

## Terra (In)cognita: Mapping Academic Writing

The essay is not merely the articulation of a thought, but of a thought as a point of departure for a committed existence.

— Vilém Flusser, 'Essays' (2002: 194)

### *Hic sunt dracones (Here be dragons)*

Students and teachers alike bemoan the sorry state of academic writing, as both readers and writers. Nonetheless, they are loath to venture beyond what they take to be the well-known territory of the academic — read: expository — essay for fear of erring, or unsettling their readers. Here I aim to map the academic essay as it is practised for the most part . . . but also as it *might be* practised. That is to say, the essay is not as monolithic a form as it has often been taken to be, but it also offers a greater range of possibilities than have commonly been taken up.

Broadly speaking, there are two main spatial models of the essay, namely, the essay as round trip and as one-way journey: the point-first (PF) and the point-last (PL) essay respectively.

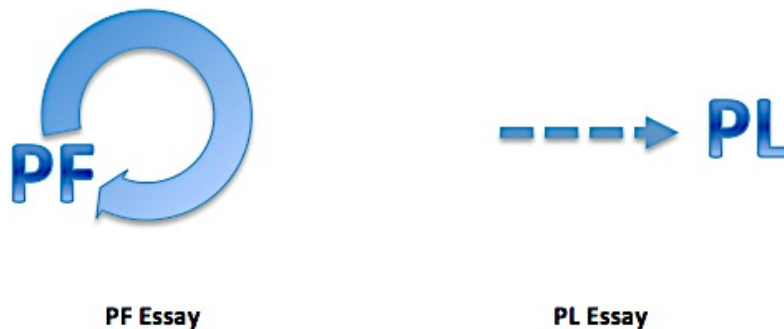


Fig. 1. The PF and PL essay.

The first model is the more common in — and seemingly native to — the academy, in that it is an *epistemic* (knowledge-displaying) and thus *expository* writing technology. [1] But it is less open, as it stakes its claim at the outset and then sets out to prove it. The second is less common — but truer to the origin of the essay, in that it is a *heuristic* (knowledge-discovering) and thus *exploratory* writing technology. It is more open, as it arrives at its claim as an end-point — although its openness is often only provisional, or pretended even, because it arrives at a claim nonetheless. These different aims also imply different rhetorical and stylistic objectives: the PF essay aims to express a single voice and to achieve transparency, namely, plain speaking and plainness; the PL essay, in contrast, is able to express multiple voices (or a multiple voice) and to achieve a certain idiosyncrasy, that is to say, complexity and a stylistic ‘complex’. (Table 1 outlines the binary that will

guide my exploration of the essay.)

Table 1.  
Characteristics of the PF and PL Essay

<i>type</i>	<b>point-first (PF) essay</b>	<b>point-last (PL) essay</b>
<i>image</i>	round-trip	one-way
<i>end</i>	returns to its starting point	arrives at an end-point
<i>function</i>	epistemic	heuristic
<i>mode of writing</i>	expository, epideictic	performative, personal
<i>logic</i>	tautological	dialogical
<i>mood</i>	indicative, thus factual	subjunctive, thus fictive
<i>mode of address</i>	informative	interactive

In short, some essays (PF essays) allow writers to show what they know, to negotiate known territory (*terra cognita*); others (PL essays) enable writers — and readers — to find out what they think, to navigate unknown territory (*terra incognita*), where lie dragons . . . or riches.



Fig. 2. Abraham Ortelius, 'Islandia' (1590).

Most of the time, academics read and write with the PF model more or less explicitly in mind, and they teach it too (if they talk about writing at all), though without thinking about the epistemological and institutional baggage the model brings with it. We might want to *map* the academic essay, first, because such a ‘narrative cartography’ can give us a vantage-point on academic writing (Ryan 2003), so we can get ‘outside’ it better to describe it and so as not to get lost in language, in the ‘literariness’ (literarity), ‘writtenness’ (textuality) and ‘writerliness’ (authorial voice) of the essay as text. Second, we might map it because these models of the essay can tell us a lot about the nature and place of writing in the ‘academosphere’ — and to some extent determine what can be said there. Writing in the academy, whether point-first *or* point-last, is almost always about making a point, or case (thesis); that is to say, its rhetoric is forensic (L. ‘of the law courts’) in Aristotle’s sense (Russell 2002: 51-63). [2] And it serves the drive to examine — because these models in their ‘pointedness’ make for easier reading and grading; and it preserves academic authority, whether that of the institution or of the élites within it — because these models normally remain unspoken and unexamined (Hoskin 1982; 1993). However, if academic writing is ‘pointed’ by nature, the PL essay does open up different, that is, more indirect and idiosyncratic ways of getting to our point. In short, then, to map the essay can give us a sense of the essay as *shaped* inwardly and outwardly, as an aesthetic whole (a structure) and an institutional medium (a construction).

