentally good sense guiding wise judgement in the arbitration of categories and hierarchies, and the detection of error. Such wise judgements, based on the representational ‘fetters’ of identity, similarity, analogy and opposition, underpin the analytic enterprise as conceived in many methods textbooks and in our everyday habits as researchers: this is like that (so we will call it a theme); that is an example of this; this belongs under that code; this is a metaphor for that; this is a sub-category; this interviewee is not saying what she really thinks. (MacLure, 2013, p. 660)

41 And I try to believe this, even as I recognise that I’d much rather be a judge. That I’d much rather be a wasp than an orchid, even though I’m not sure why.
Am I worthy of what happens if what happens happens only because I couldn't think of anything else to make happen? Because I couldn't create a new thought and could only apply methodically a pre-existing thought of methodology: *These participants* to be recruited and interviewed and observed and recorded and transcribed and analysed and represented. Recognised and judged as this or that substance or function or form. Oblivious to the myriad elements that comprise each body, human or otherwise, moving in relations of speed and slowness, capacities to affect and be affected as they come into contact with others forming their own singularities, veritable blocs of becoming, nothing to do with anything in particular. I write, because ‘writing is also a way of “knowing” – a method of discovery and analysis’ (Richardson, 1994, p. 516), even as “knowing” is placed under erasure, always already under the sign of erasure.

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‘The problem,’ suggests Deleuze:

is not to direct or methodically apply a thought which pre-exists in principle and in nature, but to bring into being that which does not yet exist (there is no other work, all the rest is arbitrary, mere decoration). To think is to create – there is no other creation – but to create is first of all to engender “thinking” in thought. (1994, p. 147)

How, then, to think? How to engender thinking in thought, when applying a thought that pre-exists in principle and in nature is not thinking at all, but mere decoration? May (2005, pp. 82-83) writes that ‘we often think badly about problems … When we think of problems, we tend to think about them in terms of solutions … as though a problem were merely a particular lack or fault that solution will fill or rectify.’ To quote Deleuze:

we are led to believe that problems are given ready-made, and that they disappear in the responses or the solution. Already, under this double aspect, they can be no more than phantoms. We are led to believe that the activity of thinking, along with truth and falsehood in relation to that activity, begins only with the search for solutions, that both of these concern only solutions. (1994, p. 158)

But it is an ‘infantile prejudice,’ Deleuze (1994, p. 158) argues, that assumes ‘the master sets a problem, our task is to solve it, and the result is accredited true or false by a powerful authority.’ An infantile prejudice that seems to be the *raison d’être* of humanist qualitative inquiry: to recognise and investigate problems which are constructed to be analysed and made sense of, producing solutions
accredited according to normative frameworks of “what works” which disappear the very problems that gave rise to them. A significant research problem well met with an informed literature review, a valid design, a rigorous discussion, a cogent analysis, and sound implications and recommendations, all communicated clearly and concisely and suitably documented. The result? An original contribution to knowledge, the disappearance of a problem, and the transformation of the person who writes.

Here is a problem, then: to write to become someone other than who one is, to trace a line of becoming, when writing is thinking, and thinking is the engendering of thinking in thought. To resist a thought which pre-exists, interfering with practices, and disrupting the desire to erect a new façade over the ruins of humanism (St. Pierre & Pillow, 2000). Making things happen, in other words, because ‘it is at the level of interference of many practices that many things happen, beings, images, concepts, every kind of event’ (Deleuze, 1989, p. 280). To reject solutions that would erase the problems that generate them and instead wallow and delight in problems themselves, the events themselves. Writing ‘essays in refusal’ (Foucault, 1986b, p. 114). Savouring the ‘restive problematisation of the given’ (Dean, 1994, p. 4), defending failure as failure, rejoicing in paradox and aporia and uncertainty because this is also where many things happen, including thought, and where many things come to life. Not writing as a way of “knowing” but writing as a way of unknowing, of interfering with knowing. A way of thinking.

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How will you read this thesis that is not a thesis? Perhaps one way to make sense of it might be to read it as ‘cultist, reflexive to the point of reduction, and filled with polysyllabic jargon’ (Adler & Adler, 2008, p. 29). Or as legitimising:

a downgrading within qualitative inquiry of the idea that the researcher has a responsibility to try to ensure that the conclusions he or she reaches are sound … to license speculative, exaggerated conclusions; to discourage careful attention to how well evidence supports the knowledge claims made; and to stimulate a preoccupation with whether research accounts are in line with political, ethical, or aesthetic preconceptions. (Hammersley, 2008, p. 137)

Or perhaps you will read this as ‘mid-way between two extremes’ (Denzin, 2010, p. 19): on one side the positivist, scientific, evidence-based research movement; on the other, a regulated and normative orthodoxy of sanctioned humanist qualitative methodological practices, which presume connaissance, licence criteria for evaluation, and model practices that impose limits on the
possibilities of freedom and creativity. Maybe you will read this writing as somewhere in-between, but in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987, p. 25) middle, the *milieu* which is ‘by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed.’

What is picking up speed? What is happening? What becomes of writing when its purpose is no longer simply ‘a task of making meaning – comprehending, understanding, getting to the bottom of the phenomenon under investigation’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 969)? What else might it do? What is writing capable of once we have accepted that our theories are not ‘pre-existent, ready-made, in a prefabricated sky’ (Deleuze, 1989, p. 280), and that our writing is neither the ‘tracing of thought already thought’ nor the ‘transparent reflection of the known and the real’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967)? And this because we can no longer be sure of what is known or what is real? What happens to thinking and writing and research once you sense that ‘language cannot serve as a transparent medium that mirrors, “represents,” and contains the world’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 968)? And when subjectivity ‘isn’t even anything to do with a “person”’ (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 98-99)? Could writing be read as an event in and of itself? Something that happens, and persists, producing effects, not merely a task of making meaning but rather one of interrupting, troubling, and interfering with practices of teaching and research and writing. Could we say that writing is to interfere? Would that even work? Perhaps writing will interfere with those practices that are ‘necessary while at the same time necessarily limiting’ (Koro-Ljungberg & Mazzei, 2012, p. 728). Perhaps writing will recognise ‘that language is an unstable system of referents, making it impossible to ever completely capture the meaning of an action, text, or intention’ (Denzin, 2010, p. 123). Perhaps writing will remember that ‘we made it up’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613), and that ‘while standard methods are often extremely good at what they do, they are badly adapted to the study of the ephemeral, the indefinite and the irregular’ (Law, 2004, p. 4). And perhaps writing will even retain its uncertainty about the impossibility of knowing what is and isn’t ephemeral, indefinite and irregular, allowing all sorts of things to happen without presuming *connaissance* of what those things are or what should be done with and about them. Perhaps writing will return us to the position of beginning again, returning us to the middle where we always already find … our Selves?

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This really happened: in his later work, Foucault distinguished between three aspects of morality: prescriptive moral codes, individual acts in relation to the code, and the sensibility or manner that leads one to act in relation to the code (Foucault, 1997b). For Foucault the moral code referred to ‘a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of
various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches, and so forth’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 25). However, Foucault did not dwell on moral codes. The second aspect of morality for Foucault was ‘the real behaviour of people in relation to the moral code [prescriptions] imposed on them’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 263). This behaviour comprises:

the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values. (Foucault, 1985, p. 25)

But as Bennett (1996) observes, Foucault also refused to place this second aspect at the centre of ethics. Instead, he concentrated his interest on the third aspect: ‘the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in reference to the prescriptive elements that make up the code’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 29). This is what Foucault referred to as:

another side to the moral prescriptions, which most of the time is not isolated as such but is, I think, very important: the kind of relationship you ought to have with yourself, rapport à soi, which I call ethics, and which determines how the individual is supposed to constitute himself as a moral subject of his own actions. (1997b, p. 263)

And so this also happened: subsequent to reading Foucault I wondered if I could use rapport à soi, which Foucault called ethics, as an ethical methodology, to employ it as knowledge and practice. A methodology of ethics. Ethics as methodology. Methodology as ethics. I wondered if research, this thesis, could constitute a kind of relationship with myself, a rapport à soi, a means of acting upon myself, constituting myself as a moral subject. I wondered if research could be ethical, or rather if research could become ethics.

This focus on ethics as rapport à soi, the relationship with the self, is the consequence of viewing ethics as necessarily involving an ‘intertwining of code and subjectivation’ (Bennett, 1996, p. 665). Campbell (2010, p. 27) sees this as a key point in understanding Foucauldian ethics, arguing that ‘while Foucault recognizes that ethics may refer to prescribed rules of action, ethical conduct cannot be simply read off from the moral code associated with it ... In short, moral principles are ethically insufficient.’ Thus ethics for Foucault was neither code nor behaviour but ‘the attitude that caused

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42 Believing them to ‘ultimately revolve around a rather small number of rather simple principles’ and to be remarkably stable across history (Foucault, 1985, p. 32). There is also another reason Foucault chooses not to focus on the prescriptive elements of code, one that highlights the dangers of thinking ethics in terms of transformational and emancipatory knowledge:

The role of an intellectual is not to tell others what they must do. By what right would he do so? And remember all the prophecies, promises, injunctions and plans intellectuals have been able to formulate in the course of the last two centuries and of which we have seen the effects (Foucault, 1989, p. 462)

43 I’m still wondering, clearly.
one to respect’ the law and its application (Foucault, 1985, p. 31). For Foucault:

all moral action involves a relationship with the reality in which it is carried out, and a relationship with the self. The latter is not simply “self-awareness” but self-formation as an “ethical subject,” a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself. (1985, p. 28)

Ethics, then, requires thought and action in practices of self-formation as a ‘dynamic process of sensibility-formation’ (Campbell, 2010, p. 35). It is in the formation of self as an ethical subject, in the relationship that one has with oneself, and through the practices employed to act upon, monitor, test, improve and transform oneself that ethics is actualised. The task of this ethical practice is thus ‘not to decipher what we “really” are, but to strive to cultivate what we might become … The idea of the care of the self thus conceives of subjectivity on a model of becoming, rather than on the traditional static model of identity’ (Palmer, 1998, p. 408). Ethics and subjectivity intertwined in that major work that is the subject itself, a subject that is not given but becoming.

And so I wondered if I could construct ethics in the doing of a doctoral research project. I thought I could see something analogous to a moral code with precepts situated in the intersection of the ‘thousands of textbooks, handbooks, and journal articles that have secured qualitative methodology by repeating the structure in book after book with the same chapter headings so that we now believe it is true and real’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 613), in the institutional research ethics review processes (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Honan, Hamid, Alhamdan, Phommalangsy, & Lingard, 2012; Rivière, 2011, p. 196), in the proliferation of ‘how to’ books on thesis writing, with their ‘typical’ thesis structures and sage advice on writing style (for examples see, Oliver, 2008; Roberts, 2010; White, 2011), and in the requirements to provide an original, clear, accurate and cogently written contribution to knowledge suitably documented (http://www.uq.edu.au/grad-school/thesis-preparation). And that alongside this moral code, which wasn’t really all that interesting, there were associated acts of research and writing that would comprise a mode of being, a process of becoming that particular researcher or writer that would require the definition of a position relative to the multifarious precepts that constitute the very possibility of such a position. And that there was yet another side, the relationship that the researcher and writer has with oneself, the rapport à soi, the process in which the researcher (which is merely a name) might form oneself as an “ethical subject”.

44 “‘Being” is always given through problematisations and practices; it is not prior to them’ (Rabinow, 1997a, p. xxxvi).
delimiting, defining, and deciding within research and writing, as researcher and writer, in relation to the law, and through monitoring, testing, improving, and transforming oneself, a certain mode of being, an attitude in relation to the law and its application. And so even if an old self was lost – that knowable, empirical subject – a new self might emerge from the ruins, not given but produced. An effect of something passing between theory and method and data and analysis and code and action and attitude, a detached and dismembered fragment of the mass/mess. A work of art. Perhaps I just couldn’t let go; perhaps I was unable ‘to get free of oneself’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 8).

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Foucault’s conception of ethics is, as Palmer (1998, p. 408) suggests, ‘explicitly formulated as an alternative to the epistemic model of subjectivity that takes the primary relationship that one has to oneself as one of knowledge.’ As Foucault demonstrates in *The History of Sexuality*, the precept “Know yourself” has supplanted ancient Greco-Roman models of subjectivity centred the principle of *souci de soi* – the “care of the self”: ‘In Greco-Roman culture, knowledge of oneself appeared as the consequence of the care of the self. In the modern world, knowledge of oneself constitutes the fundamental principle’ (Foucault, 1997d, p. 228). Palmer asserts that Foucault’s ethics:

> represents a correction of the traditional tendency to think of the subject as something that is given and whose truth can be deciphered … [and] replaces the primacy of the traditional epistemological relation in our subject formation with an aesthetic relation whereby our lives are to be viewed as works of art, to be transformed in a continual process of creation. (1998, p. 409)

And this because “know yourself” no longer works if there is no person as such that can be found and known. Foucault’s ethical analysis, then, focuses on the practices used to constitute oneself as a subject:

> technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (1997c, p. 225)

If the self is not given to us, and there is no essential truth of the self to be discovered, then what is left is the possibility of aesthetic creation, and the practices or technologies that are employed in this creation: the creation of a self as a work of art. And so I wondered: research as writing as thinking, as engendering thinking in thought, could I call this a technology of the self?
Foucault writes that:

The “essay” – which should be understood as the assay or test by which, in the game of truth, one undergoes changes, and not as the simplistic appropriation of others for the purpose of communication – is the living substance of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an “ascesis,” askēsis, an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought. (1985, p. 9)

Is it ethical? This writing is an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought, an attempt to create, to bring something into existence, not to methodically apply a thought already thought. And it is, as such, an askēsis, an exercise ‘not in the sense of a morality of renunciation but as an exercise of the self on the self by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being’ (Foucault, 1997a, p. 282). A practice through which I have undergone changes, becoming someone else that I was not before, even as there is no person as such that is found. An exercise in the activity of thought, in writing as thinking in an attempt to refuse the kinds of subjectivity imposed on us, to refuse what we are (Foucault, 1982). What will be its effects? Foucault once said that:

the first text one writes is neither written for others, nor for who one is: one writes to become someone other than who one is. Finally there is an attempt at modifying one’s way of being through the act of writing. (1986a, p. 184)

The writer’s persona is constituted by the text, or, in other words, the act of writing constitutes the writer’s mode of being, permitting recognition as writer, researcher, scholar, and so on: producing oneself as comprehensible and determinable as such (and, not inconsequentially, employable, tenure-able, promotable, mortgage-able, et cetera). Not writer producing writing but writing producing writer. As Atkinson asserts of ethnographic research, for example:

the monograph also constitutes the field and its author. The urban ethnography defines its own domain. It names it—Tally's Corner; The Street Where I Lived; Ship Street; Brown's Lounge—and so implicitly defines its boundaries. Although sociological ethnographers are less likely to be

45 For this seems to be the question at the heart of things.
46 Not in the beginning because there are no beginnings.
identified with “their” people or locale, they too become linked through the monograph. So Whyte is Street Corner Society (1981); Willmott and Young are Bethnall Green; Lacey is Hightown Grammar (1971). They have other personae too, but we know scholars and their fields through the work of the monograph. (1992, pp. 10-11)

Writing to become someone other than who one is not conventionally taken to be the purpose of humanist qualitative research, particularly critical education studies; rather, one is typically seen to research and write in order to pursue transformational, emancipatory, political goals: ‘researchers emphasize their commitment to social change, to the improvement of education, to equality and social justice’ (Gordon, Holland, & Lahelma, 2001, p. 197), constituting the writer as ethical, not only in a procedural sense (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004), but inasmuch as the writer’s work in writing is conceived as virtuous in that it critically investigates a social reality, making the familiar strange, analysing the context and its objects, elaborating implications or recommending solutions or suggesting alternatives to problems of power and resistance, structure and agency: in short, it conspires to ‘free individuals from sources of domination and repression’ (Anderson, 1989, p. 249). Solving problems, in other words. And making a difference.

But being ethical must also, inevitably, be questioned. There is a danger in that:

ethics makes safe. It throws a net of safety under the judgments we are forced to make, the daily, hourly decisions that make up the texture of our lives … Ethics is altogether wholesome, constructive work, which is why it enjoys a good name. (Caputo, 1993, p. 4)

Disrupted by deconstructive critique, and no longer holding firm, the safety net promised by ethics is ‘already torn … ‘always already’ split, all along and from the start’ (Caputo, 1993, p. 4). We must, Caputo (1993, p. 4) reasons, be against ethics: owning up to ‘the lack of safety by which judging is everywhere beset.’ And so let’s acknowledge the double articulation of writing: that which it will do in the process of doing what it does – the production of writer as writer, and the desire and interest therein. But there is irony here, and danger too, mirroring the situation courted by deconstructive research ‘of being on the whole too convinced of success as an ambivalent failure in a way that recuperates a sense of mastery through the very defence of risky failures’ (Lather, 2001, p. 486). One must remain vigilant to the dangers of being seduced again by the very ethicality promised by being against ethics. As Buchanan (2000, p. 196) puts it, ‘if posterity has seen fit to beatify Foucault it is because he articulated an ethics, something we can use to justify the practices and beliefs we live by.’

47 Or the strange familiar, it doesn’t seem to matter which (Gordon et al., 2001). Just don’t make the mistake of making the familiar familiar, or the strange strange.

48 Better to sweep roads than be a judge.
There is a risk that any kind of ethics – even being against ethics – will appear too heroic, too able to meet the demands of the problem, too ready to enable us to judge ourselves worthy of what happens to us (Buchanan, 2000). Perhaps, having abandoned ethics, it is already time to abandon it again, to leave it and not return to what it means, to always return to the position of beginning again, which means to always be in the middle of something.

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Perhaps, then, it is better to understand the work of research and writing not in terms of its emancipatory or transformational potential nor in its contribution to knowledge of the social world, its advancement of the discipline, its potential to do good, its honour, but instead to view it as the production of a way of being of the writer through the process of writing:

try to understand that someone who is a writer is not simply doing his work in his books, in what he publishes, but that his major work is, in the end, himself in the process of writing his books. The private life of an individual, his sexual preference, and his work are interrelated not because his work translates his sexual life, but because the work includes the whole life as well as the text. The work is more than the work: the subject who is writing is part of the work. (Foucault, 1996, p. 405)

Listen: like it or not I’m writing this work that is more than the work for me – the subject who is writing that is, in the end, a part of the work itself. I’m writing as askēsis, ‘an exercise of oneself in the activity of thought’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 9), wherein thought was and is an attempt to create, not to think a thought already thought. And that it was, as such, an askēsis through which I am becoming something else, where the work is more than the work. And whatever else comes after, whatever happens and subsists, is necessarily cut off from me, and will continue to produce its effects independently of my presence, and regardless of the present actuality of my intentions, my obscure desires, what I am becoming, always beginning again, somewhere in the middle.

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I began this askēsis thinking of a concept of teacher: a stable, essential, humanist subject able to be known and understood. Epistemic subject objects whom I would, I then imagined, investigate and understand. To know who “these teachers” were in order to understand the teaching and learning that took place in this context, this milieu. I would interview and observe. I would privilege voice and
presence. I would ascertain backgrounds, aggregate demographic information, uncover and reveal motivations, establish and record beliefs, and analyse behaviours. In a world of individuated identities and lived experiences, I would construct a problem to be defined, delineated, explored, understood, and solved. I would collect and analyse data. I would contribute to knowledge. But, as Lather and St. Pierre ask:

how do we determine the “object of our knowledge” – the “problem” we want to study in assemblage? Can we disconnect ourselves from the mangle somehow (Self) and then carefully disconnect some other small piece of the mangle (Other) long enough to study it? What ontology has enabled us to believe the world is stable so that we can do all that individuating? (2013, p. 630)

To go on presuming all that individuating and problem solving would be to submit to an infantile prejudice. It would be a thought already thought. So instead I have tried to engender thinking in thought, to create, to bring something into existence that does not yet exist. I read. I thought. I interviewed and observed. I talked and listened and watched. I noted and recorded and transcribed. I analysed and interpreted. I remembered. I came unstuck in time. I wrote and wrote and wrote. Methodology happened. Between the assemblage of ‘researcher-data-participants-theory-analysis’ (Mazzei, 2013, p. 732) something else occurred. An event. A veritable explosion. I write when to write is ‘perhaps to bring this assemblage of the unconscious to the light of day, to select the whispering voices, to gather the tribes and secret idioms from which I extract something I call my Self (Moi)’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 84). Could I call it research, if writing isn’t written to make sense or solve problems? If writing refuses to comprehend, or understand, or interpret? If it refuses what we are, and interferes with many practices? If, instead of meaning, writing is written to be ‘non-representational, non-interpretive, a-signifying, a-subjective, paradoxical and embroiled with matter’ (MacLure, 2013, p. 663)? To become a map and not a tracing. Not the tracing of the real but an experiment in the encounter with the real. An intense expression. Could this be a way ‘to bring something to life, to free life from where it’s trapped, to trace lines of flight’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 141)? Could we live with that?

Could we call it a thesis?
Here I had the intention of finishing this book, for at Hanoi I found nothing much to interest me. It is the capital of Tonkin and the French will tell you it is the most attractive town in the East, but, when you ask them why, answer that it is exactly like a town, Montpellier or Grenoble, in France.

-W. Somerset Maugham

The Gentleman in the Parlour

The city is a rhizome. The middle, the Old Quarter, lies near Hoàn Kiếm Lake, not far from the banks of the Red River. The streets, which date back to the 15th century (van Horen, 2005), twist and turn, intersected by multiple alleys and lanes, burrow-like ‘in all of their functions of shelter, supply, movement, evasion, and breakout’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 6-7). Not only thoroughfare, they take up whatever identity is needed of them, becoming butchers, kitchens, barber shops, restaurants, playgrounds; spaces of movement, of business, of society, but also always in the process of becoming something else, something different (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Life in my alley. Source: Susan Novak (https://www.flickr.com/photos/mobyhill/340332168/) CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

49 Though Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 19) warn that ‘it is all too easy to depict an Orient of rhizomes and immanence,’ that is precisely what I intend to do here.
The houses that open directly onto these streets and alleys remain both always ancient and always becoming something new as they are split and supplemented, growing organically to take on new forms and accommodate new generations, new businesses, and new functions. Walls, balconies, and rooftops multiply, breaking out of existing structures, accreting concrete, plastic, and iron, growing upwards and outwards, spawning electronic tendrils of almost infinite connection.

Beyond the chaotic entanglements of the Old Quarter the city continues to move in similarly unpredictable ways. Roads, streets, and lanes spread outwards, labyrinthine in their complexity. The French Quarter to the southeast offers a rich colonial nostalgia: an unexpectedly orderly and intelligible grid of wide and tree-lined boulevards and avenues, imposing villas, Nhà Hát Lớn – the Opera House – inspired by Paris’ Palais Garnier, and the Hotel Metropole; elegant reminders of L’Indochine française, la mission civilisatrice, and a not yet forgotten superiority.

To the north, the expat ghetto of Tây Hồ offers home comforts: espresso coffee, burgers, fish and chips, wagyu steaks. To the south the lively student centre of Bách Khoa reveals a young and modern Vietnam, teeming with youth and computer shops and sidewalk cafés. To the west the city grows rapidly; an expanding series of lanes and streets and roads that bifurcate fractally, repeating patterns of complexity at ever increasing scales. And to the east lies the river, no longer the border of the city but still demarcating this side and that side, an inside and an outside. Outside the French Quarter there are few straight lines and many shifting paths. All points are connected in myriad ways. When traffic on the roads slows, people on motorbikes flow onto sidewalks and down rat runs, the multiplicity of machines and people forming a single whole, like a murmuration of starlings folding and unfolding.

Or schooling, as in fish. Here and there monstrous floodlit developments loom in the haze and smog, cybernetic assemblages of concrete and steel and electricity and information, their metallic skeletons visible beneath the gaping wounds of unfinished walls. And the rhizome continues to grow and overspill. This is not fixed space, but constant and perpetual movement and change. Ancient streets are demolished to make way for new; a network of overhead ring roads has begun construction, the supporting structures sprouting like gigantic concrete poplars throughout the city; parts of the neighbouring Hà Tây, Vĩnh Phúc, and Hòa Bình provinces have been subsumed into the city – along with their inhabitants, eliminating old territories and absorbing them into new as the rhizome that is the city expands and moves and changes.

The city is context. It is milieu. It is into this rhizomatic space that teachers arrive and live, mapping literal and imaginative spaces that never stand still. They arrive to explore and colonise the exotic and unknown. As the city is explored and conquered, the virtual spaces beyond experience and understanding become actualised as they are known and named, fixed and controlled within grids of intelligibility. This, too, is a process of territorialisation, in which the unknown and unimagined
spaces of the city are colonised into known experience, rendered recognisable, but in which the teacher also is de- and reterritorialised. It begins from the middle and encroaches outwards from the Old Quarter bars and hotels where the teacher lands as each new pathway is explored and subsumed into the centre. Unknown spaces and entities that previously teased around the outer borders of imagination are assigned concepts and are fixed and stabilised within the coordinates of common sense and good sense. Objects begin signifying. Space is reterritorialised as it is represented in the imaginary of the outsider on the inside; in the middle, in the milieu. Streets, once traversed, are incorporated into perception, knowable and known. They are no longer outside the wire; they are subsumed into the territory of the perceiver and conceptualised. Invaded, occupied, and colonised. Encounters happen, bodies are perceived, judgement is made in terms of identity, analogy, opposition, and resemblance, and recognition occurs. Common and good sense is made of the city. And makes the city.

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The school emerges from the surrounding paddy on the outskirts of the city. Grey concrete and painted colour, it appears at once strange and familiar, as if some expatriate Western architect had imagined a Vietnamese person imagining a Western school and designed it accordingly. It is new, new, new; unlike the surrounding lanes and houses and lakes and pagodas. A newly paved road edged with newly planted gardens leads into the newly built school, watched over by a newly minted security guard in a newly tailored uniform sitting in a newly erected guardhouse operating a new red and white boom gate. Nothing here resembles the cancerous, flaking, yellow-washed, decrepit concrete walls and mutating structures typical of Hanoi (see Figure 3).

Across the river, the school stands on the wrong side of town but also a side of town that is undergoing its own rapid development. A few blocks back from the main highway to Hải Phòng, it sits in the shadows of the massive and ancient dyke that holds back the brown silted waters of the Red River. This is an old town of small alleys, red and green roofed houses, and picturesque green lakes surrounded by outdoor cafés where people sit outside on small plastic stools apparently all day long, apart for a few hours after lunch in the unbearable summer heat when almost everyone in the city disappears. A tall grey concrete wall surrounds the school grounds, demarcating territory and differentiating/differenciating new from old, inside from outside, us from them.

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The city is *milieu* and the *milieu* is difference. And many find the encounter with difference difficult:

> I've never lived abroad before and then living in an ... Asian country like this is a lot different. Just little things every day kind of drive me crazy.

The city and its people – what is there in the world – are encountered and experienced and judged and represented in terms of a difference that is subordinate to identity. As May (2005, p. 78) writes, ‘when we make a judgment, it is always through a recognition of what is there, a fitting of what is there into representational categories that we already possess.’ What is sensed by the faculties is recognised according to pre-given categories of identity, such as Asian and Western. And this recognition of what is there in terms of an identity that is assumed ensures that what is sensed can have sense made of it; that what is there in the world can be recognised as this or that kind of thing.

Common sense and good sense provide the stable categories: Asian in the previous example, or, as in the following extract, First World and Third World:

> But of course I am an adventure seeker, so Vietnam? Yes, without question, I am going to go to Vietnam. Don't know any- much about the culture of Vietnam, I'm going to go there and see what happens. Soon as I landed I felt like I'd landed in a Third World country. And Seoul is a First
World country. And so, to make that jump from First to Third is shocking. Especially when you see people on the rickety old motorbikes coming at you at eighty kilometres per hour going the wrong way. You know? Especially when you see cows crossing the road on the way back from the airport. I thought my goodness, what have I ... I literally said, “What have I gotten myself into?” I can't go back now, I've left my position in Korea, I've ... I can't go back now …

Prefigured, the categories guarantee the continued stability and coherence of thought by rendering sensible that which is sensed. But some encounters don’t make sense. These encounters cannot be subsumed into this logic of good sense and common sense, and so cannot be recognised:

There's no, like, “Welcome to Vietnam, come this way and we'll show you.” And there's the signs. In a lot of countries and places you'll see signs, and there will be symbols and icons so you can kind of walk around with a map and figure stuff out. It's not like that here. So it's a lot more challenging. Like, they don't have road signs sometimes, they don't have directions, they don't have ... Some things just don't make sense!50

Deleuze writes that:

Something in the world forces us to think. This something is an object not of recognition but of a fundamental encounter. What is encountered may be Socrates, a temple or a demon. It may be grasped in a range of affective tones: wonder, love, hatred, suffering. In whichever tone, its primary characteristic is that it can only be sensed. In this sense it is opposed to recognition. (1994, p. 139)

Which is to say, I think, that thought – as opposed to doxa – might occur in these moments that lie beyond the coordination of common sense and good sense. That it is in these interstices that opportunities to ‘produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently’ (Lather, 2013, p. 635) occur, if we can only bring ourselves to do it. That these are opportunities to engender thinking in thought, to create, to bring something to life beyond the limits of what already exists in thought.

