Teaching tech(no)bodies: open learning and postgraduate pedagogy

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Introduction

The actual practices of postgraduate pedagogy have been, until quite recently, somewhat mysterious and intimate phenomena. As an historical set of relations between the experienced and the neophyte scholar, they have been characterised as a process of academic over-stimulations and scholastic seductions in which the precocious 'few' are called to emulate the flattering self-image that is generated by a scholar as 'master' (Le Doeuff, 1977, p. 9). Traditionally conducted behind closed doors in spaces remote from undergraduate teaching, the intensity of the interpersonal relations of much postgraduate pedagogy is presumed but uninterrogated. It has not been in the interests of academics generally or their postgraduate charges to show and tell what systems of encouragements or discouragements may have been at work in the daily mentoring of 'pure' research and thesis-writing. This is not to presume transgression, but to understand that such pedagogy is dangerously untranslatable as rational inquiry made public.

In the past decade or so, this picture of postgraduate pedagogy has been radically shaken up. The press for fast credentials, the 'shelter effect' resulting from greater economic uncertainty and job insecurity, the declining status of undergraduate degrees, the vocationalist shift in the tertiary sector, the call for greater access for minority groups, the 'marketing' of university courses and 'coursework' postgraduate programs—all have contributed to burgeoning diverse populations of postgraduate students. Furthermore, there has been a determination on the part of governments funding tertiary education to insist that universities abandon any gesture towards the mystification of pedagogy, to 'fess up' to whimsy and élitism (and harassment), where it may exist, by means of the mechanisms of overt codes of ethics, quality assurance and quality control.

Postgraduate pedagogy, therefore, is now a wide and disparate set of processes involving more university teaching bodies and more student bodies engaging in less cloistered settings over smaller amounts of time. For the overwhelming bulk of students, the dominant "dual transference relationship" (Le Doeuff, 1977 p.9) is never experienced. They only engage in fast track, 'knock 'em down' coursework practices in which the imperative has been increasingly to excise the bodies of teachers and students from educational settings through flexible 'open' systems of delivery.

Teachers and students as 'no/bodies'

In describing teachers and students as 'bodies', we are conscious that the reader may regard this descriptor as impoverished or demeaning of persons engaged in pedagogical work. However, we think that it is important to insist on this descriptor as it is being re-claimed in the new area of social theorising called 'embodiment' theory. In this work, authors speak of a "lived body" (Leder, 1990) or a "mindful body" (Shilling, 1993) in ways that constitute a departure from the traditional Western 'mind/body' distinction. The 'self' is understood to be an integrated being in which capability is not ascribed to a decorporatised mind but to the body as a lived structure and locus of experience (Leder, 1990:5). This is an important conceptual shift for understanding how new forms of pedagogy are being experienced or 'lived out' when they demand the absence, removal or semi-disappearance of the anatomical bodies of teachers and students from the university seminar room or staffroom.

As academics, we have been caught with our theoretical pants down when it comes both to accommodating and resisting imperatives coming from technology that disrupt traditional pedagogical forms. Research in open learning is ill-equipped to deal with these issues because of an epistemological framework which still focuses on the mental as separate from, and privileged over, the corporeal. Over-whelmingly driven by Cartesian models of learning and of information processing, studies which examine 'the marriage of minds' have failed to understand pedagogy as 'embodied' (Shapiro, 1994), ie, that some body is teaching some body (Ungar, 1986). Thus the desire to teach and to learn have been rendered as merely cerebral. Desire is collapsed into motivation, pleasure becomes performance indicators, eros is rendered excellence, and so on. However, given the new work being done to theorise the body, including its relation to pedagogy (Matthews, 1994) and to technology (Sofia, 1995, 1993; Goodall, 1994; Fox, 1993; Haraway, 1991), the tools are now available for generating fresh analyses of pedagogical practices.

