



# Roland Barthes, Guy Debord and the Pedagogical Value of Creative Liberation

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## Abstract

The flexible remit of this article should operate as an invitation for educational practitioners to consider and hopefully engage with a range of democratic and pliable pedagogical tactics, and ways in which they might be adapted across academic and curricular contexts. As such, the article does not present a specific and robustly complete set of educational practices, replete with pre-assigned instructions for an exact and replicative application. Rather, the brief tract should operate to incite and generate thoughts and ideas relating to new and alternative possibilities; and, in doing so, nudge new and insurgent ways of engaging with knowledge, our environments and students. Through the exploration of a specific range of ideas and concepts, (taken and adapted from the work of Roland Barthes and Guy Debord), namely the Death of the Author, the *dérive* and *détournement*, the piece urges practitioners, to creatively confront the debilitating values and excesses of consumption, currently sweeping through the university, with a counter-surgency of radical tactics and alternatives.

**Keywords:** Higher Education; Consumerism; Roland Barthes; Guy Debord; Pedagogical Tactics; Creativity

## 1. Roland Barthes & Guy Debord: Echoes of Liberation

Whilst the philosophical works and concepts of Roland Barthes (1915-1980), and Guy Debord (1931-1994), contain inevitable differences and divergences, they also harbour an array of sympathies and similarities, supported by the fact that both theorists subscribed to unorthodox permutations of Marxism.

Through the refraction of their respective frameworks, they each – through different conceptual routes – suggest that a proliferation of culture-infused voices can manifest in unpredictable, liberated and politically potent ways. As such, their oeuvres strive to reinvigorate and promote micro experiences of political activity, through everyday practices – in the form of *tactics* – for creative empowerment.<sup>1</sup> For both Barthes and Debord, cultural material should not be categorised as an external eclecticism of purely *outside* and

<sup>1</sup> The influence and collaboration of Barthesian ideas with Debordean political/liberatory tactics is well recognised and documented; for example, see Hammond, 2017; Boscagli, 2014; Hetherington, 2007; and, Kibbey, 2005. For a detailed

definition and exposition of the notion of pedagogical tactics, see Hammond, 2017: 9-12).

completed sources; instead, culture and culture-infused experiences should be recognised and treated as a complex residue of destabilising and creative catalysts; kaleidoscopic initiations to shards of fresh and refracted enunciations (see Barthes *Camera Lucida*, and *Mythologies*, and Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* and his essays on the *Dérive* and *Détournement*).<sup>2</sup>

Debord and the wider collective of the *International Situationists* (abbreviated throughout this article as the *Situationists*, or the *SI*),<sup>3</sup> devised and developed a number of *everyday-focused* tactics, which included the disconcerting and fluid notions of the *dérive*,<sup>4</sup> and *détournement*.<sup>5</sup> These concepts or tactics operated as both theoretical concepts and cultural practices, and were aimed at inciting antagonistic forms of micro-political struggle. In developing and implementing their

practices, Debord and the SI set out to confront and challenge the subjective and lived experiences of everyday life, and the extent to which they had become smothered by the oblivion of the consumer *spectacle*. Skwarek, (2014) clarifies that Debord's use of the term 'spectacle' refers to the corporate-branding and associated behaviours that take hold as part of the consumer society; as such, for Debord, consumption not only shapes the production, marketing and distributing goods, it also diffuses a deeper and encompassing ethos, which permeates and damages wider human behaviours and expectations. As Debord notes, the spectacle of consumption is, 'not a mere decoration added to the real world', but becomes the very heart of society (Debord, 1970, p. para 9).

<sup>2</sup> For an insight to how Debord challenges and adapts tenets of Marxist theory, see *Society of the Spectacle*, paragraphs: 79-89, and 204-209. For a brief insight in to Barthes sympathies for critical Marxist activities (as opposed to dogmatically calling and labelling oneself as a Marxist), see the following excerpt taken from 'Am I a Marxist?', 'M. Jean Guerin enjoins me to say whether I am a Marxist or not ... These kinds of questions are normally of interest only to McCarthyites. Others still prefer to judge by the evidence. M. Jean Guerin would be better advised to do as they do. Let him read Marx, for example. There he will discover – at least I hope he will – that you don't become a Marxist by immersion, initiation or self-proclamation ... that Marx isn't a religion but a method of explanation and action; that that method demands a great deal of those who claim to practice it; and that, as a result, calling oneself a Marxist is more about self-importance than simplicity' (Barthes, 2015b: 46-48); other examples of Barthes' critical adaptations of Marxist analysis can be found in his 1972 publication *Critical Essays* – especially the chapters 'The Tasks of Brechtian Criticism', and 'Workers and Pastors'.