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50 Except that it is and they do. My experience of Hanoi was that it was like that there. It was incredibly easy to navigate. The Vietnamese alphabet, chữ Quốc ngữ, uses a Latin script making every sign a recognisable object, if not immediately translatable. Every street has a sign. Nearly every shop front in the city has its street name and number printed on the awning, providing an endless set of coordinates for orientation and navigation. There are signs, and icons, and directions (though mostly not in English) everywhere. Figure 4, for example, depicts a small street sign (Long Bien 1 Road/Phố Long Biên I) under a larger directional sign (Hà Nội: Xe đạp và người đi bộ) which identifies the way for bicyclists (Xe đạp) and pedestrians (người đi bộ - not buffalos, despite the caption) to cross the Long Biên Bridge into Hanoi. Why can’t this be recognised? Why do some things not make sense even when they make sense?
It can be difficult when the object of perception (a street sign, for example) cannot be recognised according to the representational categories coordinated by common and good sense. The breakdown of this process of judgement as recognition is evident in the following extract which presents the teacher’s uncertainty and confusion about the school’s form and function: what it actually is as predicated by what it actually does:

I guess I figured that an international school is supposed to prepare students to go internationally. That's the way that I've always seen it. So, um, but some of the students, I don't think they would even, like, they want to go internationally for university. But, they're in 8th and 9th grade, 10th grade, high school, and they can't even, you know, conjugate a verb, you know? So, yeah, I mean, those are the ones that I don't even think should be here.

Although the ‘international school’ is conceptualised as being a school which prepares students to ‘go internationally,’ this is not borne out by the encounter with what is there: the actual school and its aims, its students, and their apparent abilities and desires. But what is it that fails? What is it that results in this gap between sense and category, when what is there cannot be recognised according to the concept, and cannot have sense made of it?

There is, in fact, little in the way of any common and agreed determination of what an international school actually is or does. Hayden and Thompson (1995) trace the development of concepts of international schools and international education, noting that there remains considerable
uncertainty about their fundamental aims and premises. Similarly, Dunne and Edwards (2010, p. 25) note that ‘the wide diversity among schools that call themselves international means that there is no consensus on a definition.’ Rather, as Hayden and Thompson observe:

many such schools have grown up in response to local circumstances on a relatively ad hoc basis and, although there are certainly subgroupings controlled by central organisations (such as the network of international schools supported by Royal Dutch Shell), for the most part the body of international schools is a conglomeration of individual institutions which may or may not share an underlying educational philosophy. (1995, p. 332)

Individual schools might, then, be reconceptualised not as repetitions of the agreed concept of international school but rather as the actualisation in specific places of a specific confluence of forces and intensities – parents and students and teachers and all their varied desires and interests and functions and forms – a singularity characterised only by its difference, all of which is subsumed under the common noun of ‘international school’ when recognised as the object of the concept. Understood in this way, the international school could be (re)conceived more as an *event* than a pre-fabricated identity conforming to a pre-given category (*international schools are international schools, local schools are local schools*). Thought as such, the actual school becomes characterised less by the general concept than by the forces immanent to its individual actualisation; forces and actualisations which must themselves be thought of as becomings rather than stable identities or beings.

Such a characterisation of the school ruptures the convergence of common sense and good sense that stabilises thought (*international schools are international schools*). The teacher’s apprehension of the gap between the concept (*an international school is supposed to prepare students to go internationally*) and the actualisation that distinguishes this individual school (*this school, these students, here and now*) which, in many ways, does not resemble the concept, reveals this rupture, resulting in the breakdown of a judgement based on common and good sense. This is not, however, to suggest that the teacher’s concept is merely wrong. Compare it, for example, with Dunne and Edwards’ (2010, p. 25) statement that ‘generally, an international school education is seen as improving students’ mobility and their ability to excel in an increasingly internationalized world.’ Rather, it seems that what is there does not fit the concept in general because the sensory object in the world can only ever imperfectly correspond to the idea of the concept itself. The school is a Vietnamese school inasmuch as it is located in Vietnam, is locally owned and managed, and educates

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51 Stagoll (2010c, p. 89) describes events as ‘changes immanent to a confluence of parts or elements, subsisting as pure virtualities (that is, real inherent possibilities) and distinguishing themselves only in the course of their actualisation in some body or state.’
Vietnamese children in the national curriculum. It is not involved in the ‘education of children away from their own national system’ (Hayden & Thompson, 1995, p. 331). However, it is an international school inasmuch as it offers foreign education programs that are not the national system, employs expatriate native English-speaking teachers to teach these programs, and provides opportunities for international mobility in the form of access to higher education in Western universities. Teachers, then, find themselves enveloped in a milieu that is, at least in some ways, unrecognisable: what is there simultaneously does and does not resemble the concept of international or Vietnamese school, instead lying somewhere in the middle. Because the school is at once both an “international” and a Vietnamese school, ‘rather than the harmony of the faculties we discover in common sense, we have here a discord of the faculties’ (Somers-Hall, 2013, p. 116). As Somers-Hall (2013, p. 112) puts it, ‘thinking therefore emerges because of an inherent feature of the object: the contradictory status of the properties which we find within it.’ This discord between the expectation provided by the idea and the object of sense produces an encounter that is opposed to recognition and common sense:

‘Yeah, I mean, I don’t know, the thing that drives me crazy, some people will be like “Well you're in Vietnam so you have to act this way.” I'm like, ”When I'm in Vietnam, I am.” But this is, well, I thought it was an international school, so it's a different culture here than outside. So my first impression, or my impression is, how things are conducted in the school should be a lot different from the outside, because this is an international school. So it should work internationally while the outside is Vietnam. So I expect all those things. But in the school, I expect it to be different, but since I've been here long enough now, now I know it's just all the same, but ... that was my first idea that ...

‘It's a Vietnamese school.’

‘Yeah, no I just … My first impression of what I thought an international school would be is like, okay, every idea or culture, come … more understanding, and sharing ideas and stuff. And then the outside world is Vietnam. So this is its own little place.’

Thought is coordinated by the categories provided by common sense and good sense: Self and Other, inside and outside, international and Vietnamese. The hierarchisation coordinated by good sense privileges Self over Other, inside over outside, and international over Vietnamese. But what is there, the objects of sense – the school, the people, the operations, the ‘how things are conducted’ –

52 Compare, for example, with Terwilliger’s (1972) early attempt to define the general characteristics of international schools in which he describes four main predications of the concept: 1) the enrolment of significant number of students who are not citizens of the host nation and are also not all from one country; 2) a school board composed of foreigners and nationals in proportion to the student body; 3) the employment of teachers with diverse national backgrounds; and 4) a hybrid curriculum which is “a distillation of the best content and the most effective instructional practices of each of the national systems” (p. 362).
conforms fully to neither idea: neither “international” nor Vietnamese it is rather in the middle, occupying its own singular space which resembles neither the inside (as it should be, according to the concept) nor the outside, becoming unrecognisable, opposed to recognition. In this way the school – like the city, the classroom, the students – forms a problem for teachers:

The force of the problem, as independent of the questions and solutions of recognition, is that it goes beyond any past solutions stored in memory. It is a problem because it does not yet have a solution and because it will never allow for solutions that cancel it out. (Williams, 2013, p. 123)

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It’s now 7.30 A.M. and cool in Hanoi’s southwest as I leave my wife’s parents’ home in Kim Giang in the city’s south-west, and ride towards the Old Quarter. I have begun to pay attention to the increasing prevalence of English signs on the shopfronts of the city. English dominates the landscape of the major tourist areas of Hanoi, as well as the expat ghetto on the Xuân Đỉnh side of Tây Hồ. But now I notice more and more English encroaching into other areas. In the south-western suburbs where I live the majority of shops retain their Vietnamese nomenclature. But even here, an area where I rarely see another Westerner, English spreads: there are Nice Hotels, Lady Shops, Shop Mens [sic], as well as semi-English Biboshops, and the Franco-English fusions like the Le Blanc Wedding Studio. To whom, I wonder, do they wish to speak? What do they signify, if they denote nothing to the many who, despite the triumphant spread of English, do not understand?

On my way to the Old Quarter I pass some of the rash of mega real estate developments appearing around Hanoi: Royal City and the Vincom Mega Mall on Nguyễn Trãi, Mandarin Garden on Hoàng Minh Giám, The Manor and The Garden on Mễ Trì. None seem to have Vietnamese names. Royal City and its adjoined Vincom Mega Mall stand like a monument to the excessive wealth of Vietnam’s first and only bona fide billionaire (see Figure 5). The entrance boasts a white triumphal arch so clean it appears bleached, with lit gold letters spelling Royal City Vincom Mega Mall embossed on the front. Behind the arch a flower garden is surrounded by modestly draped Greco-roman statues, again in bleached white, at the rear of which four rearing bronze horses pull a bronze chariot, the arch and quadriga together evoking the Brandenburger Tor or Arc de Triomphe de l’Étoile for reasons I cannot begin to ascertain.

I have a thought as I ride past: some things just don't make sense!

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53 Phạm Nhật Vượng, who made his fortune producing instant noodles in Ukraine (“#1287 Pham Nhat Vuong”, 2014).
The site hosts a shopping mall, properly named the *Vincom Mega Mall Royal City*, which boasts 800 outlets, 170 restaurants, cinemas (*Platinum Cineplex Royal City*), an entertainment centre (*Vinpearl Games Royal City*), a bowling alley (*Royal Bowling*), an indoor water park (*Vinpearl Water Park Royal City*), the first ever ice rink in Vietnam (*Vinpearl Ice Rink Royal City*). None of it seems to exist in *Tiếng Việt* – Vietnamese – the official national language of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam.

The housing development contains 4,500 condominiums, which remain unlit when I ride home at night, despite claims that most have been sold (Kroll, 2013). There is also a campus of the *British Vietnamese International School*, which promises its ‘unique world class education model … will ensure true bilingual proficiency upon graduation, as well as preparation for leading universities around the world’ (British Vietnamese International School, 2012). I can’t help but find it strange that this enormous monument in this south-western corner of *Thành Xuân* by the banks of the *Tô Lịch* River, exists only in English. And I want to know what it all means.

And English is everywhere, when you really start to look.

The motorbikes, ubiquitous in Hanoi, are nearly all English in name:54 *Dreams, Exciters,*

![Figure 5: Vinpearl Mega Mall, Royal City, Hanoi. Source: Mr and Mrs Backpacker](http://www.flickr.com/photos/mrandmrsbackpacker/9501838320/) CC BY-NC 2.0

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54 The obvious exception being my *Honda Astrea*, presumably named after the virgin Greek goddess of innocence and purity.
Elizabeths, the magnificently named Suzuki Smash. Even the abundant and locally made Honda Wave has only an English name. The low rise shops, cafés, and office buildings that surround Hoàn Kiếm Lake, the historical centre of Hanoi, glow neon with names in English. Private-sector schools hoping to display their global credentials to wealthy Vietnamese parents brandish English names like Wellspring, Brendon, and KinderWorld. English is splattered on the walls of Lotteria, a fast food chain founded by a Korean-born Japanese businessman selling quintessentially American food in Vietnam. The poetry is almost-but-not-quite-nonsensical, denoting nothing but connoting America: ‘stars and stripes and girls in Stetsons s cows in buns [sic]’ (see Figure 6). English is everywhere, and it is unremarkable.

I stop for a bowl of phở, traditional Vietnamese noodle soup, in Hoàng Minh Giám, near the Mandarin Garden. This is still outer Hanoi and I feel conspicuous, imagining people looking at me when I enter and uttering tây – Westerner – to their breakfast partners. I’m shown to a table which I share with what looks like a pair of youngish grandparents and their grandson. I order phở tái and a cà phê nau đá – a brown iced coffee – and exchange pleasantries with the grandparents. In Vietnamese I ask them about their grandson, and they tell me he is six years old. I tell them about my four year old son. I sit back to check my phone and read the morning’s news on the café’s free wifi: Chaos as twin bomb blasts rock marathon. As I eat and read, the couple keep pressing their grandson – who keeps sneaking suspicious looking glances at me when he thinks I am not looking – to practise speaking English with me. He refuses.
Figure 7: English is great. Source: Author.
English is everywhere. We are told it has become the international language: of business, of education, of research, of technology, of development. It is a global language, an international language, and a lingua franca. It is, we native English speakers proudly proclaim, ‘the most global of languages’ (Bryson, 1990, p. 173). According to the British Council (2013), English is now ‘the dominant language of communications, science, information technology, business, entertainment and diplomacy.’ And, perhaps in light of this dominance, demand for English continues to grow, with the British Council estimating 1.6 billion learners of English globally (British Council, 2012).

But I wonder about all this English in Vietnam and in Vietnamese schools. At lunch I mention the prevalence of English to one of the teachers I am working with. I ask whether it’s important, that there is all this English in places where it doesn’t seem to belong. I point out that the notices at the school are in English first and then Vietnamese (see Figure 8). Isn’t it strange to give English this priority, I ask, what with this being a Vietnamese school for Vietnamese children in Vietnam?

She says she wouldn’t know.

I reference the proliferation of English language signs on Hanoi streets: the auto-garages near the school. The Lady Shops and Shop Mens in outer suburbs selling imported Chinese clothes to local suburban fashionistas. The Japanese-Korean-Vietnamese burger joints selling American food to Vietnamese youth along with stars and stripes and Stetsons. The ostentatious commercialism of Royal City, a monument – seemingly always and only in English – to the triumph of wealth and excess. Isn’t this significant, I ask? Important? Isn’t it worth noting the rampant signification of English and wealth and capitalism in this Socialist Republic of Vietnam? Is it good? Is it right? And what part do we play? Aren’t we – White, foreign, native English-speaking, teachers – in some not insignificant way responsible for or at the very least complicit in whatever it is that seems to be rearranging the ‘linguistic landscape’ (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) of this city in ways which would appear to privilege

55 The British Council, ‘The United Kingdom’s international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities’ (http://www.britishcouncil.org/) has maintained a presence in Vietnam since 1993 (see Figure 7).

56 Vietnam is a heavily populated country of almost 90 million people in 2010 (United Nations Statistics Division, 2012), with more than 20 million students enrolled across the education system (London, 2011). The school system is divided into three tiers: primary (1st - 5th grade); lower-secondary (6th - 9th grade); and upper-secondary (10th - 12th grade). Education law stipulates that primary and lower-secondary education are both compulsory and universal (UNESCO Bangkok, 2007). School participation rates are high, with primary school net enrolments in recent years outperforming other Southeast Asian countries with higher GDPs such as the Philippines and Thailand (UNICEF Viet Nam, 2010). Literacy rates for the population aged 15 to 24 years are also high, at 97% for males and 96% for females (UNICEF, 2013).

In 2008, the Prime Minister approved the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (decision number 1400/QĐ-TTg), one of the aims being to implement compulsory foreign language learning in schools beginning in the 3rd grade (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2008). A pilot compulsory primary English program was implemented in 2010-2011, commencing with four 40 minute periods in the 3rd grade, with the aim of reaching 100% of 3rd graders by the 2018-19 school year (H. T. M. Nguyen, 2011). Further goals are to introduce ‘foreign language enhancement training programs’ reaching 100% of vocational and undergraduate students by the 2019-2020 academic year (Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, 2008).

57 There are many: a list of rules in the cafeteria, rules by the swimming pool, rules next to the soccer fields and basketball courts, rules in the corridors, in the classrooms, the ICT room, et cetera and so on.

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English and capitalism? And if – as seems likely to me – this Anglicised linguistic landscape is just one manifestation of something much deeper, well … what’s going on? Shouldn’t we care, I ask? She says she doesn’t know and eats her rice and chicken.

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How might we understand English in the city? A critical approach suggests that teaching English is socially, politically, and economically interested (Canagarajah, 2008). That the spread of the English language is not necessarily natural, neutral, and beneficial as is suggested by common sense

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58 Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 23) define linguistic landscape in terms of ‘the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region. Further, they state that:  

- the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. The linguistic landscape of a territory can serve two basic functions: an informational function and a symbolic function. (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25)  

Informational functions of the linguistic landscape include marking and delineating territorial limits, indicating languages in use and the sociolinguistic composition within the territory, and as an indicator of power relationships between language groups (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). The symbolic functions of the linguistic landscape complement the information functions in denoting the relative value and status of different language groups, symbolising the strength and vitality of language groups, and excluding minority languages (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

59 And does this mean, by extension, that teachers of and in English are socially, politically, and economically interested?
and good sense (Pennycook, 1995), but rather that English spread may be promoted to advance specific political and economic agendas (Phillipson, 1992), is implicated with discourses of colonialism and broader social, cultural, and economic issues (Auerbach, 1995; Canagarajah, 1999b; Lin, 1999; Martin, 2005; Pennycook, 1994, 1998), and has the potential to oppress, exclude, and disadvantage as much as it has the potential to benefit individuals (Pennycook, 1995; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Tollefson, 2000).60

These, typically, are not comforting thoughts for English language and English-medium teachers. And so must we see our work, like Canagarajah, as socially, politically, and economically interested? Does teaching English and in English require us, as Pennycook (2008, p. 169) suggests, to draw connections between ‘classrooms, conversations, textbooks, tests, or translations and issues of gender, class, sexuality, race, ethnicity, culture, identity, politics, ideology or discourse’? Could being aware of and doing this kind of stuff be part of what differentiates a real teacher from someone who isn’t? Or is it, after all, just teaching English? Haven’t the authors of New Headway done this kind of difficult thinking for us already?61 Isn’t that what the teacher’s book is for? Wouldn’t it be easier to think that none of this is really important? That as a “native speaker” of English all you really have to do is ‘decide on a location,’ as suggested in the following advertisement for English language teachers:

The first step towards teaching English overseas is to decide on a location. Do you want to teach among the hustle and bustle of a city or in a relaxed little village? Do you want work where you can save lots or just enough to enjoy life while you’re there? Maybe you’d like the opportunity to earn great money teaching one-on-one during your free time? These are all questions that you need to ask yourself… or us if you need some help. We can also help with questions about getting a working visa for your chosen country.

That’s all the big decisions made, now all you need to do is get some TEFL (Teaching English as

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60 English can be beneficial, at least for some people, in some places, some of the time. But as Tollefson (2000, p. 8) argues, ‘at a time when English is widely seen as a key to the economic success of nations and the economic well-being of individuals, the spread of English also contributes to significant social, political, and economic inequalities’ through the loss of indigenous languages, the unequal distribution of opportunities in education, business and employment, and as an obstacle to education and employment requiring English proficiency. English can be used as a gatekeeper to positions of power, can lead to a dependence on Western forms of knowledge, and can threaten and displace local languages and cultures (Peirce, 1995; Pennycook, 1995; Phillipson, 1992; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). As Pennycook notes: English functions as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society. With English taking up such an important position in many educational systems around the world, it has become one of the most powerful means of inclusion or exclusion from further education, employment, or social positions. (1995, p. 40)

Canagarajah (2008) traces the development of critical approaches in English language teaching from Robert Phillipson’s (1992) *Linguistic Imperialism*, to Freirean approaches to pedagogical relationships (e.g., Auerbach, 1995; Benesch, 1993), to issues of discourse and agency inspired by poststructuralist orientations and the Frankfurt school of critical theory (e.g., Canagarajah, 1993; Peirce, 1995; Pennycook, 1994). These approaches occur across a number of related domains including critical discourse analysis and literacy, critical approaches to translation, critical approaches to language education, critical language testing, critical language policy, planning, and language rights, and critical approaches to language and literacy in workplace settings (Pennycook, 2001, 2005). Further, these critical approaches are allied to, though not synonymous with, other critical approaches to language and education such as critical pedagogy, critical language awareness, and critical literacy (Canagarajah, 2008; Pennycook, 2001, 2005).

Incorporating different domains and foci, and maintaining ‘a healthy pluralism and openness to new pedagogical questions and research methods’ (Canagarajah, 2008, p. 214), all critical approaches are committed in some sense to relating aspects of language and language teaching to other aspects of social relations, particularly in ways which recognise the power and inequality inherent in social relations and the ways ‘language functions in maintaining and changing power relations in

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62 And is there even any such thing as a native speaker? Common and good sense would have us recognise one, obviously. But it is tempting to imagine that there isn’t. While there has been a lot of important critical work advocating for non-native English-speaking teachers (see Footnote 24), the binary concept of native/non-native persists despite its theoretical shortcomings (Doerr, 2009). Perhaps it’s time for some Derridean *sous rature*? The *native speaker* is commonly conceptualised as an ‘idealized person with a complete and possibly innate competence in the language’ (Pennycook, 1994, p. 175), hence the folk wisdom of the *native speaker* as the ideal language teacher. As Cook (1999) points out, however, it is not uncommon for *native speakers* themselves to deviate from ‘standard’ forms of language, to lack fluency, and to function poorly in communicative social settings. Reliant on notions of inheritance, birthright (mother tongue), citizenship, homogeneity, and monolingualism (Pennycook, 1994), the idea of the *native speaker* is based on ‘a bounded, homogeneous, and fixed language with a homogeneous speech community, which is linked to a nation-state’ (Doerr, 2009, p. 1). Thus the concept of the *native speaker* is generally grounded in an abstraction of *homo monolinguis*: ‘the monolingual person who still speaks the language learnt in childhood’ (Cook, 1999, p. 187). Chomsky, for example, argues that:

Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker-listener, in a completely homogeneous speech-community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance. This seems to me to have been the position of the founders of modern general linguistics, and no cogent reason for modifying it has been offered. (1965, pp. 3-5)

The point here is that the linguistic concept of *native* and *non-native speakers* doesn’t take into account what Eagleton (1983, p. 97) refers to as ‘what people actually said,’ that is, the actual socially, historically, and individually located speaker who may not be an ideal speaker-listener, and most definitely is affected by actual relevant conditions such as ‘memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors’ (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3), not to mention real social relations of power and inequality. Not, mind you, that when it comes to employment as an English language teacher such theoretical questions are taken into account. Rather it is more often the case that if you a) hold citizenship of an appropriate nation state, b) sound like a *native speaker*, and (and sometimes or) c) look like a *native speaker* you are, as far as anyone is concerned, a *native speaker* (though there also exists, within the category, a further hierarchy of *native speakers*: American, British, Australian, *et cetera*). And the question then becomes what purpose does the dichotomy serve? And whose interests?
contemporary society’ (Fairclough, 2001, p. xviii). In these critical approaches language and language teaching are seen not just in terms of language content and teaching methodology, but as sites of struggle over whose languages, voices, knowledges, practices and identities are valued and preferred (Auerbach, 1995).

According to Pennycook (1999b), critical scholarship in English language teaching in particular is informed by three major unifying themes: 1) an attempt to locate English teaching within a broader view of social and political relations which focuses on questions of power, inequality, discrimination, resistance, struggle, and the global power of English; 2) a focus on transformational pedagogy; and 3) a more self-reflexive stance on critical theory. What is needed, Canagarajah (1999b) argues, is an approach to English which balances ‘the forces of reproduction and resistance’ (p.46), integrating perspectives which recognise the rigidity of power structures but also demonstrate that local situations are complicated by resistance and appropriation, ultimately suggesting that ‘domination by the center is not always guaranteed’ (p.43). This, concludes Canagarajah (1999b, p. 173), represents a “third way” that avoids the traditional extremes of rejecting English outright for its linguistic imperialism or accepting it wholesale for its benefits.’

But if taken seriously as postulates of a critical approach to teaching English and teaching in English, how far have these ideas permeated the common and good sense of the English language teaching industry itself? Which is to say: to what extent do teachers themselves summon such discourses in talking about their work as teachers? I asked teachers if they perceived any ethical dilemmas in their roles as Westerners teaching English and in English to Vietnamese kids:

I mean, I guess there's always a ... you know, like, our culture's the only way, like, ethnocentric like aaargh ours is the best! And I try to not do that, but I could see that as being a dilemma. I guess. Like telling them “No! This is the right way,’’ when ... it's not always the right way. I don't ... Western culture hasn't figured it out either, always. It's not always the right way, but ... I guess, because the Vietnamese culture is so shocking sometimes I'll be like, “No! This is the right way to do it!”

Ethical dilemmas? Don't think I've ever been ... challenged by an ethical dilemma really. I can tell that there are some political ones. I'm not really sure if that would be ... ethical or not. I mean, in tenth grade, especially, and also in eight and ninth, we like to think critically, and I always want

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63 I don’t want to conventionalise this analysis by reducing the focus to:
the ideational and cultural aspects of utterances (spoken or written) – what they mean; whether they are true, valid or consistent; whether they can be generalised to other contexts; whether they are collectable and codable under overarching themes, categories or ideas; how well arguments hold together; how power and subjectivity are constructed and negotiated.’ (MacLure, 2013, p. 664)

Nevertheless, it seems important at the outside to note the presence of a fundamental inconsistency here: that our way is not the only way, nor the best way, but that is often the right way, notwithstanding seriously unanswerable questions such as who are we? What is our culture? What is our way? And in what way, exactly, is it right? And how do we know?
to challenge them to think for themselves. That might, that may include bucking authority, as well, and so ... Not necessarily ethical but more of, um, environmental challenge, meaning, you know, considering where you are. Vietnam is still a communist country, and we have to deal with all the trappings that come with that. I um, there was a story that was told to me, by a young lady here, who I won't identify who she was, but she's in a position to know these things. Turns out that this school was investigated by the higher-ups in the Communist Party for teaching human rights. So ... ah, one teacher ... even I don't know who it was, taught human, a class in human rights, and members of the Party, the Communist Party, came here to ... check, to see if everything was kosher. They walked around the school and interviewed the teachers and whatnot. So ... I guess, not really, I can't ... can't really think of any ethical ones, but in my current situation I would say there are certain political considerations one should consider.64

No I couldn’t … I can’t even really see what could be an ethical dilemma. I mean maybe someone who teaches something where culture comes into it. But otherwise no. I mean they … I don’t see it in mathematics. With a technical subject. Something that’s more … less opinion based.65

I asked teachers if they saw any potential adverse impacts arising from their work teaching in an international school:

No.66 Not unless they are … losing their native language. That would be the only way that I’d see it - if they are not learning their native language. If they just put English all the time and they lose that. And I suppose in teaching English sometimes you might take away some of their own culture a little bit, in a way, because you’re putting another language so much ahead of theirs. That some of them get this feeling that theirs is not important. And even here the students are … I tell them “you’re not Vietnamese,” you know? “You live way more wealthy than normal Vietnamese students. You’re Vietnamese but I don’t know if you really know how it feels to be a Vietnamese person.”67 But negatively, to learn English? No.

I asked how important it was to have native English-speaking teachers:

64 Isn’t it problematic to presuppose the absence of ethical dilemmas? Isn’t there a problem in presuming that what we are doing is ‘possessed of a good nature and a good will’ (Deleuze, 1994)? Could it be that a bit more uncertainty here is advisable and, if so, what does that say about our project of knowledge production? Is this our way? Is it the best?
65 Harding points out the paradox of assuming a culturally distinctive value neutrality: maximizing cultural neutrality, not to mention claiming it, is itself a culturally specific value..., valuing abstractness and formality expresses a distinctive cultural feature, not the absence of any culture at all. And so here we find “our way” is represented as “the only way”. (2006, p. 47)
66 And isn’t it dangerous to presuppose that our work is good? That from the outset it will have no adverse effects? Again, might a bit of hesitation and uncertainty not be advisable here?
67 What, then, does it mean to be a real Vietnamese person? What does it take to really know how it feels to be a Vietnamese person? Poor? Uneducated? Non English-speaking? Inferior?
‘I think it's absolutely vital. Yep.’

‘Do you want to tell me about that?’

‘Well ... How can I explain it? Um ... When I first took over the IGCSE here, none of the students knew ... any of the lingo in English. That's ... They're all very computer literate, particularly when it comes to games. And their ability with the shortcut keys is outstanding. But if I was to say to them, um:

“Righto CTRL-C this up and CTRL-V it into here,”

They'll go “What?”

And ... that's ... pretty basic English, but they only know it in Vietnamese ... and ... also ... Even when the Vietnamese teachers teach in English, their accents are so bad, that when they do come up against a native English speaker, they don't know what they're saying.68


‘Why?’

‘Simple things … an accent. And that’s a challenge for them because they get different accents from Australian to America, whatever. I have an advantage because they are most used to the American accent because of the media. And I think that’s the one they would most likely be able to mimic because it’s in the media and I think a lot of them have the easiest time understanding because of the music and that’s what they’re used to. But I think … if I’m hiring somebody and they sound more like a normal person rather than an accent and more like they’ve learnt English as a second language, then, the more belief I have is that their English is that strong. Now ... maybe that student does poorly on a grammar test, but someone else does excellent on a grammar test but sounds like an Asian person speaking, then their English is not going to seem as good. But then hearing it, every day, and learning it, for sure. Being a native English speaker. And a lot of them who don’t have a native English speaker you can tell from their accent and so on. You know they pick up the other accent, naturally. Like college kids they take English from a Vietnamese professor, and it’s like their English has such a strong accent. Our kids, I think a lot

68 Lippi-Green observes that:

if you look at language-focused discrimination, you will find that it is not language per se that is relevant; instead we need to understand the individual’s beliefs about language and following form those beliefs, institutional practices. In short, these beliefs and practices are the ways in which individuals and groups are denied recognition. (2012, p. 67)

Language variation, then, functions as a sign which is necessarily a sign of something else, pointing beyond itself.
of them don’t speak with an accent.69

I asked what English was for:

Well since, um ... English is the international language and maybe before Vietnam didn't really consider it as an important language but I think as time progresses every country is starting to learn it more and I think ... in order to keep up with the rest of the world, you know, that's why they are actually teaching it in public schools, and people ... everywhere else is using it.

It really is a global language. It is the language of business and commerce. And if, if, if it were French, that would be, you know I wouldn't be living here and working here now. Here ... here's a good story a friend told me to illustrate the point. In Seoul, in Korea, he was at a pub, and there was a Chinese gentleman and a Japanese gentleman, both in Korea in business. And the Chinese fellow doesn't know Japanese. The Japanese fellow doesn't know Chinese. They both know ... English. It's like a lingua franca. It's the one language that can unify everyone. Whether they're on holiday or ... it's just ah, it's the business language. If you want, if you want to do international business, English is ... And there should be a language that is common to everyone, in order for that, for business to happen. Or else we would have to learn ... hundreds of other languages.