Clearly the move to the disembodied campus has already begun. We note the issues raised by the recent move at the University of Maine to create a "video campus without teachers or buildings" where students "would no longer need to attend lectures, but could tune into their chosen subjects on TV screens either from home or other campuses, and then 'interact' with a teacher hundreds of kilometres away" (*The Australian*, 19/4/95, p 26). While this has "prompted outrage" among academics in the USA, its effects are noteworthy for two reasons. First, it is indicative of the press of technology to revolutionise pedagogical events. Second, while academics quite rightly see the threat to their professional work in such developments, there is no indication that their response included cogent pedagogical arguments about the implications of this complete excision of teaching and learning bodies from the campus site.

Increasingly, material bodies are deemed to be stumbling blocks in terms of the temporal and spatial dimensions of university campuses. Without them, the pedagogical process becomes faster, potentially cheaper, and more accessible. Furthermore, keeping bodies away from each other has the added benefit of militating against charges of abusive pedagogy as overt sexual misconduct. In pedagogical terms, the 'virtual' space created by technology is also a virtuous space (Angel, 1995), devoid of bodies that could distract the mind.

We want, in this paper, to explore more closely some issues raised for postgraduate teachers by the shift to 'open' pedagogical events. How might this shift be experienced? What might be the effects of the blurring of the interface of corporeality and technology at work in the teleconference, the vis-a-vis seminar, the e-mail network, the on-line delivery? If the teacher's material body is no longer the 'sight/site of authoritative display' (Angel, 1994, p 63), what are the dangers and opportunities inherent in becoming a teaching tech(no)body?

Teachers as bodies of knowledge

Ulmer (1989, p 4) offers a starting point for examining such a question in arguing that "to inquire into the future of academic discourse in the age of a new technology we must include the possibility of a change not only in technology, but also in the ideology of the subject and the forms of institutional practice". With the advent

of new communication technologies into the university we need to rethink the subjectivities of teacher and student, and also the pedagogical relationships possible between them. Landow (1992) has likewise discussed the subjectivities of teacher and student, referring to the "virtual presence of teachers" (Landow, 1992, p 125) in technologically mediated interactions.

One effect of this 'virtual' engagement may well be the shock of recognition that, as postgraduate teachers, we have broken with a tradition in which "some body...teaches some body" (Ungar, 1986). Deutscher (1994, pp 36-37) speaks of traditional (embodied) pedagogy in these terms:

Pedagogy is the site of the densest cluster of intersubjective corporations. The teacher appropriates the body of the student in the occupation of the position of the subject supposed to know...and the student appropriates the body of the teacher in taking up an invested position in relation to the discipline - incorporating the teacher's...internalisation of certain conventions of method, content, style and technique...all of which [constitutes] the animation of the text by the teacher's body.

For the teacher who has invested much in this mentoring tradition, there may be a sense of the loss of intensity in pedagogical encounters because of a loss of bodily engagement. Powerful university teachers are likely to be well-rehearsed in terms of the bodily performance necessary to "occupy[ing] the symbolic position of subject supposed to know" (Deutscher, 1994). That is, they can enact the pleasure and seductiveness of knowing in their posture, stance, utterance, gaze, gesture as well as the written and spoken texts they generate as 'subject content' (McWilliam, 1995). Furthermore, when engaging with the bodies of learners, they can sometimes experience what Deutscher (1994, p 36) calls "the elating sensation of a physical carnation of one's body as teacher... the overt pleasure produced by the possibility of one's own performance as empowered subject of knowledge, the seductive effect of instantaneity between teaching and learning body". They may also have confronted, from time to time, the limits of the corporeal body as well as their own 'bodies' of disciplinary knowledge. Barthes (1978, p. 45) writes of this recognition of bodily limits as a crucial one for academics:

I can do everything with my language but not with my body. What I hide by my language, my body utters. I can deliberately mould my message, not my voice. By my voice, whatever it says, that other will recognise that 'something is wrong with me'... My body is a stubborn child, my language is a very civilised adult.

