

Randomness and Chance as Writing Methodology

Is There a Case for Dada in the Academic Essay?

Introduction

The inspiration to use randomness and chance in writing comes from a familiarity with the Dada art movement (circa 1915) and the techniques developed there; in particular the ethos expressed by Raoul Hausmann that 'DADA is what you can make out of yourself' (Hausmann cited in Herbst 2014). The purpose of the paper is to offer those undertaking academic writing alternative methods and practices that; foreground meaning making, that are the result of an art movement (not primarily concerned with academic writing), and that include direct physical manipulation of text such as that utilised in art practice. The advantage of these factors is the creation of a productive tension with academic requirements and writing methods that produce novel and interesting results. The paper aims to offer up a possible approach to writing focussing on Dada cut-ups, (the subject of the case study); a referent for an academically justifiable methodological approach and subsequently a jumping off point for further reading and development of randomness and chance in formal writing. The foregrounding of materiality that randomness and chance allow is key in both the Dada techniques discussed and their historic antecedents.

Writing that precedes the Dada use of chance and randomness includes Stéphane Mallarmé's, *One Toss of the Dice Never Will Abolish Chance* (1897), (available at UBWEB, 2020). The poem is an ambiguous telling of a shipwreck, it makes reference to chance in various ways most notably in the figure of the 'Master' who must decide whether to throw a pair of dice and is constructed with a reference to cryptic number patterns. Visually the work makes use of type and layout (including much blank space) it is the subject of Quentin Meillassoux's *The Number and The Siren* (2012) his interpretation is summarised by Adam Kotsko (in Gratton and Ennis, 2015) 'In Meillassoux's reading, Mallarme is reflecting on the task of the poet in the wake of the 'shipwreck' of traditional poetic form occasioned by the rise of free verse' (109-10). For Sedaghat Payam the use of experimental typography such as that utilised in Mallarmé's poem 'foregrounds materiality' avoiding the repression involved in evading the effect of typology, layout and the history of the making,

According to Johanna Drucker, Mallarme was the first poet to use experimental typography in his work *A Throw of the Dice* (1914). As she shows in her book *The Visible Word* (1994), many poets in the twentieth century have used experimental typography to highlight the materiality of their work and the material form, from which it is made. For these poets there has been a direct relation between transparency (of the language) and the immateriality (of the work of art)... (Sedaghat Payam, 2014:49)

Materiality relates to physical processes that actualise otherwise abstract mental activity, the foregrounding of such processes helps to bring writing into the territory of creative practice, it allows an opening for randomisation (in the cut up for example discussed later) to take place as the act of effecting a text physically becomes justified as a creative act.

Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* published in 1759 (see Sterne 2020) is also a precedent for the appropriation of texts, fragmentary style and purposeful disjointedness, that is a characteristic of Dada; what is of interest here is again the assertion of the materiality of the work '...what makes Tristram Shandy different is the insistence on, and readiness to make meaning

out of, the materiality of the book. Precisely because of this quality, because the meaning of Shandy is conspicuously a property not of the words alone but also of the book's design' (Yandell, 2012:122).

Perhaps most notably is the influence of Raymond Roussel who had direct impact on Dada in his experimental texts and the 'performances of Locus Solus in 1922' (see Piron, 2012:3) due to the initial enthusiasm of Marcel Duchamp (prominent member of Dada) who later cited him as an influence on his Large Glass (1915–1923). Jonathan P. Eburn in his chapter, Dada Futurism and Raymond Roussel in 1922 (in Rabaté, 2015) confirms 'Dadaist poets' as supporters of Roussel during the public backlash at a theatre performance of Locus Solus (134) further elaborating the appropriation of Roussel into the young avant-gardist's circles due to a shared attitude of dissent if only in relation to methods of writing, it's clear for example that public outrage which was part of dada was not intended by Roussel in his own work,

The 1922 performance of *Le Mystere de "Locus Solus"* disclosed his earlier works continuity with the formal and figural interests of both Futurism and Dada alike, though it did so belatedly, from the retrospective vantage point of 1922. In spite of his virtual ignorance of these movements, Roussel produced a contemporaneous body of work (135)

Referring to Roussel's *How I Wrote Certain of My Books* (1935) Wallace reflects on some of the methods used by the poet which broke with the rules of then conventional writing,

...many were inspired by puns and word games, distortions of language that prompted unexpected ideas. For instance, a phrase like "*Mais ce n'est pas pour ton fichu nez*" ("It's not for your damn nose") would mutate into the similar-sounding "*Mets son et bafone, don riche humé*" ("Ringing and mocking dish, giving rich fumes"). By following the sound of words, rather than their sense, Roussel could jump the tracks of his thought and explore new routes of inquiry. (Wallace, 2019)

The 'unexpected' aspect of the results and the sense of novelty generated, 'jump the tracks' is analogous with the methods discussed here furthermore it clearly involves the use of chance and randomness, consider Meyntjens on Roussel's methods, '...avant-garde texts that seek to break with established poetics. They do so by developing highly technical procedures (procédés) that prompt new forms of writing. Typically, the outcome of these procedures cannot be predicted beforehand' (Meyntjens, 2020:77) this thrust in avant-garde literary circles helps us understand how 'unpredictability' is liberating and potentially creative.

Futurism (founded 1909) and in particular the founder Filippo Tommaso Marinetti were also concerned with the constraint of traditional writing to fully communicate human experience, and experimented as a result with alternative methods influenced by oral performance (see Webster 1989 throughout) and noises, technological and those associated with war (see Daly, 2013) this developed into what Webster describes as 'almost "automatic" writing' (1989:76) called 'words in freedom' by Marinetti (see Marinetti in Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2002: 124;146;152). Materiality is again emphasised by this shift from writing rules to expression and creation,

'The rush of steam-emotion will burst the steampipe of the sentence, the valves of punctuation, and the regular clamp of the adjective. Fistfuls of basic words without any conventional order. The narrator's only preoccupation: to render all the vibrations of his "I."' (Marinetti in Rainey, Poggi and Wittman, 2002:145)

The sense of being obstructed or somehow blocked or restrained by established patterns is common to the antecedents of Dada in the use of alternative writing methods and Dada its self; despite

political and ideological differences between Futurism and Dada breaking the hegemony of those conventions was a shared concern,

Marinetti devalued the word as aesthetic object, as ineffable purity, and instead insisted that words be treated as material, as weapons in a propaganda war. For Marinetti, the world was not to end up in a book, but rather the book was to end up in the world. To that end, he created a visual style called words in-freedom. (Webster 1989:66)