<sup>3</sup> Guy Debord (1931-1994), was a French Marxist and intellectual provocateur who, in July 1957, became the leader of the *International Situationists* – an eclectic and maverick group of artists and intellectuals. From the outset, the focus of the collective was to critique and challenge the stagnation and boredom of the increasingly technological and consumer driven society.

<sup>4</sup> This concept (and the concept of *détournement*) is defined and explored in more detail later in the chapter; but, by way of an initial definition, Coverley (2010) notes that the theory and practice of the *dérive* refers to experimental behaviours which strive to invoke, 'a technique of transient passage through varied ambiances' (Coverley, 2010: 93). Adding a little clarity to this, Wark (2015) asserts that the '*dérive* is the experimental mapping of a situation' (Wark, 2015: 57), one that allows *dériveurs* to follow impromptu and unpredictable discoveries; from the desire to explore and wander, new places and new experiences can emerge. Coverley (2010) also usefully notes that the notion and practice of the *dérive* has a long and varied history – one that predates the *Situationists*. As such, it is appropriate to note that Debord and the SI didn't originally conceive of the *dérive*, but they developed and enhanced it as a key *Situationist* and political strategy.

<sup>5</sup> Coverley (2010) again notes that *détournement* is a method which encounters and tackles – with a view to creatively transforming – entrenched, established and routinised cultural practices, knowledge, or artefacts. To *détourner* means to seek out 'a word, statement, image or event from its intended usage and to subvert its meaning ... *Détournement* creates new and unexpected meanings by hijacking and disrupting the original' source of published culture (Coverley, 2010: 95).

In *Perspectives for Conscious Alterations in Everyday Life* (1961), Debord notes that the crisis of consumption, renders everyday life as a meaningless performance of routine, 'organized within the limits of a scandalous poverty' (Debord, 1961, p. para 11). The atomising behaviour of consumption, therefore generates a pattern of behaviour of *smooth conformity*, which cajoles people in to accepting a cooped existence in, 'a sort of reservation for good natives [to] keep modern society running without understanding it' (ibid: para 15). For Debord, subjectivities within the regime of capitalistic consumption are disempowered, distracted and stranded in a political and democratic wasteland. The only way to "arouse the masses" from the standardising pulses of the system, is to shock in to conscious recognition the correlation between its values and bureaucracies, and, the subsequent poverty of everyday experience in being rendered fodder for markets and profits (Sl, 1960, p. para 5). It is the depoliticising backdrop and stupefying grip of the spectacle of consumption, that Debord frames – with a view to reclaiming and redeeming – the hijacking and somnambulistic tendencies of individual autonomy. To navigate and challenge the intellectual and political apathy generated by the consumer onslaught, it's essential to establish, 'physical – as well as psychological – activities, to produce new concepts, new ideas, and new knowledge' (Wark, 2015, p. 58). The Debordean tactics of the *dérive* and *détournement* (explored in more detail later in the article) thus promote a micro potency of unpredictable actions, which can be developed and pitted against the psychological stupor conjured by the spectacle. To counteract the powerful routines of consumerised space, Debord promotes the practice of "inhabiting" any, and all, corporate-consumer dominated environments, with the purpose of fracturing habits of conformity, and detouring beyond strategic and structural expectations of organised compliance.

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<sup>6</sup> Roland Barthes, was born in Cherbourg, Normandy on the 12th of November 1915, and died age 65 on the 25th of March, 1980. His first book, *Writing Degree Zero* (1953), examined the fluidity and instability of language, and laid out a number of ideas and concepts which he continued to