Nevertheless, the "animation of the teacher's body" through pedagogical events can endow it with special abilities. This animation, in turn, animates both the body of the student and the text. Deutscher (1994, p 36) is almost stating the obvious in her observation that:

Even where the teacher's role is understood on the most rigid model of purity of transmission, the pedagogical relationship between student, teacher and text is very different to the relationship between teacher and text—the teacher adds something, animating the text. To be taught the Ethics or the Critique of Pure Reason by an inspired teacher is not the same thing as to go to the library and labour one's way through Kant and Spinoza....

For the highly successful mass lecturer or thesis supervisor, the fact that she/he is no longer standing and delivering to students who are literally there out front may be experienced as disembodiment, as the loss of the means by which she/he intro(se)duces students into a discipline. She/he may experience as threatened or real the loss of the pleasure of pedagogical work in terms of its mutually erotic (as distinct from an overtly sexual), performances. If 'techno-paranoia' is part of the cultural baggage which is being brought to the new pedagogical demands of open learning, this does not augur well for pleasurable new pedagogical experiences on the part of the teacher. When teleconferencing students complain, as they do when telephone lines are unclear, that the teacher is 'breaking up' or 'fading', the teacher who never 'cracks up' in terms of a lecturing or tutoring performance,

may experience a profound sense of loss of control over the work in which she/he was once so practised.

Much work needs to be done to explore the lived experience of the changing pedagogical work of teachers, and the extent to which this matters to all the participants in the pedagogical event. If, as Bill Green argues (1993), postmodernity demands the *transmutation* of pedagogy in a new era of 'disorganised schooling', the conventional pedagogical practices in the university lecture hall, seminar room and supervisor's private office are quite rightly under attack. If the postgraduate area continues to grow exponentially and if, pedagogically speaking, the *postmodern lecture* is an oxymoron, what new forms should be advocated?

Teachers as tech(no)bodies?

As postgraduate mentors, many academics have experienced the act of teaching as "not only very personal, [but] also very physical" (Ungar, 1986, p 82). We now confront the challenge of understanding what is happening to our teaching bodies in the face of the disembodied campus. There is as little to be gained from demonising technology in this process as there is from glorifying it. Fortunately, recent feminist work done to theorise the human/technology interface has provided tools for analysis which does not proceed from either of these assumptions.

Zoë Sofia (1993), for example, examines technology as ambivalent, rather than neutral. She explains:

[O]ur pleasurable and seemingly life-enhancing technologies can also have nasty histories and devastating side effects; the 'greater good' of the life force may be served by criticism that bears this in mind, even as it is open to the possibilities for enjoyment technologies afford (Sofia, 1993, p 4).

Sofia (1995) goes on to show how women in particular can act potently with regard to technology. Her work is useful for teachers in that she explains how the specificities of various kinds of technologies engage with questions of context, erotic meanings and organ symbolism, with human-technology-world relations and their limit cases. Her work allows feminists to "de-homogenise" overgeneralised notions of technology with possibilities for enabling practice through engaging creatively with current technological configurations. Sofia gives us a basis on which to rethink pedagogy/technology and the way the two interact.

In her recent article "Of Spanners and Cyborgs: De-homogenising feminist thinking on technology" (1995), Sofia defines technologies as "social processes of making and doing" in which power may be expressed through its potential to harness materials, exercise skill and force, and alter patterns of perception and social organisation" (Sofia, 1995, p 147). She extends this definition, drawing on Heidegger (1962), to show that no tool is inseparable from the context in which it is used, but that the tool can be biased towards men's use, ie, a spanner is designed for upper body strength. She shows that it is not sufficient for women to have access only to the spanner, but also to have access to the toolbox (ensembles of equipment) and the workshop (domains of equipmentality). This point has implications for both teachers and students unfamiliar with the new communication technologies available in tertiary education, in that any pedagogy designed for its use has to account for training, familiarisation, use, and responsiveness. Through these processes the bodies higher education is attempting to erase/excise from its lecture rooms can be recreated or, indeed, 'adapted' for different pedagogical events.