Again we see the use of layout and graphic foregrounding of text and typeface to create a sense of urgent expression that 'bursts the pipe' of the conventional sentence; this metaphor of bursting the pipe is similar to Meyntjens, (2020:77) 'jump the tracks' in reference to Roussel's techniques these expressions draw attention to the implied predictability and possible predetermination of the traditional methods of writing, referring to Marinetti's efforts,

Instead, we find strings of nouns interrupted at intervals by onomatopoeia in different typefaces, by blank spaces, and by verbs in the infinitive, with letters of stressed syllables occasionally repeated. Under the heading "BILANCIO DELLE ANALOGIE," the reader will notice a string of adjectives enclosed in parentheses and set in yet another typeface (an italicized boldface).(Webster 1989:74)

In each of these instances chance and randomness are drawn on to aid the restrictions that otherwise govern traditional writing, they are used to inject some contingency into processes and to foreground process and materiality.

Applying Randomness/Encountering Chance

The importance of the distinction between chance and randomness is directly linked to different methodologies advocated for here so an understanding of this difference as its asserted here is important. Antony Eagle in *Chance versus Randomness* (2019) provides a detailed account of what he refers to as the 'commonplace theses' that being that 'Something is random if it happens by chance' outlining the limitations of this in reality according to various theories that attempt to account for the differences between chance and randomness as they pertain to probability, 'Randomness, as we ordinarily think of it, exists when some outcomes occur haphazardly, unpredictably, or by chance. These latter three notions are all distinct' (Eagle 2019).

Eagle's exploration is in depth, outlining various historic and contemporary disagreement around definitions too numerous to outline here and which are as yet unresolved; what is useful is the assertion that randomness and chance are 'distinct' but related, 'It is safest, therefore, to conclude that chance and randomness, while they overlap in many cases, are separate concepts.' (Eagle, 2019). Randomness here is understood as human intervention, as in human activity through 'randomization' such as the various techniques and historical precedents for this discussed by Deborah Bennett in *Randomness* (2009). This entails decision making and the implementation of techniques, for Bennett 'randomization' (12) 'sampling' and 'selection' (11-17; 131, 155-156, 167) are all discussed as conscious methods to handle data. Here the cut-up technique and its variations discussed later are considered to belong to this category, something people can do with data, in this case physically with texts.

Chance alternatively is seen here as a surprise occurrence, in this case one which is subsequently made use of. Referring to Louis Pasteur, Stevan Harnad in his paper, *Creativity: Method or Magic* (2006) discusses the use of chance in creativity, 'He (Pasteur) correctly recognized that the essential element is still chance – the unforeseen, the unexpected – but that this fortuitous factor is most

likely under prepared conditions' (Harnad, 2006:165 parenthesis mine). The Key terms here are 'unforeseen' and 'unexpected' which are analogous with Bennett's (2009) reference to Cicero that chance is 'uncertain' subsequently stating that '...chance could not mean uncaused, since everything is caused. Chance must instead mean hidden cause' (83) making chance unpredictable and surprising. The quality of chance as a surprise or as unforeseen is important alongside Harnad's prepared conditions 'One can interpret Pasteur's dictum as follows: There is a (perhaps very large) element of chance in creativity, but it is most likely to occur if the mind is somehow prepared for it.' (Harnad, 2006:164). This preparedness for Harnad includes a basic understanding of a given field, an open-mindedness and ability to enact recombination,

Creative outcomes tend to be novel recombinations of existing elements, which must hence all be made readily available in advance by preparation. The probability of generating and recognizing a new and valuable outcome depends on a sufficient command of what is already available. (171)

Here what to do with chance occurrences is discussed in relation to the ready-made essay what is 'already available' in this case is what can be made out of one's self (recall Hausmann); a state of preparedness on the part of the writer only entails what has already brought them to their course of study and what they can achieve through research during their project. A further distinction with Harnad can be made in terms of 'serendipity' for Harnad this is a specific theory outlined below,

Serendipity. The class of theories that might be called the "cerebral serendipity" school (to which Einstein and Poincare belonged) are mutation theories, emphasizing the crucial role of chance in creativity. Pasteur of course believed this too. The scenario is one of gathering together the elements and constraints out of which a creative solution is (hoped) to arise, and then consigning the rest to the (unconscious) "combinatory play" of chance, with intuition perhaps helping to suggest which combinations might be fruitful. (Harnad, 2006:174)

This notion of 'gathering together' is not irrelevant but is outside chance as understood here, that is as a surprising occurrence discussed here under the subheading, *Readymade Essay: speculating on serendipity*; there I argue for ways in which found occurrences such as juxtapositions of images and events entirely outside the 'gathering together' of the writer can inspire writing and suggest structure for writing. This entails an intrinsic thought process with an emphasis of creating connections and making meaning in contrast to the physical randomisation of the cut-up methods both of these approaches outlined here though could be thought of as methods of preparation in line with Harnad (2006) but preferably as attitudes of comporting one's self to the challenges of writing academically for those seeking alternative approaches.

Returning to Dada and to Hausmann 'DADA is what you can make out of yourself' (Hausmann cited in Herbst 2014) this declaration was in part a rejection of the indoctrination of tradition and skill which in the Dadaist view cowed the subject. This attitude came out of desperate disillusionment with early 20th century politics and the effects of World War One. The direct link to written works however comes from a particular emphasis on Tristan Tzara's cut-up technique as developed from *How To Make a Dadist Poem* (1920) by Tzara in the *Dada Manifesto*

Take a newspaper.

Take some scissors.

Choose from this paper an article the length you want to make your poem.

Cut out the article.

Next carefully cut out each of the words that make up this article and put them all in a bag.
Shake gently.
Next take out each cutting one after the other.
Copy conscientiously in the order in which they left the bag.
The poem will resemble you.
And there you are—an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though
unappreciated by the vulgar herd (see Lewis, 2007: 107).