***Terra cognita: the made-to-measure model or template essay (the PF essay)***

By framing in this violent way, . . . one evades perhaps a certain complication.

— Jacques Derrida, ‘The Purveyor of Truth’ (1988: 181) [3]

To turn first to the PF essay: the standard formula is ‘tell me what you’re going to tell me, tell it, then tell me what you told me’ (Hahn 2003: 141). From this instruction follows what is in the United States called the ‘thesis-support form’ (Heilker 1996: 4) or, even more prescriptively, the ‘five-paragraph theme’ (Schaffner 2003). This standard form has become so internalized for academic writers as to become, as David Chapman puts it, ‘the ‘default-drive’ for expository writing’ — the form of ‘conformity’, Procrustean in its execution (Chapman 1991: 73). [4]





Fig. 3. ‘Theseus Fighting Prokrustes’ (c. 440-30 BCE) (Nguyen 2011).

It helps to know something of its history. To begin with, the essay was heuristic and philosophical, or literary; only later was it epistemic and pedagogical, or academic. [5] Interestingly, the etymology of the word ‘essay’ bears both senses — but in reverse order. Its use to mean ‘a composition of moderate length on any particular subject’ is first attested in the 1590s in the *Essays* of Francis Bacon (1597). He took the term from Michel de Montaigne, whose *Essais* (1958) were first published in 1580. The Old French *essai* means ‘trial, attempt, essay’ — whence its philosophical or literary sense. [6] *Essai* comes from *assai* — our ‘assay’ — which derives from the Latin *exagium*, ‘weighing’, the nominal form of *exigere*, ‘to weigh, prove, measure, examine’ — whence its pedagogical or academic sense (*OED Online*). The PL essay, then, predated the PF essay.

Generically speaking, the academic essay grew out of the expository prose of scientific scholarly research, in particular, the peer-reviewed journal article, which began, with *The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society* under its first editor Henry Oldenburg (1665-77), as a medium for the communication of scientific knowledge. That medium was institutionalized with the emergence of the research university after the example of Wilhelm von Humboldt’s University of Berlin (founded 1810), with its ‘ethos of [scientific] objectivity’. [7] Nonetheless, the essay as we know it mixes the ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’: hence, for example, the paradoxes of academic authority as singular (located in individual scholars) and citational (distributed through a scholarly community), and

scientific research as public and private good (common or individual intellectual property). [8] The forensic rhetoric of the essay, whereby the author makes a case supported by evidence, be it experimental, statistical or textual, exemplifies this uneasy mix. Related pedagogical writing technologies like the student essay — not to mention reports, proposals, dissertations, theses and exam essays — came later. [9]

The academic essay was and is, essentially, a scientific (or pseudo-scientific, in the case of the humanities) report on research, describing the aims, objectives, outcomes — and outputs, or findings — of our research. It is thus writing after-the-fact or in hindsight. Reports usually follow what Susan MacDonald (1994; 2002) calls the ‘AIMRaD’ formula: *Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results and Discussion*, summarizing the findings of research and answering the *why, how, what* and *so what* questions. Why use such a formula? Because it speeds up reading and literature review, as the reader can easily select what is relevant to their purpose. It presents information logically, chronologically in fact — though this neat order rarely corresponds to the process of scientific discovery — and it eliminates unnecessary detail. Most importantly, it focuses on the findings (outputs) of the research, its point.

In practice, this formula generates a template known popularly as the ‘five-paragraph theme’, variously described as a double funnel — or rocket, keyhole or burger, even — which announces its point, or thesis, about the topic at the outset and supports it with a series of sub-points (usually three), each addressing an aspect of or offering a justification for the main point:



Fig. 4. The PF essay template.

A similar introduction-body-conclusion — or, to put it more simply, beginning-middle-end — form marks each body paragraph. According to Jane Schaffer's (1995) paragraph model, each body paragraph should ideally comprise eight sentences in two 'chunks' (b-d and e-f below), following a 1:2 ratio of data (evidence) to analysis (explanation):

- a. a topic sentence;
- b. a concrete detail 1,
- c. commentary 1a,
- d. commentary 1b;
- e. a concrete detail 2,
- f. commentary 2a,
- g. commentary 2b; and

h. a concluding sentence.