It's pretty common knowledge throughout the world now that the language of the Internet, and the language of business, is English. And for a lot of these kids their only way out of poverty – I mean their parents have sold the farm and in a lot of cases their only form of income. And so for the kids it's a little bit like what happened in Australia in the forties, fifties, and sixties where the cities started to grow, the farmers sold their vegetable patch, built a beautiful big house, but then the kids had no income from the family farm. For them, they just simply went and did trades. Here they don't have that option. Trades don't pay. And for them getting into business, banking, IT, or some other ... internationally related industry is ... really ... their only hope ...

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69 Lippi-Green notes that: linguists have struggled to find an accurate definition of the word accent, and for the most part, given it up as a bad job. Generally accent can only be understood and defined if there is something to compare it with. (2012, p. 45)
For example, in the field of second language acquisition, Derwing and Munro (2009, p. 476) understand and define accent as phonological variations resulting from L1 influence on the L2. But what kind of variations are Derwing and Munro thinking of here? Of course, everyone has an accent, and no accent, native or non-native, is inherently better than any other. Because our research involves immigrant L2 speakers in western Canada, when we use the word ACCENT here, we refer to the ways in which their speech differs from that local variety of English and the impact of that difference on speakers and listeners. (Derwing & Munro, 2009, p. 476)
Non-accent, then, is not a lack of accent but the presence of a non-differentiated accent, the presence of an absence of difference. Which is to say that all of the students described in the excerpt above did, of course, speak with an accent, but that only some succeeded in failing to differ from that of the teacher.
I’ve spoken to a lot of parents about this and that's exactly why they send their kids to international schools. So they can learn English to either go and work overseas, or to at least study at a recognised university. A lot of parents here realise, especially those that have travelled overseas, they realise that the education system here in Vietnam is not recognised anywhere else in the world. So they put their kids in international school in the hope that they can learn English and get out. Even a lot of the staff that work here ... and at other schools that I know ... they're working at international schools to increase their level of English so they can get work overseas or go and study overseas. Yeah.

But there is in these responses, I think, a kind of ambivalence around English and the international school. A paradoxical and precarious position in which it is simultaneously recognised and misrecognised that there are social, political, and economic issues that must be acknowledged: ethical dilemmas, adverse impacts, contradictions, and uncertainties, and that these must also not be acknowledged in order to continue to produce the desire and necessity for native English-speaking teachers. For example, despite the avowed necessity for learning English from native English-speaking teachers, one teacher described English as:

... just another hoop the kids have to jump through to get the kind of job that they want. Or maybe they can look a little bit better. I don't think there is a real desire to learn English, per se, among most of the people, you know? It's, well, I have to do this because I need to get a better job, and I want to work for a foreign company, I don’t want work for the government, you know? So if I learn English I can hook up with a private company and make more money.

And so despite the apparent ubiquity and urgency of English, and the stated extreme importance of learning English from native English speakers, there is uncertainty here. Another teacher explained that:

... for the majority of people I don't know what they do with it. It's just ... you have to learn English. You have to learn how to read. You have to learn how to write ... It's ... it's like, de facto, you have to do it ... But I don't know why ... You know, they'll never write a letter in English. They'll never write a memo to their boss in English. You know? Nothing like that ... They might enjoy movies a little bit more in English. They'll have a little bit better understanding ... That, and

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70 And so this remains the common sense of English as an international language: that anyone who isn’t doing it needs to because everyone else already is, and it is their only hope, their only way out, their only answer.
they'll probably enjoy music, a little bit more. But ah ... I can't really ah ... tell you why they are
... doing it. And I'm certainly not here telling them they have to learn English, you know?"

But aren’t we telling them that they have to learn English? And that they have to learn it from us?
Isn’t this exactly what we are doing? That English is needed to keep up? That it is the international
language? The business language? The commercial language? The common language? The Internet
language? The language of study and education? The way out of poverty? The way to knowledge?
Their only hope? Because, it seems, the message is everywhere: built into the school, writ large on
the walls of Lotteria, prominent in the majestic excess of Vincom Mega Mall, and hanging loosely
askew above the Lady Shop. This is the symbolic function of English – communicating the relative
value and status of English in Vietnam, symbolising education and opportunity and money. And this
is, of course, the message immanent to the schools and embodied by the White teachers themselves:
that English must be learnt, at least as a point of individual differentiation and advantage; that ‘as
Vietnam continues to evolve and change, the best placed professional and business leaders will be
those educated to an international standard in English’ (British Vietnamese International School,
2012).

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It is in the milieu of the city that teachers become, in encounters with schools and classrooms and
students and all sorts of things. But what becomes of a teacher whose subjectivity is not given, whose
Self is not given as such? From what source does this teacher emerge? How is a teaching Self
constituted? Individualised? Actualised? By what processes are they created, as a work or art or
otherwise?

Teachers are caught up in ebbs and flows, movements in space and time, lines of flight. They
come and go, producing ‘phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of
acceleration and rupture’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4), losing and finding their Selves, de- and
reterritorialising identities in contact with local assemblages that are different and Other. On the edges
of the rhizomatic assemblage, boundaries come into contact, producing a ‘double becoming’ that
changes both the rhizome of teacher and the rhizomes teachers encounter (Sutton & Martin-Jones,
2008, p. 6), each deterritorialisation implying an accompanying reterritorialisation because:

How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative,
always connected, caught up in one another? The orchid deterritorializes by forming an image, a
tracing of a wasp; but the wasp reterritorializes on that image. The wasp is nevertheless
deterritorialized, becoming a piece in the orchid's reproductive apparatus. But it reterritorializes the orchid by transporting its pollen. Wasp and orchid, as heterogeneous elements, form a rhizome. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10)

Which is to say that all encounters are becomings, double becomings in which each heterogeneous element is deterritorialised even as it is deterritorialising the other, and reterritorialised even as it reterritorialises on the other:

At the same time, something else entirely is going on: not imitation at all but a capture of code, surplus value of code, an increase in valence, a veritable becoming, a becoming-wasp of the orchid and a becoming-orchid of the wasp. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10)

Could I say that teachers, like rats ‘in their pack form’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 6) are rhizomes, an image of identity that ‘has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and overspills’ (p.21)? Can teachers form a singular multiplicity or rhizome, each connected to the other, no longer individual teachers, but both one and many? A single shape, fluid and moving, like a school of fish continually forming and reforming. Folding and unfolding. Could the network of White, Western English-speaking teachers, expatriate, disparate, but connected by something shared be considered a rhizome? And could the teacher and the city (and the school, and the classroom, and the student, et cetera) in encounter form another rhizome in which the city becomes teacher and the teacher becomes city, pushing each deterritorialisation further in a ‘circulation of intensities’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10), creating teachers, and students, and classrooms, and schools, and entire cities that create further encounters, an infinite becoming that never ends, that never is, but that is nevertheless always reterritorialised into representation and meaning? As Deleuze and Guattari put it:

Even those who are best at “leaving,” those who make leaving into something as natural as being born or dying, those who set out in search of nonhuman sex – Lawrence, Miller – stake out a far-off territoriality that still forms an anthropomorphic and phallic representation: the Orient, Mexico, or Peru. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983)

The city presents itself as a transformable and transformed new world to be explored, traversed, traced, and conquered. The teacher reterritorialises on the city, tasked with educating the local population into the English language and the superior knowledge and culture of the West, constituting

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71 And what is it, exactly, that is shared? That seems to bind us and exclude them? Language? Culture? Tradition? History? More than this? Or perhaps less?
a concomitant teaching self that is Western, English-speaking, and superior of knowledge and culture. But the populace is not simply subjected to a linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 2008), but rather negotiates, contests, resists, and appropriates English for their own purposes (see Figure 9) (Canagarajah, 1999b). English can never merely serve the interests of the centre, it is always deterritorialised as the periphery engages in its own reterritorialising movements.

For the teacher, leaving somewhere else to enter the city is a movement through which the teacher escapes the determinations of a known and fixed identification, a deterritorialising movement that allows reinvention as another person: they can become someone else, creating a Self.72 The body becomes avataristic, an object of perception that represents no specific idea of any individual person, that means nothing inasmuch as the individual teacher is unknown, the body’s prior significations lost to memory and the teaching subject liberated from a prior identity produced and recognisable within a particular social milieu and its specific relations and encounters (Roffe, 2010). No longer tied to a collective past, now removed from family, friends, colleagues – from society and historicity – reinvention and manipulation become possible. Becoming is made both explicit and explicitly necessary. Cut loose in space and time, the teacher must become anew, and can, if desired, become another person, at least for a while:

So I found myself without a job. Looking for something, I was interviewing in the HR field …

And, ah, I had a friend, a very dear friend of mine who was teaching English in Korea. And he was back on holiday and he said to me, “Why don't you teach English in Korea?”

And I said, “Well, first of all I'm not a teacher and ...”

And he goes, “No, no, no! You just need to be a native English speaker with a BA, and the rest takes care of itself.”

So I said, “You know? I love to travel. I'm looking for an adventure. Why not?”

Identity is also deterritorialised as the teacher is becoming teacher. Teacher identities emerge in the school milieu, in affective classroom encounters and relations with students and colleagues. Again the movement to the city represents a line of escape and liberation from a prior “being”, enabling the becoming of a new, different Self as “leaving” leaves behind former selves and introduces a new society of teachers:

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72 It is, as such, a line of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).
Figure 9: Well, they’ve learned this much English, at least. Source: Peter Garnhum (http://www.flickr.com/photos/petergarnhum/340834005) CC BY-NC 2.0
I have a bachelor’s degree in hotel restaurant management, when I was a kid, and then I worked in the restaurant industry for about 25 years. I was a training manager opening up new restaurants, and then I went back to school and I got a degree in linguistics.

Only to disperse once again when contracts are completed, new positions are found, or new countries are visited:

As a lifelong career? I think eventually I would get rather bored with it. Yeah. I don't ... I really don't think I could see it as a career. It would be more of a job of necessity. Something I would do for good pay. Teaching as a calling, yes. But ESL, the subject ESL, it would be more of a- I'll do it out of necessity. But if I had my own ... choice, I would rather teach a social science.

Rhizomatic teachers emerge within the expatriate teaching community in encounter with the city’s schools, each a confluence of intensities and forces that in provides teachers with a temporary social milieu in which to fabricate a teaching self.

But the teacher also reterritorialis on the city. They are positioned at the edge of the rhizome, literally and metaphorically on the periphery of the teaching imaginary, marginalised professionally – the unqualified, inexperienced, redundant; socially – the perverted, the sexpats, divorcees, the addicts, and other misfits. As Westerners in the school and city they form a minority, and as English language teachers (or perceived as English language teachers) they form a marginalised minority within the Western expatriate society. All work on the boundaries of Western English-speaking schooling, far from the metropolitan centres of Western modernity and educational practice, and here employed by the marginal schools, the for-profit business, the Vietnamese schools that aren’t really international schools. In these marginal and often precarious positions, the teacher is far from home and the support provided by family and friends, and institutions, often in insecure employment without regulatory protections in bottom tier schools in a developing country:

The first three months was incredibly painful. I didn’t know anyone. I didn’t know the language. The novelty of it wore off quite quickly. I find myself in a dormitory living on campus, about thirty minutes from town in the middle of nowhere. So it was very lonely. And I would go on Skype almost every night crying saying I want to come home, I want to come home!

Interestingly, what research exists on native English-speaking teachers working in foreign countries suggests that the desire to teach English overseas is rarely seen as a career or calling but instead is entered into for instrumental reasons such as a desire for travel, adventure, career change, or lack of other career direction (Mullock, 2009; Senior, 2006). Teaching English is rarely a first choice of career for native English-speaking teachers, entry into the profession is often perceived as accidental, and leaving is a constant possibility (Centre for British Teachers, 1989; Johnston, 1997; Mullock, 2009).
I love it and hate it, I think, if I’m honest with myself. But at the same time some of the things that I hate is the same reason I love it. You know? How unorganised and crazy things are, sometimes it gets to me. It’s just unorganised: the people are unprofessional, there’s nothing about it that’s like back home. But, at the same time, the un-organisation of all of it in different aspects are the things I like. You know - the streets, being more free, being able to drink a beer on my motorbike if I want. And those types of things are what makes it interesting. Definitely the difference is it makes it more fun, and that’s why I’m not in a place like Australia or Canada because I think it’s too much the same. So yeah, that would be my outlook. Love it and hate it. Good days and bad days. Like everywhere else. I do think I want to leave though, and go somewhere else.

Within the city and the school the teacher is reterritorialised as tây – the Westerner. Vietnamese stereotypes of Western teachers render the body a recognisable object fixed according to certain logics of common and good sense: they are foreign, White, and wealthy:

They think we walk around with gold in our pocket.

Um ... there's also the, ah, what we call the 'skin tax', you know? It's one dollar for a local, three dollars for tourists. And everyone's a tourist. If you're not Vietnamese you're a tourist.

No longer liberated, the teacher becomes an embodied representative of the West, performing pure signification. Never resident, never belonging, with no potential of ever becoming-Vietnamese, becoming-tây is a reterritorialisation into signification and representation: in this case an understanding that one is serving the interests and needs of others, and that one’s body signifies otherness:

... when I go somewhere, like this weekend, I had people taking pictures of me all the time because they're like “Oh! White girl, looks different!”

And I'm like, “This is crazy!”

There is also the realisation that it is not the individual Self that is desired, neither the prior being nor the becoming-teacher, but rather the symbolic value of the body itself. This is the recognition that White, Western, presumably English-speaking, mostly male bodies sell enrolments:

They just want the money. You can charge so much more for White faces, and I think that's basically the end of it.
I think we look really good in photographs. That's what I'm getting out of it.

Really, honestly, I firmly believe that we are only here to be in photographs so that they can say, “Look we've got international teachers.”

All the parents of these Vietnamese that go to these language centres want to see is a White face teaching. They don’t know what’s being taught. They don’t know … you know? There’s so much … it’s just a waste.

In this way the potentials for self-formation dissipate as the teacher becomes the recognisable object of a different logic of common sense and good sense. Within the school, this is intensified as the segmented spaces and times of the school day chain the teacher into the lockstep of the organisation. Subjectivities are stratified by subject, period, year level, room. Time is order, and the location of the body in space and time is predetermined and disciplined:

You know, probably the thing that's the hardest for a teacher, is the Vietnamese management idea of making money off the employee. You know I think this is fairly common in all Vietnamese companies, I've heard stories, but we get fined for silly things that are just ... ridiculous! And it's just a money making thing for the school, you know? That's the way we see it. If I forget to punch in they fine me ten dollars! You know? That kind of stuff is ...

This disciplining of the body, forced to appear in this place at this time, further intensifies the realisation that the White body is all that is valued:

We're like work horses. We're like horses that run laps. We're not- We're not like people.

As with the body, the potentials for thought are also constrained as the teacher reterritorialises on the school. The syllabus is overdetermined in the form of the course book, teachers’ book, workbook, and so on. Thoughts of becoming-teacher are overcoded with pre-existing scripts for being a teacher:

I had another one of those, like, “Whaaaat?” moments. Like, “Are you kidding me?” moments as I was teaching through these English books. I had a teacher that I was working with ... um ...
the same class. And she said you are going too fast. I said I'm going at the speed the students are learning.

“Well, you did too much.”

I said, “No. They are learning. I am moving. I'm moving the curriculum as fast as the students are learning. If they don't understand something, I go back. And I may be slower.” I said “I don't care. I'm moving at the rate the students learn. And I can tell they're learning because I've got these skills and these outcomes that I've got, and I'm checking.”

And she said, “Well ... if you're going too fast, we'll finish the book.”

The Western teacher must also fulfil the expectations of the idea of Western teacher for which reason they have been employed, becoming perceptible as Western teacher or otherwise risking censure. As Stanley notes of teachers in China, they:

respond to expectations about them and also to evaluations of the “authenticity” of their performances (as “authentic” Westernness is imagined in China). Performance expectations borne of stereotyping operate like roles to provide frameworks within which individuals” behaviours may or may not “fit”. So an individual’s performance (as a “foreign teacher”, for example) may be critically evaluated as “typical” or “atypical”, or (insufficiently) “authentic”, according to outgroup constructions about the cultural identification ascribed to the individual. This puts pressure on the participant teachers, as individuals are evaluated on the extent to which their performance corresponds to norms of their role as this is constructed by the dominant discourse in the context: in this case, the students’ discourses about “foreigners.” (2013, p. 59)

And yet despite the pressure to perform to expectations of authentic Westernness, there is also a sense that this idea of authentic Western-ness is both desired and disparaged:

See we've been employed as Westerners but we get in trouble because we are not Vietnamese ...

And that the expectations of teachers and the authenticity of their performance as foreign teacher are neither clear nor transparent, and provide no explicit frameworks for performance:

We all need to be in one place at one time, and we need to go down and explain ... and I'm not talking about pointing fingers and saying you motherfuckers and fuck this school ... No. We need to have- I want them to say what they think we do. And we're gonna say what we think they do. And they are gonna tell us what they actually do. And we're gonna tell them what we actually do. Because it's a huge- It's miles apart, what's in their mind and what actually goes on.
And so this encounter between teacher and *milieu* – city, school, students, all kinds of things – de- and reterritorialises the teacher, offering possibilities for “leaving” and escape that are simultaneously reduced to logics of common sense and good sense as the teacher reterretorialises and is reterretorialised on the city, its schools, classrooms, students, and so on: ‘reterritorializations that always reconstitute shores of representation,’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 316). And there is an accompanying reterritorialisation of the city, school, students, and so on as teachers represent the city, its schools, and its students as Vietnamese and Asian, constraining the ways it is possible to conceive of and encounter any individual body, and consequently the possibilities of becoming-teacher in the *milieu* of the school, in the city, in contact with students who:

… don’t think outside the box a lot. That whenever you give them a problem solving skill they try to find a direct answer, not a creative answer.75

And yet, teaching happens and continues to happen: teachers encounter the city, and the city encounters the teachers, all sorts of bodies in encounters producing something from each event, something different, something new, a becoming.

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Teachers, in their pack form, form a rhizome. The city, the school, the classroom, though it is too easy to imagine, form rhizomes. As heterogeneous elements, teachers and cities and schools and students, all kinds of bodies, together form rhizomes. Like wasp and orchid they are constantly creating lines of flight, movements of deterritorialisation and processes of reterritorialisation:

Each of these becomings brings about the deterritorialization of one term and the reterritorialization of the other; the two becomings interlink and form relays in a circulation of intensities pushing the deterritorialization ever further. There is neither imitation nor resemblance, only an exploding of two heterogeneous series on the line of flight composed by a common rhizome that can no longer be attributed to or subjugated by anything signifying. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10)

Could I say that there isn’t even a teacher or a student? How would we think about the unspeakable complexities of classrooms then? Could I say that there is only becoming-teacher and becoming-student in a becoming-city as each element is continuously de- and reterritorialising, as the circulation

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75 It seems ironic that this fundamental problem of being Vietnamese (or Asian, or Oriental) always seems to be encapsulated in a direct and non-creative answer.
of intensities continues even as the rhizome(s) mutates and changes, folding in and out like a flight of birds, in constant motion both relative and absolute, tracing lines of flight, constituting encounters, creating events, producing something beyond recognition, beyond representation, beyond reterritorialisation? Something beyond knowing, that can’t be answered by asking ‘what does it mean?’ (Buchanan, 2008, p. 121), or, rather, that renders the question itself unaskable.

Could I even write that?
Two men stood on the balcony outside the staffroom, leaning on the railing, watching a few primary children playing on the grounds below. They stood a few metres apart. It was warm outside, and morning, and a strange clarity affected the usually thick air, as if after a storm. Occasionally they would both turn around, and lean back on the railing for a while, mirroring one another, before reverting to their former position leaning forward. They were similar in many ways. They stood side-by-side, a few metres apart, facing the same direction, talking and listening.

One, a teacher, talked about his life before Vietnam: a twenty-five year non-teaching career, a redundancy, becoming a mature age student, teaching in Korea, teaching in Vietnam. He talked about not wanting to be in Hanoi, about not liking the city, about not liking Vietnam. About how he was only there because he was married to a Vietnamese woman. About his idle step-daughter, in her twenties, who had finished university but didn’t want to work. About how once she was “sorted out” he would try to persuade his wife to move back to the US with him, despite his wife’s successful business in Hanoi.

The other listened and nodded as the teacher talked about teaching English and teaching in English. About how he enjoyed teaching English literature. About how he enjoyed having sophisticated discussions with students. About how he didn’t very much like teaching ESL students. About how he didn’t very much like playing language games with students of limited English proficiency, which was fine for primary kids but a problem with the high school kids he was

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4. difference

*Om gate gate pāragate pārasaṃgate bodhi svāhā*

-Anonymous

*Heart Sūtra Mantra*²⁶

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²⁶ Lopez Jr observes that we cannot say what the mantra means in and of itself, imagining that the sound could have meaning independent of grammar and syntax; meaning is derived from context. The translators, in choosing not to translate, joyfully abandon meaning in favor of the power of the event. (1990, p. 360)

So this chapter is an attempt to joyfully abandon meaning and choose not to translate in favour of the power of the event. As such it might become a mantra about mantras, not deciding on any particular meaning, not presupposing the context in which it will be read and, perhaps, spoken, and in which meaning will be derived. It is not an attempt to let participants (and voice) speak for themselves (Mazzei & Jackson, 2012), nor to complicate the meaning that can be derived from analysing voice but to joyfully abandon meaning altogether (well … almost) and instead present enunciations, which are never individual, as events to be read, and encounters to occur, that provoke recognition or that maybe, hopefully, are opposed to recognition.
We stood apart, and I listened as he talked about how he had never intended to become a teacher, or to live in Vietnam. ‘Who do you think benefits,’ I asked, ‘from this whole English language teaching industry?’

‘I think that ... every, you know, every group benefits in a different way,’ he replied. ‘I think teachers benefit from gaining experience and learning new ways to teach. Um ... I think the school obviously benefits from, you know, income. And the students, assuming that lessons are done

77All of this, as I indicated earlier, really happened. The teacher described here is not one but many: multiple, a pack, an assemblage of heterogeneous elements. A becoming-teacher de- and reterritorialising on a becoming-school in a becoming-city. The school is an amalgamation, not one but multiple. Names have been removed altogether; they do not signify anything. There is nothing to do with an individual. There is no longer any point to speak of a speaker, a participant, an interviewee: ‘the subject, the speaker, is not the author of her communication (expression reflecting intention) but at best an effect of the operation of collective assemblages of enunciation (agencements collectifs d'enunciation)’ (Lecercle, 2002, p. 34). There are events, and forces, and intensities, and common sense and good sense, and judgment, and recognition, and a collective assemblage of enunciation. There is no identifiable subjective experience. This is deliberate. There is no subject: ‘there is no individual enunciation. There is not even a subject of enunciation’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 79), neither ‘grammatical subject - sujet de l'énoncé – or the utterer - sujet de l'énoncé’ (Lecercle, 2002, p. 156). Voices and gazes are disembodied. Perspectives shift. There is no coherent narrative. This is an accurate reflection of experience. Some identifying details have been changed. Days have been compressed. Times have most probably been corrupted. All of this happened; notes were taken. Yet the words are not what they represent and the map is not the territory. Throughout this chapter I refer to participants (the perceived sujet de l'énonciation) simply as “the teacher.” Inasmuch as this thesis is concerned with processes of subjectification I am guided by Deleuze’s insistence that:

A process of subjectification, that is, the production of a way of existing, can't be equated with a subject, unless we divest the subject of any interiority and even any identity. Subjectification isn't even anything to do with “person”: it's a specific or collective individuation relating to an event (a time of day, a river, a wind, a life ...). It's a mode of intensity, not a personal subject. It's a specific dimension without which we can't go beyond knowledge or resist power. (1995, pp. 98-99)

In this way, reporting what this or that “person” said becomes academic. Rather all utterances are utterances of a collective assemblage of enunciation: an event, a moment of individuation relating to the specific assemblage of forces and intensities present and immanent to the event constituted in the encounter between teacher-student-researcher-classroom-school-city; none of which have anything to do with a person. There is only the collective assemblage of enunciation and the production of ways of existing. The focus of writing, then, becomes to think about the assemblage of forces and intensities giving rise to the event, this production of ways of existing, and the mistaken ways in which events themselves are represented as something stable and sedentary. The analysis of any statement is not an analysis of anything to do with a “person,” and not an analysis and judgement of the “person” itself, but rather an analysis of the representations made possible by the assemblage of forces and intensities immanent to the statement itself. Writing this way is also a tactic to palliate my own concern that what I might be doing here is nothing more than determining my own “identity” in opposition to an analogous but inferior Western other – i.e. that teacher that is less worthy than I of what happens.

And, of course, you may judge that this is indeed what I am doing. This recollection is not intended to express an empirical subjective experience nor interior subjectivity to you, the reader. I attempted to write it ‘independent of subjective intent or meaning’ (Vivian, 2005, p. 258), though, of course, I failed. Each image is not intended to have direct relevance to the images they precede or succeed, nor are they intended to provide “answers” to the events described. Narration is decoupled from the imagery of the observations and conversations (see, for example, Sterritt, 2010): scenes and voice overs, contrast, fragmentation, everyday language. Does it work? I don’t know. This is not an attempt to re-present reality but to ‘undermine the ontological status of the very times, places, and people [I] portray’ (Vivian, 2005, p. 252). It is an invention, an illusion. I made it up. It all happened. The focus is on movement, relations, becoming, distance, speed and slowness, an attempt to undermine the ontological status of the teachers, students, classrooms, times, and events observed and reported on. Of course it fails. Movement is unpredictable and unnatural. The pretence of narrative flow and interpreted meaning is undermined. The logic is that of ‘creative stammering (and ... and ... and)’ (Verevis, 2010, p. 170).

The intention of this author, then, is neither the representation of some definitive truth, nor the representation of a questioning of this truth, but rather an enactment of questioning itself (Vivian, 2005): saying becoming doing, a dubious undermining of the pretences of objective and verisimilar representation that obscures and subjuges difference. Writing without judgement and recognition. What is the effect? It is not for me to say. Whereas humanist qualitative inquiry seems to work, like much traditional film, to ‘obscure evidence of their artifice in the presentation of coherent and natural narratives’ (Vivian, 2005, p. 252), this writing, ostensibly about White Western teachers in Vietnam questions the taken for granted ontological and epistemological assumptions (a researcher, a participant, an observation, an interview, an original contribution to knowledge) that ground humanist research and disparage ‘the big, risky, question … the one that enables all the rest. If we give up “human” as separate from non-human, how do we exist?’ (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013, p. 631).

77Though there were, of course, participants. White, Western, native English-speaking teachers. American, British, Australian, Canadian. Male and female. Young and old. Single and partnered. Qualified and unqualified. Experienced and inexperienced. Would recognising which was which help you to understand? Would it help you to make sense of it all? To understand what it all means? 68
properly, then students, you know, gain the ability to speak better. Um, who gains the most? I don't know- It depends on where your values are. If your values are inside the bank, then definitely the school. Um ... I guess they- Ultimately we would like to say that the students benefit the most. We would like to say that. But in all honesty I don't think that is entirely accurate. Um ... unless you have a very, extremely studious ... student, who doesn't mess around and is there for ... a reason. He's there to learn, you know? Which is few and far between with, you know, kids. Adults, it's a different story.’

‘And does anyone not benefit?’ I asked. ‘Are there any negative consequences?’

‘Ah ... I ... with actual effort put in to it?’

‘No I mean in the reality of it. Is it marginalising anyone?’

‘Ah I think um ... the actual reality of it ... I think that there are students who will not benefit from it because they don't try hard enough. They don't do what they are supposed to do. They don't want- They don't even want to be there. They don't see the reasoning behind it. They figure that they'll be in Vietnam their whole life. Which is fine, I mean they could technically stop going to school and be a xe ôm taxi driver,\(^{78}\) whatever, if that's what their ultimate life goal is.’

I listened carefully, wondering what we were doing there, keeping my distance.\(^ {79}\)

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**What is this difference between us?**

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I sat and glanced around the staffroom, feeling like matter out of place, watching the other teachers working at their desks, not wanting to disturb them. Everyone worked quietly, their heads down,
looking at computers or books. This was a place of work. Nobody spoke. Books were piled on and under the tiny workstations. The furniture was standard office fare: veneer topped desks, black chairs, all aluminium framed. The room was air-conditioned and quiet. Comfortable. In the far corner a water-cooler offered the promise of conversation. I could imagine working here, returning to my desk between classes to rest. Dropping off one set of books and collecting another. Taking a moment to check email. Reading news. Wasting time. I could picture a life here, the routine of a day’s teaching, the interruptions of bells signalling classes, meetings, students.

Still early, I slipped out of the staffroom and walked along the balcony to the tenth grade English class in which six Vietnamese girls and five Vietnamese boys sat quietly at small laminated desks, their backpacks scattered on the grey tiled floor. Some were sleeping or feigning sleep, heads on their desks. Others played with iPads and phones. I walked quietly to the back, sat and took out a notebook and pen. Bare fluorescent tubes lit the high ceilings and concrete walls on which small fans oscillated, almost but never quite synchronising. There was a large whiteboard on the front wall – as if this were any classroom anywhere – and a teachers’ desk and chair. Above the whiteboard a picture of Queen Elizabeth II was stuck on the wall, with ‘Aunty Liz’ written below it. Beside Aunty Liz there was another label, ‘Uncle Ho,’ but the picture was gone (see Figure 10). On the rear wall large framed glossy photographs of the British Library, Buckingham Palace, a Queen's Guard, and a portrait of Elizabeth II and Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh were hung beside students’ work. The teacher entered the classroom and greeted the students. There was little response. Trying again, he asked about the previous week’s excursion. Again, there was no response. He made a comment about the apparently new seating arrangements. Again, there was nothing.