A number of similar and symbiotic themes are identified within the work of Roland Barthes; <sup>6</sup> for example, his essay *The Death of the Author* (1989a), which suggests that the *modern* artifice of power and coherence which has grown to illude the transience of the *modern* author is problematic. For Barthes, the meaning of *a text*, 'in contemporary culture [has become] tyrannically centred on ... [the author's] person, his history, his tastes, his passions' (Barthes, 1989a, p. 50). Expressing somehow, 'the voice of one and the same person, the author,' intercessing a seam of truth to us (ibid: 50), which serves to render the assumed meaning of the text – and by implication knowledge – as a static entity that can be owned, corporatised and stifled. However, the shaky notion that the practice of a singular author, can somehow engineer a stasis of meaning into an array of hieroglyphic symbols, (in the form of letters and words) is akin to a blind and misguided faith. For Barthes, the assemblage of a preliminary sequence of linguistic symbols and textual characters, does not reveal the psychic dimensions of its author, but instead, opens up a portal of chaotic associations harboured within the *reader*, recipient or *Scriptor*; (*Scriptors* establish new rhythms and interpretations in response to the fluidity of their encounters with the text). In ceasing to release a single authoritative meaning, 'the author absents himself from [the text] at every level' (ibid: 51-52); here, 'the author enters into his own death' (ibid: 49), and in doing so, proliferates a multi-dimensional constellation of contested meanings, 'a fabric of quotations, resulting from a thousand sources of culture' (ibid: 52-53). The author then, *performs* a catalytic function, to agitate multilinear torrents of unpredictable reinterpretations from the refracted and secret worlds of disparate *Scriptors*.

Barthes' stance regarding the unwieldy proliferation of knowledge brings the institutional positioning and micro-political practices of the Higher Education lecturer in to critical focus. The protocol, format and

refine and develop as part of his later essays and themes, (such as the productive misinterpretation of text, the arbitrariness of meaning, and, the unpredictable chaos of personal association).

sanctioning of university knowledge, disseminated and filtered through mechanistic modes of delivery, is inevitably problematised by the ramifications of the *Death of the Author*. Teaching across the university, generally adheres to quite typical pedagogical models, where the *expert* practitioner didacts a tightly surveilled canon of knowledge, on to a selected, regimented and largely inactive and audience. This is typically aligned with subordinated groups of learners being subjected to formulaic forms of assessment, consisting of perfunctory and emulatory essays. Any scope for radical, passionate and creative endeavour is not only stifled, it is architecturally and strategically rendered redundant and obsolete.

In *The Rustle of Language* Barthes brings in to question his identity as an educator – and, its associated purpose – and asks, whether he speaks and performs in the name of, ‘a function? Of a body of knowledge? Of an experience? What do I represent? A scientific capacity? An institution? A service?’ (Barthes, 1989b, p. 320). As part of his response, he remarks that anyone teaching in a formalised context must become increasingly conscious of their staged and exclusionary actions. He contends that the traditional format of teaching is unavoidably divisive, and based upon a dichotomous opposition: on one side, the sole and unidirectional speech act ejected by the academic, and, on the other, the creative and unpredictable reception of a flurry of words and ideas received by the diverse and eclectic *audience*. And yet, when considered through the filter of the *Death of the Author*, the radical activity of Scripting and *writing* beyond the impact of word and text, becomes reframed as a practice that can be utilised to transgress and usurp processes of control and imposed authority. Encounters with language and *text*, and the subsequent fission of knowledge, should be akin to an ‘uninhibited person who shows his behind to the *Political Father*’ (Barthes, 1975, p. 53). Within the fractured interiority of a Scriptor, the minutiae of subjective experiences contain kernels of creative tangents, latent and perpendicular directions of thought which, in turn, can shift beyond the cloistered spheres of academic control. Through creative provocations, personal and personalised driftings can emerge through, ‘language’s illusions,

seductions, and intimidations’ (ibid: 18). As such, teaching as a proliferation of communication, and catalytic instability of learner encounters, harbours a political potential that can challenge, reveal and confront the terminal and privileged knowledge that underpins and upholds the authority of the university.

## 2. The Rustle of Language: Expressive Autonomy

Technical, colourless and mundane academic writing serves to suck the life, desire and pleasure out of thinking; ransacked, learners are stripped of the possibility of engaging with discovery and hopeful writing. *Inducted* and disciplined in to the constraints of technical writing, learners develop mechanical habits, ‘in the very place where freedom existed, a network of set forms hem in more and more the pristine freshness of discourse, legalistic modes of writing appears in lieu of the undulating indefiniteness of language. The control and regulation associated with the expectations of undergraduate and postgraduate writing, also produces a secondary effect, that of psychological order. Once the empire of rules, style and content has been drilled and habituated, essayistic and other technical offerings are rendered, at best, lifeless doppelgangers of pseudo-knowledge.

