

Don't Fence Me In: the Liberation of Undomesticated Critique

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In response to Helmut Heid's critique of domesticated philosophical critique, I focus on the metaphor of domestication, which is central to his article. Drawing on the work of Jacques Derrida, I offer a deconstructive critique of the opposition between domesticated and undomesticated critique, arguing that a clear conceptual demarcation between the two is impossible, and that 'domesticated' and 'undomesticated' critique always carry each other's traces. I explore connections between the undomesticated and das Unheimliche (Freud's 'Uncanny'), as well as differences between Helmut Heid's and Paulo Freire's interpretation and use of the concepts of 'domestication' and 'liberation'. Lastly, I examine how educators might go about a pedagogy of critique. I argue that critique can and should be understood and taught as a tradition, but one that is heterogeneous rather than monolithic. A careful reception of this translated and metonymic tradition of critique will enable students to see the spaces in which new critique—and critique of critique—is possible.

Oh, give me land, lots of land under starry skies above,
Don't fence me in.
Let me ride through the wide, open country that I love,
Don't fence me in.
Let me be by myself in the evening breeze,
Listen to the murmur of the cottonwood trees.
Send me off forever but I ask you, please,
Don't fence me in.
(Cole Porter, 1944)

CRITIQUE AND RESPONSE

Thankfully, my task is to write a response, not a critique—for to write a critique of an article outlining criteria for correct or 'undomesticated' critique seems particularly daunting. But I find myself in the double bind of one invited to respond. As Jacques Derrida points out, if I respond, I risk appearing to find myself at ease in the position of being addressed and

invited to respond, as well as to feel ‘*capable of responding . . .*’ (Derrida, 1995, pp. 18–19). On the other hand, if I do not respond, I may seem ‘not to take sufficiently seriously the [author and text] offered here, to evince toward them an inadmissible ingratitude and a culpable indifference’ (p. 21). Moreover, if I claim to feel incapable of responding *to* Helmut Heid,¹ and of answering *for* myself, do I not ‘undermine, both theoretically and practically, the concept of responsibility, which is actually the very essence of the *socius*?’ (ibid). So, I will respond, albeit in a manner that may be judged too circumlocutory and insufficiently responsive.

Responding is part of the philosophical ritual and requires my participation in that ritual. But can it be a non-critical participation? To play a role in philosophical ritual, ‘one must at the same time be inscribed in the logic of ritual and, precisely so as to perform properly in it, to avoid mistakes and transgressions, one must to some extent be able to analyze it’ (p. 3). Although there is a critical difference between critical and non-critical participation and analysis, ‘the participant must make choices, distinguish, differentiate, evaluate’, and indeed ‘operate according to some *krinein*’ (p. 4). My (non)response can never be free from critique, yet never sufficiently critical.

CRITIQUE IN CRISIS?

Etymologically, the English ‘criticism’, the French-English ‘critique’, the German *Kritik*, and so forth are derived from the Greek *krinein*, from which stems also the word ‘crisis’. The single signifier *Kritik* can be translated into English as ‘critique’ and ‘criticism’, two signifiers with related yet distinct fields of signifieds. I invite my students to critique rather than to criticise a text, hoping it will encourage a more nuanced approach. *Critique nuancée*, criticism once removed from itself, auto-critical through its linguistic detour? *Krinein* carries meanings such as to separate, to distinguish, to decide, to judge, to grant. *Kritès* is commonly translated as judge, critic, or member of a jury, and *krisis* as decision, judgement or verdict. Is critique in crisis? Have we, philosophical critics in and of education, reached a decisive point with respect to the lurking threat of domestication of critique? The right to critically examine any theory and phenomenon, and to guard this examination and its outcomes from the manipulation of those in economic, political or other power, is a right I would gladly defend—but this defence of undomesticated critique is itself not politically neutral. In fact, one might argue that the very defence of undomesticated critique perpetuates the belief that critique can ever be outside a service to some value or other, and that this belief hinders a more critical examination of those values.