The teacher looked to be thirty-something and friendly, with black hair and teeth white enough to be uncanny. Neat steel-rimmed glasses framed his unshaven face, a scruffiness that continued down past his untucked shirt to his short black trouser legs revealing a pair of worn and holey socks. He was relaxed and comfortable with his students, smiling often and laughing easily with the six girls and four boys he referred to collectively as “guys” and individually by the nicknames he had given them. They laughed and smiled and sat quietly and watched him.

80 Imagery of Hồ Chí Minh abounds throughout Hanoi and is generally treated with respect. I was once reprimanded in a post office for disrespectfully attaching an Hồ Chí Minh embossed postage stamp to an envelope. Notwithstanding the teacher’s description of him as a ‘homicidal psychopath’ (see chapter 1), Uncle Ho (Bác Hồ) remains, I think, genuinely admired within Vietnam, even in spite of a waning adherence to party principles following the đổi mới economic reforms begun in the 1980s. A view I heard expressed (to me at least – and always in hushed tones) was that Hồ Chí Minh’s vision for a liberated Vietnam had been corrupted by those who came after him.

And so I wondered about this display, reminded as I was of Auerbach’s (1995) argument that classrooms are not neutral sites, but places where teachers and students negotiate whose languages, voices, practices and knowledges are valued and preferred. What is being signified here, in this Vietnamese classroom of Vietnamese children reigned over, in the absence of Hồ Chí Minh, by Elizabeth the Second, by the Grace of God, of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her other Realms and Territories Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, Defender of the Faith (also known as Aunty Liz)?
He sat at the teacher's desk and checked if they had completed their homework. The students were well dressed, though not in the school’s uniform. Most wore blue or black jeans and trainers. It was cool in the air-conditioned classroom and some wore sweaters or cardigans. They were trying to find the answers to his homework questions and called them out when they did.

As he continued he forgot which question he was supposed to be checking. The students prompted him, laughing, ‘Number seven!’ as though this happened often. One boy called out an answer to number seven, with a rapid barrage of words I couldn’t understand. The teacher, looking up from his book, slowly said, ‘I don't understand a word of what you just said.’ The class laughed, and the student unhesitatingly repeated his answer, speaking slowly so the teacher could understand.

Finishing the homework, and still sat at his desk, the teacher took his laptop from his bag and began working on it, while the students began speaking softly in Vietnamese. At this school they were classified as a bilingual class, which meant that their English proficiency had been judged inadequate for the more prestigious (and expensive) international class. Eventually he looked up. ‘Ok this isn't working,’ he said. ‘I was supposed to test your speaking but we'll have to do something else.’ Fifteen minutes had passed. Some of the students looked at him, others continued talking quietly in Vietnamese.
The teacher reached into his bag and took out an English language course book. He flicked through the pages for a few moments. ‘Ok, so we're going on with week number three of unit number five, and as boring as you guys find this ... ’ he trailed off, still flicking through the book. After a moment he looked up and reminded the students of the midterm exams they would soon have to sit. Several students protested, reminding him that they had already completed the exams. He responded enthusiastically, exclaiming that they could now move on to unit six, before remembering that they had also already completed unit six. He returned to flicking through the course book, and the students returned to chatting, sleeping, or gazing at their smartphones and iPads.

Eventually the teacher looked up again. ‘Alright, I think the last thing we did was page 74? Miss Hiến will do the grammar with you so we'll do culture on page 86.’

The students reached for their backpacks and took out their course books, opening them to a page titled Advertising in schools with a text Young minds for sale and some comprehension questions. ‘Advertising!’ the teacher exclaimed, still seated at his desk, with what might have been sarcasm. Following the pre-reading questions in the course book, he asked the class if they had seen any advertising around the school. A few kids offered answers but the teacher didn’t seem interested, instead directing them to think about the Milo sponsorship around the school’s basketball courts that he was thinking about. Then, again prompted by the course book, he asked the students if they had any vending machines in the school, in Hanoi, or in Vietnam. ‘If you guys could have vending machines, what would be the top five things you would want in them?’

‘Coca Cola,’ said one student.
‘Chips,’ said another.
‘It's not like Vietnam has that big a selection of drinks,’ the teacher replied. ‘For snacks you guys would have an even smaller collection.’

He told the students to read the first paragraph of the text, which discussed three reasons advertisers target schoolchildren, then asked them what they bought as children that they still bought now. One boy said “snack” but it sounded like “snake,” the other students helped him with his pronunciation and eventually the teacher understood.

‘What brand of chips do you buy?’ the teacher asked.
‘What?’ asked one student, sitting near the front of the class.
‘What brand?’
‘O'Star,’ said the student.
The teacher looked at him blankly.
‘O'Star,’ the boy said again firmly.
‘What's that?’ asked the teacher. ‘O'Star? Is that a brand?’ asked the teacher. ‘Man, I don't know any of your brands out here. I think some of your brands are very odd.’ The teacher looked up at me, sitting at the back of the classroom. ‘Have you ever seen ... You know Swiss Miss, right?’ he asked. ‘You're familiar with Swiss Miss? Have you seen the variation out here which looks exactly the same except instead of the name being Swiss Miss it’s called Dutch Lady?’

I nodded, picturing the Dutch Lady brand milk that was popular in Vietnam, but not really sure what he was getting at.

The teacher turned back to the students. ‘You guys know Dutch Lady, right?’

They replied that they did.

‘The picture and everything is a rip-off of what's called Swiss Miss. A very popular world-wide brand. World-wide except for Vietnam because you guys have Dutch Lady! But, the lady looks the same. The background looks the same. Even the words are the same. Now we know where your plagiarism comes from! Your skills in copying!’

‘Where?’ several students asked.

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81 I submit that they do not look exactly the same: See Figure 11.
‘It’s in your blood!’ the teacher laughed.82

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Where does it come from?

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I followed the teacher as we walked unhurriedly along the balcony to the secret staircase where the teachers smoked during breaks. Students politely pushed their way past us on their way to the classrooms that flanked the balcony. The stairs ascended to nowhere, barred at the top by a chained and padlocked grey steel door. Another teacher sat on the concrete steps smoking.

‘You know the next one we get to read a book will be our first!’ the teacher said, flicking ash into an old paint can.

‘Yeah.’ laughed the other. ‘It is, it is definitely ... I'm like, I know that's the way they, they've been learning, read a book. But we quickly found out, between a lot of conversations between us teachers is, “Okay, this isn't working.” Like I talked to you before I thought these kids would be ... pretty good at English. So we quickly found out they're not. And then you're like, okay, well, all my lessons about taking activities and things from the book, I can't do because they don't understand directions. So then you're like ... okay.’

‘Which is going to be their major problem when it comes to doing exams, because they can't follow instructions. They don't read them.’83

82 The teacher’s contention here, that Dutch Lady (milk) was a Vietnamese copy of Swiss Miss (powdered hot chocolate) intrigued me. Googling later I later found out that Dutch Lady, a brand of milk popular in Vietnam and Malaysia, was a subsidiary of a Dutch dairy cooperative FrieslandCampina, and that its current ‘corporate identity’ had been created by a British designer, Chris Mitchell (see http://www.epicicons.com/detail.php?i=288&c=9). Swiss Miss, meanwhile, was a brand of powdered cocoa products owned by ConAgra Foods, Inc., an Omaha, Nebraska based American packaged foods company. The basis for the teacher’s explicit claim that these students had ‘plagiarism in their blood’ was the similarity of the design: the lady, the background, and the text, despite a) there being little similarity (Swiss Miss, despite the name, has no lady, the text is in a different font, the backgrounds contrast – one a green field, the other snow covered mountains); and b) the Dutch Lady corporate identity being designed by a British designer.

And yet that Vietnamese learners are plagiarists by virtue of their being Vietnamese (it’s in your blood) is so self-evident that it can be asserted, in class, directly to the learners themselves. The view that “Asian” students are skilled at copying is not uncommon, though it is rarely stated in quite so nakedly essentialist terms. In their review article on plagiarism in second language writing, Pecorari and Petrić (2014) note that the oft-asserted connections between culture and plagiarism have been in large part responsible for the appearance of the topic as part of the second language writing research agenda. And yet, as they describe it, ‘the body of informed commentary on plagiarism and culture is as fragmented and contradictory as the body of empirical evidence’ (Pecorari & Petrić, 2014, p. 286). Nevertheless, common sense seems to suggest that Asian students, naturally good at rote memorisation and dependent on teacher dominated classrooms, are culturally predisposed to copying. And if it’s not in the blood, it is, at least, in the water: ‘many Asian cultures,’ observe Ballard and Clanchy (1991, p. 15), ‘place much greater emphasis than ours does on the conserving attitude to knowledge: scholarship is traditionally manifested by an extensive and accurate knowledge of the wisdom contained in authoritative texts or the sayings of earlier scholars and sages.’

83 Let’s observe here that the students simply can’t win. Either ‘we’ will be lucky to get one to read a book, or they are reliant on ‘book learning.’ Either they are dependent on rote learning and memorisation in teacher centred classrooms, or they cannot even follow directions or instructions.
‘No!’
‘Even if you do ... point one, write your name ... a lot of them don't even write their name. They just skip through that bit, “That's too hard, that's too hard I'll do this bit.”’\(^{84}\) And because in an exam, if you don't do all the steps, when you get to the end, nothing's going to happen. And these guys just can't grasp that fact.\(^{85}\) It's, even the top kids struggle with it, and yeah.’\(^{86}\)

‘We found, and so a lot of this is ... is that basic teaching style, like owning your learning. With writing your name, it really starts at the most basic step.’\(^{87}\)

‘And I think it's because they've been trained ... if there is basic steps, when we say write your name the Vietnamese will have an example next to it with “Your name” written there. So they'll think “Oh, I have to write my name!” And then the next step will be “Open up Word” and they will have a picture of the “Start” button, with Word opening up, you know? They literally spoon feed every step to them. If you just put it in text, doesn't happen. And that's fine if you're teaching primary school,’ he sighs. ‘But ...’\(^{88}\)

‘So we were all sort of, at least-’ he stopped and laughed. ‘At least, we were all sort of like “Okay, what do they, how can we get them to learn?” If we're supposed to be doing ... chapter one, I have a hundred steps to go to chapter one! So ... that's also the- The- I would- I guess it's ... I guess it's a role too, but it's like, just ... schooling fundamentals. Just, not just, okay, come to class and learn science. Here's a new technique about doing science. How do you behave in society? And ask questions of society? Getting these kids to ask a question. Whether it's a clarifying question. Whether it's a, you know, modifying question, “Can I do this instead of that?” Whatever kind of question, getting them to ask a question. And that's, some of the basic things of science too. So it's basic schooling. So that's a part of my goal too.’

‘We were basically in second term, would have been second term, when we identified our first

\(^{84}\) Syed Hussein Alatas (1977, p. 215) argues that the image of the lazy native ‘was a major justification for territorial conquest, since the degraded image of the native was basic to colonial ideology.’

\(^{85}\) This notion of an Asian student incapable of free thought is long-lasting, and often cites the same kinds of culturally grounded explanations used to explain copying and plagiarism. In their book Teaching students from overseas: A brief guide for lecturers and supervisors, Ballard and Clanchy (1991, p. 25) note that ‘in many societies, as we have seen, independence of thought or expression are not so highly valued as a precise knowledge of authoritative sources.’

\(^{86}\) Note, too, that this is not mere generality or tendency; even their most capable must be disparaged.

\(^{87}\) Compare with the descriptions of the unsatisfactory Other (see Footnote 79) as docile, dependent, reticent, passive, teacher-centred, rote learning, lacking autonomy; lacking critical thinking, preferring a reproductive approach to learning; and reliant on a limited range of learning strategies, especially rote memorisation.

\(^{88}\) And these culturally grounded images of an unsatisfactory Other are not limited to representations of learners, but expand to incorporate all aspects of learner culture. Educational systems, beliefs, and pedagogies are all represented as static, traditional, and backward in contrast to the dynamic, modern, and developed West (Liu, 1998; Pennycook, 1994, 1998; Phan, 2008; Phillipson, 1992), Canagarajah (2008, p. 215) argues that ‘pedagogical cultures in many non-Western communities are denigrated. Not only are they essentialised as product-oriented, teacher-dominated, and passive, they are also considered pedagogically dysfunctional for these reasons.’ And yet these would also seem to be precisely the kind of pedagogical cultures enacted by Western native English-speaking teachers.
free-thinker in the school.'

‘Yeah!’
‘Where he had the ability to think, outside-’
‘Outside!’
‘What we actually said. Like if we said whatever topic you choose-’
‘Yeah.’
‘This is what I want you to do with it, most of the class would just copy what I put on the board and only one, and that-’
‘That's right, that was second semester!’
‘Second term or second semester?’
‘Maybe second term.’
‘Second term.’
‘Yeah. Second term.’
‘Yeah. And one kid in the international program- No wasn't even that, he was bilingual-’
‘Yeah he was a bilingual kid-’
‘And he was the first one in the school that actually got it. That he was allowed to think. We've got more now-’
‘Yes, yeah.’
‘But man it was hard to ... “What!? I can do whatever I want?” You know just-’
‘And the kids who can do that, we give them that chance that opportunity to do. But the other kids, they're, they just kind of look at you like ... ’
‘You've got too many!’
‘How did you identify that person?’ I asked them.
‘Just simply because he started doing radical things,’ the teacher said. ‘Like, giving the kids free time, and, or you know free thought, and ... I'd go, “Dude, what are you doing?”

And he goes “Oh, don't know, haven't decided yet.” And then I’d turn around two minutes later and he's like boom! Just blasted this thing together. I go, “Dude, where'd you come up with all that?”

He goes, “Oh I thought about it. I had a dream, and there it is.”

I go, “Dreaming! That's it! It's not free thought, it's a dream.” So it's a bit like the dreamtime for the Blackfellas, I guess. They can't do it in reality but they can do it in a dream and write it down. So then I spent a lot of time in ICT reading stories, fantasy stories, like Chinese legends of dragons and Vietnamese heroes and all sorts of stuff. And I'm going “How did these stories come about?”

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89 And such images are not recent, but rather have deep colonial roots. Compare, for example, the novelty of uncovering a ‘free thinking’ Vietnamese student, with John Stuart Mill’s characterisation of a Chinese society “brought to a permanent halt for want of mental liberty and individuality” (Mill, 1910, p. 200).
“Oh, they're all real!”

“Right! Yes. We often see dragons flying around Hanoi! But okay, now I want you to write a story about a dragon.” The first lot of work I got back was a week after the first time I read to them and it was almost word-for-word what I'd read. They hadn't thought of their own story at all. Mind you their memories must be awesome, because they could remember word-for-word what I'd said, more or less. Which surprises me because getting them to remember something like HTML has proved to be almost impossible.

I listened carefully, nodding as if in agreement.

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This self distinguished from something else?

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I walked back down the stairs and onto the balcony, passing the three smiling cleaning ladies in blue uniforms who were forever mopping the tiled floors with their mephitic concoction. I walked slowly, listlessly, hands in my pockets, unable to wipe from my mind images of dragons and heroes and a school of plagiarist student-worker drones who could only learn from books but couldn’t read and couldn’t write their own names, and wouldn’t try, but could, if only in a dream, and only memorised except when they couldn’t even remember what we told them. I found a teacher outside of staffroom.

‘What's your sense,’ I asked, ‘of the students' readiness to live abroad in terms of culture and behaviour?’

‘Well,’ the teacher explained, as we walked towards class. ‘Every once in a while, maybe every two weeks to a month I try to give them some sort of video to watch that will kind of expand their minds culturally, you know? Just kind of give them an idea of what's on. Like, one time, one of the other classes, we were going over Thanksgiving and I kind of tried to explain everything about how Thanksgiving works and then the celebrations that we have, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade, they got to see that and they all liked it. And then the Black Friday that comes after that, the biggest shopping day, and they were all amazed by it! And just- Sometimes we'll watch a couple of TV shows,

And here: an image of a student reliant on rote memorisation, copying, and plagiarism.

And so must students always be represented as necessarily inadequate? Either they are reliant on rote memorisation and copying, possessed as they are of ‘awesome’ powers of memorisation, or they cannot remember what ‘we’ are asking them to remember, with such failure never being responsibility of the teacher, but resulting from the essential inferiority of the student as Other. So do such statements have anything to do with teaching and learning, or is the representation of such total, inevitable, and irreversible failure something else entirely?
sitcoms or something, that actually show how real families would be.'92

‘It’s fairly common to say the parents want foreign teachers for their kids,’ I said. ‘Why do you think that is?’

‘Well,’ the teacher replied, ‘I think that ... they don't have experienced Vietnamese teachers who've lived outside of the country.’93

‘So they are learning English from a Vietnamese teacher with a Vietnamese accent. And Vietnamese construction. And with Vietnamese knowledge of the language... And so, even if the person has a Master's degree or a Doctorate degree they can't translate from Vietnamese to English, they just don't have enough experience with the language.’94

‘So when they want to ... an English speaker ... they're looking for the accent, they're somebody who actually understands the language, and knows the idioms, and can, you know, model the language as it's spoken... It's about the language.95 It's nothing about ah ... if it was Russian it would be the same thing, you'd want a Russian. If it were Spanish you'd want somebody who speaks Spanish. You know?’96

‘So the parents clearly want their kids to speak English,’ I said. ‘And they're spending money to send them to a school with native speakers because they see the advantages of having a native speaking teacher. What's your sense of the kids? Do the kids get it? Do they want it? Do they understand that it's important?’

‘No,’ he answered. ‘The kids are um ... what they are... That's what the parents are saying, of course. But they're also wanting them to follow the Vietnamese- Vietnamese curriculum ... Because when these kids ... go to college and university the majority of them are still going to go to a Vietnamese university. And so they need to have Vietnamese credentials to go to the university. And that's really important for them to get the kind of job ... that the parents want them to get, you know? So I think the kids understand that, I think they understand that their first job is Vietnamese and, you know, the more you learn English the better you will be in the future ... ’

‘But the Vietnamese is still the priority?’ I asked.

‘Oh absolutely,’ the teacher replied. ‘Still the priority. You know my wife has a ... twenty-one year old daughter and ... she wanted her to go overseas, but after thinking about it again she realises
that if she wants to get a job in Vietnam it's better to have an education that's accepted by whatever ministry she's going to work for... .

‘What do you think the role of English is, then, for the kids who will end up-

‘I think last time I told you it's a limiter ... you know? It's a weeder-outer, you know? If you can do this ... you're talented ... you know? You could be a good piano player, or a good soccer player, you know? You have to show some sort of talent somewhere and um ... I'm pretty sure most Vietnamese corporations have an English entrance exam, you know? And they need to be able to pass that.’

Still walking, I asked, ‘How important is having Western native English-speaking teachers?’

‘Um ... when I was teaching ESL at the university level, um, I had doctors, and lawyers, and ... I had the head of the electricity commission for Vietnam in my class, um, hardly spoke a cracker at first and then after six months they were all coming on quite well. And I said to them one day, “So, how do you think your English is going?”

And they went, “Oh yeah! We're really good at English, we know English really well!”

And I said, “Okay, You've just jumped on the plane. You've landed in Perth. You're going to the University of WA to get your doctorate. Exciting?”

And they go, “Oh yeah!”

“You can all do that?”

And they go “Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!”


And they go, “Wha ... ?”

I go, “That's what we speak like back home! You guys know this much English. And this is what you need to know in the real world!”

And they go, “Aah, teach us!” And they ... just had no comprehension,’ he continued. ‘Because all th- and I think that's one of the major problems here is this ... falsehood of ... you know, “You've passed, you've passed, you've passed.” It's not measured against any ... measurable standard. The only standard they use here is grammar. And ... you know, even some of these guys are supposedly IELTS

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97 Compare these statements with Pennycook’s (1995, p. 40) argument that ‘English functions as a gatekeeper to positions of prestige in society’ (see Footnote 60). If this is the case then the situation becomes one where the students need native English-speaking teachers because the students need English, begging the question of why English is needed in the first instance. And so can we continue to take for granted the tenet that ‘it’s about the language’ (see Footnote 95)?

98 He says all of this rapidly, in a broad and stereotypically ockerish Australian accent.

99 He demonstrates this by pinching his forefinger and thumb together.

100 And this with his arms spread wide apart.
seven, which is really, really high ... I'm struggling to have conversations with them.'

The teacher entered a classroom. I nodded and walked back along the empty balcony, again passing the cleaning ladies still engaged in their ceaseless mopping. I walked slowly, passing the closed offices of administrators and teachers, back towards the staffroom.

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Once, between observations, between schools, I stopped at an old quarter café for lunch. It had been raining, and I was wet and miserable, the small white fairing on the Honda and my flimsy plastic poncho offering little protection against the driving rain. Sitting in my wet clothes, I watched two girls in one dollar sleeveless Hồ Chí Minh T-shirts (see Figure 12) at the next table, chatting to someone, somewhere on Skype, in youthful American accents. ‘I'm teaching English in Thailand,’ one said excitedly. ‘I'm teaching year one! I'm a little bit nervous, but I hope I'll charm them with my blonde hair and blue eyes!’

I wondered if she would.

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‘I have a question,’ I said, arriving back in the staffroom and making a cup of tea at the water cooler. ‘I wonder if the school and the parents, I wonder what their expectation for foreign teachers is, and if it is defined quite closely as teaching the language not the social stuff. Linguistic input without anything else coming along with it?’

I wasn’t really sure what I was asking.

‘I don't know’ the teacher answered. ‘To start off with all of the teachers, not just here but in every other school, any international school, any language centre, our qualifications are based on the colour of our skin. Bottom line. That's how it is. That's how it was in Korea, that's how- Doesn't matter if you- There are people in Korea that have ... um ... that have master’s, that went to Berkeley

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101 And so if it isn’t just about language (see Footnote 97), then don’t we need to consider what it is about? What is being exchanged? What is being bought and sold? What is desired that is signified by English and the (mostly) young, White, (mostly) male body of the teacher?

And why does it become possible and even necessary for doctors, lawyers, the head of the electricity commission of Vietnam, all to be denigrated as subdued naïfs, rendered helpless face-to-face with our ‘real world’? What if statements like this aren’t really ‘about the language’ at all, and instead form part of a weird kind of self-obsessed affirmation, the production of a way of existing – an appeal to existence – wholly dependent on establishing a Self that is predicated on the ineradicable difference between Self and Other because this is our major claim to legitimacy (and perhaps our only claim?): that we are not like them, and that they cannot be like us, for the simple fact of the accident of all of our births. What if such statements are about the habit of “I” encapsulated in ‘the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority’ (Said, 1978, p. 42)? What then?

102 Obviously.

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Figure 12: Uncle Ho does not approve. Source: lets.book
(http://www.flickr.com/photos/letsbook/5209022844) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
– which is a very hard school to get in to – but they just happen to be, you know, Korean. So they didn't get a job. They had no problems with visas. They didn't have to be sponsored. But it is the fact of the matter that ... students- Maybe students don't mind as much but parents do mind. They think quality comes from, you know ... ?\textsuperscript{103} Doesn't matter if a person was born and raised abroad and speaks that native language perfectly. If your skin is a different tone and your eyes are a different angle then ... you know ... .\textsuperscript{104}

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I followed the teacher to the computer lab, standing next to him and watching the students arrive to sit and work at computers in rows of three separated by a central aisle. At the front was a desk and computer for the teacher, a large whiteboard, and a data projector. The whiteboard had teachers’ email addresses and some old looking instructions for uploading files to a server. There was a lone poster on the cream painted concrete wall titled ‘Rules of the ICT Room.’ It was entirely in English.

The students were working in pairs on some kind of multimedia English vocabulary exercise, answering multiple choice questions on computers. I followed the teacher around the classroom, listening to his continuous exhortations to the students to speak English, and listening to students continue to ignore him and speak Vietnamese.

\textsuperscript{103} Why didn’t he want to say it, I wondered? Could I say it?

\textsuperscript{104} It seemed like everyone had a story about a teacher who was either not hired or fired for not looking White, despite being a native English speaker (In fact I have some I would like to tell you, but I’m not sure if they would count as ‘data’). Race remains a neglected area of research in English language teaching, despite having obvious material effects on the lives of people within ELT. Kubota and Lin (2006, p. 472) argue that the field remains ‘in dire need of an explicit exploration of race,’ with issues of race inescapable in a field which necessarily brings people together from different racialised backgrounds, and which is inextricably linked with colonialism and the kinds of Self and Other identities produced in colonial discourses. Drawing on critical race theory (CRT) (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995), Kubota and Lin (2006, 2009) observe that race continues to wield significant power as a socially constructed discursive category for legitimating division, categorisation, and judgment of human beings based on phenotypical characteristics. Racialisation, the categorisation of people and attribution of meaning to biological features of human beings, ‘produces and legitimates difference among social groups based on perceived biological characteristics, yet it is a dynamic and historically situated process in which racial significations are always shifting’ (Kubota & Lin, 2006, p. 477), CRT scholars argue that these racial categories, which exclude, dominate, or inferiorise others, are based on two fundamental fallacies: a) that people can be differentiated based on phenotypical features; and b) that Whiteness is the norm against which other races are differentiated (Willis, 2008).

With the majority of English language teachers in the world being non-native English speakers (Canagarajah, 1999a; Matsuda & Matsuda, 2004), it is no surprise that a significant area of research into English language teacher identity has focused on the issues of professional and social marginalisation faced by non-native teachers. Despite the contestation of assumptions about native-speakers and standard language (Canagarajah, 1999a; Moussa & Ilurda, 2008; Rampton, 1990), Miller (2007, p. 150) observes that ‘institutions and teachers are often complicit in promoting a standard language ideology which rejects or marginalizes certain varieties of English’ based on ideologies of “native-speakerism” (Holliday, 2005) with links to (Phillipson, 1992) monolingual and native speaker fallacies. Importantly, however, it is not just that certain varieties of English which are marginalised, but also certain speakers: both those who do not sound like a native-speaker, and those who do not look like a native-speaker. Amin (1997) has demonstrated that students may associate native English speaker status with ownership of English and Whiteness, assuming that only White teachers can be authentic native speakers of English regardless of linguistic background or ability. Research on students’ perspectives of teachers has shown that teachers perceived to be non-native often suffer from negative student evaluations of their teaching (Braine, 1999; Thomas, 1999), and continue to suffer discrimination, professional marginalisation and lack of credibility in the workplace (Mahboob, 2010a). Furthermore, Maum (2002) observes that outside of the United States, native English speakers without teaching qualifications are more likely to be hired as ESL teachers than qualified and experienced non-native English speakers. All of which points towards Motha’s (2006, p. 497) proposition that racial identities are implicated in linguistic identities and that Whiteness is an intrinsic but element of English (see, for example, Figure 13).
Another teacher entered from an adjoining lab as we watched the students, speaking the moment he saw us. ‘Internet’s down,’ he stated bluntly, before we could even greet him. ‘This place is fucking useless. I tried to tell them how to fix it but I’m just the dumb White guy. That’s how things work around here unfortunately!’

I nodded, listening, thinking slowly, speechless, unsure how to respond, wondering what the students had heard, and why he didn’t seem to care if they had, as he turned and walked straight back out again. Turning to the teacher, I asked, ‘Is the way you build a relationship with these students different with how you would have done it previously in the States?’

‘I think fundamentally it’s the same …’ the teacher answered. ‘You can approach the students but they’re still a little shy … We have to put them at ease a little bit to talk to them and put them a little more at ease so there’s, there’s a little bit more of that going on … Their requests are different. I have to be careful of their requests. They- I know a lot of what students in the US would request of me, but here I don’t.’

‘I wanted you to tell me about the students,’ I said.

‘Generally they’re … For me, initially I had a few problems … um … one or two students just
wanted to push the envelope a little bit ... um ... but, I've got a fair bit of BMAD\textsuperscript{105} experience so I was able to stomp on that pretty early on ... That guy that I kept picking on in class, he was terrible. At the beginning of the year I actually said to him, “Dude, what are you in this class for?” I honestly didn't think he was going to do anything. And now he's approaching the top of the class ... The guy that sits in front of him on his own, the really tall guy, he's a genius! He is insanely intelligent ... and he was giving me grief at the beginning of the year, but I told him I was going to take him outside and break his legs if he didn't pull his head in. He pulled his head in. Not in those words of course! But, you know, I laid the law down. And ... he has turned the corner and is now performing really, really well. And ... there's quite a few success stories. There's a guy sitting next to you, ah ... definitely special needs. Not quite sure. I'm not a psychologist. But I've identified some issue with him ... Um ... but ... at the end of today he was up with the rest of the class. At the beginning of the year it would have been blank screen. And, and a lot of the students were like that. If they didn't know, they would just sit there. They wouldn't do anything.\textsuperscript{106} Now I've- I'm engaging them so, I think overall ... the students are quite respectful. I think the girls generally ... want to learn more than the boys. Which I think, that's probably a teenage thing. Um ... also the girls in Vietnam tend to do all of the work, and the boys tend to do not much. And I think, I'm not saying that's genetic but I think it's like a hereditary ... um ... what do you call it? Inherited trait, from their parents. That the girls have to learn because they don't want to be housemates. They want to get out and be- Get into business. Whereas the boys they really don't care, you know? They'll go and work with dad at the immigration department, or, you know? Do it some ... so they can do- They've just got that attitude of ...’

I watched a boy at the back of the class wearing a Superman t-shirt who didn’t understand what he was supposed to do. Speaking Vietnamese, he asked his friends for the answers. The teacher, now helping other students near the front of the class, didn’t notice. Superman rocked back in his chair with his arms folded, chatting in Vietnamese with the other boys around him.

The teacher left the classroom for moment. Superman took out his iPad and played a game. Someone else started singing loudly. Two other boys shouted across the classroom. A couple of kids checked their email. Two boys directly in front of me had downloaded a cracked copy of Starcraft to a USB hard drive and were busy installing it on their computers. None seemed bothered that the teacher was just outside the classroom with the door open. And none seemed bothered by me, having quickly figured out that I was not going to do anything more than take notes. I heard only two words of English spoken: tired and boring.