However, should Barthesian inspired approaches to *Expressive* writing be afforded curricular and pedagogical space, positive and liberated practices of expression can develop, ‘from the scriptor’s phantasms, and not from a uniform and reductive law ... as if the Scriptor were obeying not academic law but a mysterious commandment that comes to him from his own history – perhaps even from his own body?’ (Barthes, 1989c, pp. 44-45). Beyond the rigidity of the formal lecture-based text delivered by the academic, ‘a thousand adventures happen’ (Barthes, 1989b, p. 323); as the educator, (the *author* of the lecture) finishes speaking, the confines of any prescheduled narrative disintegrates and falls away to reveal a *vertigo* of knowledge. Such an approach belies a powerful challenge to the otherwise deferential and subservient silence of uncritical conformity; it serves as a reminder that the rupture between, ‘the pleasure of

the text and the institutions of the text' (Barthes, 1975, p. 60), is far from insurmountable.

Amidst the various academic challenges posed by the Barthesian tactics, is the need for practitioners to begin to devise alternative approaches to curriculum design and formulaic assessments; unfamiliar permutations which can promote, and importantly, accommodate the serendipity and creativity associated with liberated learner writings. Any such practices should also afford learners the freedom and non-prescribed space to Scribe unpredictable and bespoke offerings; *Expressionistic* explorations, which inevitably contain the risk of including "ignorances" and "blunders". For Barthes, any such meanders or mistakes should not be damned and failed, 'as aberrations or debilities' (Barthes, 1989c, p. 45); rather, they should be recognised and accommodated as gestative spaces and potent cells of proto-creativity. Incorporating the Barthesian notion of *skidding* – or, 'reinterpretive skids' – creative and *Expressionistic* approaches to writing can operate to tackle and reverse the traditional pedagogical replication of pupilistic prototypes, learner-automata created in the lecturer's *own image*. In this sense, for Barthes, it is essential to remember that, as a teacher:

I speak, endlessly for and before someone who does not speak. I am the one who says I (the detours of one or we, of the impersonal sentence, are insignificant), I am the one who, under the cover of an exposition (of something known), proposes a discourse, without ever knowing how it is received (Barthes, 1989b, p. 312).

To recognise and accommodate the expressive and meandering connections emergent from within the Scripted worlds of liberated learners, practitioners must start to creatively and tactically manoeuvre pedagogical alterations within the stultifying rules of the academic

machine.<sup>7</sup> Democratic practices and tactics should be experimented with, to ensure that serendipitous and subjective voices are afforded space to birth and grow towards meaningful explication. In recognising and accommodating connections to what might be referred to in Barthesian terms, as 'experiments in rustling' (Barthes, 1989d, p. 78), emergent writings from liberated Scriptors can gradually reorient towards an experience and presence of *freedom* (Barthes, 1970, p. 16). Navigating from 'the threat of a secret' (Ibid: 20), the opening-up of dynamic spaces and writing opportunities, means that *Scriptors* can set out to grasp for the intrigue of undisclosed *rustles*, which reverberate beyond the *formulary* and staid routine of technico-legal academic language.

In this sense, the opportunities and openness associated with Barthesian liberatory tactics, can operate as micro-political and democratic catalysts. In a curricular (and, 'delivery') sense, rather than presenting Barthes' work and ideas as a finite and finished archive of completed texts, to be technically probed and dissected as part of an academic endgame – by comparing his conceptual strengths and limitations against the assumptions, omissions, and obliquities of other theorists; instead, alternative, radical and empowered experiences with the *expressive* potency of Barthesian ideas are ripe for discovery. As a creative and destabilising alternative, the *death of the author*, can be presented as an unspecified landscape to learners, a participatory invitation offered to scriptors, to embark, discover, and creatively shape, knowledge and learning in new and unforeseen ways. The fluidity and instability of language harbours a radical potency, which can be actively shaped through the non-denominative writings of scriptors. In this sense, Barthes embodies an academic and politicised reminder that the parameters of normative knowledge and university relationships, institutionally scaffolded

<sup>7</sup> See the following publications for more detail on developing and implementing alternative pedagogical tactics within Higher Education contexts: Hammond, C. A. (2017) *Hope, Utopia and Creativity in Higher Education: Pedagogical Tactics for Alternative Futures*. London: Bloomsbury;

Hammond, C. A. (2017). Machiavelli, Tactics and Utopia. In M. Daley, K. Orr, & J. Petrie (Eds.), *The Principal: Power and Professionalism in FE*. London: Trentham.

and sanctioned disciplined ranks of experts, can be challenged.