The object of Heid’s philosophical critique is philosophical critique itself. The larger part of his meta-critique is dedicated to the distinction between domesticated and undomesticated critique, and to the criteria for this distinction. At the end of the article, Heid acknowledges that ‘the boundaries between domesticated and undomesticated critique are not

always obvious' (p. 338). This question of distinctions and boundaries between domesticated and undomesticated critique will be my central concern. To justify this selection, let me say a few words about levels of critique or, to use a less vertical and hierarchical metaphor, loci of critique. Heid writes that 'undomesticated critique aims at an objective (logical, theoretical, empirical) judgement and—if possible—evaluation of an object' (p. 325). Among the criteria used for judging an object of critique, Heid distinguishes 'criteria with respect to objective correctness, and criteria with respect to the moral desirability of an object of critique' (p. 333). We might say that a philosophical critique may focus on the (logical) validity of the argument structure, the (empirical) soundness of the argument's premises and/or the moral desirability of the selection of the topic and of the assumptions underpinning the argument.

This last is without doubt the most controversial locus of critique. The assumptions underpinning an argument are often not made explicit, and permeate not only the selection of topic but also the philosophical tradition and methodology, and the formal conventions of structure and language. Heid does not mention deconstruction as critique aimed at the assumptions underpinning the argument, especially at the structural and linguistic level. Whereas some would argue that deconstruction signals the end of philosophical critique, or that it has at least placed itself outside its tradition, I agree with Samuel Wheeler (2000) that deconstruction is legitimately understood as a form of philosophical critique itself.

DECONSTRUCTIVE CRITIQUE

Deconstruction is not a philosophical system or school of thought, nor is it a technique or methodology with clearly discernible or repeatable steps. A deconstructive approach or mode of thinking typically takes aim at the binary opposites that have structured language and philosophy, and 'gets going by attempting to present as primary what metaphysics says is secondary' (Bennington, 1993, p. 42). It seeks not to destroy its object, but rather to make 'the constructed character appear as such ...' (Derrida, 2002a, p. 16). Derrida writes, 'Hospitality—this is a name or an example of deconstruction' (Derrida, 2002b, p. 364), and I want to suggest that deconstruction is properly characterised as a practice of *conceptual hospitality*. Through deconstructive critique, conceptual boundaries are shown to be more permeable than might appear at first glance; concepts are not monolithic, but rather concatenations of past significations, which remain open to future resignification.

Deconstructive critique has been experienced (and critiqued) as being evasive, refusing to address the supposed object of critique head-on and instead focusing its critical efforts on concepts and structures considered peripheral to the supposed object. Since deconstruction typically takes off from an inversion of the hierarchical order of binary pairs, it should not come as a surprise that the pair *central-peripheral* undergoes the same treatment. If the reader expected my response to deal with the criteria for

(un)domesticated critique head-on, then she or he may be disappointed by the selection of the concept of domestication as object of critique and criticise my method as evasive. Yet it is not my intention to evade response or critique, merely to respond both critically and auto-critically—that is to say, respond in such way that the selection of focus within what has been presented to me as object of critique, becomes itself an object of critique.

DOMESTICATION

The metaphor of domestication (German: *Domestizierung*) is powerful. The word is derived from the Latin *domus*, house, and via *dominus*, master of the house, it is related to ‘domination’. ‘Domestication’ is typically used with reference to animals. The domesticated animal has been tamed, brought in service of human beings, restricted in its movements, whereas the undomesticated animal remains untamed, wild and free. In this binary pair, the undomesticated animal is often regarded as the more powerful one (although not necessarily the more valued one). Wild animals roam free and can even pose a threat to humans, whereas their domesticated counterparts are made to work or produce in the service of humans. The wild animal is pure and natural, untainted by human attempts at changing its habits or restricting its movements.

It is much the same with the animal of critique in Heid’s analysis. Undomesticated critique is strong and free, whereas domesticated critique loses its ferocity when it is brought in the service of the critic’s interest(s). Undomesticated critique is the original, critique as critique ought to be, a form from which domesticated critique borrows but to which it cannot measure up. The strength of the metaphor of domestication is that it compounds the charges against domesticated critique: not only is a domesticated critique subordinated to elements that do not ‘properly’ belong in the sphere of critique, hence unfree and inferior; it is also relegated to the domestic, private, sphere: not fit for the public (undomesticated) sphere where the exchange of critique takes place.