This introduction-body-conclusion form, in which the point is given in the introduction and returned to in the conclusion, could be described as the academic writing ‘fractal’: the self-similar — scale-invariant, even — structure that underlies essays, articles or chapters, paragraphs, even sentences in the akademosphere, such that academic writing is fern-like in its symmetry. [10]

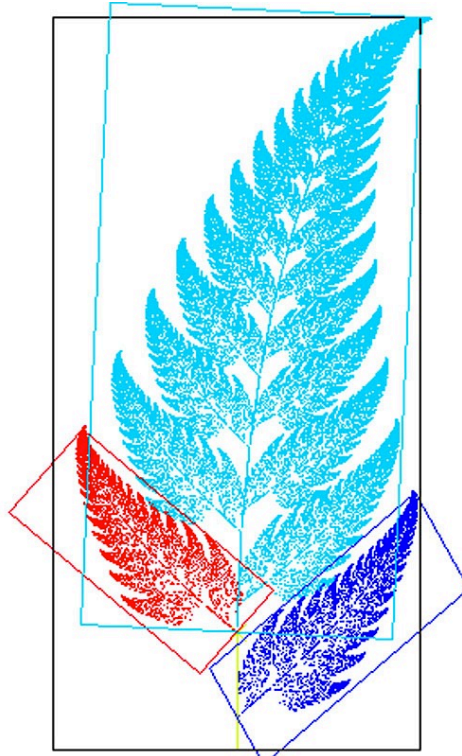


Fig. 5. Fractal fern (de Campos 2011).

Or, perhaps, less poetically, it's like a Sierpinski sieve through which content is filtered.

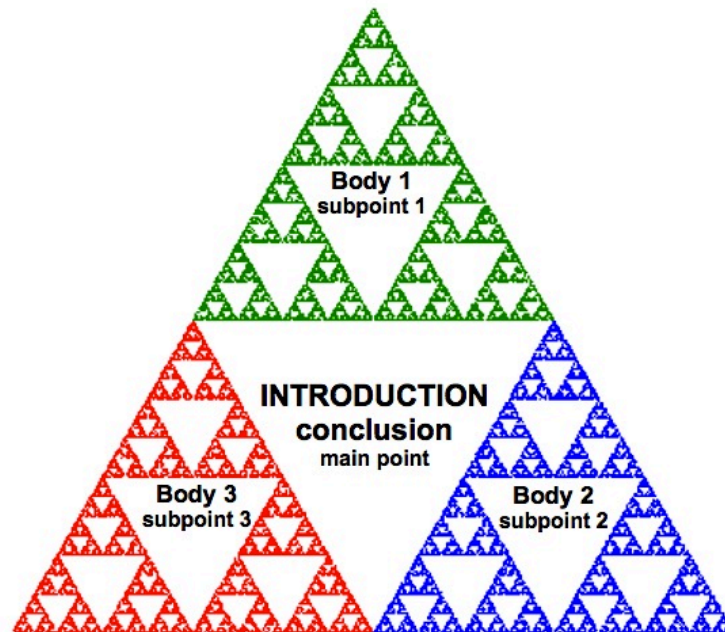


Fig. 6. Sierpinski sieve (adapted from ‘Sierpinski Triangle’ 2011).

At their best, essays that fit this template feel like a round trip; they feel as if they are going somewhere — and we read them in that expectation (see figure 7: ‘The PF essay in process’). They work like a film that begins with a flashback, or a police procedural, in which the outcome (be it a denouement or a murder) is known at the outset, and which, as it were, works their way back around to their starting point in order to explain it. When this departure-and-return model of the essay works, it does feel ‘organic’ (Zeiger 1990).



### PF Essay in Process

Fig. 7. The PF essay in process.

At bottom, though, the PF model is a useful template for *efficient* academic writing because it is up-front with its point — which is, after all, what most academics read for. Stylistically, it aims for transparency, in other words, plain speaking and plainness: it can thus be said to be indicative in ‘mood’: to express a fact, or a given point, and thereby to



inform or instruct its readers. Rhetorically speaking, as an epistemic (knowledge-displaying) and thus expository writing technology, it allows writers to show what they know — and to emphasize their voice (or point) at the expense of others' (or their 'counter-points'). In addition to its virtues as a medium for the communication of knowledge, albeit of a monological kind, it offers an easily teachable and gradable (examinable) model, and a common lexicon for teachers and students to talk about the essay. As Paul Lynch puts it, somewhat tongue-in-cheekily, 'Teachers teach it for three reasons. First, it is easy to remember. Second, it's easy to perform. Third, it's easy to grade' (2011: 288).