While also acknowledging Tzara's scepticism with objective approaches to knowledge and truth, one which is shared by many creatives (and non-creatives) who have to adopt a formal academic tone when writing in higher education. This issue is given voice in popular culture in articles which explore and criticize the arbitrary rules and seemingly pedantic obsessions of academic disciplines such as those expressed by Derounian (2011) or Rothman (2014) in the *Guardian* and *New Yorker* respectively. These themes are explored in more depth by Devlin (2016) in relation to students and practice at University of the Arts London,

It may be that this gripe arises from how I perceive that gap between what the academic essay is and what it could be, and where I witness students' hard struggle to express themselves and fit into all the seemingly arbitrary rules. It may be a residue left by my not making more of my background in creative writing, or just a feeling that we need to venture into new territory (Devlin, 2016:38)

Devlin outlines many undergraduate frustrations, in particular the dismissal of the personal pronoun in pursuit of a pseudo-scientific idea of objectivity. For Tzara the objection to rules is put more militantly and his target is the lazy assumption that rationality and logic guarantee 'correctness' and are anything but our views in more formal clothing,

Some people think they can explain rationally, by thought, what they think. But that is extremely relative... There is no ultimate Truth. The dialectic is an amusing mechanism which guides us / in a banal kind of way / to the opinions we had in the first place. Does anyone think that, by a minute refinement of logic, he has demonstrated the truth and established the correctness of these opinions? Logic imprisoned by the senses is an organic disease (Tzara cited in Motherwell, 1951)

Empowering Through Embodied Approaches

Taking into account these criticisms the purpose of speculating about the use of randomness and chance in formal writing is with a view to empower the writer in different and perhaps more immediate ways than traditional scholarship offers.

Following Schön (1983) the goal would be to offer agency to the researcher and here we would extend this to the uninitiated, to the creative or layman for whom academic practice is either too intimidating or too remote from their creative work 'The researcher is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique but constructs a new theory of the unique case' (Schön 1983: 68).

A convincing case for the use of randomness and chance is made in Diaz (2011) and by combining and enhancing this with insights from Sharples (1999) we have a justification for the use of randomness and chance in even a piece of formal writing. For example where originality is required,

Situations where there is a need to develop innovation and find new solutions require different methods. (Diaz, 2011: 21)

Alternatively where it is important for students to write about their own creative practices; by extension, and we are on less sure ground, could the techniques developed by Tzara also offer ways to penetrate academic texts? to use the vocabulary and sentence construction therein to serve the researcher in ways which do not depend on only the use of quotations and paraphrasing only but blend, redact and force concepts and ideas together literally to create something which exists and demands explanation.

By emphasising an 'embodied perspective' Diaz brings knowledge creation into a physical realm where it can be touched and effected directly by the researcher (Diaz, 2011:22). Where ideas are subject to chance and randomness but also to editing and choice of emphasis; this is surely what is meant by the 'territory of human agency'. This approach combined with the Dada cut-ups positions the researcher as the linchpin who, rather than wading theoretically through ideas is able to crystallise ideas and physically manipulate them to invent incongruous and novel combinations.

The use of chance is, in my opinion, compatible with the currently held notion of design as goal-oriented behaviour, enacted with the intention to produce a given result. Throughout the activity of design, the designer posits an objective and procures and utilizes the means to achieve it (Diaz, 2011:22).

If writing has an objective and requires a means then Diaz's insight prompts the question, could writing more generally also benefit from the use of chance and randomness?

A writer need no longer be portrayed as a solitary thinker grappling with ideas, but as a member of a design team situated in a rich environment of colleagues, resources and design tools. Writing as design leads us towards new forms of authoring, such as multimedia design on computer, where text is woven into a rich interaction of form and function (Sharples, 1999:10)

Sharples appears to be stating a similar case for a design based, less constrained form of writing, he speculates about the application of this in a contemporary context; while later being clear that even planned writing 'also makes use of chance discovery' (1999:10). It is possible that the direction of an essay could be informed by chance, randomness and personal agency in such a way to guide the exploration of a topic or the criticism of an idea. Can there be a Dadaist methodology which validates such an approach in writing for undergraduates and scholars where there is a requirement to adopt less constrained approaches and act immediately making something out of ones-self without recourse to the expert or savant?

Engineering Meaning

Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf (2014) refers to Dada as 'paradoxical thinking' (:222) but one which also has the function of creating meaning; later discussing Brian O'Doherty's guest edited double-edition of Aspen (a magazine in a box) Cotter shows us how this works;-

The poem invites us to construct meaning across the gaps between the word phrases. This literary logic reoccurs elsewhere in the box, most radically in a recording of psychiatrist Charles R. Hulbeck, formerly Dadaist Richard Huelsenbeck, reading vowel poems and sound poems made up of fictitious words, as well as in a reading of Nova Express (1964) by William Burroughs, which was written using the cut-up method of enfolding snippets of different texts into the novel. (Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf, 2014: 224)

The filling in of gaps between incongruous combinations or the building of resonances between 'words and phrases' becomes the researchers original contribution; their production of 'the unique

case' (Schön 1983: 68). As Schön makes clear it's not a doing away with academic tools or style but 'dependency' that must be eschewed if interesting writing is to take place.

One way to eschew this dependency comes from tried and tested means, skill building and is the go-to method of all institutions with mixed results as it is also the means by which dependency is established. However the short circuit to profundity, insight or novelty which Dada represented could be placed among the tools available to scholars as well as creatives and one which they could legitimately apply as a methodological approach.

I would posit that a Dada methodology which draws on or adapts Tzara's original cut-up technique could be utilised in the creation of novelty or newness (Diaz, 2011; Sharples, 1999) and in the formation of meaning (Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf, 2014).

These qualities can be added to, overcoming stuck-ness and general idea development which other creative activities such as mind mapping, as popularised by Buzan (1974) approaches in a highly conscious way. Buzan's mind maps or synaptic diagrams as they are sometimes called do offer visual and somewhat embodied ways to develop ideas but being a conscious and thought through activity are also prone to contrivance. Recalling Tzara 'which guides us / in a banal kind of way / to the opinions we had in the first place' (cited in Motherwell, 1951).

The absolute necessity for improvisation required when confronted with truly random results, the need to 'construct meaning across the gaps' (Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf, 2014: 224) means that laboured contrivance the 'banal' trajectory that Tzara highlights is entirely avoided while mental activity is concentrated instead in creating effective links in a process that exists to frustrate rather than reinforce 'the opinions we had in the first place'.