### 3. Debordean Meanders towards Freedom

The micro-political implications of the Barthesian framework are sympathetic to a number of Debord's arguments in the *Society of the Spectacle*; Debord asserts that all social structures and environments risk being infected and shaped by the power and spectacle of *consumption*. As is abundantly clear, the contemporary university is no longer exempted from the expectations and excesses of consumption; the Academy is being rapidly restructured, to redefine its purpose and function into becoming a standardised and marketable *commodity*. Knabb (2006) argues that the collective reconstruction of universities along the lines of large business corporations, is serving to render them as institutions of *efficient ignorance*. Increasingly, as glossy and uncritical organisations, the financial, branding and bureaucratic purpose of the university is serving to generate a, 'mass production of uneducated students who have been rendered incapable of thinking' (Knabb, 2006, pp. 410-411). The *anarchy* associated with individual creativity and democracy is, 'taken over by the authorized organisms of power' (Vaneigem, 2004, pp. 121-122). Subjected to the spectacle and processes of comfortable familiarity, the castrated role of the *student-as-customer* is increasingly rendered as a passive witness, who, at most, engages in instructional and ceremonious façades, to rehearse their, 'ultimate role as a conservative element in the functioning of the commodity system' (Knabb, 2006, pp. 408-409). Consumer-based processes and practices of banality serve to construct, dupe, and reformulate students as production line operatives, in a 'paternalistically entrenched cultural mire of subservience and deference' (ibid: 310).

The increased *businessification* of the university, means that the qualities and practices of academic freedom and knowledge critique, in pursuit of social progress and the *public good*, is necessarily abandoned. The professionalised *Public Relations* role of sculpting of the university as a brand and an educational 'product' is something that becomes increasingly invested, honed

and protected. The public image and identity of the university must be safeguarded, to ensure its ability to successfully compete in the higher education market. As collateral damage the role and identity of the lecturer, (as maverick, critic, innovator) is also increasingly subjected to an array of 'quality control' processes, in the form of task-specific data surveillance and target-aligned assessments. The emerging role and identity of the new university lecturer, is subsequently diluted to a technical *instructor-of-knowledge*, to routinely and uncritically fulfil the, 'considerably less noble function of sheep-dog in charge of herding white-collar flocks to their respective factories and offices in accordance with the needs of the planned economy' (ibid: 411). As part of the carefully crafted academic machine, the likelihood of the *instructor-of-knowledge*, being able to confront problems of criticality, freedom and democracy; to generate alternative spaces for the practices of dynamic and radical freedom; and, to take risks in the pursuit and development of alternative pedagogical models, becomes corporately problematic and increasingly unlikely.

To respond to the power and pace of such strategic and intimidating changes, the need for *Creative Tacticians* to emerge, and commence experimentations with malleable pedagogical tactics is all the more necessary (Hammond, 2017). Rather than resign ourselves to the politically allocated function of policing fledgling followers and curricular voyeurs into tranches of bordered readings and sanitised interpretations of knowledge, we need to subscribe to, and embrace insurgent pedagogical tactics, aimed at eliciting spontaneous caches of fresh and critical developments. As practitioners, we must therefore set out to discover, creatively adapt, and implement new pedagogical frontiers, as '[n]o one can develop in freedom without [first] spreading freedom in the world' (Vaneigem, 2006, p. 247).

### 4. The Debordean Dérive & Détournement

The In his instructional tract *Theory of the Dérive* (1958), Debord defines the Situationist take on this concept, and establishes it as one of the foundational principles of SI practice; as he notes,

‘the *dérive* [literally: “drifting”], [is] a technique of rapid passage through varied ambiances. *Dérives* involve playful-constructive behaviour and an awareness of the psychogeographical effects of our environments; as such, a *dérive* is fundamentally different to the notion of an idle journey or stroll (Debord, 1958, p. para 1). For Debord, in one sense, the *dérive* is associated with the physical act of purposeful *wandering*; it is about actively transiting from psychic states of conformity, (behavioural and mental habits programmed over time), to engage in the active avoidance of uncritical routine. Illustrating the elasticity of the *dérive*, Debord notes that the conscious and intentional *dérive* or *meander*, can take place, ‘within a deliberately limited period of a few hours, or even fortuitously during fairly brief moments; or it may last for several days without interruption’ (ibid: para 12).<sup>8</sup> However, the purpose and application of the *dérive* is not confined to a set of instructions for ‘getting lost’ in the City, it is more fluid and trans-contextual than this. As Wark (2015) notes, the Situationist adaptation of the *dérive*, also refers to:

“derivare” [which] means to draw off a stream, to divert a flow. Its English descendants include the word “derive” and also “river”. Its whole field of meaning is aquatic, conjuring up flows, channels, eddies, currents, and also drifting, sailing or tacking against the wind. It suggests a space and time of liquid movement, sometimes predictable but sometimes turbulent. The word *dérive* condenses a whole attitude to life (Wark, 2015, p. 22).

The Debordean *dérive* therefore refers to a shift or transition in one’s state of mind; in this sense, it is a mechanism to challenge oneself, to resist the compulsion to conform to established and stultifying

thought patterns. Debord clarifies that the *dérive* can be, ‘precisely delimited or vague, depending on whether the goal is to study a terrain or to emotionally disorient oneself’ (Debord, 1958, p. para 14); as a result, the diverse and molten characteristics of the *dérive*, means that it evades rigid definition as a stable or ‘pure state’. As a tactic for creative contemplation, the *dérive* can be adapted to almost any situation, and serves to psychically and intellectually defibrillate the passive spectator into the role of subversive actioner, a potential ‘revolutionary following a political agenda’ (Coverley, 2010, p. 97).<sup>9</sup> Replacing the figure of the Baudelairean or Benjaminian *flâneur* – a passive stroller and hapless receptor of environments – the *dériveur* is an active, purposeful and resistant rebel, a political actor who responds with creative and unpredictable resistance to being objectively positioned.

As a key Situationist challenge, Debord proposes that the *dérive*, and the activities of the *dériveur*, be transposed and translated to all forms of human relationship and organisation. Therefore, adapting the *dérive* as a Situationist tactic into a melee of curricular spaces and pedagogical environments, means that a new architecture of relations and associations needs to emerge. To be reinhabited by the wandering and creative Scriptings of individual *dériveurs*, academic spaces need to be navigated and altered, so that the wider framing of knowledge and the pre-specified roles and activities of the lecturer and *learner* can be countered. With this, co-constructive possibilities can start to emerge to directly change the ways in which the parameters of curricular space can be shared, encountered and experienced. *Dériveur*’s can challenge and usurp the traditional modes of navigating and encountering learning environments, to create learning

<sup>8</sup> Debord, also offers the following insight to the physical *dérive*: ‘In spite of the cessations imposed by the need for sleep, certain *dérives* of a sufficient intensity have been sustained for three or four days, or even longer. It is true that in the case of a series of *dérives* over a rather long period of time it is almost impossible to determine precisely when the

state of mind peculiar to one *dérive* gives way to that of another’ (Debord, 1958: para 12).

<sup>9</sup> Debord questions, in relation to this point, “What is private life deprived of?” Quite simply of life itself, which is cruelly absent. People are as deprived as possible of communication and of self-realization. Deprived of the opportunity to personally make their own history’ (Debord, 1961: para 23).

spaces characterised by the potential for new connections and discoveries, which remain perpetually and democratically, 'open-ended for all participants' (McDonough, 2004, pp. 261-262). The spontaneity of the *dérive* can open up new forms of learning labyrinths, build bridges between the disparate and burbling non-linear worlds of the singular imagination, and the wider environment of pedagogy and the curriculum. With the wisp of a pragmatic technique, Vaneigem suggests that individual and creative meanders can be instigated through an expansive range of cultural prompts, such as, music, film, and literature (Vaneigem, 2006, pp. 198-199). But, rather than passively consume the contents of the cultural material, he stipulates that the fragments be extracted, manipulated and used as catalysts, to incite spontaneous and creative associations and new vibrant diversions.

As was briefly highlighted earlier, the notion of *détournement* – basically, to *detour* – elaborates this notion of re-interpretive cultural practices. To restate Coverley's definition from above, to *détourner* is to seek out 'a word, statement, image or event from its intended usage and to subvert its meaning' (Coverley, 2010, p. 95). *Détournement* entails the politicised poaching of aspects, or segments of published texts and other material; the idea is to hijack the ossified piece of culture, and use it to produce new and unintended meanings. There is no particular size, shape or context to be associated with the source of a *détourned* object; as Wark notes, it could, 'be a single image, a film sequence of any length, a word, a phrase, a paragraph' (Wark, 2015, p. 40). What matters, is that as a result of the refracted association, a fresh and creative direction is unpredictably jettisoned.