### ***Mundus vetus (the Old World)***

There are those who argue that such formulas aren't such a bad thing, and that the bias against them is snobbery on the part of the humanities against scientific prose. [11] But although the PF template is efficient, it is not necessarily the most *effective*. Leaving aside the epistemological problem of assuming that form (an essay) is simply a container for content (an argument), there is a 'cartographical' problem with PF essays. [12] Though they can achieve a sense of 'organic' wholeness, most often their arguments seem tautological: we don't get a sense of having travelled far between the thesis-statement in the introduction and its return in the conclusion. [13] And we know where they are going because their path is singular and returns to its starting point, and because there are a limited range of moves possible in the body of the essay (away and back, basically, say, to address counter-arguments). For these reasons, they can easily become boring and predictable — formulaic, Procrustean even — for students and teachers, and disabling for students, if, for example, they feel that their point must always be supported by exactly three subpoints (Heilker 1996: 2-9). The PF template is most problematic if it becomes *the* template, if we assume that there is only one way to write in the academy, whatever the content and methodology.

Why the academic essay might have become formulaic has to do with the econometric design-drive of today's academosphere, which projects aims, objectives and measurable outcomes in the service of outputs — or rather, an efficient relationship between inputs and outputs. This leads to what I call teleological (from the Greek *telos*, 'end, aim'), or 'end-stopped' (Sturm and Turner 2011), teaching and learning (also known as 'goal-oriented' — GO — education [Popham and Baker 1970]). In other words, in the academosphere everything must be seen as if in hindsight; it is a future anterior world, a closed loop that achieves a predetermined outcome — not unlike the *ouroburos*, the serpent that eats its own tail (see figure 8). [14]



Fig. 8. *Ouroboros* from the *Chrysopoeia* of Cleopatra (c. 100 CE). [15]

This explains the obsession of the academy today with econometric measures that close the loop of teaching and learning, like constructive alignment and summative assessment, measures that allow for total quality management (TQM) of the academy according to corporate best practice (with teaching and learning as professional development and research as product development). [16] And as the diagram of the ‘PF essay in hindsight’ in figure 9 suggests, the PF essay similarly always works from a predetermined outcome (‘o’) — its point, or thesis — backwards. [17]



**PF Essay in Hindsight**

Fig. 9. The PF essay in hindsight.

It serves — in fact, it is informed by — the econometric design-drive of the

academosphere: it can readily be templated, taught, read and graded (examined) due to its tautological nature. As a result, it is less open than it might be. Nonetheless, to use it well (professionally and productively) demonstrates the author's membership of the academy . . . for better or for worse; this is its epideictic function of 'not arou[sing] controversy . . . , but simply of promoting values that are shared in the community' (from *epideiknunai* 'to display, show off') (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969: 52). [18]

***Terra incognita: the bespoke model or true essay (the PL essay)***

The turns and re-turn of [one's] wanderings, the turns and ruses of [one's] mind, are mirrored in the turns (*tropoi*, rhetoric and rhetorical figures) of the [essay] itself.

— Pietro Pucci, *Odysseus Polytropos* (1987: 16) [19]

To turn, instead, to the PL essay: whereas the epistemic (knowledge-displaying) and expository writing technology of the PF model is more common in and seemingly native to the academy, the *heuristic* (knowledge-discovering) and *exploratory* PL model is less common there but truer to the longer history of the essay that goes back to Montaigne's *Essais* from the Renaissance. It is common in the literary essay, namely, the familiar essay, the personal essay, creative non-fiction and so on, but much less common in the academy — though, as Helen Sword (2009) has argued, many academics would like it to be, as readers *and* writers. To read off from our binary schema (table 1): whereas the PF essay stakes its claim at the outset and then sets out to prove it, the PL essay seems more open, as it arrives at its claim as an end-point. And whereas the former allows writers to show what they know — by speaking in their own voice and plainly, the latter can enable them to find out what they think — by adopting more than one voice and cultivating a certain idiosyncrasy, that is to say, complexity and a stylistic complex. For this reason, it has been called the 'genuine' — I'd call it the *true* — essay (Kazin 1961: viii). [20] It is a *bespoke* (custom-made) model of the academic essay. [21]

The PL essay is no mere container for content: it can perform, that is, embody its point or points; the content of the essay can be allowed to shape its form. As Vilém Flusser puts it in his essay 'Essays', this means that the choice of PF or PL essay (he calls them the 'treatise' and the 'essay' respectively)

is not a decision with regard to form only. It also has to do with content. There does not exist one idea that can be articulated in two ways. Two different sentences are two different thoughts. (2002: 192)

And, by implication, two different arguments are two different essays (as two different essayists are presumably two — or more — different arguments). It is thus subjunctive in 'mood', in that it can express possibilities, even counterfactual or fictive ones, whether by

traversing a range of points (by trying multiple paths) or by working toward a point (coming at it by multiple paths). [22] Figure 10 represents these two options — in hindsight, hence the ‘winning’ path is solid and the others, dashed.