Centrality of Agency

Rethinking here around academic writing is driven by the notion of agency and the lack of this is key as emphasized in Devlin (2016:38) in Diaz (2011:22) and in Cotter (in Schwab and Borgdorf, 2014:229,230,231;335). Cotter extends this notion through an investigation of creatives, among them Dada practices (Marcel Duchamp and Richard Huelsenbeck) to include the agency of the audience as well as the artist, advocating a greater engagement or less 'passive' (:224) interaction with works on the part of the viewer;

The Death of the Author's challenge to the exclusive agency of the artist in the production of art prompts a further analogy with Marcel Duchamp's precociously early proposition that the viewer completes the artwork, outlined in *The Creative Act* (1957), another of Aspen 5+6's essays. Duchamp outlines that while the artist struggles through 'a series of efforts, pains, satisfaction, refusals, decisions' to bring to light his or her artistic production, it is the viewer who can see the artistic product for what it is (Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf:229)

Following Duchamp's logic here a Dada methodology could offer an approach to reading (as 'viewer') as well as to writing (as artist). Julia Lockheart and John Wood through their work at WritingPAD draw attention to the acrimony which exists between traditionally academic systems, their advocates and creative studio practice 'Almost half a century ago colleges of art and design were obliged to include writing as part of the degree syllabus. Many remember the aftermath as a Cold War between academic research and studio practice' (Lockheart and Wood, 2019). Here again as with Devlin (2016) we have a less aggressive tone than Tzara's but one which still names 'bureaucracy' and acknowledges continued tensions,

In place of educational bureaucracy, we envision a more joined-up, student-centred, collaborative, ethical, and ecological approach to learning, making and doing. At the institutional and economic level this would entail a closer integration of research, practice, and teaching. In effect, this suggests a unified field that acknowledges writing as a catalyst to a variety of practices such as ideation, visualisation, thought, speech, action, drawing, making or research (Lockheart and Wood, 2019).

The idea of a 'unified field' may imply a lack of tension where all actors around institutional writing operate in unison; this is not the interpretation here where the term 'dialogic' also used by Lockheart is preferred. For the purpose of this study, continued tension is a sign of a healthy balance between the categories identified by Lockheart and Wood.

Melles and Lockheart (2012) refer to agency via Joans et al. (1999) and explain that academic literacies has helped to make power relations which were tacit, clear; interesting to note that this is problematizing for educational practitioners what was always a problem for students and the uninitiated,

What scholars and teachers working within this framework have been at pains to show is that an oppositional and dialogic approach to writing in higher education is possible which encourages writing practices which are oriented to making visible, challenging and even playing with official and unofficial discourse practices in the academy (Melles and Lockheart, 2012:350)

The notion of an 'oppositional and dialogic approach' is surely one that the Dada tradition can add to. The tools developed there, which act as hacks into text creation challenging the idea of mastery include techniques such as: cut-ups, sound poems and the use of mixed typography. Those concern words and language directly while others such as photomontage and assemblage may be useful if analogous lexical versions of these were created. Even the notion of the readymade could hypothetically be used to identify events or narratives otherwise categorised and recast them as 'readymade essays' through the framing efforts of the researcher; although here readymades will be treated as a purely hypothetical possibility and not suitable for the assessment demands on most students writing essays.

Monteur: Towards the Dada Essay

Here the 'Montieren Method' will be outlined and advocated as a possible approach in essay writing which exists in tension within the framework of the formal essay. The notion of the monteur is taken from Dadaists Heartfield and Hausmann: - monteurs (mechanics),

Heartfield was known as "Monteur-Dada," for his concentration on photomontage—which term (wrote Raoul Hausmann) "translates our aversion at playing artists...thinking of ourselves as engineers, we intended to assemble, construct [*montieren*] our works." (Elderfeild, 1983:128)

The 'Montieren' method would be one which operates on an Inherent tension between the institutions rules (the referencing system, the brief criteria); the Dada methods which introduce chance and randomness; and the editing (authorial intent) of the researcher.

In this way the cut-up could exist at:

- Key junctures of the essay combining random or selected texts and providing implications for the researcher to interpret or explore (such as the way a synaptic diagram is used, see Buzan 1974).
- Be a constantly recurring repetition of the introduction and key/suggested texts reproducing itself into the next chapter, each iteration combined with a more formally written interpretation to 'construct meaning across the gaps' (Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf, 2014: 224) in order to meet a given brief but each aspect recognised as key in the journey of writing.
- Take the terms of a question or brief and mix these with the researchers chosen texts looking for resonances and interesting combinations.
- To combine two incongruous subjects or seemingly impenetrable texts and explore the narrative suggested by the cut up act rather than what the texts author intended.

In regards to this possibility its narrative which emerges from the components, offering a read into-ness otherwise denied by the original text,

It made no difference if what was being associated were two essays on mathematics or two articles of popularized science. The resulting texts always took a narrative turn, enigmatic at first but ultimately explicit and often premonitory. The semantic distribution of these basic elements diverted them from their original meaning, thus revealing their real significance. (Lemaire in Burroughs and Gysin, 1978:10)

It would be the task of the 'monteur' to recognise the 'premonitory' or intuitive potential of the new text with regards to its relationship to the original. These are just suggestions and it's possible that in specific circumstances students and researchers would adapt the cut-up method further; this act would itself be welcomed and in line with the development of the method overall (see Burroughs and Gysin, 1978).

Poet William Burroughs is often credited as popularising the method of cut-ups and providing mutations which involve folding and gridding up text. Lemaire (in Burroughs and Gysin, 1978:9) explains how Gysin came across the method of cut-ups and 'immediately informed' Burroughs who was able to utilise it effectively. Between the men the technique was developed to include variations and an emphasis on narrative improving 'readability' (:10) seen as not present in the original Dada method,

The cut-up, that mechanical method of shredding texts in a ruthless machine ("Take a page of text and trace a median line vertically and horizontally./ You now have four blocks of text: 1, 2, 3, and 4./ Now cut along the lines and put block 4 alongside block 1, block 3 alongside block 2. Read the rearranged page"), a machine that could upset semantic order...(Lemaire in Burroughs and Gysin, 1978:9)

Here Lemaire explains one of the variations which 'upset(s)' the meaning which was intended by the original author; therefore repurposing the rigorous architecture of the original text to an entirely different purpose one which results in a new text where the monteur (my term) had written no actual words. The architectural analogy is useful, as we can imagine a building composed of one or more existing forms of architecture which is at once reminiscent of its components previous singularity while presenting simultaneously something entirely different perhaps even an implied commentary on the original,

...—that method has a history that goes back to Dada. In his Manifestos Tristan Tzara set down the principle of cutting up the pages of a newspaper, throwing the words into a hat,

and pulling them out at random. Shortly thereafter, Marcel Duchamp, in his *Rendezvous du Dimanche* 6 fevrier a 1 h 3/4 apres-midi, placed four apparently unrelated texts in four divisions of a square. Such are the ancestors of this technique,... (Lemaire in Burroughs and Gysin, 1978:9)

The candour of Lemaire also recalls Tzara's scepticism regarding 'minute refinement(s) of logic' (cited in Motherwell, 1951, brackets my own) it also pre-empts Lockheart and Wood's, (2019) frustration with 'educational bureaucracy' or Devlin's (2016:38)'arbitrary rules' providing the thread which connects the sources '... the negation of the omnipresent and allpowerful author—the geometrist who clings to his inspiration as coming from divine inspiration, a mission, or the dictates of language.' (Lemaire in Burroughs and Gysin, 1978:12).