The distinction between domesticated and undomesticated is a conceptual demarcation, a border that aims ‘to oppose rigorously two concepts or the concepts of two essences, and to purify such a demarcating opposition of all contamination, of all participatory sharing, of all parasitism, and of all infection’ (Derrida, 1993, p. 41). Indeed, Heid not only separates but opposes domesticated and undomesticated critique, and seems especially concerned with keeping undomesticated critique safe from contamination by domesticated critique. But this clinical separation is bound to fail. To demarcate domestication and its opposite, a border must be drawn, but this drawing ‘can only institute the line by dividing it intrinsically into two sides. There is a problem as soon as this intrinsic division divides the relation to itself of the border and therefore divides the being-one-self of anything’ (p. 11). Neither the state of domestication nor the undomesticated state can ever fully be one with itself; each must be

internally divided. Derrida concludes that 'the only characteristic [of borders] that we can stress here is that of an irreducibly double inclusion: the including and the included regularly exchange places in this strange topography of edges' (p. 80). In other words, not only is undomesticated critique possible and conceivable only because of domesticated critique; it can never fully exclude the domestication it opposes.

Another way of putting this would be to say that the domesticated critique carries *traces* of the wildness from which it has been withdrawn, just as the undomesticated critique carries *traces* of the domesticated state from which it has been released, as well as of the domestication it has produced. Neither the domesticated nor the undomesticated critique is privileged as the original from which the other is derived. Heid asserts that undomesticated critique is critique that follows the principles of the modern Western philosophical tradition. But as Blake, Smeyers, Smith and Standish point out,

If one of the central commitments of the modern Western tradition in philosophy is to the evaluation of the validity of arguments, then another is to critique. And the two are tightly intertwined . . . But notice that a commitment to critique is actually a position in the politics of knowledge. Whilst overtly, in its monological mode, abjuring such politics, Western philosophy has always . . . retained . . . a set of covert commitments within a politics of knowledge which it overtly disavowed (Blake *et al.*, 1998, p. 26).

Heid's article may be committed to safeguarding critique from 'domesticating' commitments, but that does not make it any less committed.

CRITICAL DIGRESSIONS

Objects of deconstructive critique are concrete texts and discourse itself, rather than 'facts [which] depend on or can be influenced by human action' (Heid, p. 332). As Wheeler points out,

in view of these different objects of critique, considerations that would be 'irrelevant to the argument' in a standard philosophical discussion may well be relevant to showing a discourse incoherent. If other connections besides meaning connections are the 'binders' of a discourse, then Freudian considerations, aesthetic coherencies, 'literary' connections and resonances, and so on, may all be part of the 'coherence' of a discourse (Wheeler, 2000, p. 224).

And I will indeed explore some of these resonances and connections. If we pursue a psychoanalytic reading, for instance, the connection between domesticity and *Heimlichkeit* is obvious. As Freud discovers in his linguistic examination of '*heimlich*', this signifier carries meanings ranging from familiar to tame (domesticated) to concealed. He is

particularly interested in Schelling's definition of 'unheimlich' as 'the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light' (as cited in Freud, 1955, p. 224). Rather than cleanly separate and diametrically opposed, Freud concludes that 'unheimlich is in some way or other a sub-species of heimlich' (p. 226). *Das Unheimliche* always haunts *Heimlichkeit*, and nothing would be *unheimlich* if it had not first been *heimlich* and then surmounted or repressed (p. 249). Although there is, in general, nothing *unheimlich* about undomesticated critique, Freud's analysis raises questions about the relation and possibly interdependency of domesticated and undomesticated critique.

The term 'domestication' (Portuguese: *domesticação*) is also used by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, whose name is, at least in North and South America, firmly inscribed in 'Critical Pedagogy'—which denotes not all pedagogy that can be considered critical but, more specifically, pedagogical orientations in the neo-Marxist tradition. Aimed at emancipation and positing the primacy of the material over the cultural, the critique offered by Critical Pedagogy is not a deconstructive critique. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire writes about educational practices that assist the oppressed in liberating themselves. The traditional 'banking' approach to education is oppressive (Freire, 1970, p. 72), and 'functionally, oppression is domesticating' (p. 51). A follower of Hegelian dialectic, Freire believes that the contradictions about reality that are taught in the banking approach 'may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality' (p. 75). Through dialogue and critical thinking the oppressed can overcome their domestication, and 'for the critic, the important thing is the continuing transformation of reality, in behalf of the continuing humanization of men' (p. 92).² In other words, the kind of critique that, in Freire's view, contributes to the undoing of domestication, and could justifiably be considered not only undomesticating but undomesticated, is a critique *in the interest of* the transformation of reality and the humanisation of (wo)men. As with other instances of *krinein*, judging one critique to be domesticated and another undomesticated depends on one's criteria. Heid suggests that critique in the service of a certain Western philosophical tradition, but not in any (supposedly extra-philosophical) political or economic interest, is undomesticated. Freire could argue, conversely, that critique in the service of the political and indeed human interests of the oppressed is truly undomesticated. Derrida might add that the dichotomy between domesticated and undomesticated critique deconstructs itself.