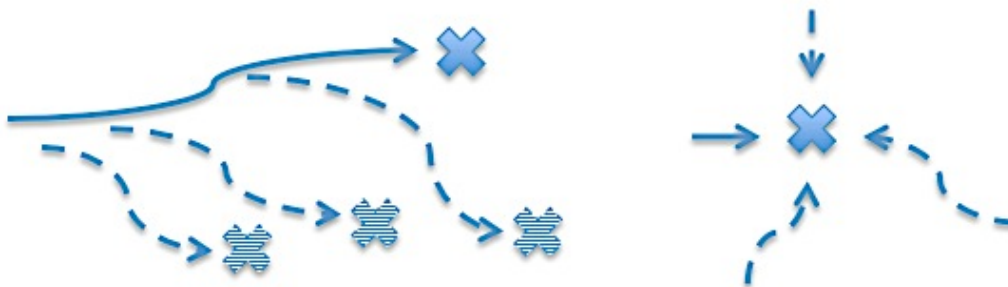


Fig. 10. The PL essay in hindsight.

So, unlike the PF essay, which is monological and instructs or informs its reader, aiming to communicate knowledge to them, the PL essay is dialogical and interacts with its reader, requiring them to co-construct knowledge — through the medium of form. [23] It follows that the PL essay often takes the form of a narrative of enlightenment, of coming-to-know one’s topic or oneself: the reader learns as the author does (or rather, as they seem to). As Paul Heilker puts it in *The Essay: Theory and Pedagogy for an Active Form* (1996), something of a vade mecum for the PL essay, ‘In the art of the essay, we write in a perpetual movement toward knowledge and wisdom; in reading essays, we witness writers perpetually moving toward wisdom and understanding’ (183). I would add: ‘. . . and, as readers, we perpetually move toward knowledge and understanding’.

To co-construct knowledge through form thus requires that PL essays can take many forms. Generally speaking, whereas the PF essay is largely static, or rather, offers only a singular trajectory, the PL essay is characterised by what Heilker (1996) calls ‘kineticism’ and a multiple trajectory (167-184). [24] He argues that the essay is not a form, or that its form ‘not the form of a thing, but rather the form of an activity or action’ (169), that the essay is really *essaying*. Or, to put it otherwise, that what defines it is its quest for the *right* form, for a form that will activate the content. As a starting-point, then, to venture beyond the well-known territory of the PF essay, it may be enough simply to say that the form *need not* be seen as closed off, as formulaic and end-stopped.

In this spirit, Heilker offers metaphors for essaying as mobile from a range of essayists; among others, it is

- a. flying (György Lukács [1974: 13]),
- b. slithering (G.K. Chesterton [1931: 1]),
- c. journeying (Virginia Woolf [1948: 97]),

- d. walking (William Gass [1985: 29]),
- e. wandering (Clifford Geertz [1983: 6]), and
- f. getting lost (Robert Musil [1953: 301]).

Several are explicitly geometric; it is

- a. zigzag (Scott Sanders [1988: 661]),
- b. circling (Gass [1985: 25]),
- c. constellating (Theodor Adorno [1984: 161]), and so on.

My favourite is Coleridge's from the *Biographia Literaria* of the essay as pleasurable peristaltic:

The reader should be carried forward, not merely, or chiefly, by the mechanical impulse of curiosity, or by a restless desire to arrive at the final solution; but by the pleasurable activity of mind, excited by the attractions of the journey itself. Like the motion of a serpent, which the Egyptians made the emblem of intellectual power; or like the path of sound through the air; at every step he pauses, and half recedes, and, from the retrogressive movement, collects the force which again carries him onward. (1985: 14) [25]

All these metaphors capture the sense that the PL essay is mobile, and that its trajectory is multiple — polytropic — and doesn't, or need not, return to its starting point (the popular and my metaphors for the PF essay, by contrast, are static and singular). They suggest that there are a greater range of moves possible in its unfolding as it proceeds to what seems an unknown outcome (x) (see figure 11: 'The PL essay in hindsight and in process') — although its openness often only seems provisional because it most often arrives at a claim nonetheless.



Fig. 11. The PL essay in process.

The logic of the PL essay is thus neither deductive nor inductive (Adorno 1984: 158). Rather, it is not unlike that of Socratic dialectic, a dialogue that is driven by Socrates' ironic questioning (*eironeia*, Gk, 'pretended ignorance') to arrive via refutation (*elenchus*, Gk) at a final Truth, an endpoint (Vlastos 1983). Derrida's essays are similar, often ending, despite what Barbara Johnson has described as their appearance of simply '[f]ading in and out', with a 'figural' or symbolic *clou* (Fr., 'nail') that sums up the essay (Derrida 2004:



xvii). [26] A genuinely provisional performance — one that might well be perceived as ‘point-less’ in the academy — would quest without resolution, more akin to the essays of Montaigne that draw on common-placing [27] or to a Situationist *dérive* (Fr., ‘drift’). [28]