The notion of the 'geometrist' in this way can be seen as an unhelpful projection of superiority onto a master whom in any case even when they do exist: - as institutional figures or published authors are also making use of chance, recall Sharples (1999:10).

The supposed superiority in the projection (of geometrist master) is stifling for the writer who is either struggling to earn their insight by skill development, placing them at the bottom of an academic hierarchy where they may languish for years avoiding the very flashes of inspiration they do have as arbitrary or unworthy; or worse where they actually believe that 'by a minute refinement of logic, he has demonstrated the truth and established the correctness of these opinions?' (Tzara cited in Motherwell, 1951). This illusion mistakes uniformity and neatness for insight and profundity and sees in the traditional essay a superiority which, in the end is akin to nothing more than a tidy haircut or recalling Tzara, 'Logic imprisoned by the senses is an organic disease'.

The Readymade Essay: *speculating on serendipity*

Having cautioned the reader in the use of a 'readymade essay' especially in relation to worry around plagiarism or the meeting of course briefs I will speculate as to what a readymade essay might entail.

Taking Shelley's *Ozymandias* (1818) as an illustration of a 'monteur' (the 'traveller') who happens upon a readymade essay.

I met a traveller from an antique land
Who said: Two vast and trunkless legs of stone
Stand in the desert. Near them, on the sand,
Half sunk, a shattered visage lies, whose frown,
And wrinkled lip, and sneer of cold command,
Tell that its sculptor well those passions read
Which yet survive, stamped on these lifeless things,
The hand that mocked them and the heart that fed:
And on the pedestal these words appear:
'My name is Ozymandias, king of kings:
Look on my works, ye Mighty, and despair!
Nothing beside remains. Round the decay
Of that colossal wreck, boundless and bare
The lone and level sands stretch far away. (Shelley in Bl.uk, 2019)

We know of course that Shelley invented the scenario that he describes in the poem inspired perhaps by the acquisition in Britain of Egyptian antiquities (see Bl.uk. 2019). However his thought process here is illuminating in terms of our pursuit of the hypothetical 'readymade essay'. Shelley

did not use 'monteur' to write *Ozymandias* or even a similar method; rather the poem's fictional traveller is our focus in understanding the possibility of the readymade essay. The traveller is inspired to assemble out of the objects and environment a meaning, to make his/her sense of it which is greater than the sum of its parts. Shelley juxtaposes the destroyed visage of an ancient tyrant with a hubristic statement that recalls the pronouncements of such figures regarding their supreme power; in short Shelley imagines the narrator finding a readymade essay, or in his case a readymade irony which he poeticises. If we accept, and surely the success and force of the poem requires us to accept, that it is possible to find in reality such a serendipitous occurrence then we have at least a fictional illustration and precedent for the readymade essay occurring by chance. Let us imagine ourselves as 'monteurs' in the position of Shelley's traveller; the components of the imagined discovery have clear implications:- the destroyed image of a powerful historical figure, his statement of supreme power, the sands which stretch far and wide.

In the first place we see hubristic pride, then we see its inevitable collapse, then we are implicated in the sands we stand in that imply entropic forces in which man is dwarfed by time. The potential for originality is not impeded as Shelley's own context demonstrates his poem is different enough from his friend Horace Smith's version of the same year (the men had a friendly competition to respond to the same historical quote). Smith's version implicates the city of London imagined in a ruined future state.

From the serendipitous occurrence we have our subheadings each demanding exposition, e.g. who is this king? Are there contemporary examples? How do such figures represent themselves in other contexts such as our own? And so on. In this way a serendipitous occurrence of images or events (image sound, text) could open a formal essay where the 'monteurs' skill is much like the photographer or poets recognising the implied meaning in a seemingly random layering of images and where the 'monteurs' responsibility is to explore the implications bringing the formal essay into the territory of the creative practitioner.

Workshop Case Study

Eight participants, a mixture of staff and students of various levels attended a workshop titled *Breaking into and Out of Academic Writing* at Central Saint Martins on the 10/12/19 (see Eden, 2019). The participants experimented with the cut up technique as laid out by Tzara and some variations informed by Burroughs and Gysin (1978). After creating cut-ups the participants were asked; how might these methods be used by students in academic writing? The following bullet points are notes of the discussion and comments made as follows,

- Generating titles, inventing categories and imposing categories; generating frameworks and subheadings to then connect.
- Perhaps use one's own notes IE implement the strategy further down the line after some initial paraphrasing and notation has happened.
- To formulate ideas/ include ideas; an initial process combined with mind mapping.
- Contrast to formal *aligning*, more fun; offers a way to breakdown apprehension; encourages the editor's mind of recognising quality when it occurs.
- Use of cut up as a generative method: inspiration, way of overcoming stuckness, generating thematic ideas.

- Use of cut up as a method of agency: overcoming anxiety around reading/writing, breaking down hierarchical gatekeeping, building confidence.
- Use of cut up as a unifier of academic work and creative practice.

From the comments above it is clear that initial thinking of participants confirms that the Dada techniques could be used at least as effectively as mind-mapping to build confidence and allow for an alternate entry point into a piece of writing.

Further to this we might examine the examples created and think about the implications of these outcomes and how through a process of editing and authoring they might form the conceptual basis for written works. With this mind I have imagined myself as the generator of the cut ups and for the purpose of demonstrating the usefulness of this method I will proceed to use the cut up to create a plan for an essay that explores its implications.