The bell rang; I left the class. I wondered how many classes were like this. How many teachers

\textsuperscript{105} (Behaviour Management and Discipline).

\textsuperscript{106} And so the image of passive Asian student returns.
were like this? And what was this *this* that I thought I recognised, anyway? Who was I to say anything? To judge? It was warm outside, as I walked along the outdoor balcony to the next class. Students flowed along the balconies and stairwells, noisy and oblivious to me. As I walked I could see teachers standing at the front of classrooms, talking to students. What were they saying, I wondered? I walked slowly, not exactly sure where I was going. I watched the way my feet moved as I walked, and noticed the way they pointed slightly outwards. I passed one teacherless classroom with a whiteboard that shouted *Dr Dre* lyrics in large black hand-written letters: BITCHES AIN’T SHIT BUT HOES AND TRICKS. A boy inside, seeing me stop to copy down the words, hurried to the front of the class to wipe it off.

I kept walking.

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*Can there be no Self without Other?*

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The teachers and I hurried out of the staffroom, down the stairs, and to our motorbikes in the parking area behind the playing fields. Time was short. I followed them as we rode through winding alleys until we turned suddenly onto a broad avenue. We sped down the road, before abruptly pulling up outside a KFC for lunch.\(^{107}\) *‘In order to become more developed,’ I asked them, ‘Vietnam – does it have to follow a Western model? Does it have to become more Westernised?’*

‘Yeah, pretty much,’ the teacher answered. *‘If you look at all the Southeast Asian or Asian countries that are developed – Korea and Japan come to mind – they still retain their culture but they have developed an economic philosophy similar to that in the West. If Vietnam does not adopt that economic model then it's going to continue to be a- … Third-World.’*

‘I don't know too much about the other countries,’ added another. *‘But, Indonesia is very successful and definitely not that Western. And Malaysia is very successful and-’*

‘The culture and ways of doing business here is-’

‘-the economic stuff, I don't know, I would think, I would guess that they're more Western.’

‘You don't need to be Westernised. No one wants the whole world to turn into a little Britain or

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\(^{107}\) KFC is subsidiary of Yum! Brands, Inc., (NYSE: YUM), ‘one of the world’s largest restaurant companies with over 40,000 restaurants in more than 125 countries and territories’ (http://www.yum.com/investors/faqs.asp). It opened its first restaurant in Vietnam in 1997, and now has over 140 restaurants in 19 cities and provinces of Vietnam, ‘making considerable contributions to Vietnam’s fast-food industry as well as to the formation of a new consumption habit and culinary culture in the areas where KFC is present’ (http://www.kfcvietnam.com.vn/en/about_us).
a little America or whatever-’

‘Yeah.’

‘You want to retain elements of your culture. But in order to do business in a global marketplace, where all the successful companies, or countries, are adopting Westernised ways to do business, if you cannot do that-’

‘Especially when the world is growing, right? I mean everyone wants to have their own culture and be this special place but at the same time we're pretty much just one world now. You can go anywhere you want, and to not have some similarities in the entire world, it would be kind of crazy not to expect that to happen. I mean-’

‘Yeah, there's one thing for sure, they have to evolve one way or another!’

‘Yeah!’

They laughed together knowingly at this joke.

As we ate our KFC I asked the teachers if they felt any responsibility to adapt to Vietnam. To learn the language, to learn about the culture, the society, to fit in.

‘Well,’ the teacher said. ‘We may have come here but we were invited to stay, for a specific purpose. As long as you fulfil that purpose everything else is on you. It's not mandatory. You have no choice but to learn how things are done just by experience and then you- … That's- … you adapt that. But there's no need to just lose who you are, or even give up a substantial portion of your identity to fit in. Unless you want to marry and live here for ever. But I'm here for a- I was invited here for a purpose, I'm going to fulfil that purpose, and then I'll move on the next culture. And then maybe ... somewhere, I'll find the culture that I really love and then I'll want to be a part of it. But there's nothing about this culture- Not that it's all bad or anything; it's quite lovely for the most part. But there's certain things that I will never accept ... If you look at where you’re from, actually all of us are from, there's only a small amount of assimilation that's done with immigrants from Mexico or Europe or where ever. They still retain a part of their own culture, as they should, and there's only a couple of things that change. So the same rules apply here. There's no need to completely just abandon your sense of reality, your sense of history, your sense of who you are, your sense of culture, for them... ’

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No I without thou?

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108 And so this idea of evolution, with its connotations of primitiveness/superiority, returns again and again.
109 And is it significant that while they have to evolve, you don’t, unless you want to?
‘Is there a conflict between their knowledge and our knowledge?’ I asked the teachers, still eating my pressure fried chicken. ‘Do you feel that?’

‘I can ... throw a little bit in here,’ replied one. ‘I remember growing up in Australia ... and we were taught exactly the same thing. Don't get wet and go outside or you'll get a cold. It's not- We now know that that's all old wives’ tales. But all the old wives’ tales that my grandmother and my aunty used to feed me when I was a little tacker are alive and well here. Don't eat apples with the skin on in the afternoon ... What difference does it make? But here it's like, “No, no, no! You can't eat an apple in the afternoon with skin on!”

“Why?”

“Um, I don't know.”

Um, something else, oh like coffee! You're only allowed to have one cup of coffee in the morning and no more after that or you'll never go to sleep again.’

‘So they're like forty years behind in their ... development of, just, common knowledge,’ he continued. ‘Like you see all of these people spitting on the streets, pissing in the lakes. There's a guy pissing there the other day in the lake. And there's a woman only about six feet away washing her swamp-weed covered in DDT in the lake. Right next to where he's pissing. Where all the oil and … all the other things from the motorbike shops and everything else just washes in to the lake. And you can see the scum floating on the top. All the hydrocarbons and all the rest of the stuff. And there she is washing her vegies in there, and then she takes them down and sells them. Holy dooley, you know!? Has no one told them about the toxicity of the lake? Or the different bacteria that are growing in there? Or the algae that's growing in there and the other forms of stuff that we don't even know about?’

‘I went to the open market,’ added the other teacher. ‘And ... as ... just a person who likes farmers’ markets was horrified. And then I - it just totally struck me, and this was the first couple of weeks being here, I was like “Oh they don't ... their science information is, ah, low.” And, ah, the more I understood the culture, the more I talked with folks here, the more I understood that it's, it's ah-’

‘Primitive,’ said the other teacher.110

I asked them if they felt they were partnering with students to educate parents.

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110 Here again sees the eternal return of the primitive Other. Is it this paternalistic evocation of primitive and needful Other that adds a sheen of legitimacy to the mission civilisatrice? Compare, for example, with the comments of Frederick John Dechartly Lugard, 1st Baron Lugard GCMG, CB, DSO, PC, Governor of Hong Kong from 1907 to 1912, Governor-General of Nigeria from 1914-1919, and instrumental in the founding of Hong Kong University:

I am profoundly convinced that there can be no question but that British rule has promoted the happiness and welfare of the primitive races. Let those who question it examine the results impartially. If there is unrest, and a desire for independence, as in India and Egypt, it is because we have taught the value of liberty and freedom, which for centuries these people had not known. Their very discontent is a measure of their progress. We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, and to govern. (Lugard, 1922, pp. 618-619)
'Considering we've both taught ... um ... like low level’ one of the teachers said. ‘I've worked with Aboriginals, with youth at risk ... I've worked with really, really severely handicapped people ... and some of them get it better than the guys here.' Which surprised me, you know? I was quite surprised. Quite surprised. But the tools we used working with those guys ... are completely different from what we need here because ... those guys haven't got the prejudice against learning as to what they've got here. We've actually, well I've actually been told, that some of the Vietnamese teachers here actually tell the students they don't need to learn English because Vietnamese is the international language and any university they go to, they'll be able to speak Vietnamese. So that cultural warping between those that have come through the government system and those that are trying to learn to get out of the country it's quite ... never the twain shall meet. So ...'

‘It's a very ... ah ... like you said there's tension. And there's ... I've decided to approach it in a way of acceptance of their ... folklore.' And then to just counter it with ... the ... the most simplest information. And the most basic, respectful way is like ... um, “No, not what I learned in school,” or “Not what I understand about this.” And I just- A simple- A simple disagreement- And ... it- I'm usually not asking for their help, but they are very helpful ... um, people. “Oh you have this issues? Oh, ok, well just do ...” And you're like- And the science knowledge is ... is ... completely wrong. There's not even, like, a little bit of- There's a wrong that's just not even- It's compl- It's just inaccurate. Completely. And I was like, “Okay.” Um. I don't go further ... it's, I think ... would not be ... taken well. It- They're not looking to be educated by me at that moment. If they would like to know more information, they know I'm a science teacher because I tell them.'

111 Compare this with Holliday’s (2005, p. 20) assertion that images of a culturally problematic Other in English language teaching are ‘used indiscriminately to describe the unsatisfactory other of the day, whatever that may be’ (see Footnote 79).

112 Pennycook argues that: a construction of English as a superior language, when coupled to a belief that to know English is to have available a better way of describing the world, makes of the native speaker of English not merely a supposedly better teacher of English but also someone endowed with superior knowledge about the world. (1998, p. 156)

Thus the totality of the inferiority of the Other is assured. Not only are not proficient in our language, but their language, their culture, their society, their ways of knowing the world are inferiorised. Their knowledge becomes folklore relative to our science.

113 As in their folklore can be countered even with our most simplest information.

114 Harding notes that: Until recently, most people of European descent assumed that there was only one collection of beliefs and practices deserving the name “science” – modern Western ones. These beliefs and practices did already, or in principle could, form a coherent, unified representation of nature’s order, or at least one that exhibited a harmonious relation among physics, chemistry, biology, and other sciences. The knowledge systems of other cultures, it was routinely asserted, were infused with magic, superstition, religion, and other forms of irrationalism and anthropomorphism, making them unreliable guides to nature’s regularities and their underlying causal tendencies, and leaving the thought of those cultures firmly lodged in the premodern. Such knowledge systems did not deserve the name “sciences,” and because of their cultural elements they could not be integrated into a unified or harmonious relations with modern Western sciences. This is still the prevailing view in perhaps most parts of Western sciences and in popular Western opinion. (2006, p. 5)
Is there nothing which distinguishes itself and yet is not distinguished from that from which it is distinguished?

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Our KFC consumed, we rode back, turning off the busy avenue and into the old lanes that wound their way to the school, passing oil and scum and toxic DDT-and-piss lakes and hydrocarbon fertilised swamp-weed gardens and through the village of ancient houses constructed of old wives’ tales and folklore and filled with unreal families of real poor and illiterate Vietnamese people who’d sold the family farm. Late, we rushed to class, the sixteen students already milling around the classroom as the teacher and I entered together. The remains of a Vietnamese language trigonometry lesson were still on the board, triangles and ABCs strewn around in mathematical formulae that looked familiar yet remained just unrecognisable. These students were all wearing their uniform: some a white dress shirt, some sports shirts, and one a school hoodie with the hood drawn over her lens-less glass frames.

As we entered the students noisily rearranged themselves. The teacher picked out several students and directed them to seats near the front of the class. One boy protested that he wanted to sit at the back of the class near ‘the teacher,’ meaning me.

Saying ‘quiet please’ several times as the students slowly took their seats, the teacher returned some tests, pronouncing the students’ Vietnamese names passingly well. Now unusually quiet, the students seemed subdued as the papers were returned, but began talking with each other in Vietnamese as they got their marks.

The teacher prepared something on the laptop at his desk. He gave no instruction, and the students continued chatting quietly to each other. The teacher ignored them while he continued to work on his computer.

‘Nam Anh! Stand up!’ he called out suddenly.

Nam Anh stood up hesitantly, looking around, as the other students all turned to look at him. ‘Nam Anh got one hundred percent on the listening exam. Congratulations!’ The teacher clapped, and one or two of the students joined him. Nam Anh seemed to bear it as best he could and sat down. The teacher repeated this with other students for spelling, grammar, and reading. Finally he announced that Nam Anh achieved the highest overall score and told him to stand up again. This time the teacher and one other boy clapped, while the others either seemingly paid no attention or disputed Nam Anh’s achievement. One boy approached the teacher and asked to see the mark spreadsheet on his computer, which the teacher permitted.

With the ceremonies over, the teacher collected the papers and told the students to read a text in
their student books titled *Superstitions*. The students continued talking in Vietnamese as they opened their books. One asked what page to read and others told him, all in Vietnamese. The teacher waited for them to read the text before asking them if they could tell him a Vietnamese superstition. The students debated this seriously with each other in Vietnamese.

‘Okay! In English!’ the teacher said. ‘Raise your hand if you can tell me a Vietnamese superstition in English?’

‘No number four!’ one of the boys replied. There was a terse and vigorous discussion between several students, in Vietnamese, as to whether this was a superstition or something the boy had just made up.

‘Hey!’ shouted the teacher. ‘Let me remind you this is English class. Try and practise your English! Any other superstitions?’

‘Seven years bad luck if you break a mirror,’ one boy said.

‘You have that one too? Really? Any others?’

‘No banana before bed!’

‘That’s a good one! No bananas before bed!’

‘Don’t kill a black butterfly.’

‘Do you have any superstitions for dating? If a girl goes to visit a boy where should she go first?’

‘The kitchen,’ several boys shouted, laughing.

‘What about for dead people?’ The teacher asked. ‘Any superstitions for dead people?’

There was no response, though some debate continued in Vietnamese.

‘What about business?’ the teacher asked. ‘What should you do if you want to succeed in business?’

‘Lend money,’ said a boy at the back of the class.

‘Right! Burn money!’ said the teacher, perhaps not hearing him correctly. ‘If you want success in business you should burn money!’

‘How about *Vu Lan* Day?’ he asked. ‘Can somebody tell what *Vu Lan* Day is in English?’ The teacher waited patiently as the class debated *Vu Lan* Day in Vietnamese. ‘Is that a superstition?’ he asked finally.

‘Yes,’ replied several students around the class.

‘Very good!’ the teacher said enthusiastically. ‘*Vu Lan* Day is a superstition!’

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115 *Vu Lan*, the Buddhist *Ullambana* or Ghost Festival, was described to me as a Vietnamese Mother’s and Father’s Day – a day for honouring parents living and dead. Voice of Vietnam (the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's national radio broadcaster) describes *Vu Lan* as ‘the second largest annual traditional festival of Vietnam after the lunar New Year (*Tết*) festival, and it is celebrated by Vietnamese people participating in various religious rituals and humanitarian activities’ (R. Tran, 2013).
On the way back to the staffroom I asked, ‘Do you see any potential negative impacts for Vietnam of this kind of education and the desire for English?’

‘Um ... I ... yeah ... again, another good question,’ the teacher said. ‘I've travelled a little bit around ... ah ... India, Malaysia, and Indonesia. And I've done a bit of time here in Vietnam now. And I suppose on the outside you could say that bringing English and the world into Vietnam could destroy their culture ... But India's had it for four hundred years and India's culture is as strong as ever and ... There's been no real negative impacts that I could see, other than the colonialism itself, which is another whole kettle of fish. But based on the language and bringing English in to it: India is the powerhouse IT capital of the world ... um, so yeah I don't really see any negative to it. The culture here in Vietnam is a thousand years old and strong. And while a lot of the young people want to change it, a lot of the old people are hanging on, particularly in the rural areas. And I ... I can only see a nice blend coming out of it that ... Vietnam will learn the goods parts of the West and hopefully they'll keep the decadence out. But greed is already here,’ he laughed. ‘It's part of their culture, so as, they can't blame the decadent West for that!’

‘So as a foreigner,’ I asked, ‘living and working here, how do you approach this ethically? What is an ethical relationship? What's an ethical approach?’

‘I think a lot of it is done respectfully,’ the teacher answered. ‘I think a lot of it is done with communication, non-verbal and verbal. Just being honest and respectful. Saying, “I don't agree with that. Here's why I don't agree with that.” That's it. And just that simple, that easy, but without all this I'm right, I'm wrong. That ... that puts a “we” and a “they” so trying not to set up a “we” and a “they”. Trying to set up an “us”. ... Really listening to the other. To the Vietnamese counterparts. Listening to what they say without, and this is the challenge ... for me, without jumping in and going ... crazy!’

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116 But it isn’t, really; Pennycook (1994, 1998, 2007) makes the case that there are several ways in which the significance of colonialism to English teaching must be understood: a) historically: colonialism is significant to history of Anglo-American imperial expansion and, thus, the spread of English; b) politically and economically: the current spread of English can be seen as political and economic continuation of neo-colonial relations; and c) culturally: colonialism has had long-lasting effects on the knowledges, beliefs, and practices that constitute the discipline of English teaching, with many aspects reproducing cultural constructs of colonialism. Pennycook argues that English language teaching:

is a product of colonialism not just because it is colonialism that produced the initial conditions for the global spread of English but because it was colonialism that produced many of the ways of thinking and behaving that are still part of Western cultures.

European/Western culture not only produced colonialism but was also produced by it; ELT not only rode on the back of colonialism to the distant corners of the Empire but was also in turn produced by that voyage. (1998, p. 19)

As Pennycook probably didn’t say: same kettle; same fish.
'You have to be yourself,' the teacher continued. ‘So that's the challenge, I think, of any expat anywhere, including the Vietnamese who go to the US. How do you become effective as a teacher? How can you effectively teach a different culture, in a different language, while maintaining your true … your truths? And that's the challenge, and sometimes it goes one way, and some days it goes the other. It … there's a balance that shifts, for me, that some days it works and I'm my authentic self, and some days it doesn't work and I'm like, “Who the hell is that? What the hell was that about?” I don't know. And then I have to gain the balance back, adapting, meaning taking on new parts.’

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The one that becomes two?

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Back in class, the teacher asked, ‘What's one thing you wrote?’

‘Personality,’ answered one of the students.

‘So you'd go up to someone and say, “What's your personality?”’

‘It's hard to ask,’ replied the student.

‘So what would you ask if you wanted to know about someone's personality?’

No one answered.

‘So it could be the complete opposite,’ he continued. ‘Like, Brian likes football. Does anyone else like football? You like it a little bit. So you want to know what they think about you?’

The students sat quietly. I think they were confused. I was confused.

‘Do you know that's a very Vietnamese question? Because in Western culture if I said, “What do you think about me?” they're going to tell me everything they think I want to hear to be polite. Because if I'm in the US, and I say, “Oh, what do you think about me?” they'll say, “You're fine.” But here if I say, “What do you think about me?” they'll say, “Well, you're fat” or, “You're this. You're this. You're this.”’

The students sat quietly. ‘Like that's just a completely different way of answering that!’ He continued. ‘In the US, even if you think your friend is fat you would never say they're fat! You would say, “You're okay! You're okay!” You have to be nice! You have to be polite! Okay? Good!’

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It was the teacher's last class. After complaints from students and a disagreement with management, he had either been fired or persuaded to leave, I’m still not sure which. He sat at his desk, his shirt open at the neck, his sleeves rolled up. The nine students present in this Year 10 English class were sitting with their small veneer topped desks in a broad U-shape facing the whiteboard. The teacher was doing something on his laptop while the students talked in Vietnamese.

The teacher asked the students if they enjoyed their excursion the previous week. One girl, wearing jeans and a blue top, said that she did, which the teacher misheard as ‘didn’t,’ leading to a back and forth between the two of ‘did?’ – ‘didn't’ – ‘didn't?’ – ‘did!’ – ‘did?’ – ‘did!’ until they finally agreed that she did, in fact, enjoy the trip. The teacher asked several other students, to no effect, before checking if any of them had actually gone, which it appeared, like him, they hadn't.

After about five minutes had passed, the teacher addressed the class, ‘Anyhow. Just to let you guys know ... This is ... Well ... This week, let's see ...’

He hesitated, leaning forward over the desk, his elbows on the table and hands clenched together. The students quietened and looked at the teacher. He suddenly sat up, his voice brightening, ‘Friday is the 29th! That's the last actual school day of the month. And Monday is April Fool's day! Don't forget! Also April 4th is a lunar eclipse. Do you guys know what a lunar eclipse is?’ Several students said no, and the teacher spent a couple of minutes explaining the lunar eclipse to the students, rolling in his chair over to the white board in order to draw them a diagram without standing. ‘I would invite you guys to check it out,’ he said casually, slowly rolling back to his desk. ‘But I won't be able to remind you since Friday will be my last day working here.’

A few of the girls exclaimed, ‘What!?’

‘Because I'm not going to work here anymore. April Fools! No. I wish. Seriously. You guys will have a new teacher.’

The students talked quickly and quietly to each other in Vietnamese. Some seemed concerned while others thought he was joking. They asked the teacher why he was leaving. ‘Maybe you guys will have a Vietnamese teacher,’ he replied. ‘Wouldn't that be fun?’

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117 An interesting situation which revealed something of the complexity of power relations in which teachers find themselves. The teacher had been the subject of written complaints from a class of students, poorly managed by the Vietnamese administration (in his view), and had either been fired or agreed to leave. Among the consistent and pervasive difficulties expressed by the teachers were uncertain working conditions, unfamiliar employment practices, and poor job security, which was to later result in an anti-climactic crisis meeting and non-actioned threat of strike action by expatriate teachers when another staff member was fired after a contretemps with senior management. It seems important to note here that despite their protestations of superiority, these teachers occupied sometimes parlous and difficult positions, and that their Vietnamese counterparts were not subjugated and colonised naïfs.
‘The new business teacher is a Vietnamese teacher which I thought was funny since I was told the international class was supposed to be taught by native speakers. So yeah! I’m trying to get out of the whole teaching thing. I’ve done teaching for eleven years and I’m a little burned out.’

‘Are you still in Hanoi?’ One of the boys asked.

‘Yeah I’ll still be in Hanoi,’ the teacher answered. ‘Still be in Vietnam.’

Ten minutes had passed. The teacher changed the subject abruptly. ‘How many of you guys are old enough to drink? How old are you?’

‘Eighteen,’ replied one.

‘I thought you had to be nineteen to drink in Vietnam?’

‘Eighteen is enough,’ she replied. ‘Nobody checks.’

The teacher told the students about the drinking age and being “carded” in the US. He told the students that the drinking age in Mexico was also eighteen, and that when he lived in California he and his friends would drive to Mexico so they could drink legally. ‘Mexico,’ the teacher said, ‘is like a very poor, poor Hồ Chí Minh City. One dollar beers. Tequila. You guys know what Tequila is, right?’ Still not having moved from the teacher's desk, he told the students about drinking in Mexico. About paying money to have tequila poured down a friend's throat. Fifteen minutes had now passed.

‘Okay, so ... let's pick up page 88. Okay! Reading!’ He read directly from the student book, ‘Giving it all away! Imagine you had a million euros and you gave it all away. If you had a million euros what would you do? I don't know how much that is in VND. Let's say one million dollars because that's what I know. If you had a million dollars who would you give it to? UNICEF? PETA? Science? Who would you donate to?’ The students did not respond.

‘Who would donate to science?’

‘Science?’ asked a student. The teacher explained scientific research, citing examples of what he considered frivolous research that wasted public money such as a study on the behaviour of intoxicated ants.

One student said he would donate the money to the bank and receive the profit.

‘That's not donating!’ replied the teacher. ‘Okay. Let’s say I have one million that we are going to donate. You can't have it but you can choose who I will give it to. So who would you choose?’

Another student said he would spend it.

Another, perhaps referring to teacher’s comments on scientific research, said, ‘At least in the USA you do something, in Vietnam we do nothing.’

‘Yeah,’ the teacher agreed. ‘Giving it to your government would just be stupid. It would just go right into their pockets.’ The teacher talked to the students about the social strata in Vietnam, concluding that rich Vietnamese people did not donate money to charity. He asked the students about
their financial status. They did not respond.

He changed his approach, still trying to get a donation. ‘Okay. So let’s say ... there are nine of you, we'll count David at the back as ten,’ he said. ‘So you each get one hundred thousand dollars, or two billion VND, what are you going to do?’

One student said he would buy a Ducati. Another said he would donate the money to Manchester United in order to help them buy Ronaldo back from Real Madrid. Finally, mercifully, another said she would give the money to orphaned children. Another chose the Red Cross. Another suggested people who take care of wild animals. One said poor children in Vietnam. And the last chose to give his money to Capcom, a Japanese computer game development company.

Thirty minutes had now passed.

The class spent the next ten minutes reading a text about a man who gave all his money away. The teacher chose a student to read each paragraph aloud, and helped them with any vocabulary they stumbled over, modelling words like “auction” and “refugee”. When they had finished, he read aloud some comprehension questions from the student book which the students answered as a class.

‘When you guys go out to eat street food,’ he asked. ‘Or when you guys go out to ... I don’t know what you do? Do you eat street food? Have you ever seen an old person, usually, or a young child walking around with a basket selling gum? Do you ever buy gum from them?’ A few students answered, yes, or sometimes, or no.

‘You know they ask you a few times and usually I just ignore them but then they just stand there and “uuuuuuuuuuuuurgh”,’ he made a kind of terrible moaning sound. ‘So now, whenever I go out, I just take one of those big bottles of gum and I put it in the middle of the table and point to it. You know? When you don't buy it they get really annoying!’

‘Especially in the Old Quarter,’ he continued, ‘you guys ever go there? Where all the foreigners are? There are a lot of old people sitting around begging, and they usually have a baby or a young child with them? I watched an old guy once, he had maybe a ten year old boy who was asleep. Only foreigners give them money! I watched this guy for a long time. I was waiting for my wife so it was a long time. And he had this kid sleeping, and then he just woke the kid up, gave him a hundred thousand, and they went their separate ways. It was disgusting!’

Forty-five minutes had passed. The bell rang.

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And what difference would it make?
Outside, on the balcony, we parted ways. ‘I've changed my mind,’ he said.

‘About what?’ I asked.

‘About if we're asking them to change and to grow. To learn. And not just learning English, learning Western-, learn ideas and learn culture. That means they have to change. That means we have to change too. That … that we have to adapt and understand and change and grow and learn as well. I have to accept those things, and I have accepted those things. Then it's the how – how do you do that? How do you adapt and change? How do they? And then how – if you're asking them to change and to grow – how? And then if they do, in what time period? In exactly which ways do they change and grow?’

‘And in what ways do we change?’ I asked, feeling a sense of déjà vu as the conversation quickly worked its way back to them changing and growing.

‘Right! And that's not- That's more an individual thing. And that's- That's why I don't- I don't.- My hands are off that one! How do they grow? And in what ways and in how much time do they grow? That's their … that's not up to me at all. But I'm asking them to change in this way, science education. Then I am saying “This is what I'm asking you to do: learn about science. Facts. Then you have to change and grow. And so do I.” And I've got to go to class!’ And he did.118

And so I stood alone on the balcony outside the staffroom, leaning forward on the railing, surveying the school for the last time. Watching him stride along the balcony, heading back to class. Thinking about everything I had seen and heard that day, the last two months, the last eight years, ever.

And then I went home.

118 And so even here, at the end, accepting that we might have to ‘adapt and understand and change and grow and learn,’ what returns is how they change and how they grow. And despite the protestations it seems we are passing judgement on how and in what ways they need to change and they need to grow. We are asking them to be more like us, to learn our ideas, our culture, our language, our science, and our facts. Perhaps I’m being ungrateful. These are not the only ways teachers think, speak, and act in relation with students. Nor are such positions and statements to be taken as evidence of the existence of the kinds of power and superiority they seem to evoke. Rather, such statements, as I have suggested, seem to operate as a kind of mantra, made powerful not through the meaning of the statement itself – for often it has no meaning – but through the power of the events invoked through the recitation of the mantra: the memories of superiority, the history of Empire, that ineradicable distinction of superiority. Rather than the expression of a totalising power that is, the mantra is an attempt to invoke the power that is desired, to achieve and reify the incorporeal transformation from powerless to powerful that is actualised when the constitutive Other is denigrated and disparaged, a process that is the production of a way of existing that is a collective individuation relating to the myriad events that constitute the teacher qua teacher, in this milieu, at this moment in time, in these specific relations.
5. recognition

Beware, my friend, of the signifier that would take you back to the authority of a signified! Beware of diagnoses that would reduce your generative powers. “Common” nouns are also proper nouns that disparage your singularity by classifying it into species. Break out of the circles; don’t remain within the psychoanalytic closure. Take a look around, then cut through!

-Hélène Cixous
The Laugh of the Medusa

The concept of teacher works, in general, by predicating a human subject as someone who teaches someone something: that is, a teacher is a person who teaches,¹¹⁹ and teaching has to do with imparting knowledge to or instructing someone in how to do something.¹²⁰ But obviously not all teachers who teach someone something are the same. Nor are the someones they teach, nor the somethings that they teach them. They differ. Individual teachers themselves vary between and within classrooms, before and after lunch, from the start to the end of the week, earlier and later in careers, on good days and bad days. They also differ from other teachers, between classrooms and schools, cities and countries, languages and cultures: this teacher is not the same as that teacher. Even the idea of teacher changes, varying ‘over time, between cultures, and within cultures’ (Connell, 2009, p. 214).

Individual teachers come and go, entering and leaving the profession, becoming and un-becoming teachers. Beginning and ending their enactment of being that someone who teaches someone something. Some are educated, qualified, credentialled, and licenced, having themselves been taught, by someone, something about how to become and be a teacher. And this raises interesting questions, such as:

What does it mean to ‘become’ a teacher? Does every prospective teacher become one? How? When in time does this happen: at the moment of licensure, upon completing student teaching, with the first letter of hire, on the first day of work? And does being a teacher prevent one from continuing to become a teacher? (Marble, 2012, p. 21)

And so when and where and how does the teacher begin and end, this someone who teaches someone something? What do they know, and think, and do, in order to become and be? When and where and how do they become?¹²¹ At what point does the pre-service teacher undergo the incorporeal

¹¹⁹ This, at least, is what Oxford Dictionaries tells me (http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/teacher).
¹²¹ And cease to be?
transformation into the full-blown teacher? And how might we know? And if we don’t know, how can we say for sure who is and isn’t a teacher? And does all of this indicate a problem with teachers as an imperfect case of the idea? Or a kind of problem with the concept itself, with the common noun teacher? Could it be read as a glimpse of the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in the idea? That the idea of teacher and the recognition of any individual as teacher is not as simple as we might like it to be?