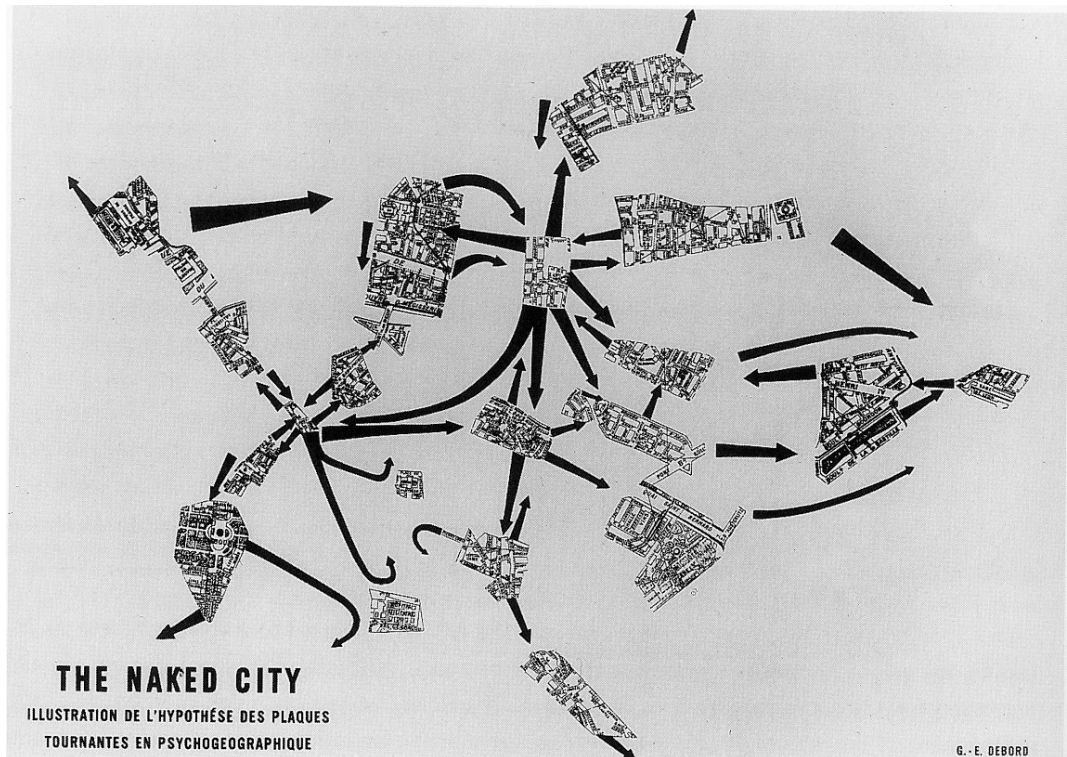


Fig. 12. Guy Debord (with Asger Jorn), *The Naked City: Illustration of the Hypothesis of Psychogeographical Turntables* (1957). [29]

The formal mobility of the genuine essay — its polytropism — thus reflects, or rather, embodies a certain critical mobility. As Heilker puts it, the true essay is ‘a form of transgressive symbolic action in which intellectual freedom is enacted as a movement across ideological boundaries and borders’ (1996: 181). This critical mobility is embodied in the various forms of critical-creative writing, like the performative essay, the creative non-fiction or fictocritical essay, the lyric essay and so on, that inhabit the margins of the academosphere. [30] These forms are not only vehicles for critique (critical in their *content*) but also implicit critiques of the essay as mere container for content (critical in their *form*). Because such essays resist the idea that writing in the academosphere must conform to a standard form or template (viz. the PF essay), they implicitly critique the econometric design-drive of the university that informs that template.

### ***Mundus novus (the New World)***

PL essays thus answer a different need than PF essays: accordingly, they open up the

academic essay — and thereby academic subjectivity — to new possibilities. Practically speaking, to mobilise the essay we might, in the first instance,

- a. look for moments of freedom in the writing process or its product, for example, the writerly moments that the introduction and conclusion offer us;
- b. begin with a provisional thesis (or a problem), rather than finished one (or a solution); or
- c. traverse a range of possible arguments or perspectives — or even methods, rather than settling on one from the outset; or
- d. conceive of or construct it *as a story*.

To conceive of the essay as a quest or narrative of enlightenment, as I have suggested we might, is to ‘storify’ it, but there are some straightforward storytelling moves with which we are familiar from the PF essay: for example,

- a. suspense (building up to the most important point);
- b. signposting and other metadiscourse (leading the reader);
- c. scene-setting (seeing introductions as setting up the argument);
- d. episodic structure (sectioning the essay); and
- e. following a main character (a thinker, idea, source, and so on) through a paragraph.