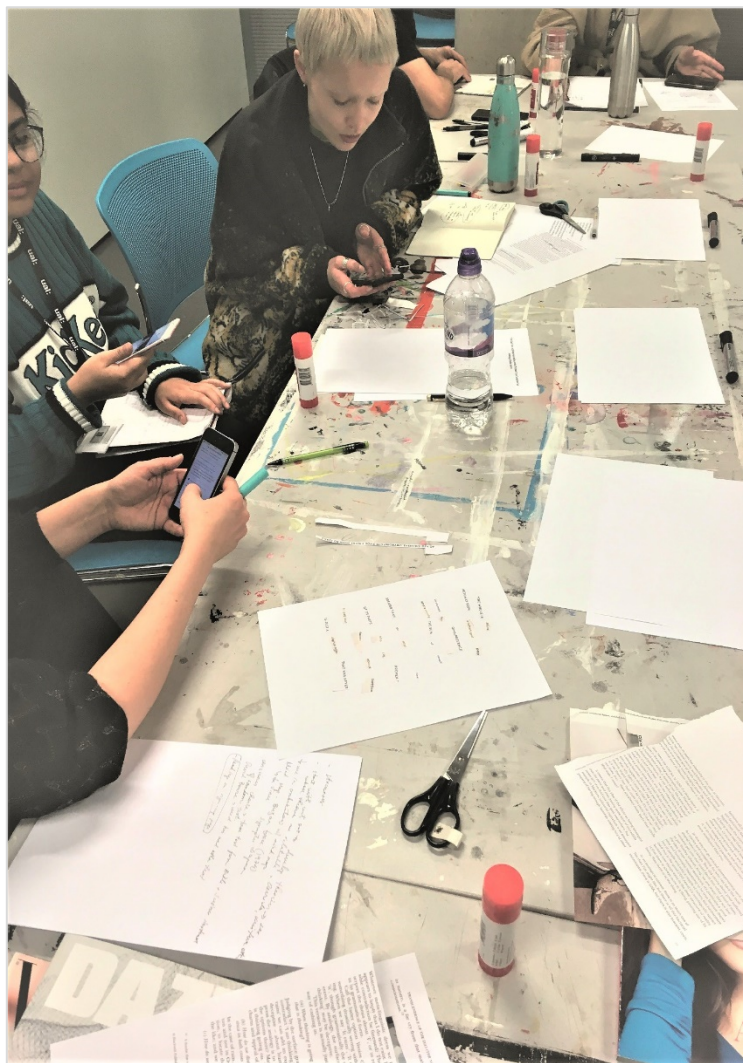


Fig. 1. Students and their cut-ups at the workshop, *Breaking into and out of Academic Writing* (2019)

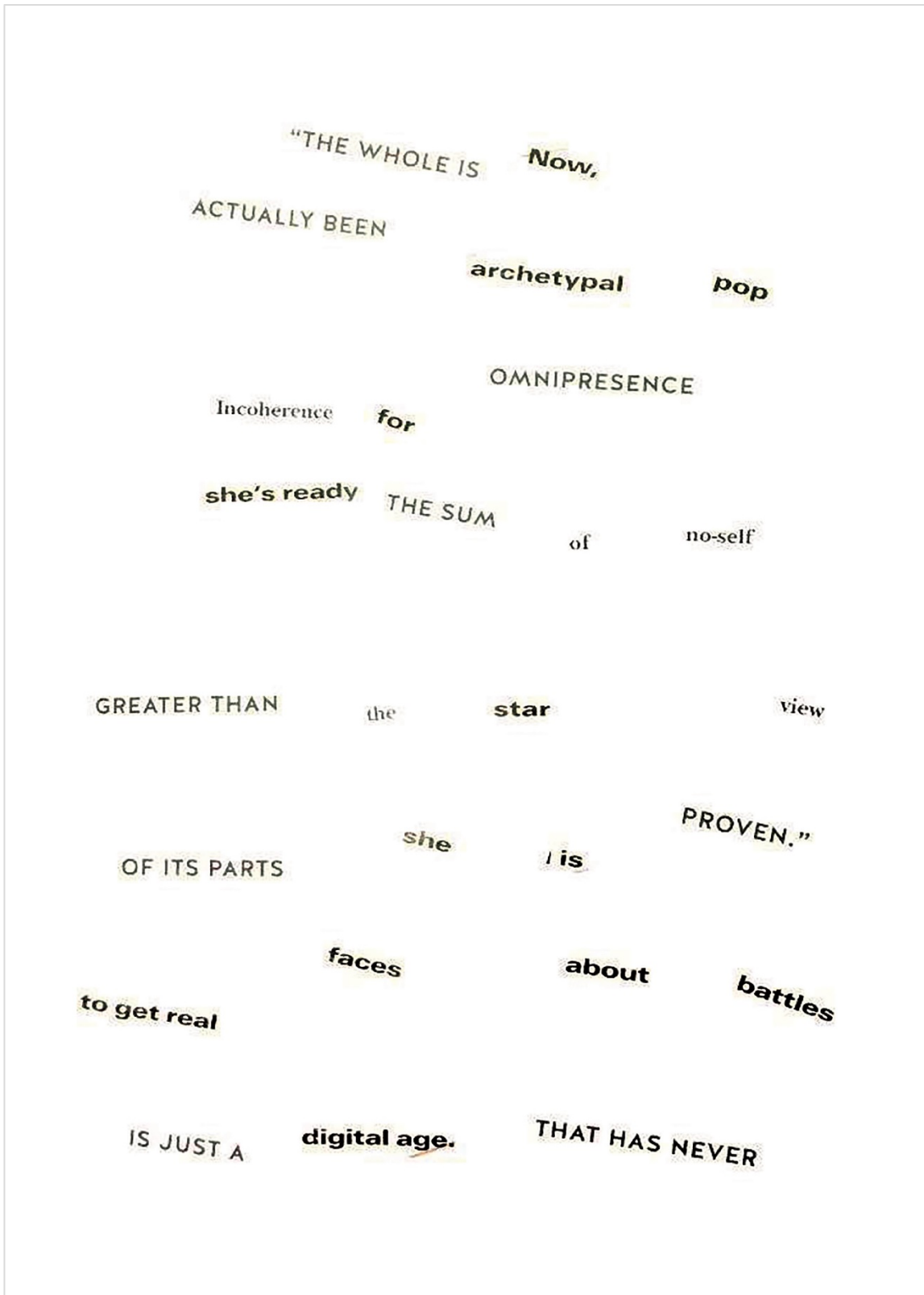


Fig. 2. Participant Cut-Up example 1 (2019)

Firstly I have transferred the text into a word format retaining the original punctuation, capitals and layout.