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We could say that a concept has two aspects: comprehension and extension.\(^\text{122}\) The comprehension refers to the necessary and defining properties of the concept, ‘the set of attributes which it implies, or … the set of attributes which could not be removed without destruction of the idea’ (Kneale & Kneale, 1962, p. 318). The extension, on the other hand, is the set of all those things that fall under the definition, or ‘the set of things to which it is applicable’ (Kneale & Kneale, 1962, p. 318). For example, then, the comprehension of the idea of teacher includes personhood, the possession of some particular knowledge, the act of imparting this knowledge to other persons, *et cetera* and so on. And the extension would include many of us: the Vietnamese writer Hữu Ngọc (2004, p. 996), for example, cites an old adage: ‘He who teaches you a letter (ideogram) must be regarded as your teacher, even he who teaches you only half a letter is also your teacher.’

But by further specifying the set of attributes that teacher implies, the set of things to which it is applicable can be reduced. Somers-Hall writes that:

> we normally see objects as composed of substances and properties, and we describe these objects using the parallel conceptual terms of subjects and predicates. Depending on how many predicates we ascribe to a subject, we can determine which objects fall under that concept. For example, we can restrict the application of a concept by stipulating that it only applies to objects which have a certain property. (2013, p. 14)

To give an example of a concept of teacher that is restricted in application by the ascription of further attributes:

\(^{122}\) Kneale and Kneale (1962) write that the distinction between comprehension and extension is the best remembered contribution of the 17th Century *Port-Royal Logic*, which according to Somers-Hall (2013, p. 14) was ‘widely considered to be the definitive logic textbook until the mid-nineteenth century.’ The *Port Royal Logic* describes comprehension and extension thus:

I call the COMPREHENSION of an idea, those attributes which it involves in itself, and which cannot be taken away from it without destroying it; as the comprehension of the idea triangle includes extension, figure, three lines, three angles, and the equality of these three angles to two rigid Angles, &c.

I call the EXTENSION of an idea those subjects to which that idea applies, which are also called the inferiors of a general term, which, in relation to them, is called superior, as the idea of triangle in general extends to all the different sorts of triangles. (Arnauld & Nicole, 1850, p. 49)
predicates to the subject, we could examine something like the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). According to the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL):

Standards define the essential qualities and expectations that characterise a profession. The Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards) promote excellence in teaching and provide the first Australia-wide basis for articulating and defining quality teaching. The Standards clearly state the professional knowledge, practice and engagement required of teachers through the four career stages:

• Graduate
• Proficient
• Highly Accomplished
• Lead.

The Standards present a common understanding and language to enable professional conversations between teachers, school leaders, teacher educators, teacher organisations, professional associations and the public. This common definition of the qualities of professional practice contributes to enhancing the status and profile of the profession. (2014a, p. 27) 123

My focus on the APST in this section is exemplary and somewhat arbitrary. I use the APST because they are familiar to me, but the standards examined here could easily have been the TESOL Professional Teaching Standards (TESOL International Association, 2015), or the UK Teacher standards (UK Department for Education, 2011), or any other application of a codified determination of what constitutes teaching and, either implicitly or explicitly, a teacher. This is significant because, as Ryan and Bourke (2012, p. 414) note, ‘in many countries around the world, there is an enormous interest politically and administratively in identifying, codifying and applying professional standards of practice to the teaching profession.’ Thus, although this is not a specifically Australian story, I use the APST as an example because ‘much in the Australian story has a wider relevance’ (Connell, 2009, p. 214).

I am also not particularly interested here in critiquing the content and detail of the standards. Rather, my interest in the standards is analogous to Foucault’s remarks with regards to moral codes: ‘I am not supposing that the codes are unimportant. But one notices that they ultimately revolve around a rather small number of rather simple principles’ (Foucault, 1985, p. 32). What I am interested in here are the ways in which the promulgation of standards work to circumscribe a concept of teacher which recognises particular objects as teachers, and in the ways in which, despite proclamations of the ‘widespread recognition that countries need to have clear and concise statements of what teachers are expected to know and be able to do’ (OECD, 2005, p. 13), the concept engendered by standards is necessarily a disparagement of the individuality of any particular teacher, not because it is wrong, but because of ‘the fundamental impossibility of taking account of the idiosyncratic and the contingent in teaching and learning’ (Clarke & Moore, 2013, p. 489).*

* But okay – here is another line of flight, another thesis that will always remain unwritten: I do wonder about the content, and in the way the standards themselves are presented as necessarily good. Isn’t there a danger in, for example, taking as self-evident that knowing students and how they learn is a good thing? Ought we not consider the ways in which ‘the diagnostic and poetic truths we produce and activate here and now, and the extent to which they are true … will form the basis of future problematisations and will have to be resisted and transformed yet again later’ (McGushin, 2007, p. 288)? One need not look far to discover problématiques constituted wholly or in part by presuming to know students and how they learn: in Australia, for example, the production of knowledge about “Aboriginal learning styles” (Harris, 1984), has, in the words of Nicholls, Crowley, and Watt (1998, p. 54), ‘spawned some unfortunate pedagogical practices.’ (And indeed it is interesting to note the ways in which the very concept of “learning styles” itself – fundamental to certain conceptualisations of knowing students and how they learn – has become the basis of problematisation (for example, Coffield, Moseley, Hall, & Ecclestone, 2004; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2004)). Might it not then be wiser to instead suggest teachers must remain sensitive to impossibility of knowing their students; to remember that ‘the presence of those seeking the truth is infinitely to be preferred to the presence of those who think they’ve found it’ (Pratchett, 2004, p. 273)? And cognisant that the ethical safety net promised by being a “good” teacher who, in relation to the standards, knows students and how they learn is “always already” split, all along and from the start’ (Caputo, 1993, p. 4)? Which is to say that ‘everything is dangerous’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 256), and that:

Continued on next page
It would be interesting, I think, to consider the ways the Standards could be interpreted through Foucault’s ethical analysis. We might envisage an analysis in which the Standards would be conceptualised as the prescriptive moral code and analysed as: texts written for the purpose of offering rules, opinions, and advice on how to behave as one should: “practical” texts, which are themselves objects of a “practice” in that they were designed to be read, learned, reflected upon, and tested out, and they were intended to constitute the eventual framework of everyday conduct. These texts thus served as functional devices that would enable individuals to question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects; in short, their function was “etho-poetic.” (Foucault, 1985, pp. 12-13)

The ways individual teachers think and act as teachers (or their knowledges, practices, and engagements) might be considered the individual acts in relation to the code. And the sensibility that leads one to act as teacher in relation to the Standards could be the rapport à soi, the relationship one ought to have with oneself.

Foucault (1985, pp. 26-28) outlines four major aspects of this ethics: 1) the determination of the ethical substance – ‘the aspect or the part of myself or my behavior which is concerned with moral conduct’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 263); (2) the mode of subjection (mode d’assujettissement) – ‘the way in which people are invited or incited to recognize their moral obligations’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 264); (3) the forms of elaboration, of ethical work (travail éthique) – ‘the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 265); and (4) the telos of the ethical subject – ‘the kind of being to which we aspire when we behave in a moral way’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 265).

If we identified knowledge and practice as the site of self-formation, the ethical substance to be worked upon by ethics, the Standards promote state registration, voluntary accreditation, and self-discipline, ‘turning the panoptic gaze on oneself, keeping oneself in line’ (St. Pierre, 1995, p. 251) as the modes of subjection through which people are invited to recognise their obligations as knowing and acting teachers. Though not directly responsible for teacher registration (teacher regulation occurs at the state or territory level in Australia), the Standards are promoted as crucial to a ‘nationally consistent teacher registration in Australia, as endorsed by Education Ministers in 2011’ (AITSL, 2014f). In addition to compulsory registration, AITSL promotes its own voluntary process of national certification that ‘that recognises Highly Accomplished and Lead teachers’ (AITSL, 2014d), which to endorsed by Education Ministers in 2011’ (AITSL, 2014f). Furthermore, AITSL offer a number of ‘tools’ that ‘support’ teachers, including: (1) the My Standards App, which ‘makes the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers accessible anywhere, anytime. Collect and annotate your own artefacts, referenced to the Standards to inform and evidence your professional growth’ (AITSL, 2014e); (2) the Self-Assessment Tool, ‘enabling teachers at all career stages, in a range of contexts, to reflect upon their practice in accordance with the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers’ (AITSL, 2014f); and (3) the Teacher Toolkit, ‘the one place where AITSL’s online tools and resources to support quality teaching can be found’ (AITSL, 2014j).

The telos of the knowing and acting teacher, at least according to the incitement of the Standards, is to be recognised (and voluntarily certified) as a Lead teacher: ‘recognised and respected by colleagues, parents/carers and community members … [as] professional, ethical and respected individuals within and outside the school’ (AITSL, 2014c).

And what of the travail éthique – ‘the means by which we can change ourselves in order to become ethical subjects’ (Foucault, 1997b, p. 265)? According to the Standards, at least, the means to transform oneself is self-discipline under the panoptic gaze of the Standards, which ‘provide a framework by which teachers can judge the success of their learning and assist self-reflection and self-assessment … [and] to recognise their current and developing capabilities, professional aspirations and achievements’ (AITSL, 2014h), and which decree that part of this capability includes understanding and using the Standards to identify and plan for their own lack of knowledge or deficiencies in practice as measured against the Standards (AITSL, 2011, p. 18). Thus, as necessarily good, the correct sensibility is to aspire to be standardised, and who but the heretical who embrace mediocrity could possibly object? ‘Undoubtedly,’ as (Adoniou, 2014, p. 99) remarks, ‘everyone is interested in developing “excellent” teachers.’ And yet, as Yinger and Hendricks-Lee (2000, p. 96) note ‘many educators perceive standards to be another layer of state regulation to contend with.’

I suspect then, that the practices teachers perform to transform themselves into ethical subjects would be many and varied, and related to ‘resistance, ambivalence, or accommodation to the codes’ (St. Pierre, 2004, p. 343). Not merely the relinquishment of the Self to the processes of standardisation, but the formation of a self in relation to the code, a process of rapport à soi that:

is not simply “self-awareness” but self-formation as an “ethical subject,” a process in which the individual delimits that part of himself that will form the object of his moral practice, defines his position relative to the precept he will follow, and decides on a certain mode of being that will serve as his moral goal. And this requires him to act upon himself, to monitor, test, improve, and transform himself. There is no specific moral action that does not refer to a unified moral conduct; no moral conduct that does not call for the forming of oneself as an ethical subject; and no forming of the ethical subject without “modes of subjectivation” and an “ascetics” or “practices of the self” that support them. (Foucault, 1985, p. 28)

It would be interesting, I think, to consider the Standards as moral precept, and to pay attention to the practices of the self that teachers use to act upon themselves, to monitor, test, improve, and transform themselves, becoming ethical subjects. And it is tempting to think that these would not be simple observance, as the Standards and its authors desire, but that actual practices of resistance, ambivalence, and accommodation that might occur. Alas, this will remain forever not that thesis.
As shown in Figure 14, the APST comprise seven interconnected, interdependent and overlapping standards, grouped into three domains, at four different career stages, that outline ‘what teachers should know and be able to do’ (AITSL, 2014g). The Standards are explicitly about articulating a definition of teaching and teachers that permits the recognition of objects as teachers and teachers as professionals by stipulating that those objects recognised as teachers must exhibit certain properties, understood as the prescribed knowledges, practices, and engagements that define what a teacher knows and does. And so the addition of these seven predicates restricts the extension or application of the concept to only those individuals who exhibit the knowledges and behaviours articulated in the standards: ‘an object only falls under a concept if that concept comprehends the object, i.e. if it has all of the properties of the concept’ (Somers-Hall, 2013, p. 15). And this is an important function of the Standards as they ‘become a major way to demonstrate to the public and to policy makers that the profession has sufficient quality controls for the processes of professional education, for controlling entry to the profession’ (Yinger & Hendricks-Lee, 2000, p. 97). Thus the task of ‘enhancing the status and profile of the profession’ (AITSL, 2014a, p. 27) is approached as one of judgement and recognition: the Standards specify the ‘agreed characteristics of the complex process of teaching’

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124 Isn’t knowing itself always the present mark of an absence? Always deferred? Always separating known from unknown? Always permanently delayed? Never fully arrived?
125 And even though I’m not focusing on the content of the standards, isn’t it interesting to think about the excess here? What is left out in the administrative codification and circumscription of what teachers should know and be able to do? What place is there for love? Affect? Intuition? In the standardisation of people who teach someone something?
providing ‘a framework that makes clear the knowledge, practice and professional engagement required across teachers’ careers’ (AITSL, 2014), and produce ‘illustrations of practice that show what the Standards look like in classrooms across Australia’ (AITSL, 2013, p. 5). One explicit function of the Standards, then, is to permit the recognition of objects as teachers. But unlike the earlier definition of a teacher as someone who teaches someone something, the Standards are expressly interested in seeking to reduce the extension of the concept by predicking the subject with properties thought to characterise teaching excellence or quality.

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The comprehension and extension of a concept coexist in a relation of inverse proportionality:

Every logical limitation of the comprehension of a concept endows it with an extension greater than 1, in principle infinite, and thus of a generality such that no existing individual can correspond to it *hic et nunc* (rule of the inverse relation of comprehension and extension). (Deleuze, 1994, p. 12)

Or, in other words, as the comprehension of a concept is increased, the extension decreases, and *vice versa*, meaning that if we were to increase the comprehension of the concept by, say, increasing the number and specificity of the predicates that define the concept, then its extension will be restricted, and the concept will apply to a reduced set of individual objects. Alternatively, if we were to decrease the comprehension, reducing the number and specificity of the standards, the extension will increase, resulting in the concept applying to more individual objects. This can be seen in the comprehension and extension of the two concepts of teacher already mentioned: the application of a more general and less specific comprehension of teacher as someone who teaches someone something might extend to include perhaps everyone,\(^1\) while a more specific comprehension of teacher as someone who possesses certain agreed upon knowledges, practices, and engagements under the APST would extend to apply to a much smaller body of individuals, as it is intended to do.

Another interesting result of this inverse relationship between the comprehension and extension of a concept is that if we were to take a singular object – let’s imagine a particular teacher – then a concept that corresponds only to this specific teacher, thereby having an extension of one, must have a comprehension approaching infinity. And since any useful concept of teacher can neither uniquely apply to only one individual\(^2\) nor practically have a potentially infinite determination, then, as

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1\(^1\) At least everyone who has taught someone at least half a letter.

1\(^2\) That is, its extension must be greater than one.
Deleuze (1994) notes, the concept is in fact of a generality is such that no individual object can correspond to it, and it must therefore inevitably fall short of completely specifying the uniqueness and individuality of any one individual object.

The concept of teacher, then, rather than specifying any individual teacher in their uniqueness, can only specify a resemblance between individuals according to its determinations, with the extension of the concept dependent on where we limit the comprehension. Deleuze calls this process of limitation an ‘artificial blockage’, with the grouping between the singular and infinite created by the artificial blockage of the determination or comprehension of the concept:

A concept can always be blocked at the level of each of its determinations or each of the predicates that it includes. In so far as it serves as a determination, a predicate must remain fixed in the concept while becoming something else in the thing (animal becomes something other in man and in horse; humanity something other in Peter and in Paul). This is why the comprehension of the concept is infinite; having become other in the thing, the predicate is like the object of another predicate in the concept. But this is also why each determination remains general or defines a resemblance, to the extent that it remains fixed in the concept and applicable by right to an infinity of things. Here, the concept is thus constituted in such a fashion that, in its real use, its comprehension extends to infinity, but in its logical use, this comprehension is always liable to an artificial blockage. (1994, p. 12)

And it is through this blockage, and where we introduce it, that we are able to create more or less general and more or less useful concepts. Somers-Hall offers the following example:

When we define a species, for instance, we attribute a set of properties to a thing. For instance, we might define a horse by the properties of being a mammal, having hoofs, being a herbivore, etc. In this case, we don’t want to develop a concept that defines an individual, since we want a concept that allows us to talk about a group of individuals at the same time (horses). Rather than carrying on until we have specified a particular horse, we introduce what Deleuze calls an “artificial blockage” (DR 12/14) by stopping this process of determination. Depending on where we introduce the artificial blockage, we will get more or less general concepts. (2013, p. 15)

And so we can move from a general undetermined concept, let’s say a human subject, and begin adding determinations or predications of the subject, such as a human subject who teaches someone something, and then continue adding determinations, such as and knows students and how they learn, and so on, until we realise a concept of teacher that serves our purposes, that defines the kind of concept of teacher we wish to define, and extends to a group of individuals we wish to recognise and
comprehend according to the concept, but stops short of defining any particular individual teacher. And we can finesse our concept by adding or subtracting determinations and increasing or decreasing its comprehension and thus applying it to a more or less specific class of individuals as its extension increases or decreases. In this way we could move from a general concept of a teacher as a human subject who:

- Teaches someone something

To a more specific notion of a human subject who:

- Knows students and how they learn
- Knows the content and how to teach it
- Plans for and implements effective teaching and learning
- Creates and maintains supportive and safe learning environments
- Assesses, provides feedback and reports on student learning
- Engages in professional learning
- Engages professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community

And so we could understand something like the APST as constituting a point of artificial blockage that realises a concept of teacher based on ‘agreed characteristics of the complex process of teaching,’ (AITSL, 2014g) which predicate what teachers should know and be able to do, and thus what (or who) is comprehended as teacher. But it is also, implicitly, an artificial concept, one that is constructed through the deliberate and interested blockage of the comprehension,128 and also one that is also necessarily ‘of a generality such that no existing individual can correspond to it hit et nunc’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 12).129

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It is interesting to note, I think, that in both the definitions of teacher mentioned so far the concept of teacher is determined in relation to a concept of a student. In the general definition, a teacher is someone who teaches someone something, thus this someone who is implicitly not teacher, at least in the moment of being taught, is vital to the definition of teacher. And in the APST also, student figure heavily: teachers know students, and how students learn, and et cetera and so on. This, perhaps, is just common sense, that student is the ‘constitutive outside’ (Hall, 1996, p. 3) of teacher. But if the

128 Who agreed? And what choice did they have, when opposition is tantamount to heresy?
129 And so all of the “people” (re)presented in this text as teacher may or may not be recognised as such depending on how the concept is defined: the qualified and unqualified, experienced and inexperienced, those that know their students and how they learn, and those that don’t, and so on. Though it might also be expected that some would be more readily judged as teachers than others, at least according to certain judges.
concept of teacher is created by artificially blocking the comprehension, then it follows that a concept of student - that someone who is taught something by a teacher - must also be similarly constructed. And so, just as teacher can be more or less generally determined, so, presumably, can student. Starting from an initial general and undetermined concept of a human subject, we could begin adding determinations, such as:

- a human subject who teaches someone something,
- a human subject who is taught something by someone,

and in doing so we could differentiate between more highly determined species of people involved in teaching, such as teachers and students, and to these we could continue adding further predicates, increasing the comprehension and restricting its extension of each, specifying this or that concept of teacher and student, and recognising certain kinds of people as teachers, or students, or neither. And each of these determinations could also be further predicated, constituting species of teachers and students, such as the native English speaker, the non-native English speaker, the Westerner, the Asian, the free-thinker, the non-free-thinker, the rote memoriser, the plagiarist, the copier, the lazy, et cetera and so on.

This kind of specification depends on what Deleuze (1994) terms conceptual or specific difference, which is the kind of difference that can be represented and produced by the addition of more precise determinations to our concepts (Somers-Hall, 2013). And it is this conceptual or specific difference that permits the recognition of individuals as this or that kind of person involved in teaching: the conceptual difference between species of teacher and student within a genus of human subjects involved in teaching and learning that might also include other species such as principals,130 and parents, and school crossing supervisors, and academic researchers, and policy makers, and Ministers for Education, and so on. And with each of these as genera further specified as Western or Asian, native English-speaking or non-native English-speaking, scientific or folkloric, and so on, each specified by shifting the determination, adding or removing contrary predicates in order to result in this or that concept that permits the recognition of this or that type of human subject, this or that identity each conceived as different in some specific, conceptual way.

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The importance of difference to identity has long been recognised. Describing discursive work on identities in the latter part of the twentieth century, Wetherell notes that:

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130 It seems relevant to note here that AITSL has also produced Australian Professional Standard for Principals (AITSL, 2014b).
whereas earlier work had tried to capture as the essence of identity what was the same, what was similar and what was shared, theorists now began to highlight the ways in which acts of identity required the marking out of differences, separating self from ‘other’, creating hierarchies of included and excluded; where the nature of self and group came to be defined through what one was not. (2010, p. 16)

Or to quote Stuart Hall:

Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its 'identity' - can be constructed (Derrida, 1981; Laclau, 1990; Butler, 1993). Throughout their careers, identities can function as points of identification and attachment only because of their capacity to exclude, to leave out, to render 'outside', abjected. Every identity has at its 'margin', an excess, something more. (1996, pp. 4-5)

But there is another way that difference is crucial to a concept of an identity subject to the play of différance. Identities that are multiple and shifting are always necessarily becoming different from themselves. If, as Hall (1996) states, there is no ‘bit of the self which remains always-already 'the same', identical to itself across time’ (p. 3), then the very concept of a selfsame, enduring and unified Identity must be reconceived as a ‘process of becoming rather than being’ (p. 4).

But when reconceived as becoming, identity is not only determined through difference but is in itself characterised by difference. In becoming, it is difference that endures and difference that is repeated in the continual becoming-other of something: ‘the continual production (or ‘return’) of difference immanent within the constitution of events’ (Stagoll, 2010a, p. 26). Which is to say that a thought of becoming cannot continue to privilege ‘points of temporary attachment’ (Hall, 1996, p. 6) precisely because ‘becoming produces nothing other than itself … What is real is the becoming itself,

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131 Here I am reminded of Said’s (1978, p. 3) Orientalism: the ways in which ‘European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.’

132 The rule of the inverse relation of comprehension and extension suggests that a concept with a comprehension of one must have an extension in principle infinite. Conversely, a concept with a comprehension in principle infinite must have an extension of one. One might, then, be tempted to theorise that a concept of identity, the fact of being who one is, with an extension of one, could be infinitely comprehended. Conversely, the constitutive outside, that which can be determined as being not what one is, could, in principle, extend to include all other objects in the universe. Is it possible, then, that the Self could be infinitely determined in opposition to the infinite array of objects in the universe which are Other? That is to say, in other words, the Self could be infinitely determined as not this, nor this, nor this … ad infinitum. And, inversely, the infinite Other can be singularly determined as not Self. And could teacher, then, be infinitely determined as not that which is outside of teacher: students, primarily (a teacher is a person who teaches someone something), but also principals, and parents, and administrative staff, and school crossing supervisors, and Ministers for Education, and this table, and this apple, and this piece of wax, and Theodorus and Theaetetus, et cetera, and so on?
the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238). This, then, entails the equally radically disturbing recognition that not only is identity not only determined through the relation to what it is not but is also always-already becoming-other than what it is. Identity is only ever a becoming that is:

not defined by points that it connects, or by points that compose it; on the contrary, it passes between points, it comes up through the middle, it runs perpendicular to the points first perceived, transversally to the localizable relation to distant or contiguous points. A point is always a point of origin. But a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination; to speak of the absence of an origin, to make the absence of an origin the origin, is a bad play on words. A line of becoming has only a middle. The middle is not an average; it is fast motion, it is the absolute speed of movement. A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get it by the middle. A becoming is neither one nor two, nor the relation of the two; it is the in-between, the border or line of flight or descent running perpendicular to both. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 293)

To reconceive identity-as-becoming in this way is to apprehend that ‘difference is behind everything, but behind difference there is nothing’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 57). But Deleuze argues that our thinking of difference is both negative and inadequate, subordinating difference to identity and lacking a positive concept of difference in itself:

When we define difference as conceptual difference, we believe we have done enough to specify the concept of difference as such. Nevertheless, here again we have no idea of difference, no concept of difference as such. Perhaps the mistake of the philosophy of difference, from Aristotle to Hegel via Leibniz, lay in confusing the concept of difference with a merely conceptual difference, in remaining content to inscribe difference in the concept in general. (1994, p. 27)

Conceptual difference is positioned in terms of the variation or non-identity between things, reduced to what Williams (2013, p. 66) calls ‘a matter of contrary predicates that allow for the determination of subsets within greater sets defined by more general concepts,’ represented, for example, in the ways identities can be said to differ from each other.¹³³ Conceptual difference is implicitly tied to representation that is always ‘only empirical’ and which can produce determinations that are ‘only extrinsic’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 28), and which do not and cannot account for how things became different, nor how they will continue to become other. And it is this acceptance of a priori identities,

¹³³ For example, in the ways teachers differ from students, or in the ways Graduate teachers differ from Lead teachers, or Asians differ from Westerners (They cheat on tests. They cut in. They call people fat. They shit in the lake. They drive crazily).
and the accompanying inability to think an immanent difference that produces becoming, which contracts and constrains even notions of identity as constructed through difference.

What is needed, then, is a concept of difference freed from the mediation of representation and which can account for the emergence of form. This would be difference thought not as the external variation that distinguishes between an \( x \) and \( y \) that are given but that which is both productive of and immanent to \( x \) and \( y \), ‘internal to a thing or event, implicit in its being that particular’ (Stagoll, 2010b, p. 75). This is a concept of difference that is beyond representation:

> a notion of difference irreducible to identity, and prior to the logic of contradiction; a difference that does not reside between things, but one that lives in the heart of things themselves, internal to what we labor to call their identity. (Donkel, 2002, p. 323)

Thought in this way, difference becomes ‘the condition for changes in actual things and actual things are the condition for the expression of difference as something that can be determined’ (Williams, 2013, p. 61). Thus to understand difference in this way, if possible, would be to:

> set the concept aside and focus instead on the singular, and the unique circumstances of its production. Awareness of such specific circumstances means that the notion of some ‘thing in general’ can be set aside in favour of one’s experience of this thing, here and now. (Stagoll, 2010b, p. 76)

Identity-as-becoming is a process characterised by the eternal return or production of difference immanent to becoming itself. As such, it is necessary to conceptualise identity not as ‘points of temporary attachment’ but as a line of flight, the in-between that produces only the in-between itself, here and now, a becoming that never becomes so, without origin or destination. A radical re-conceptualisation that would account for difference-in-itself, a concept of difference that exceeds representation and identity, rescuing difference from its ‘maledictory state’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 29).

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In conversations about teaching in the international school the categories of ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’ are commonly used to make sense of the situation. Although the project of English language and English medium education as it occurs in this context is predicated on an avowed beneficence and necessity of English language proficiency (Pennycook, 1995), the work of teachers is represented as being about much more than simply teaching the language. Rather, this work is about the Western
teacher influencing the non-Western student’s culture, bringing English and the world into Vietnam, widening their understanding of the (Western, English-speaking) world and helping them to understand what we (in/from the West) think is important:

‘When we come here and teach English is it just benefiting individuals – the students we teach – or is it somehow going to benefit the whole society and somehow improve Vietnamese society as a whole?’ I asked.

‘I strongly feel, the teacher replied, ‘that it does influence the culture of the society, so when they learn English, from native speakers, they’re learning the language and the culture, so they’re widening their understanding of the world, especially the English-speaking world, and especially the Western - like America - so they understand more about who we are as a people and what the language, and the power of the words, and what the words mean, and what we think is important.

‘Yeah …’ added another.

‘Like, freedom, like responsibilities, etcetera, so there's a lot more than just ‘Oh I've learnt another language.’

Such representations could be said to be problematic inasmuch as they presuppose their conceptual ground (here, the categories of Western and non-Western). For objects of sense (people, in this case) to be made sense of, they must be recognised and judged in relation to the categories that prefigure them. Thus, on this representational account, Westerners are Westerners, non-Westerners are non-Westerners, and from these identities the specific differences between them can be thought (Colebrook, 2002b). Somers-Hall explains that this kind of specific difference:

is what allows species to be defined in Porphyry’s tree by dividing the genus. So, if we take the genus, animal, we are able to determine the species, man, by dividing animals into two kinds: rational and non-rational animals. Difference is the criterion by which we divide the genus into two species. (2013, pp. 25-26)

In analogous ways, if we take the genus of thinking human subjects then we are able to determine the species, Western and non-Western, by dividing human subjects into two kinds: one predicated as free, responsible, democratic and native English-speaking; and another as non-free, non-responsible, non-democratic and non-native English-speaking. Difference here is the external relation between existing and identifiable beings that permits the determination of species and groupings of genera. But the problem with such a representation is that it fails to account for difference in itself; it does not and cannot account for how things became different nor how they will continue to become different, instead representing identities as points of apparent stasis and stability, ‘integral, originary and
unified’ (Hall, 1996, p. 1). Stagoll writes that:

On such an account, difference is subordinated to sameness, and becomes an object of representation in relation to some identity. As such, it is never conceived in terms of ‘difference-in-itself’, the uniqueness implicit in the particularity of things and the moments of their conception and perception. (2010b, p. 75)

The determination of actual objects in the world occurs according to a process of judgement: that process of fitting the material of experience into categories that we already possess (May, 2005). According to Deleuze (1994, p. 29), this judgement can take a number of forms: ‘identity, in the form of the undetermined concept; analogy, in the relation between ultimate determinable concepts; opposition, in the relation between determinations within concepts; resemblance, in the determined object of the concept itself.’ For example, when asked to talk about students, one teacher replied:

‘They're all boys, sixteen boys and three girls, you know they're- How would I describe them? I think they're pretty normal, you know, teenagers …. ’

‘Normal for teenagers worldwide?’ I asked.