Not coincidentally, the domestic sphere has traditionally been the sphere of women. Women were—and in certain contexts are—expected to stay at home and occupy themselves with 'domestic duties', while men were expected to work outside the home and participate in the public domain. As is the case with the binary pair *woman–man*, the terms of the pair *domestic (private)–non-domestic (public)* stand in hierarchical relation to each other. Socially, the non-domestic sphere is considered more powerful and valuable than the domestic sphere, just as Heid values undomesticated critique over domesticated critique. Particularly given this historically

gendered character of the domestic(ated) and undomestic(ated), it is worth paying attention to the gendered nature of a text about the domestication of critique. The single English signifier 'critic' can be translated into German as 'Kritiker' and 'Kritikerin', losing the gender ambiguity of the English signifier (an ambiguity that is, however, often eliminated by the pronoun that accompanies it).

In the modernist, androcentric philosophical tradition, the use of both feminine and masculine pronouns is considered unnecessary and distracting, and it is assumed that authors and readers share the understanding that masculine pronouns are shorthand for all persons. In this tradition, furthermore, the content and structure of the philosophical argument take centre stage, and matters of form and style are considered peripheral. In contrast, I propose not only that the language and style of a text are legitimate objects of philosophical critique, but also that the content cannot be considered separately from language and style. With Michael Naas, I believe that, especially in a deconstructive critique, it is important to pay close attention to 'language and style and the way these *work* not simply to note but to *produce* truths' (Naas, 2003, p. xxi). Is a feminist critique that pays attention to the gendered language of its object, and in fact makes that gendered language itself object of critique, a domesticated critique? If it does not critique the truth claims made explicitly *in* the article, but rather the truth claims made implicitly *through* the article, does it fail to offer undomesticated critique? Can a critique of truth claims made implicitly *through* the article leave the truth claims made explicitly *in* the article untouched? As I have argued above, every domesticated critique contains resistances to its domestication, the potential to be read in undomesticated ways, just as every undomesticated critique is, to some extent, domesticated.

PEDAGOGY OF CRITIQUE

Even when I have asked students to 'critique' rather than 'criticise' a text, I have received scathing dismissals of, as well as celebratory agreements with, the texts concerned. It appears that many undergraduate students, even if they have been taught to state their opinions, have not been taught what critique is, nor why it is of value. So how could one go about a pedagogy of critique, with students at the elementary and secondary level, as well as with students of educational research at the university level?

Teaching critique will, first of all, have to contend with the prejudice that education and educational research ought to focus on what is useful, where 'use' is increasingly narrowly defined as economic productivity (for example, Lyotard, 1984). Heid observes, 'As long as they remain abstract, both critique, as a mode of human judgement, and the human ability to criticise are highly valued. However, their products are not appreciated in so unequivocal a way' (p. 324). In many educational contexts, not only the products of critique, but also the efforts they require are not unequivocally

appreciated. Critique slows matters down, requires analysis and reflection, and often raises questions rather than providing answers. Education in the service of economic productivity concentrates on the training of transferable skills—time-management skills, problem-solving skills, even critical thinking skills—but not critique. Educational research is increasingly forced to concentrate its efforts on empirical and quantitative models that provide directly applicable means for predetermined ends.³ Critique's currency is language, and to get the value of this currency recognised in a world that values action, the false dichotomy between language and action must be addressed.