THE WHOLE IS Now,

Actually Been archetypal pop OMNIPRESSANCE

Incoherence for she's ready The Sum of no-self

GREATER THAN the star view

OF ITS PARTS she is PROVEN."

to get real faces about battles

IS JUST A digital age. THAT HAS NEVER

Following this I can choose to author the text with greater intentionality; alter the punctuation, add words or make additions, for example this is useful if I want to actually write a legible and understandable poem:-

The Whole Is Now

There has actually been a shift?

Archetypal pop omnipresence is no longer dominant,

for she is ready. The sum of no-self.

In the now she is greater than a star, she is proven to get real faces into battles,

not just digital ones that have never really lived.

This kind of activity is fairly close to those used by Burroughs and while my own writing skills are rather limited we can at least see that alteration and additions in this way can force the randomly generated words into a more easily understandable whole. However, how might we use the original to generate a plan, concept and reading list for a formal essay? Here I will attempt to use free association and basic but focussed searches in Google scholar, recall 'The poem invites us to construct meaning across the gaps between the word phrases.'(Cotter in Schwab and Borgdorf, 2014: 224)

Returning to the original:-

THE WHOLE IS Now,

Actually Been archetypal pop OMNIPRESSANCE

Incoherence for she's ready The Sum of no-self

GREATER THAN the star view

OF ITS PARTS she is PROVEN."

to get real faces about battles

IS JUST A digital age. THAT HAS NEVER

1: The Free Association (Dada is what you can make out of yourself)

The emphasis on time here i.e. 'Now' makes me think about ideas of the past and of the future being incomplete (not 'WHOLE'). Furthermore of only the 'Now' (a contingent category) as being where an active sense of self as whole emerges.

'Archetypal pop omnipresence' is a curious combination of terms, immediately it implies the occurrence and reoccurrence of types, symbols and stereotypes 'pop' leads me into thoughts about the media as a vehicle for an 'omnipresence' that is; an all-pervading and frequently encountered set of types which might be the context of the essay.

The notion of the simulacrum as conceived by Baudrillard, and of archetypes as defined by Jung may be useful in looking at the proliferation of images, their necessity and problematization or negative aspects as illusion machines.

Now subjectivity is further implied and gendered 'for she's ready The Sum of no-self' and this is contrasted to the star view, 'GREATER THAN the star view' star as a term for celebrity again implies pop culture and feels combative the aforementioned 'whole' self of the 'now' becomes the 'no-self' recalling Lacan 'woman does not exist' much contested by, and sometimes appropriated by feminism this statement makes me think about a blank slate a subject without constraint from 'pop archetypal omnipresence' freewheeling and self-defining.

Again a gendered statement, 'OF ITS PARTS she is PROVEN' the 'she' as proven, that is: sure, actual and demonstrated introduces ideas of authenticity and presence this 'she' is real, a 'whole' 'no self' which in contrast to pop culture 'omnipresence' is embodied. The paradox of a whole, no-self would be interesting to explore.

Actuality and the real is emphasised again 'to get real faces about battles' for this to make sense 'about' needs to be understood as to (as in, to be about). In this way a sense of organisation is implied to bring the real 'whole' people to the 'battle' what this battle is with is further emphasised with an example of the latest pop culture form of media 'IS JUST A digital age.' The omnipresence of images then is exasperated by the digital and the cut-up ends with an incomplete portent that again returns the notion of time 'THAT HAS NEVER'. I am left thinking about this specifically gendered 'she' as no-self and I recall Griselda Pollock writing about the female artist which she situates in a particular conception of time.

2: Generating Relevant Sources Via Basic Searches

From searching the exact key phrases, 'archetypal pop OMNIPRESSANCE', 'no-self' and 'digital age' the following five academic texts are identified,

Green, C., Ordóñez, E. and Beck, G. (2011). *Breaking Plates: Fracturing Fictions and Archetypal Imaginings*. Calif.: Pacifica Graduate Institute.

Giles, J. (1993). The No-Self Theory: Hume, Buddhism, and Personal Identity. *Philosophy East and West*, 43(2), 175-200. doi:10.2307/1399612.

Kooijman, J. (2014). *Fabricating the Absolute Fake*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Lévy, P. (1998). *Becoming virtual*. London: Plenum Trade.

Purser, R. (2011). A Buddhist–Lacanian perspective on lack. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 39(4), pp.289-304.

Further to this, looking at my own free associations I identified the two following texts,

Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Orton, F. and Pollock, G. (1996). *Avant-gardes and partisans reviewed*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

I now have four key components 1: the cut-up text, 2: my authored version of this, 3: my free association and 4: a relevant set of academic texts. With some minor refinement of the free association (making reference to the identified texts) that 400wrds can be extended and become a proposal or thematic plan for a full essay exploring subjectivity in the digital age.

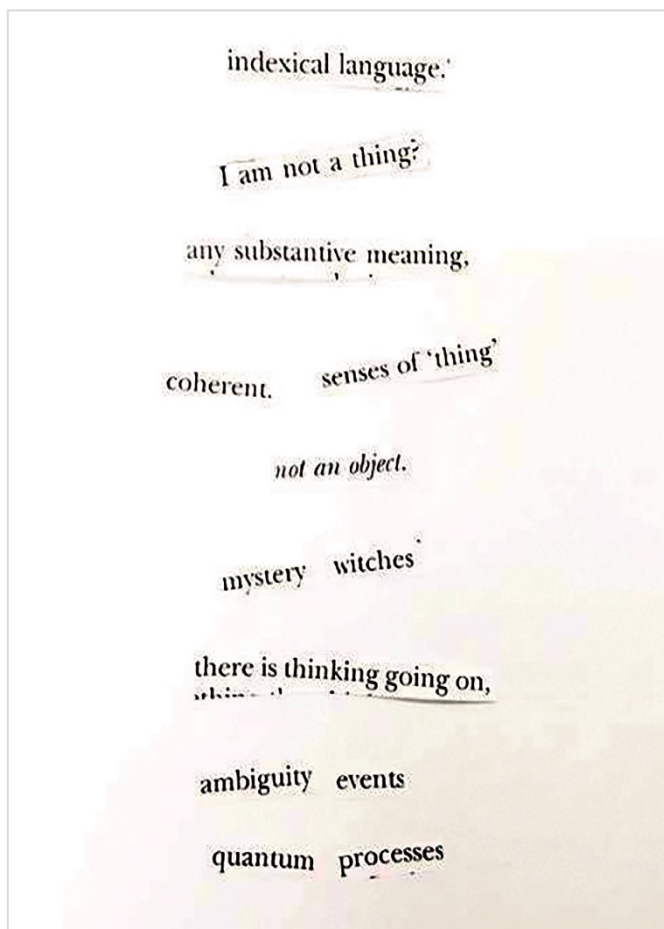


Fig. 3. Participant Cut-Up example 2 (2019).