‘Yeah I think so. Except for, I think Vietnamese teenagers are a little bit ... emotionally immature, you know? I don't think these people are quite as street-savvy as you would find in the United States or in Korea. I think that maybe they're, yeah definitely they're not as emotionally mature as most kids. They've been babied and coddled, you know? They don't have a lot of responsibilities. Maybe some of them have really poor life skills, you know? Things like that. But otherwise they're normal.’

Here, the differentia of the genus of the thinking human subject are the predicates boy/girl, Vietnamese/American/Korean, emotionally mature/immature, and so on. Each different species is analogous in the ways in which it is a species of normal thinking human subject, but opposed in terms of its predicates, which:

divide the diversity of the sensible in a binary manner into mutually exclusive properties and by attributing only one property of a pair of opposites to each thing, determine this thing in accordance with the ideal of complete determination with each category a subdivision of the genus determined by a specific difference. (Voss, 2013, p. 20)

Thus, difference is understood as the difference between species of teenager, the criterion that determines that Vietnamese teenagers are Vietnamese teenagers who, though similar inasmuch as
they are teenagers, are different from American teenagers who are American teenagers. It is in this way that ‘difference is understood in terms of resemblance, identity, opposition and analogy, the kinds of relations used to determine groupings of things’ (Stagoll, 2010b, p. 75). And there is some indication of the failure of conceptual difference to account for the emergence of identity: because students are different, they belong in different categories; because they belong in different categories, they are different. And so here the potentials of differenciation immanent to each individual as a becoming-student are subordinated to essential, stable and exclusive categories of identity, points of origin that can only mask ‘the uniqueness implicit in the particularity of things and the moments of their conception and perception’ (Stagoll, 2010b, p. 75). Individual students are grouped and classified (boys/girls, Vietnamese/American), with each category reliant on explicit or implied relations of opposition to measure, compare and catalogue the individuals subsumed within it, and resemblance providing the means to recognise ‘the object of the concept’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 138): the individual students ‘who differ but are subsumed under the same species’ (Somers-Hall, 2012, p. 61).

Representing a world of individuals who are specifically different is mistaken inasmuch as such a representation can be only empirical and can only subordinate an apprehension of the real conditions of possibility here for each student as a fluid and multiple becoming-student, characterised by the eternal return of difference. Interpreting a world of stable identities and the differences that lie between them misunderstands difference, ‘both as it manifests itself in the metamorphic process of becoming … and as it exists in itself, as a virtual immanent within the actual’ (Bogue, 2004, p. 331). As Voss (2013, p. 21) observes, ‘not only is the world of the sensible denatured by being covered with a conceptual net of identical concepts, but also the nature of difference itself is distorted.’ And this is a reductive and conservative position, as Stagoll (2010b, p. 75) writes, ‘this tendency to think in terms of sameness detracts from the specificity of concrete experience, instead simplifying phenomena so that they might ‘fit’ within the dominant model of unity’ as can be seen by returning to the teachers talk about the “free-thinker”:

‘We were basically in second term, would have been second term, when we identified our first
‘free-thinker’ in the school.’
‘Yeah!’
‘Where he had the ability to think, outside-‘
‘Outside!’
‘What we actually said. Like if we said whatever topic you choose-‘
‘Yeah.’
‘This is what I want you to do with it, most of the class would just copy what I put on the board and only one, and that—’

‘That's right, that was second semester!’

Here, the difference implicit in a school filled with individual and particular thinking human subjects is reduced to what amounts to a binary of us and them. The infinite potentiality of immanent difference is effortlessly subordinated as individuals are grouped by relations of resemblance, identity, opposition and analogy. Non-Western students (the school; most of the class) are judged analogous to Western teachers (we) in being thinking human subjects but are opposed inasmuch as they are predicated as non-free in their thinking. Individual students are recognised only as the repetition of the a priori categories of identity, in the process denying the possibility of becoming, a ‘form of recognition [that] has never sanctioned anything but the recognisable and the recognised; [and] will never inspire anything but conformities’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 134).

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If difference is distorted in mistaken representations of students that subsume identity-as-becoming into predetermined, recognisable identities, it is this same difference that is taken up as the constitutive outside through which a teacher identity is constructed. There are, I think, compelling reasons to suspect that these representations are grounded in an ambivalent colonial discourse founded on binaries of Self and Other, ‘the objective of [which] is to construe the colonized as a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 101). To achieve secure identities within this ambivalent colonial discourse, the Self is constructed in external relations of resemblance and opposition that take an inferior Other as the object of thought: ‘a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122). Specific difference is used in strategic representations of the student as a degenerate Other in need of the kind of civilising instruction it is the Western teacher’s burden and interest to provide. It is, at least in part, this ‘recognition and disavowal of racial/cultural/historical differences’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 100), the necessary and ineradicable distinction between the superior West and inferior non-West (Said, 1978), that constitutes the beneficence and necessity of English language and Western knowledge delivered by Western native English-speaking teachers:

‘They're never going to adopt Western systems here.’

‘Should they?’ I asked.
‘Should they?’ the teacher checked.
‘Mmm,’ I said.
‘I don’t see why.’
‘For the benefit of the majority they should,’ added one of the others.
‘You know that’s ah, that's the stuff of revolutions,’ the first said.
‘I don't know, I hate coming to a place and being like “Oh, my way is the best way ever!”’ said another.
‘But it's true.’
‘But there are some things ...’
‘There are some cultures that are superior.’
‘Some things are just- I can't wrap my head around the way they do it! And I don't know if that's being really biased but- Because I hate being that person, I like just letting culture be how it is. But at the same time it drives me crazy!’

Here the ambivalences and contradictions of colonial discourse are apparent, simultaneously revealing the burden to instruct, the hesitancy in enunciating this interest and the essential inferiority of the Other as its justification. The Orientalist declaration of inevitable cultural superiority implies the specific differences that exist between cultures, and it is the amelioration of this difference that is positioned as the explicit goal of the project of instruction that is constituted as a *mission civilisatrice*. In short, constructing the student as an inferior colonial Other produces the need for the Western teacher who can provide the benefits of English and the West (*a superior culture, freedom, responsibility, democracy*).

Impossibly, however, were the project to be successful, it would erase the very difference that constitutes this necessity. That is, if the differences between students’ and teachers’ cultures were erased through instruction then there would no longer be any justification for the project. The process of subjectification of the teacher, then, the production of a way of existence, is ultimately aporetic: to remain vital they must fail. Consequently, the student as Other must always be represented as ambivalent, incomplete, flawed: ‘almost the same, *but not quite*’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 132). My point, then, about this recognition of difference is that it is at once generative of and threatening to the identity of the White teacher. This is what makes teachers’ representations of students as Other and the differences deployed in their construction so important. As expressions of the ambivalence of

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134 This might be the outstanding instance of the collective enunciation of a collective superiority. A climax, of sorts. The culmination of a mantra of superiority that achieves the incorporeal transformation of the White native English-speaking teacher from nobody to relative *Übermensch*.

135 And yet, even here there is ambivalence. We would like to let it be. We don’t want to be that person. But …
colonial knowledge, this intensification of insecurity is ‘always both an aggressive expression of domination over the other and evidence of narcissistic anxiety about the self’ (Huddart, 2006, p. 29), an ambivalence and anxiety that are almost always present in ways students are differentiated by teachers:

It's tough for me because I feel like kids are kids everywhere, to a point. No kids in America and no kid in Vietnam wants to sit down and read a story. Or do, write an essay, you know? But at the same time there's something ...

Responses like these enunciate a recognition of a conceptual difference that positions students as ‘almost the same, but not quite’; they at once serve to position non-Western students as analogous to all thinking human subjects and resembling of kids or teenagers anywhere while at the same time undercutting such positioning with a vital recognition of difference, however intangible. The ‘to a point’ and the ‘something …’ in this representation (and compare also with the ‘pretty normal’ and ‘except for’ in the representation of students earlier) signify the continued ‘desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ (p. 122). They are expressions of what Bhabha (1994, p. 125) terms ‘mimicry’, ‘the effect of a flawed colonial mimesis, in which to be Anglicised is emphatically not to be English.’ This student, Anglicised but never the quite the same, is the constitutive outside for the Western teacher, expressing a creative and destructive power that Deleuze describes as an ‘expressive value’:

The other who is nobody, but who is self for the other and the other for the self in two systems, the a priori Other is defined in each system by its expressive value - in other words, its implicit and enveloping value. Consider a terrified face (under conditions such that I do not see and do not experience the causes of this terror). This face expresses a possible world: the terrifying world. (1994, p. 260)

What possible and terrifying world might be enveloped by the expression of the student as Other? I submit that, at least on one hand, it is one in which the institution of the Western native English-speaking teacher is eliminated, along with:

the imaginary qualities that confer on it a kind of transcendence or immortality under the shelter of which the individual, the ego, plays out its pseudo destiny: what does it matter if I die, says the general, since the Army is immortal? (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 62)

And isn’t this, Buchanan asks, the fear at the heart of colonialism:
That the empire and all its institutions might prove to be not merely mortal, but sadly all too human as well? Is this not the “white man’s burden”, the constant need to prop up the fantasy if not the actual reality of the immortal empire? Was this not “the horror, the horror” of Kurtz’s dying breath? And can we not see Forster’s emblematic exhortation “only connect” as the desperate plea of an individual fantasy that desires nothing so much as to be properly plugged into a group fantasy, something able to confer the feeling of immortality and relieve the ego of its anxiety. (2008, p. 88)

The expressive and ultimately ambivalent value of the Other in this system is as an Other whose desire constitutes the teacher qua teacher while simultaneously expressing the possibility of a world in which the individual teacher and the very institution of Western native English-speaking teacher is mortal. Or in other words, the teacher must constantly desire a student whose own desire for a teacher constitutes the teacher as such. But this is a paranoid form of unconscious desire, one which ‘forms whole subjects who cling to their identities in a social production network that must not change and that reinforces the rigid (tribal or imperial) coding and channeling of flows’ (Bonta & Protevi, 2004, p. 76). Under this paranoid regime the productivity of desire as ‘the domain of free syntheses where everything is possible: endless connections, nonexclusive disjunctions, nonspecific conjunctions, partial objects and flows’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 54) is crushed by the socially-authorised belief in concepts of teacher and student, Western and Asian, native English speaker and non-native English speaker, and so on; an Oedipalised and illegitimate form of desire and connection that:

constitutes an illegitimate restriction on the productive syntheses of the unconscious because it emphasises global persons (thus excluding all partial objects of desire), exclusive disjunctions (thus relegating the subject to a chronological series of moments that can be given a coherent narrative account), and a segregative and biunivocal use of the conjunctive syntheses (thus reducing the identity of the subject to a coherent or static set of one side of a set of oppositions). The subjection of desire to a phallic paradigm results in a subject who experiences himself as ‘having’ an identity that is fixed on either one side or the other of various oppositional divides (male or female, white or black), and who designates the various pleasurable and painful states through which he passes in terms of the attributes of a fundamentally unchanging identity. (Holland, 2010, p. 195)

The ‘ambivalence of mimicry’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 123) reveals the reduction of the possible world and the subjection of desire to such global, historical, and statically oppositional identities. For the
unchanging teacher the student as Other always expresses a threat compresent with desire: that in successfully mimicking the language, knowledge and culture of the teacher, by threatening to become the same through being taught, they subvert the very claims to being that these teachers hold, placing them in ultimately parlous positions as they cling to an illusion of identity, repressing pure becomings which never rest, moving in ‘both directions at once’ (Deleuze, 1990, p. 2), eluding the present as they are both becoming vital and becoming unnecessary, but never finally becoming either, for there is no transgression of the limit, no finally becoming so, no being teacher as such. ‘The extent to which we find a paradox difficult to comprehend,’ writes Buchanan (2000, p. 111), ‘is the extent to which our thinking is limited by some form of orthodoxy.’ This, then, is the way thinking is limited in the assignation of fixed identities to teachers and students by the orthodoxy of representation: like grouped with like and offset against the unlike according to a priori categories of identity, with distinctions drawn between the inferior student as Other that produces the necessity of a teaching Self. Representation serving ‘the “dogmatic image of thought” as that which categorises and judges the world through the administration of good sense and common sense, dispensed by the autonomous, rational and well-intentioned individual, according to principles of truth and error’ (MacLure, 2013, p. 659). The particularity and potential of the individual becoming-student, not to mention the becoming-teacher, or becoming-classroom, or becoming school, is concealed behind the illusion of the ‘factitious unity of a possessive or proprietary ego’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 72), as the threat of pure becoming promises to erase identities that can never finally become so, and an institution that must remain transcendent and immortal to shelter the individual. And, ultimately, a meagre concept of difference, one in which ‘difference in itself remains condemned’ (Deleuze, 1994, p. 262).

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Deleuze’s philosophy of difference generates possibilities for different kinds of encounter and connection by forcing a reconsideration (a thinking difference differently) of encounters grounded in identity and mediated by representation. Mistaken representations of teachers’ and students’ identities labour under the illusions of identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance as such identities are constructed through specific difference. Under such conditions of thought, difference is subordinated as objects are identified and categorised according to a certain logic of being and the potentials of becoming as the eternal return of difference-in-itself are obscured.

What if each student and each teacher could be reconceived as an event? If somehow each moment, each individuation, each point of temporary attachment could be understood as a specificity through which difference ‘differentiates itself into actual multiple entities while itself remaining
immanent within each of those entities’ (Bogue, 2004, p. 331)? If, instead of global bodies and fixed identities, we could think ‘partial objects and flows, selecting and cutting the one with the other, passing from one body to another, following connections and appropriations that each time destroy the factitious unity of a possessive or proprietary ego’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 72)? Might we then escape the logic of representation that constitutes an unchanging us in violent consort with an oppositional them who define us? And is it even possible to engage in an encounter with the student as Other in ways that overcome the limitations of representational thinking while affirming the conditions that establish the encounter, particularly when these conditions are understood as aporetic? To do so would require a different way of thinking difference and identity, one in which difference is not subordinated to identity but understood as the power of becoming that makes a life possible. This will be a way of thinking difference in which ‘we will no longer take who we are (the actual) as the ground and measure of life; we will recognise life as a virtual power for becoming that can take us into an unforeseen future’ (Colebrook, 2002b, p. 2).

Deleuze (1994) argues that we do not differentiate life through the structures of language but rather that language reduces or contracts infinite and molecular differences. A true apprehension of difference would then be an encounter with ‘the intense germinal influx’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 190) rather than its repression, which is to say it might amount to some sort of appreciation of individuality as moments of actualisation, pointing not to an essential similarity but rather to a possibility of infinite differenciation. It would suggest not that sovereign subjects differentiate and individualise an essentially similar humanity by imposing a system of difference upon it, but that an ‘infinite and open array of difference’ (Colebrook, 2002b, p. 38) must be reduced and contracted to arrive at manageable and representable identities: that ‘man must constitute himself through the repression of the intense germinal influx’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 190). That difference is prior to identity, representation, categorisation and knowledge.

And here is another thing: perhaps we already know this. Or maybe knowing is the wrong kind of concept; perhaps we perceive it or are affected by it. Or rather retain the capacity to be affected by it. After all, don’t we feel that representation subsumes the individual, that the particularity of any person, here and now, cannot simply be reduced to a concept of a thing in general? For example, one morning, as I stood at the back of the class observing, the teacher approached me and surveyed the class with a sweep of his hand:

‘You know, most of these guys won't make it,’ he said dismissively.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

‘They won't make it into the international program; they won't make the English.’
The international program was the prestige stream at the school, with an international curriculum taught by foreign teachers. Students had to pass an English proficiency test to enter the international program. The students surveyed here were in the integrated program, comprised of the Vietnamese curriculum taught by Vietnamese teachers with additional English language classes taught by foreign teachers.

But then, following up his broad survey of class failure, the teacher started pointing out individual students to me:

‘He could make it,’ he said, pointing to one boy. ‘And she will. And he could if he tries. And him.’

And so on. He continued around the room, gesturing to them one-by-one, and this one, and this one, all these Vietnamese students, the boys, the girls, the babied and the coddled, considering each one and, before I think he even realised, he had identified almost all of the class as having the potential to make it if they tried. Then, finally, looking at the last pair of boys in the room, and as if realising something was amiss, he said, ‘They probably won't make it.’

I think that, just for a moment, something happened. That this was, as it were, a different moment and a moment of difference. That just as this teacher began to recognise and represent these students within the customary binaries of identity and opposition – teacher and student, Western and Asian, Self and Other, success and failure – the intensity of difference forced thought to break out of the structures of representation and to consider what each becoming-student was capable of becoming. That in this brief opening up of thought, judgement and recognition dissipated, and the virtual was apprehended. Just for a moment, it seemed that these individuals were no longer constituted by the contraction of the infinite and the application of manageable and knowable identities.

There is of course more – much more – to each student and each teacher than the binary representations I have (re)presented here. Re-thinking difference and thinking subjectivity differently offers possibilities for generating different encounters between the becoming-teachers and becoming-students, possibilities to become those who will no longer simply be reduced to identities of teachers and students. This concept of difference, and the challenge it presents to think differently, ‘is the problem of Deleuze's work: whether we can think difference and becoming without relying on common sense notions of identity, reason, the human subject or even “being”’ (Colebrook, 2002a, p. 4). The kind of conceptual difference that distinguishes teachers and students is inadequate, as is the difference that distinguishes Western and Asian, and so on; a meagre image that is subordinate to identity and relies on mistaken representations of identity and opposition to produce a way of existing. Deleuze’s challenge – how to think difference and think differently – remains crucial.
6. ... and they die

‘Sooner or later,’ Heng said, and I was reminded of Captain Trouin speaking in the opium house,

‘... one has to take sides. If one is to remain human.’

-Graham Greene

_The Quiet American_

I wake early, flail through the mosquito net, and drag on a pair of jeans and a shirt. From somewhere above the haze the morning sunlight slants down with minimal effect amidst the close set Vietnamese houses. Nearby a cock squalls raggedly, and several dogs bark in reply. I sneak to the bathroom to splash some cold water on my face. A tap at the door and a whispered ‘Anh ơi!’ signals that Đạt, my wife’s younger brother, is also awake and ready. He is, I suppose, a typical young Vietnamese man. Maugham might have described him as an Annamite: ‘pleasant people to look at, very small, with yellow flat faces and bright dark eyes’ (1955, p. 144). And once I might have recognised him as such. Now I find it impossible to describe him; there can be no adequate description. He is more than an idea or concept: a real, breathing person; a body.

A body which, as Maugham might have noticed, is small. But to quote Deleuze, following Spinoza:

>a body, however small it may be, is composed of an infinite number of particles; it is the relations of motion and rest, of speeds and slownesses between particles, that define a body, the individuality of a body. Secondly, a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and being affected that also defines a body in its individuality. (1988, p. 123)


136 Maugham’s description of the Annamites continues:

>But though in all these lands the clothes the people wear attract our eyes because they are peculiar, in each everyone is dressed very much alike; it is a uniform they wear, picturesque often and always suitable to the climate, but it allows little opportunity for individual taste; and I could not but think it must amaze the native of an Eastern country visiting Europe to observe the bewildering and vivid variety of costume that surrounds him. An Oriental crowd is like a bed of daffodils at the market gardener’s, brilliant but monotonous; but an English crowd, for instance that which you see through a faint veil of smoke when you look down from above on the floor of a Promenade Concert, is like a nosegay of every kind of flower. Nowhere in the East will you see costumes so gay and multifarious as on a fine day in Piccadilly. (1955, p. 144)

It seems a curious paradox that Maugham elaborates here: a uniform and undifferentiated difference of monotonous peculiarity, and a differentiated and bewildering familiarity.
You will not define a body (or a mind) by its form, nor by its organs or functions, and neither will you define it as a substance or a subject ... if you define bodies and thoughts as capacities for affecting and being affected, many things change. (1988, pp. 123-124)

What are this body’s capacities, I wonder? What is it capable of? And what might change in defining it as such? What might become possible in a classroom conceived not as subjects, substances, and functions, but as an assemblage of bodies, particles in relations of motion and rest, speed and slowness, and capacities to affect and be affected? What kind of relationship between teacher and students would become possible?

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We turn our motorbikes, which sleep in the living room with my father-in-law, pivoting them elegantly on their kickstands, swinging them around to face the door. Somehow we manoeuvre them out without waking him, or more than likely he pretends not to wake out of politeness. On the way out I grab my helmet and backpack, throwing in a bottle of water and a few biscuits to sustain me. We wheel our bikes silently out of the compound, and into the dusty lane. At this hour the pastel Vietnamese houses look soft and delicate, beautiful faint greens and blues and pinks that suggest leaves, and sky, and flesh. Đạt looks over his shoulder and asks, ‘Okay?’ I nod in reply. We start our bikes and begin winding our way through the empty lanes, a zigzagging short cut to the highway that is probably longer than the potted main road. A clutch of chickens ignore us as they peck at something in the dust that coats the concrete lane. Turning on to Đại Kim we see our first people of the day, well-dressed suburbanites commencing their morning commute, clad in scarves and gloves in the morning air which feels cold on a motorbike. Together we enter a body of riders, comprised of individual elements which are themselves comprised of motorbike and human, complex assemblages of pistons and conrods and hearts and arteries and other elements, each of which is composed of infinite particles all in relative motion and rest. And poor young men walk arm-in-arm beside the Tô Lịch River, coming home or going to work dressed in dirty dark trousers, light coloured shirts and plastic sandals. Together we comprise a city.

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We circle Linh Đàm Lake and turn north onto busy Giải Phóng, moving faster now, a larger, more urgent body, heading towards the city centre. We pass the Bạch Mai Hospital on the left and the Bách
Khoa University on the right, moving faster than the old men on bicycles and slower than the younger men in expensive European cars. As we cross Đại Cồ Việt, Giải Phóng becomes Lê Duẩn. At the Ga Hà Nội, the Hanoi Railway Station, we turn right into Trần Hưng Đạo, entering the city’s Hai Bà Trưng district. It occurs to me that sometime back this trip would have been quite different. The names on the map have changed. The Bạch Mai Hospital was built as the René Robin Hospital in the 1930s. The Bách Khoa University site was originally planned as the expansive Cité Universitaire by Chief of Town Planning and Architecture Henri Cérutti-Maori (Logan, 2000). Lê Duẩn was the Rue Mandarine, and Trần Hưng Đạo the Boulevard Gambetta. As Marr puts it:

Street names are not always significant. Nevertheless, when hundreds of thousands of persons choose to fight and – inevitably – to die in struggle against a colonial ruler, particularly one that has the temerity to name Vietnamese streets after such “great colonizers,” as La Grandier, Paul Bert, and Gallieni, then one may surmise that the renaming of streets upon independence will carry deep symbolic value. (1971, p. 3)

The city is made of an infinite number of particles: streets and buildings and people and motorbikes and myriad other things all comprised of myriad particles. It’s particles all the way down. All have proper names, but names that designate not persons or subjects but effects, things that happen in the in-between:

not one term which becomes the other, but each encounter[ing] the other, a single becoming which is not common to the two, since they have nothing to do with one another, but which is between

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137 Named for the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Vietnam from 1960 to 1986, Lê Duẩn succeeded Hồ Chí Minh as the nation’s most powerful decision maker.

138 Named for the 13th Century General. Born Trần Quốc Tuấn, Trần Hưng Đạo successfully repelled three Mongol invasions as leader of the Trần Dynasty military. Marr describes Trần Hưng Đạo as: Vietnam’s first real culture hero, if we take that to mean not only one who is revered widely but also one whose personality and historical actions are well enough known for him to be remembered by subsequent generations as much more than a mere repository of generalized symbolism and disembodied ideals. (1971, p. 11)

139 Literally ‘two ladies Trưng’. The two Trưng sisters, Trưng Trắc and Trưng Nhị are Vietnamese heroines revered for their ill-fated rebellion against Chinese rule in 40 A.D. Symbols of national resistance to Chinese invasion and colonisation, Trưng Trắc is said to have overrun the Chinese governor, causing him to flee, and established a royal court in Mê Linh and ruled as Queen over 65 strongholds (Taylor, 1983). However: In the end, the uprising failed. Ancient Viet civilization was destroyed. But this was a “death that did not become death,” as history eventually saw. Even if the ancient Viet people had not risen up in the year 40, Dong-son culture still would not have survived, whether by enticement or by coercion. It would have faded and fallen into ruin by degrees. At the same time, the memory of the Hung kings and the idea of a common Viet people would have melted away. But Dong-son culture poured itself out into the towering, flaming tongue of a courageous struggle. Along with the resentment, the memory of this was deeply engraved in the feelings of the people. That is the secret of a miraculous phenomenon not easy to see in history: though oppressed by a foreign country for a thousand years, the will that “we are we” among our people was not something that could easily be shaken loose. (Phạm Huy Thông, 1975, as cited in Taylor, 1983, pp. 338-339)

As Taylor notes, the heroic courage of the Trưng sisters, though doomed, preserved the Đông Sơn heritage, ‘insuring that it would not degenerate and invite the scorn of later generations’ (Taylor, 1983, p. 339). Is it enough to will that ‘we are we’? Does that even work? Which “we” am I? Never Vietnamese. No longer exactly expat teacher. Who are “my” people? Which body am I part of? What am I becoming?
the two, which has its own direction, a bloc of becoming, an a-parallel evolution. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 6)

An axle is not a chariot. Nor the wheels, nor the body, nor the yoke, nor the reins. But in-between all of them a chariot may occur (Mendis, 1993).

The city is a bloc of becoming, uncommon to the encounter between the elements that produce it, an effect of countless encounters designated by words and names, a Gambetta effect, a Trần Hưng Đạo effect, a Lady Shop effect, produced of encounters and producing its own a-parallel evolutions in encounter with its own others, elements that ‘have absolutely nothing to do with each other’ (Chauvin, 1969, as cited in Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 10), always becoming something else, ‘beyond the avenues, relations, values and meanings that seem to be laid out for us by our biological make-up, our evolutionary heritages, our historical/political/familial allegiances, and the social and cultural structures of civilized living’ (Sotirin, 2005, p. 98). Who are we? What am I?

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As far as I know Đạt is accompanying me today simply because he thinks I like to visit pagodas. Which is true enough: he didn’t need to come – I would have gone myself. But I am glad of his company, even though we will spend most of the day in silence, satisfied simply with being together.\(^\text{140}\) As we enter the wide villa-lined boulevards of the French Quarter he slows and drops back to let me lead the way, thinking that I know this part of the city better than him. We turn north onto Hàng Bái, which becomes Dinh Tiên Hoàng as we pass Tràng Tiền Plaza,\(^\text{141}\) and then circle around the top of Hoàn Kiếm Lake.\(^\text{142}\) I lead him north on Hàng Đào, past the clothes shops, empty of tourists at this still early hour, and the Đồng Xuân market, so that we can cross the old Long Biên

\(^{140}\) Or is it becoming together?

\(^{141}\) Hàng Bái was formerly named Đồng Khánh after the puppet Emperor installed by the French in 1885. Dinh Tiên Hoàng (named for the emperor of Đại Cồ Việt from 968–979) was the formerly named Rue Francis Garnier for the French naval officer and explorer who captured Hanoi, then the capital of Tonkin, in 1873, holding it for a month before being killed by the mercenary Black Flag army. Tràng Tiền Plaza was originally built in 1901 as Les Grand Magasins Réunis. Tràng Tiền Street was formerly the Rue Paul Bert, named for the first Résident Général of Annam and Tonkin.