But to conceive of or construct the essay as a story also opens up the play of reader(s) and writer(s): it implies

- a. a *reader*, most importantly, but also
- b. a *writer* (and/or narrator), that is, a storyteller, and thus a certain subjectivity or subjectivities, academic and authorial, at work in the essay (a voice or voices, a body or bodies, a *person*); not to mention,
- c. the essay as *written*, both to lead a reader — by storytelling techniques, namely, authority, reality and narrative effects — and thereby to engage them — by eliciting certain responses like curiosity, a sense of suspense, confusion, transformation, and so on; and, thus,
- d. the essay as *read* because it requires engagement at the level of style, that is, interaction with the essay, and content, that is, interpretation of the essay.

Thus, as Roland Barthes has it, the genuine essay is not a ‘readerly’ form but a ‘writerly’ one, whose intention is ‘to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text’ (1974: 4).

However, there is more at stake here than some new moves or the play of reader(s) and

writer(s) in the essay. PL essays embody Montaigne's view of the essay as 'essaying the self' (Raine 2009), of the essay as essentially personal, idiosyncratic even (from Gk, *idios*, 'one's own' and *synkrasis* 'temperament, mixture'). Genuine essays balance fidelity to their subject matter and to their author's voice(s): in their treatment of a topic, they perform — or embody in their form — a certain subjectivity. This can be taken more or less straightforwardly.

Firstly, essays can be autobiographical, that is, fashioned after a self ('I am myself the matter of my book', writes Montaigne [1958: 2]), or autopoetic, that is, self-fashioning ('My style and my mind go roaming *together*', says he [761]). [31] Most creative non-fiction and lyric essays work this way, but the move goes back to Montaigne. As he confesses with his characteristic irony in 'Of the Affection of Fathers for their Children', he tends to the autobiographical: 'finding myself destitute and void of any other subject matter, I presented myself to myself for argument and subject' (1958: 278, translation amended). [32] (Not for nothing is his motto 'Que scay-je?' — what do *I* know? — inscribed over a pair of scales [393; see Hardison 1988: 620].)



Fig. 12. 'Que Scay-Je?' Detail of title-page of the Journal edition of Montaigne's *Essays* (1659) by N. de Larmessin (1659?).

Flusser and many moderns tend to the autopoetic. He describes essays as 'existential': if I choose the essay (rather than the treatise), 'the style . . . will begin to reflect, to articulate,

to formulate my project of body and soul', such that it constitutes, to cite the quote with which I began, 'a point of departure for a committed existence' (Flusser 2002: 194). The subjectivity implied by this form of 'essaying the self' might be described as lyrical (autobiographical, or fashioned after a self) or ethical (autopoetic, or self-fashioning).

Secondly, and less straightforwardly, essays can be autotelic (Eliot 1932: 19), or self-sufficient. [33] As such, they are the art form of what Alexander Nehamas has called the truly 'aestheticist' 'art of living', in which

the aim is to produce as many new and different types of works — as many different modes of life — as possible, since the proliferation of aesthetic difference and multiplicity, even though it is not in the service of morality, enriches and improves human life. (2000: 10)

That is to say, the essay enables the multiplication of perspectives — that is, works of art (essays) and thereby ways of living (selves) — as an end in itself. Performative and fictocritical essays work this way. The subjectivity implied by this form of essaying might be described as ironic (Kofman 1998). As such, it would permit a different reading of Flusser on the essay as 'a point of departure for a committed existence' (2002: 194): the essay would embody irony as a 'style of existence', as Claire Colebrook puts it, in which '[t]he subject 'is' nothing other than an ongoing process of creation' (2004: 52). To explore such an idea of academic writing could be to find ourselves in unknown territory (*terra incognita*), but its dragons might well guard great riches.

## **Notes**

1 For expository writing in the academy, see Arrington (1992)

2 For Aristotle on forensic rhetoric, the second of his three species of rhetoric (political/deliberative, forensic/legal, epideictic/ceremonial), see Garver (1994: 96-100), and Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, bk 1 chs 3, 10 and 15; bk 3, chs 12 and 17

3 See Derrida on Lacan's Procrustean reading of Poe's 'The Purloined Letter' (1988: 173-212), which just so happens to liken a pro forma murder investigation to a 'Procrustean bed' — see Lacan (1988: 191-205) and Poe (2004: 362-379)

4 For the academic essay as the 'default genre' in higher education, see Womack 1993: 42; see also Brannon et al. (2008) and Wesley (2000)

5 For the longer history of the essay, see Hardison (1988)

6 For the translation of Montaigne's title 'Essays' as 'Tests upon One's Self' or 'Self-Try-Outs', see Auerbach (1957: 256)