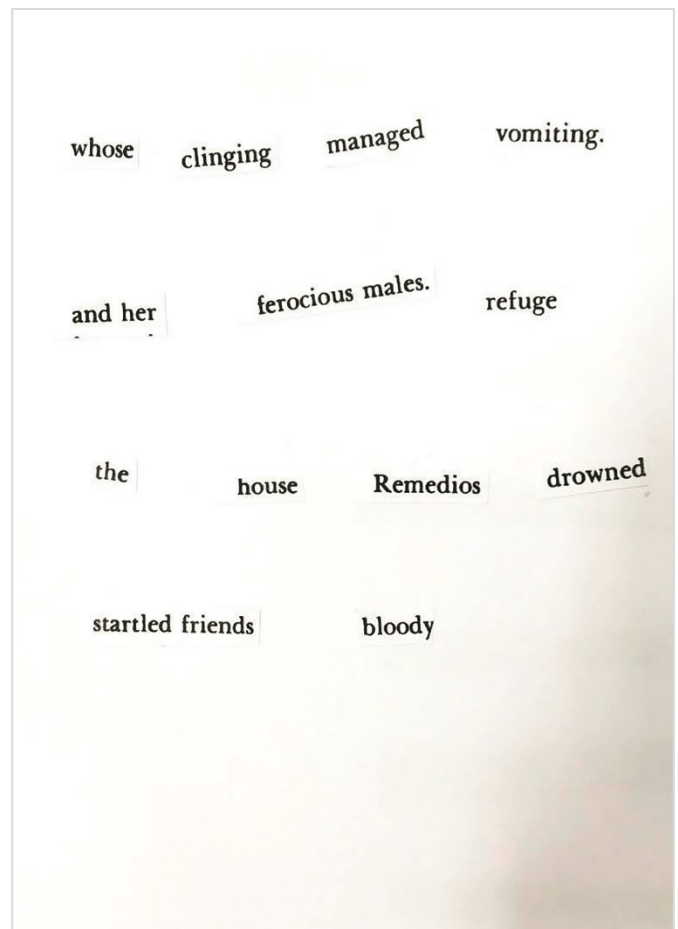


Fig. 4. Participant Cut-Up example 3 (2019).

Above are two other examples of 'Monteured' texts from participants I would hope that the reader is able to recognise each as rich deposits of meaning which can be mined to create similarly useful free-associated write ups and used to generate useful reading.

Conclusion

The existence of and justification of alternative methods first and foremost create opportunities for individuals whose strengths lie in non linear, experimental thinking. Devlin (2016) highlights the need for greater diversity of methods 'creative experimentation' (37) and greater appreciation of these especially in institutions where there are high numbers of creative students with 'enhanced capacity for visual/spatial thinking' he links this to the expanded visual world we live in as well as the inert abilities of the students '...literacy is not just verbal but also visual, multiplied by how each text is hyperlinked (Kress, 2000) to a network of interconnecting texts' (37). The obvious materiality of the cut-up method, its immediacy and simplicity, the lack of dependence on skill, literary or technological to produce a result, as demonstrated in the examples (recall participant examples 1, 2 & 3) make it highly accessible to creative thinkers such as those Devlin describes.

Furthermore overcoming procrastination is another obvious reason to employ the methods discussed, Bennet refers generally to 'chance' a key element in the 'Montieren Method' as presented here as one way to break a deadlock 'A second reason we resort to chance is to avoid dissention and get on with the show' (Bennett, 2009:13) here Bennet is referring to the inaction that occurs when differing voices find difficulty in coming together to move forward, but such an impasse is analogous to individual procrastination (the struggle for justification); the chance outcome in the cut-up defies pre-emptive justification and simply moves the writer forward to their next task where heuristic sense making takes place (such as that demonstrated in the Free Association).

Novelty and originality are identified by Otto Kruse (in Björk, Bräuer and Rienecker, 2003) as typical problems that students have when they are tasked with writing academically. He reflects on an example student who is discouraged by the seemingly unassailable multiplicity of existing material, 'While she reads this chapter, she starts to get discouraged. Dozens of empirical studies are summarised here and she is unable to think of a way to add anything to them' (20) this is exactly why Devlin (2016) refers to the linear essay as 'monolithic form' in need of 'fragmenting' (37) since its structure teaches deference to such a mountain of knowledge, (deference to and addition to the monolith). Kruse (2003) continues, 'Summarising the texts continues to be a problem, as she never feels certain that her summaries are correct. Neither has she found a way to integrate her own opinion into the text. What she has written looks like a copy of the original, without anything of her own' (21). The 'Montieren Method' cannot help the student to summarise the other writers texts this does require her comprehension and ability to condense the aspects into ideally shorter explanations. However, it would offer her a way to have something totally original; the 'cut-up' cannot be but entirely her own and the free association, employed methodologically places emphasis on the writers ability to make sense out of and create meaning from the cut up. This is empowering since the tower or 'monolith' of empirical data is reduced in its relevance, it is material for a cut-up.

This relates to Patrick T. Randolph (in Perren et.al, 2012) who highlights the difficulty of writers of academic prose to gain a '...sense of ownership of the topic'. Randolph further makes the point that idea development in both the minutia of paragraphs and the overall essay is a problem for students, both those with English as a second language and 'domestic students' (71). The ability to randomise selected sources or previous writing so as to educe ideas is developmental as well as generative it could be employed at any point in a piece of writing, and at any scale; a developmental use would be more controlled used at key junctures in a text otherwise obeying the linear standard. While a generative use would open a text and provide a starting point. The issue of how much chance and randomness to include in a piece would be the decision of the writer; for the academic standard to be satisfied the 'Montieren Method' simply needs to be properly introduced in the writer's

methodology. This paper and its antecedents is an attempt to make the writing of such a methodology possible to the monteur who values the creative potential of chance and randomness.

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