\(^{142}\) Hoàn Kiếm Lake is the \textit{locus} of activity which constitutes Hanoi:

Hoàn Kiếm Lake is the spiritual centre of Hanoi, and is located in the centre of the Ancient Quarter in the centre of Hanoi. According to a fifteenth century legend, a fisherman from the village of Thanh Hoa by name of Le Loi was casting his nets into the lake when he caught, not a fish, but a sword. Legend has it that he used the sword to defeat the occupying Chinese troops. Having made himself king, he wished to return the holy sword to the lake. As the ceremonial cortege reached the lake, thunder and flashes of lightning emanated from the sword. The sword rose from its sheath, transformed itself into a jade dragon, and dashed into the lake, thus giving the lake the name “Lake of the Returned Sword”. The area around the lake is a gathering space during festivals such as Tet, National Day and New Year. In the mornings people practice tai chi and jog around the lake, while during the day, informal hawkers sell their wares. The lake and its two islands, and their temples, banks, trees and gardens have become one of the most important heritage conservation foci in Hanoi. (van Horen, 2005, p. 165)

Even this lake has gone by several names: Luc Thuy (Green Water), Hồ Guom (Sword Lake), Hồ Hoàn Kiếm (Lake of the Restored Sword). On French period maps it is marked as \textit{Petit Lac}.
bridge to escape the city.143

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Why does language matter? Why should we concern ourselves with the linguistic landscape? With the names of streets and bridges? With the correspondence between language and the real? With the language of classroom signs and conversations? With our language and their language? With bringing English and the world into Vietnam? Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 76) argue that ‘language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience,’ a conception of language that implies:

(1) Language is the art of authorised, and authoritarian naming. (2) A word means what the speaker forces it to mean (we might call this the Humpty-Dumpty principle, as it is Humpty-Dumpty's conviction that ‘when I use a word . . . it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less’); more generally, meaning (the meaning of a proposition or an utterance) is the embodiment or inscription of a rapport de forces. (3) Consequently, speech gives rise to real acts, acts within the real, that is, the world outside the subject. (Lecercle, 2002, p. 166)

This is a notion of language which refuses the apolitical scientism espoused by linguistics and applied linguistics, asking not “what does it mean?” but instead raising the question: ‘what are the forces that are enacted and interpreted in and by language’ (Lecercle, 2002, pp. 166-167)? What happens, for example, to a city as it is named and renamed, represented, understood, and interpreted in and by language? Chinese, French, Vietnamese, and English? An assemblage of terms, vestiges of colonialism and neo-colonialism. As Deleuze puts it (describing Godard’s cinema):

language is presented to us as basically informative, and information as basically an exchange. Once again, information is measured in abstract units. But it's doubtful whether the schoolmistress, explaining how something works or teaching spelling, is transmitting information. She's instructing, she's really delivering precepts. And children are supplied with

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143 ‘Architecture,’ as Deleuze (1995, p. 158) puts it, ‘has always been a political activity.’ The Pont Doumer, now the Cầu Long Biên (Long Biên Bridge) was constructed between 1899 and 1902 by the company of Daydé & Pillé (see Figure 15). The bridge, which with its iron beams is reminiscent of Eiffel’s Tower, is often said to have been designed by Gustave Eiffel himself, though as Logan (2000) notes this is unlikely given that Eiffel resigned from Daydé & Pillé in 1893. The Vietnamese architectural historian Đặng Thái Hoàng described the construction of the Long Biên Bridge as ‘a nature-taming message’ intended to impose ‘a sense of obedience on the Vietnamese people while preparing to rob their country of its natural resources’ (as cited in Logan, 2000, p. 141). Now superseded by five additional bridges crossing the Red River, the Long Biên Bridge continues to carry rail, pedestrian, and two-wheeled traffic. Built by the French, broken by the Americans, repaired by the Vietnamese, the Long Bien Bridge, unrestored and missing its bombed spans, or the Hanoi Railway Station and its ugly rebuilt central section, are just as much tributes to the people of Hanoi during the Vietnam War as they are to the engineering and architectural skills of the French. (Logan, 2000, p. 178)
syntax like workers being given tools, in order to produce utterances conforming to accepted meanings. We should take him quite literally when Godard says children are political prisoners. Language is a system of instructions rather than a means of conveying information. (1995, pp. 40-41)

Could it be that, like Godard’s schoolmistress, the teacher is transmitting precepts, ordering (and re-ordering) the world, acting within the real, imposing forces? Claiming a territory inside and outside the classroom, and declaring an interest? Supplying Vietnamese children with precepts, order-words, syntax and tools, deterritorialising their “Vietnamese-ness” and reterritorialising them into “Western-ness”, teaching them to form grammatically correct sentences in the language in an attempt to force a takeover – to position the language as dominant:

forming grammatically correct sentences is for the normal individual the prerequisite for any submission to social laws. No one is supposed to be ignorant of grammaticality; those who are belong in special institutions. The unity of language is fundamentally political. There is no mother

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144 Because, despite the triumphalist discourses of English, it is not the dominant language of the Vietnamese classroom.
tongue, only a power takeover by a dominant language that at times advances along a broad front, and at times swoops down on diverse centers simultaneously. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 101)

A street name or a bridge name or a shop name is not informative, it is the ordering of a social field, an authoritative and authoritarian naming, because ‘to speak and to write in grammatically acceptable terms means to submit to the societal laws of one's culture, since grammar expresses the appropriate and accepted means of expression’ (Albrecht-Crane, 2005, p. 123). An authoritarian naming is an articulation and an effect of force and power, an attempt at closure – this is the Long Biên Bridge – even when it isn’t, or wasn’t, or won’t be, because it is always only ever really a line leading somewhere else rather than a point of origin or destination. Perhaps English no longer advances along a broad front, just as French has ceased to carry its nature-taming message across Vietnam, but it continues to swoop down, imposing forces and expressing power in the language centres and international schools of the periphery, in diverse encounters between all kinds of bodies: bridges and signs and shops and students and teachers and classrooms and schools and languages themselves that are another kind of body, part of an assemblage, territorialising social spaces with all kinds of categorisation and ordering (Albrecht-Crane, 2005).

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We find our way up and onto the old bridge, on which the normal right-hand traffic is, for some unknown reason, reversed. I perceive that the city continues being, even as it changes, even as it continues becoming something other than what it was, or is, or will be. Hanoi is. It is recognisable and recognised as such. It is defined by its form and substance and function. With archaeological evidence indicating human habitation back to Paleolithic and Neolithic times it has long since been, but not as it is (Logan, 2000; van Horen, 2005). In the 257 BC the first Citadel, Cổ Loa, was established just to the north of the confluence of the Red River and Dương River. In the early centuries of Han Chinese occupation, Long Biên (Dragon Twist), situated in the fork between the two rivers, became the provincial capital of Jiaozhou province. It was moved in AD 603 across to the south bank of the Red River, the site of present-day Hanoi, and named Tống Bình, and also known as La Thanh (Enveloping Wall) (Schafer, 1967). In AD 1010, following the liberation of the country from Chinese rule, the emperor Lý Thái Tông ordered the construction of a new Citadel, Thăng Long (Soaring Dragon), on the site of Tống Bình, vestiges of which still remain in Hanoi’s present-day Ba Đình District (van Horen, 2005). In around AD 1400 the capital was moved to Tây Đô (Western Capital),

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145 Present day Hanoi which, incidentally, now once again incorporates both Long Biên and Cổ Loa.
and Thăng Long was renamed Đông Đô (Eastern Capital), before being renamed again Đông Quan (Eastern Gate) by Chinese Ming dynasty invaders in 1406, and Đông Kinh (Eastern Capital) in 1430 when the Chinese were again overthrown, this time by the emperor Lê Lợi ("Hanoi: Dates to remember," 1982). And only later still, in 1831, did the Nguyễn emperor Minh Mạng rename it Hà Nội, meaning ‘city on this side of the river’ (Hung, 1982, p. 8).146

Substance and form and function. River and sand. Citadel and capital. What of its capacity to affect and be affected? What is a city capable of? Can a bridge emit obedience or resistance? A city of sorts has stood hereabouts for a thousand years, or two thousand, or ten, or more (there is no beginning). Only it wasn’t always here, where it is, and it wasn’t always a city, what it is. It wasn’t always called what it is. It has moved, and shifted, and expanded and contracted, de- and reterritorialising, always becoming something other than what it was, always becoming something other than what it is becoming, always claiming a territory. Tonkinese. Chinese. French. Communist. Vietnamese. North bank, south bank, the rivers have shifted their course, the swamps have been reclaimed, the lakes emptied and flooded, filled-in and dredged out. The ponds that once connected Hoàn Kiếm Lake to the Tô Lịch River filled in and cut off by the French, and the Tô Lịch itself partly canalised (Logan, 2000). Countless multitudes born and died. The garrison constructed by the Chinese, the citadel built by the Vietnamese, both gone. The railway station built by the French, bombed by the Americans, and repaired by the Soviets. The Old Quarter raised by the Black Flags, ‘tidied up’ by the French: ‘streets widened and straightened, guild gates removed - so not even the street patterns are intact’ (Logan, 2001, p. 54). The buildings constructed, altered, destroyed, replaced, always becoming so that not even the Old Quarter is really old, despite its authoritative naming:

Much of the significance of old Hanoi is iconic rather than strictly historical. Myths, ancient and modern, help to make Hanoi as a whole a special city. The heritage importance of the Ancient Quarter lies more in the belief of its historical quality than in the physical reality. It is important to the Hanoi people to hold on to this belief; it is part of their intangible heritage and a key to their cultural identity. But Nguyễn Vinh Cat outlined in 1993 a recent survey of 33 old streets in the Hoàn Kiém district which showed that, of the 2,345 existing houses, only 7 per cent had been built before 1900, 9 per cent were built between 1900 and 1930, and the remaining 84 per cent were newer than 1930. (Logan, 2000, p. 60)

An assemblage of intensities and forces, elements of stone and sand and wood and sweat and blood

146 What does the authorised and authoritarian renaming do? Does what is named become something other through the act of renaming?
contracted into a moment, an event. An accumulation of silt in the flow of brown water. A memory. A shaft of sunlight on a cancerous yellow-washed concrete wall. A bridge and a hospital and university. A story we tell our children. A state of intensity. A man dying on a road. A name. Hanoi isn’t even a thing, but an effect – a proper name which designates not an object but a potential, something which happens, a capacity to affect and be affected:

The theory of proper names should not be conceived of in terms of representation; it refers instead to the class of “effects”: effects that are not a mere dependence on causes, but the occupation of a domain, and the operation of a system of signs. This can be clearly seen in physics, where proper names designate such effects within fields of potentials: the Joule effect, the Seebeck effect, the Kelvin effect. History is like physics: a Joan of Arc effect, a Heliogabalus effect – all the names of history, and not the name of the father. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 86)

Like a body, the city persists, there is no beginning or end: it is milieu, the middle. An assemblage of infinite component elements: human, plant, animal, buildings, roads, bridges, lakes, rivers, an assemblage of forces and intensities giving rise to memories and stories that are born and die, becoming and un-becoming, de- and reterриториalling as people come and go, streets are moved and straightened, buildings erected, renovated, demolished and replaced, names changed and changing again, and then again. The city zigzags like a flight of starlings, or a school of fish, moving this way and that, expanding and contracting, changing form as each body moves in speed or slowness relative to the others, but somehow remaining whole, persisting over time. What is it that persists? The city is Đạt and I, speeding by an old lady selling cigarettes by the road, still as we ride next to a black Mercedes, slowing beside a man dying somewhere on a dusty road by the banks of a river. A mother mourning a son who never returned home. A baby crying for her father at night. A lonely wife sadly reminiscing about a future that never was. It happens – it is an event: A philosopher hurls himself from a window. Good morning Thaeteus. This piece of wax. This piece of string. This thesis, which never was.

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How difficult it is to abandon our reliance on the I that speaks – ‘the self-sustaining subject at the centre of post-Cartesian western metaphysics’ (Hall, 1996, p. 1):

A body can be anything; it can be an animal, a body of sounds, a mind or an idea; it can be a linguistic corpus, a social body, a collectivity. We call longitude of a body the set of relations of
speed and slowness, of motion and rest, between particles that compose it from this point of view, that is, between unformed elements. We call latitude the set of affects that occupy a body at each moment, that is, the intensive states of an _anonymous force_ (force for existing, capacity for being affected). In this way we construct the map of a body. The longitudes and latitudes together constitute Nature, the plane of immanence or consistency, which is always variable and is constantly being altered, composed and recomposed, by individuals and collectivities. (Deleuze, 1988, pp. 127-128)

The city and the teacher always becoming, bodies comprising longitude and latitude, movement and force, always variable and varying, ‘not phenomena of imitation or assimilation, but of a double capture, of non-parallel evolution, of nuptials between two reigns. Nuptials are always against nature. Nuptials are the opposite of a couple’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 2). Heterogeneous bodies, nothing to do with each other, forming something else, a wasp and an orchid, a student and a teacher, a collectivity, an assemblage, a multiplicity through their relative motions and their set of affects. Constructing maps of cities, and schools, and classrooms, and students. The bridge – seeing it, crossing it – it moves me, literally.147

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So we cross the _Sông Hồng_ River, the brown Red River, and leave the city behind, continuing northeast through the industrial district of _Gia Lâm_ until we reach the _Sông Đuống_, the _Đuống_ River. _Đạt_ resumes the lead and I follow him as we wind away from the highway with its grey grime of oily dirt and industry and trucks and onto the _Đuống_ River dyke, for a more bucolic and remote journey, winding our way back through the Vietnamese countryside and history, always atop the ancient dyke, following the meandering path of the quiet river. As I ride I see brown kids playing soccer in fields outside ancient walled villages; ageless and muddy grey buffalo grazing beside the road; plots of green vegetables; terracotta graves and conical bamboo hats sprouting like animated mushrooms from the endless paddy. From atop the high dyke the world seems remote and ancient. Everything is below us: river and forest, farms and villages. In truth however, we are never far from “civilization.” I’m deliberately overlooking the empty _Coke_ cans and _La Vie_ bottles that litter the banks of the dyke.148

Forgetting the pelaton of brightly lycra clad Western cyclists who pass us going the other way on

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147 A body of a bridge, an idea of a bridge, and an idea of me, a body of mine. What about the bridge and _Đạt_, what affect, if any does it have on him, I wonder? What about the bridge and the hundreds and thousands of people who cross it every day for more prosaic purposes? How does the bridge affect them? The market gardener? The locomotive driver? The student?

148 _La Vie_: ‘The first bottled water to be launched in Vietnam back in 1992, _La Vie_ has maintained its leading status ever since’ (http://www.nestle-waters.com/brands/la-vie).
expensive bicycles. Ignoring the moment we pass under the National Route 1A highway, recently refurbished with financial assistance from Japan and the World Bank, a direct route to the northern city of Lang Son and a gateway to China, a raging torrent of steel and plastic and transistors heading ever southward.

***

The international school is an apparatus of capitalism and a certain neo-colonialism, delivering precepts that will allow children ‘to produce utterances that conform to accepted meanings’ (Deleuze, 1995, p. 41). Reterritorialising Vietnamese children into the collective assemblage that is Western capitalism, supplying the tools required for the dominant (major) language of ‘communications, science, information technology, business, entertainment and diplomacy’ (British Council, 2013).

Producing the kinds of subjectivity required to conform, to become recognisable as a subject of English, of global business, because this is the right way to do it, because we can teach them how to think for themselves (by thinking the way we think), because their accents are so bad, because everyone else is using it, because it’s the international language, the lingua franca, the Internet language, the common language, because it’s the way out of poverty, because it’s the way out of being ignorant of grammaticality because nobody is supposed to be ignorant of grammaticality and those who are do not and cannot belong to the collective subjectivity that makes English and the West and capitalism possible. A production of subjects that is the repetition of the non-different because:

the different in capitalism can never be more than the mere appearance of difference, because capitalist difference can always be overcome, and returned through the processes of abstract exchange, to what is always the same, the utterly fungible. (Surin, 2005, p. 27)

It is not life, but the end of life. The denial of singularity and the denial of the repetition of difference. Being recognisable, not becoming.

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As we continue along the dyke, the stūpa for which the Bút Tháp Pagoda is named becomes just visible above the tall acacia trees that surround the temple (see Figure 16). The seventeenth century Chùa Bút Tháp lies in the shadow of the Dương River dyke, about thirty kilometres from Hanoi, in
Figure 16: Bút Tháp. Source: Zniper (http://www.flickr.com/photos/zniper/) CC BY-NC-ND 2.0
Bắc Ninh Province, the cradle of Buddhism in Vietnam (T. Nguyen, 1999).

Facing south-south-east in line with principles of phong thủy or feng shui, the pagoda complex is separated from the surrounding village on each side by paddy fields and ponds. The dyke lies to the north, and beyond that several hundred metres of paddy before the river itself. About four kilometres to the north, on the other side of the river, the enormous statue of the Amitābha Buddha and the stūpa of Chùa Phật Tích on Tiên Du Mountain can be seen faintly through the haze (see Figure 17).

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Every encounter between teacher and student is an event. A meeting of singularities, of countless elements in relative motions of speed and slowness, and capacities to affect and be affected. A double becoming in which each body is altered and composed and decomposed, producing something between them that is neither one nor the other – a class, or school, or an idea, or something else entirely that cannot even be thought. What practical use does this knowledge have for teachers? Don’t be unworthy of what happens (Deleuze, 1990). Don’t proceed by judgement and recognition (better to be a road-sweeper). Don’t define a student by form, or functions, or substance, or subject. See what might happen if you define students as capacities for affecting and being affected. Relish your fundamental encounters, be they with Socrates, a temple or a demon. Recognise those moments

*Figure 17: Tiên Du Mountain. Source: Author.*
opposed to recognition, those things that don’t make sense. Think differently. Think about all the difference you do not perceive. About how:

underneath the self which acts are little selves which contemplate and which render possible both the action and the active subject. We speak of our “self” only by virtue of these thousands of little witnesses which contemplate within us: it is always a third party who says “me”. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 75)

Become something else entirely. See what happens. Bring something to life.

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We enter the territory of pagoda through the small entrance gate and follow the palm lined bricked path, passing under the separate two-story bell tower. I follow Đạt, never quite sure what the protocols are for being in such places, uncertain of the grammar. I mimic my brother, doubling him, my actions pure rote, like an English student’s reply of ‘I’m fine thanks, and you?’ I follow in his footsteps, I imitate his respectful mannerisms. I impersonate, becoming other, an uncanny becoming in which I deviate from one majority and into another. Even as “we are we” we are not we, as I watch and mirror Đạt, even as he performs the routines he has grown up watching and mirroring – a collective assemblage of enunciation:

There is no subject of the becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of the majority; there is no medium of becoming except as a deterritorialized variable of a minority. We can be thrown into a becoming by anything at all, by the most unexpected, most insignificant of things. You don't deviate from the majority unless there is a little detail that starts to swell and carries you off. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 292)

We are not dégagé. We are always already functioning together, a part of the multiplicity, entangled in the entanglement, ‘a machinic assemblage of bodies, of actions and passions, an intermingling of bodies reacting to one another’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88). No subject, only a collective assemblage of enunciation. A body composed of countless elements that constitutes one of countless elements in countless bodies. What makes us think we can individuate ourselves (Lather & St. Pierre, 2013)? What makes us think we can define any student or teacher by substance or form or function?

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The walls are a melange of whitewash, mould, and rising damp; the upward curving roofs tiled in fish-scales of terracotta and a patchy carpet of moss. Trees and sparse-looking bonsai animals stand in pairs, one on either side of the path. From the bell tower we continue along the path to the Anterior Hall, in front of which sits a large square stone cauldron filled with pink sticks of burning and burnt incense, flanked by two stone storks holding lotus flowers in their mouths while perched upon turtles (see Figure 18). The southern Anterior Hall, northern Rear Hall and adjoining Stele Houses on the east and west form a walled compound that encloses the main complex, claiming its sacred territory, with only the entrance gate, bell tower, and stūpas on the eastern side lying outside.

As one we step into the Anterior Hall. It is damp and dim inside, and smells of sandalwood and old gods. Beams of sunlight enter through invisible cracks and openings, illuminating floating particles of incense smoke and dust. There are statues here but I don’t know who or what they signify. I spend a moment looking around while Đạt makes small offerings of money and prays silently and quickly at the various altars. Then we continue on together to the Buddha Hall, the most important building in the complex:

the spiritual center where the Buddhist deities are enshrined: Buddhas of the Three Periods, the Ascetic Buddha Śākyamuni, One Thousand-Armed Avalokiteśvara, Bestowing Child Quan Âm
(Guanyin), Mahāsthāmaprāpta and Mañjuśrī. A group of eighteen Arhats is also venerated along the podiums, nine on each side. It is here that the historical Buddha Śākyamuni is revered in ceremonies and rites with prayers and sacrifice. Among the structures in the temple, the platform of the Buddha Hall has the highest elevation. This is [the] only building whose foundation and columns around the balcony were constructed with stone. The stone balconies are decorated with archaic bas-reliefs depicting various themes, such as animals (horses, deer, rams, monkeys, rhinoceros, lions, unicorns, phoenix and dragons); flowers (lily, lotus, hibiscus, sunflower, orchids, chrysanthemum and plums); birds (parrots and cranes); fish and tree (bamboo and pine).

(T. Nguyen, 1999, p. 82)

It is here that I recognise what it is I’ve really come to see: a wooden statue of the One Thousand-Armed Quan Âm, the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara (see Figure 19). It has sat here in Chùa Bút Tháp, by the dyke of the Đuống River, since it was completed in 1656, poised on a giant lotus supported by an undulating dragon, its thousand arms, thousand eyes, and eleven heads representing ‘incessant activity and vigilance’ (Ngọc, 2004, p. 1024) and ‘expressing the bodhisattva’s extraordinary abilities to seek out and respond to the distress of all beings’ (Birnbaum, 2005, p. 705). Avalokiteśvara is:

one of the most important bodhisattvas in Mahāyāna Buddhism. He embodies compassion (karuṇā), and is thus called Mahākarunā (the other necessary constituent of a buddha being wisdom, prajña, which is embodied in Mañjuśrī). Avalokiteśvara is the manifestation as bodhisattva of the power of the equally compassionate buddha, Amitābha (Amida). He is the supremely compassionate helper, and is often depicted with a thousand arms and a thousand eyes for that purpose. ("Avalokiteśvara", 2000)

The Sanskrit name Avalokiteśvara translates literally as ‘the lord who looks down’ (Lopez Jr, 2004, p. 549). Birnbaum notes that:

The meaning of this bodhisattva’s name traditionally has been understood in several ways, emphasizing his sovereignty over the material world and his responsiveness to the calls of suffering humanity. A principal interpretation holds that the name Avalokiteśvara is a compound of Sanskrit avalokita and īśvara, translated variously as “the lord of what is seen, the lord who is seen” or “the lord who surveys, gazing lord.” (2005, p. 704)

Curiously, however, the Vietnamese name Quan Âm translates instead to ‘attentive to all sounds’ (Ngọc, 2004, p. 1024) rather than one who sees. Mironov (1927) attributes this to an incorrect
Figure 19: La statue de Quan Am dans la pagode But Thap. Source: Jean-Pierre Dalbéra (http://www.flickr.com/photos/dalbera/4372763660/) CC BY 2.0
translation of the original Sanskrit but I can’t help wondering if it easier to close one’s eyes than one’s ears to another’s suffering. It also seems notable that despite originally assuming male form in India and Tibet, during the journey East between the 10th and 16th centuries Avalokiteśvara ‘underwent a startling and profound transformation,’ becoming a female ‘Goddess of Mercy’ in Vietnam and China with noted similarities to representations of the Madonna (Yü, 2000, p. 223). Perhaps a kind of “becoming-woman” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

The main head of the Quan Âm has three faces, one frontal and two profile, above which are arranged eight smaller heads in a pyramid on top of which an Amitābha Buddha sits in meditation. Forty-two principle arms are arranged in symmetrical pairs either side of the body, each holding an elegant pose. A further nine hundred and fifty-eight small arms fan out to form a large halo behind the Bodhisattva. Each hand holds an eye in its palm: a thousand arms and a thousand eyes. Ngoc (2004, p. 1024) claims Quan Âm ‘gives an impression of both womanly gentleness and Buddhist serenity,’ though Nguyen disagrees, asserting that ‘the female form is not apparent in the images of multi-armed, or one-thousand-armed Avalokitesvara’ (1999, p. 110). As I gaze upon the face of the Bodhisattva, it seems to me that Nguyen is right: this Quan Âm is androgynous, neither masculine nor feminine, its gender imperceptible. And I perceive it as overwhelmingly benign, the heavily lidded eyes and elegantly posed arms suggesting a lull of meditative quietism at odds with Ngoc’s (2004, p. 1024) description of ‘incessant activity and vigilance.’ But perhaps the meaning is not immanent to the representation itself but rather the representation is something that causes meaning? Perhaps Quan Âm’s elegant gestures are not intended to be reproduced, but rather interpreted? It is neither masculine nor feminine, angel nor demon. A bridge can emit messages of superiority and science, or obedience and pillage, or resourcefulness and perseverance. A street name can mean conquest or resistance. A student can represent a future of hope and possibility, or the possibility of erasure and destruction. Perhaps the problem is not to discover that which each represents, but to apprehend its polysemy, its ‘capacity to absorb and organize all of these quite distinct anxieties together’ (Jameson, 1979, p. 142). What meanings have the thousand arms and eyes of the Bodhisattva caused in its three hundred and fifty years of encounters? I have been here before, about six years ago, and barely noticed the statue (a thousand arms – cool). Now I am filled with anticipation. What are its capacities to affect and be affected?

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150 Presumably. I did not count them all.
151 And not, one notes blasphemously, a thousand ears.
Recognising a body as form and substance, as an organism, as a totalised organisation of elements, contracts the immanent difference from which every encounter emerges, disparaging its individuality, and reducing it to a common noun. A city. A school. A class. A teacher. A student. Each is characterised by difference, a singularity that is only difference from everything that it is not, an endless proliferation of difference, an eternal return of difference. A city is something that happens between a bridge, a river, a shaft of sunlight, a person. A school is something that occurs, an event, the actualisation in a specific place of a specific confluence of forces and intensities: teachers, students, parents, desires and goals, functions and characteristics. A class is made of bodies and forces and desires and interests and languages, each constitutive element a singularity made of bodies and forces and desires and language and … and … and … . Each student is infinitely more than what is perceptible, more than Asian, more than Vietnamese, more than order accounted for by the collective assemblage of enunciation, the thought of a student which pre-exists in principle and in nature. And so it is with teachers too. This is the challenge of thought, to think differently. To think difference.

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As I stand and contemplate Quan Âm I try to think the unthinkable, to engender thinking in thought, to create. I’m not looking to find the truth here in Bút Tháp. I don’t mean to present a solution of ‘some hazy fantasy of becoming a plains Indian, or Steppes peasant’ (Buchanan, 2000, p. 74). Or a Vietnamese Buddhist. I don’t wish to imply that what is here offers some sublime alternative to the dominant capitalist paradigm of Western thought, only that ‘there are other ways of thinking and doing things from the way we do’ (Buchanan, 2000, p. 74). I don’t know what Quan Âm means, or if it is right:

You should not try to find whether an idea is just or correct. You should look for a completely different idea, elsewhere, in another area, so that something passes between the two which is neither in one nor the other. (Deleuze & Parnet, 1977, p. 10)

I try to think a completely different idea. My attempts are mediocre at best. For example, I try to think that I do, in fact, have eleven heads, and a thousand arms, each with an eye in its palm, and that with these I am able to see the previously unseen, to perceive the imperceptible, to recognise the unrecognisable. As if suddenly enlightened I think that I apprehend the infinite difference immanent to all events. I see all the particles that comprise each body, and see each body as a particle comprising other becomings. I think all that remains unthought. I look at Đạt (a thousand eyes – I don’t even need to turn) and comprehend his singularity. I am aware of my capacity to affect and be affected. I
realise that a thousand eyes is all that is needed to perceive the world differently, and that we all have a thousand eyes, but that somewhat problematically you need to see that you have a thousand eyes in order to see that you have a thousand eyes. And I realise that there are a thousand “I”s. Or rather more than that. Or rather that “I” is a curve of inverse proportionality, now approaching singularity, now approaching infinitude, never finally becoming either for becoming so would mean to cease becoming and to be. Or an asymptote, a line continually approaching but never meeting. And I realise that there are little “I”s underneath the “I” like an infinite series of matryoshka dolls extending in all dimensions at once, always already mise en abyme, tiny homunculi proceeding in lines of longitude and latitude, all the way up and down, each containing another, and each contained within another, so that any point is illusory, a subject always and forever subject to the logic of and … and …and … . But even as I affect this pose of creation I recognise that it is only an affectation. That this is not creation but decoration. The limits remain, and even the limits of the limits remain imperceptible.

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So I begin and begin again, always in the middle of something. I turn to face the Bodhisattva, close my eyes and press my palms together in front of my face, again mimicking Đạt. Faded memories return of being made to mindlessly kneel in church and mouth the words of hymns to a god in whom I didn’t believe. I’m not becoming one with my brother, but we are becoming something else as something passes between us. I don’t know what it is. I don’t know what it means. I don’t know for how long it will endure. I still don’t believe. I’m not really praying. I’m just pretending. But, as I bow three times, I wonder what difference that makes.

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This is not a conclusion. Ce n’est pas une fin. Đây không phải là một kết luận. How could it be? There is no final, satisfying judgement to be offered here. As Foucault puts it:

we have to give up hope of ever acceding to a point of view that could give us access to any complete and definitive knowledge [connaissance] of what may constitute our historical limits. And, from this point of view, the theoretical and practical experience we have of our limits, and of the possibility of moving beyond them, is always limited and determined; thus, we are always in the position of beginning again. (1997d, pp. 316-317)

Nothing can be said of teachers and students that will render the reader’s work complete – not only
do we have our limits, but our knowledge of our limits is limited. There is nothing to be said of
students and teachers (or of students by teachers [or of teachers by students and et cetera and so on])
that is not judgement and recognition, and it is better not to judge and not to recognise:

for recognizing is the opposite of the encounter. Judging is the profession of many people, and it
is not a good profession, but it is also the use to which many people put writing. (Deleuze &
Parnet, 1977, p. 8)

Don’t put writing to the service of judgement. Make the language stutter and twist and turn, bifurcate
each of its terms, beginning and beginning again even when there is no beginning as such. Try not to
think of teachers and students, Westerners and Asians, free-thinkers and non-free-thinkers, Self and
Other. Imagine teachers are not given as teachers, and students are not given as students, and that
difference cannot be reduced to the difference between them. Refuse that thought of Self and Other,
of an non-identical identity. An interior and exterior. Imagine instead that all teachers are becoming-
teachers who are becoming something in encounters with becoming-students who are becoming
something in encounters with becoming-teachers, and that between them something additional
occurs, something else entirely. Imagine that all encounters produce effects, and try to be worthy of
what happens. Try not to think of points of origin and destination or even temporary attachment. Or
form and function. Think instead ‘in terms of speeds and slownesses, of frozen catatonias and
accelerated movements, unformed elements, nonsubjectified affects’ (Deleuze, 1988, p. 129). Think
of lines and the in-between and relative motion. Imagine you are nothing but an assemblage of an
infinite series of heterogeneous assemblages, forming an infinite series of heterogeneous
assemblages. Think things that don’t even make sense yet. How? I don’t know. I’m still thinking
about thinking. And in any case, there is nothing to be said about how:

We learn nothing from those who say: “Do as I do”. Our only teachers are those who tell us to
“do with me”, and are able to emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose
gestures for us to reproduce. (Deleuze, 1994, p. 23)

Create something that does not yet exist in thought or in nature. Experiment. Think differently. Don’t
signify. Don’t contract. Take a look around, then cut through! Oppose and interfere with and disrupt
those insuperable and insufferable habits of superiority, the assumptions and practices of an “I” that
would oppose an Other. And fail. Refuse that which we have been given to be. That which we are.
Imagine what else we might be capable of, what else we might become, what else might happen.


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