The anatomical body remains the means by which we experience the world, but the way we currently deal with it is to relegate it to the margins of our activities, ie, we place it at the end of a number of communication technologies where we expect it to teach and learn in the same way as if it were still in the lecture room. But our teaching 'bodies' and learning 'bodies' are capable of transmutation as the distinctions between the corporeal body of student and teacher and the technology itself become blurred. Effectively, in this increasing technologising of pedagogy in tertiary education, we may become *cyborgs*, ie, creatures with no bodies or all bodies. A cyborg, a human-

technology fusion, is a fantastic body that is not collapsible onto anatomy, gender or sexuality but is a body that is all and everything. The cyborg possesses, in the words of Sofia, (1995, p 153) "a polymorphously perverse fantasy body that can possess combinations of organs not found in nature".

Sofia's (1995) discussion of the cyborg is particularly useful to educationists. By milking the 'cyborg' as a metaphor for what teachers and learners can become at the nature/technology interface, we can open new possibilities for pedagogy and its critique in tertiary education. This is particularly so in relation to the use of communication technology in open and distant learning, two modes currently being promoted in universities as a panacea for overcrowded lecture theatres, insufficient places for tertiary students, and 'advantages' of new ways of teaching to ameliorate the above problems. Just as the 'Terminator' of the science fiction film can peel back the skin to reveal the technological prosthesis beneath it, so postgraduate learning and teaching bodies may be re-made, with all the danger and opportunity that this transmutation implies.

Because the cyborg is a limit case of the "leaky boundaries" of the anatomical body, it offers ways of giving new meanings to the application and use of technologies in education. For example, if the cyborg is an anatomical body talking to other anatomical bodies through as simple a technology as the telephone, then the 'faults' of the technology become located on the anatomical body. But apart from the 'faults', this putting of 'oneself', ie, of putting the anatomical body into the machine, represents the powerful possibilities of inhabiting and using technologies of our own devising for our own purposes and pleasures. Sofia offers some examples of how this might be done; one example of particular usefulness at present is the virus which can invade undetected, proliferate, and take over—a very transgressive, pleasurably perverse example of women using technologies within technologies. This can be achieved because of the coexistence of the biological body and technology, a transmutation which is not liable to binary formulations. Writing on the internet can achieve the same possibilities because there is no body to the internet address; the body *is* the internet address, a body which is totally de-anthropomorphised to an address. The 'self' becomes machine and interacts with machines.

Conclusion

Issues of scholarly identity and the teaching and learning self clearly press forward when discussing the cyborg and education. What is a lecturer and what is a student in this interchange? Who is the teacher and who the student? Where do our boundaries lie? What difference does this make to knowledge production?

It is the problematic idea that, in the pedagogical event, the teacher or her cyborg 'delivers the goods' to the students that remains the 'modernist' Achilles heel of tertiary course design. The fact that so many lecterns (like so many alternative learning 'packages') are *fixed*, bolted to their foundations, on guard against challenges to their authority, says a great deal about the grounding of tertiary pedagogy in modernist assumptions about the conflation of knowledge with information, and this, in turn, with data. Lyotard argued over a decade ago that the age of the professor 'standing and delivering' had come to an end, because:

> [A] professor is no more competent than memory bank networks in transmitting established knowledge, no more competent than interdisciplinary teams in imagining new moves or new games (Lyotard, 1979, p. 53).

It is not a matter of the teacher no longer "professing desire" to teach (Ungar, 1986), but of understanding the potentialities and pitfalls of the radical shake-up of postgraduate pedagogy including the use of new communication technology. We need to explore how 'lived bodies' are situated productively within and through technological systems, and the capacity of academic teaching bodies to be more malleable and permeable (as well as pleasured) at the human/technology interface.

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