- 7 For the link between the academic essay and the growth of the research university, see Cline (2011)
- 8 For common or individual intellectual property, see Hyde (2010)
- 9 For a history of academic writing, see Russell (2002) and Peters (2009: 1-13, especially 6-9: 'Academic Writing and a Brief History of the Essay')
- 10 In a *self-similar* object, the whole has a similar shape as one or more of its parts; in a *scale-invariant* object, at any 'magnification', the whole has a similar shape as one or more of its parts
- 11 For an argument against 'formulaphobia' in learning and practising writing, that formulas 'have a democratizing potential, making the complex practices of the few available to the many', see Birkenstein and Graff (2008: 21); for the opposing view that formulas are detrimental, see Wiley (2000) on the Schaffer paragraph and Berggren (2008) on the thesis-support form
- 12 For the problem of form as container, see Derrida in Olson and Worsham (2003: 61-69); see also Cain (1992). Derrida argues that 'writing . . . is not simply 'writing down' something' (62), or 'composition' (65) — which implies that we can distinguish between content and form; instead, it is about 'positionality', that is to say, 'you have to invent each time new forms according to the situation' (*ibid.*)
- 13 For the metadiscursive technique common in academic writing by which the argument is announced at the outset (outlining) and foreshadowed throughout the text (signposting), see Dyer (2011)
- 14 For the future anterior (future perfect tense, the 'will have been'), see Derrida (1997: 5)
- 15 The legend reads *En to pan* in Greek: 'all is one'
- 16 For constructive alignment, see Biggs (2003); for summative assessment, see Rust (2002). For the deleterious effects of TQM's régime of 'Quality . . . as compliance with minimum standards' on 'quality . . . as . . . excellence in scholarly endeavour', see Anderson (2008: 256-257)
- 17 For backward chaining, and two other options — 'forward chaining' and 'total-task presentation' — see Pear (2001: 237-254)
- 18 For the academic essay as epideictic, see MacDonald 1994; for the academosphere as epideictic, see Carter (1992)
- 19 Polytropic (*polytropos*) is the word used in the Homeric Hymns to describe Hermes, patron of travellers and boundaries crossed — see Homer (2005: 38) — and by Homer to describe Odysseus, the traveller; according to Heubeck, West and Hainsworth (1990), it literally means 'turning many ways', thus 'of many devices, ingenious', or 'much wandering' (69)
- 20 In full, 'The genuine essayist . . . is the writer who thinks his way through the essay — and so comes out where perhaps he did not want to. . . . [H]e uses the essay as an open form — as a way of thinking things out for himself, as a way of discovering what he thinks' (Kazin 1961: vii). See also Eco 1989: 3-4
- 21 For bespoke curriculum and assessment, see Knights and Thurgar-Dawson (2006)
- 22 For the 'performative shape' of essays, see Derrida, quoted in Olson and Worsham (2003: 62)



23 For co-construction as ‘the joint creation of a form, interpretation, stance, action, activity, identity, institution, skill, ideology, emotion, or other culturally meaningful reality’, see Jacoby and Ochs (1995: 171). On writing as co-constructed, or rather, dialogic, see Bakhtin (1981: 273-275)

24 For the essay as a ‘plural and mobile text’, see also Bensmaïa (1987: 57)

25 On this *reculer pour mieux sauter* (Fr. ‘withdraw to better leap’) dynamic of imagination, see also Coleridge (1985: 124; vol 1, ch 7)

26 See Derrida (1997: lxxxv), where Spivak gives the example of the image of the heliotrope stone that rounds out ‘White Mythology’; see Derrida (1974: 74)

27 On commonplacing, see Darnton (2000a: 82-87), reprinted in Darnton (2000b: 149-174); on Montaigne and commonplacing, see O’Neill (2001: 62) and Engel (1995: 99-102)

28 On the *dérive*, see Debord (2003: 703-705); on the essay as defined by ‘drifting’, see Bensmaïa (1987: 47-51)

29 For a reprint of this map, see Sadler (1998: 60); the map was originally bound into Jorn (1958: 125-136)

30 On the performative essay, see Pelias (1999; 2005); for the creative non-fiction essay, see Miller and Paola (2004); for the fictocritical essay, see Brewster (1996: 29-32) and Muecke (2002: 125-131); for the lyric essay, see Marcus (2003) and D’Agata (2003)

31 For the contrast between the essay as informative (the ‘positivist’ essay that divorces form and content) and performative (the ‘critical’ essay that marries form and content), see Adorno (1984: 153, 166)

32 For the essay as self-fashioning, see also Montaigne (1958: 610)

33 On perspectivism, an idea often identified with Friedrich Nietzsche, see Strong (2000: 294-309).

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