As Marianna Papastephanou argues elsewhere in this issue, critique is threatened not only by the demand for economic utility and efficiency, but also by narcissism and a confusion of critique with a dismissal of one's object. To learn to critique, even make philosophical critique the object of critique, it is important to understand critique as a tradition. In an interview with Maurizio Ferraris, Derrida says, 'A transgression should always know what it transgresses. . . . And I feel best when my sense of emancipation preserves the memory of what it emancipates from. I hope this mingling of respect and disrespect for the academic heritage and tradition in general is legible in everything that I do' (Derrida and Ferraris, 2001, p. 43). Students must be taught that their critique will be part of long traditions of critique, and that it will contribute to and renew those traditions only if it understands its own historicity. Learning respect for the tradition that forms one's historical context is not stifling if one learns to approach the past genealogically and to see that no tradition is monolithic (see, for example, Foucault, 1984). In elementary and secondary education, this means, for instance, that the history of science is not taught as a linear, celebratory narrative of European progress from Aristotelian cosmology and Ptolemaic geocentrism to the enlightened discoveries of Nicolas Copernicus, Galileo Galilei, Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, but that questions are raised about the dead ends, the influence of scientists from outside of Europe, the absence of women, the power of the church and other institutions and so on. It also means that language is not taught merely as a transparent medium for effective communication, but as carrying a past of meanings and uses that trouble its apparent clarity and that produce meaning beyond the intentions of any author. In a pedagogy of critique, students need to know *both* that 'hysterical' is used to mean emotionally out of control and extremely funny, *and* that it carries a sexist history. They need to know *both* that 'denigrating' is used to mean putting down and speaking ill of, *and* that it carries a racist history. And they need to know that these examples are not exceptions, but that in language the ideas and beliefs of the past have become sedimented, flaws and inconsistencies included, and that 'how we talk [and write] and see our situation is a product of the kind of language we have' (Blake *et al.*, 1998, p. 152).

Educational researchers must work from the understanding that the traditions of philosophical critique and educational research provide structure, but that this structure is permeable because the heritage is

translated rather than transmitted, and is internally heterogeneous and multiplicitous:⁴

Let us consider, first of all, the radical and necessary heterogeneity of an inheritance . . . An inheritance is never gathered together, it is never one with itself . . . If the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it. We would be affected by it as by a cause—natural or genetic. One always inherits from a secret—which says ‘read me, will you ever be able to do so?’ (Derrida, 1994, p. 16).

Currently, neither education nor educational research are comfortable with secrets, demanding instead that texts and data are transparent and can be used and consumed completely. A pedagogy of critique views education as initiation into a mode of response—and response requires reception rather than consumption. ‘And yet, each time we receive the tradition, each time we take it on, we are offered a chance to receive something unforeseeable and unprecedented within it’ (Naas, 2003, p. xviii).

The tradition of philosophical critique offers ‘land, lots of land under starry skies above’, and although the existing paths that traverse the land are worth following, new paths can and should be explored and questions about old paths raised (why there? in what direction? for what vehicle?). The land and, as we know from Immanuel Kant, the ‘starry heavens above’ may fill one with ‘awe’ and ‘admiration’ (Kant, 1956, p. 166), and indeed they ought to be contemplated respectfully. Kant also warns, however, that ‘though admiration and respect can indeed excite to inquiry, they cannot supply the want of it’ (ibid.). Thus a responsive reception of the tradition of philosophical critique demands critical reflection on this tradition itself. Tradition cannot be fenced in, must remain open to new reading, because no context is closed and no interpretation is definitive. Fixing the boundaries of what counts as legitimate critique means limiting what can be learnt and inherited from critique, suffocating the tradition that can only stay alive by renewing itself. (And suffocating it in the interest of what or whom?) Philosophical critique can only keep its critical edge if it continues to subject itself, its own aims, objects and criteria, to critique.

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NOTES

1. All references to Heid are to his ‘The Domestication of Critique’, the preceding paper in this collection.
2. Freire’s use of ‘men’ and ‘man’ as signifier for both women and men deserves to be the object of critique, although elsewhere in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire uses more gender-inclusive

- language. His work has been criticised for its lack of acknowledgement of race and gender as axes of oppression.
3. The definition of 'scientifically based' educational research by the United States federal government is a case in point: in section 9101 of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the US federal government specifies that 'scientifically based' research uses 'experimental or quasi-experimental designs', is empirical, objective and replicable.
 4. Zelia Gregoriou, personal communication, 29 March 2003.

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