The SI tract *Détournement as Negation and Prelude* (SI, 1959) identifies two related aspects to the practice of *détournement*; initially, the object being *détourned* must be stripped of its false and reified ownership, in order to be perceived as just another fluid and

contributory building block of culture. Secondly, once stripped of its false value, it should influence or become part of a 'brand new ensemble', a new and creative expression of a fresh and formative artefact of cultural work (SI, 1959, p. para 1). The decomposition of the source of the original artefact, (with its associated cultural past) is rendered unimportant, as a "reinvested" expression emerges from the creative *detour* to produce, 'a negation of the value of the previous organization of expression. It arises and grows increasingly stronger in the decomposition of the original' (ibid: para 3).

*Détournement* of a piece of writing, or other segment of pre-existing cultural product, is therefore the 'opposite of quotation' (Wark, 2015, p. 40). Traditionally, the rigid and authoritative process of quotation entails the insertion of a fenced piece of past information into a newly emerging 'here-and-now'; however, it is executed within the strategic confines of an institutional setting in a specific and legislated way. Quotation maintains the legal identity and separation of the existing work, retaining its security and identification as a privately owned and corporate artefact. In comparison, to *détourner* is to resist authorial expectations; again, as with the *dérive*, to engage in an activity of *détournement* is to adopt a participative and subversive stance, to challenge the incorporated standards of ownership and control. Through reinterpretation, *détournement* liquefies the false truth and artificial petrification of a cultural product, and untethers the guy-ropes of authoritarian stagnancy, so that the legalistic hold over the work is weakened. Ultimately, *détournement* embodies a 'challenge to private property, it attacks the kind of fetishism that reifies cultural products of collective human heritage and endeavour (Wark, 2015, p. 40). As a form of *expressive* subversion, *détournement* is targeted at hijacking of existing knowledge, and disrupting the consumer world of packaged and privatised order.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that similarities can be identified here between Barthes *Death of the Author*, and his notion of the

*expressive* 'rustles' of language, and, the Debordean liberation of creative and alternative voices.

## 5. Pedagogical Tactics for Future Possibility

**Commonalties** The alternative pedagogical possibilities posed through the tactical latency of the Barthesian *Death of the Author*, and the expressive notion of liberated writing, in conjunction with the Debordean influenced *dérive* and *détournement*, hopefully provides practitioners with malleable options, to consider creatively tackling the practices and pressures dictated by edu-business and the consumer environment. Rather than accepting and obeying the imposition of such expectations as a *categorical imperative*, pedagogical practices could be opened up to the principles of creative and expressive wandering. To pursue pedagogical co-constructions and micro moments of creative discovery, practitioners and students could start to engage in the challenge of developing tactics for alternative and transformatory practice.

To counter the pressure to conform to the insipid role and values of business, *all* can start to resist the emerging practices of a system that is based upon the routine fulfilment of commodified and standardised tasks and outcomes. Invoking the principles of the *dérive* and *détournement*, pedagogical practices could emerge that begin to challenge, through experiential discovery, the practices of rote, lifeless and regurgitative learning. Such tactics are not about creating a formulaic set of instructions and measurable objectives, or implementing a Situationist pedagogy; as Debord notes in *One More Try If You Want to Be Situationists*, 'there is no "situationism" as *doctrine*', as such, we should resist the habit of exhaustively predefining knowledge, practice and outcome, prior to any explorative experimentation (Debord, 2004c, p. 49). Rather, negating pre-specified formulas and institutional narratives based on grades and final awards, a Situationist-esque experimental pedagogy, can lead towards practices and developments that are as yet to be defined. The potential for pedagogical adaptations of these principles and tactics, means that conversations, narratives, learning-practices and expectations within and across university contexts, can start to feature as part of academic discourse, and so

resist the poleaxing mental consequences of the consumer university.

The *Death of the Author*, Barthesian Scriptor-writing, the *dérive* and *détournement*, are therefore openly and freely gifted as flexible pedagogical alternatives, which can be reinterpreted in any number of different ways. Facilitating creative permutations and opportunities for discovery, untethered renovations of personal voices, moments and situations, and the provocation of wonder and astonishment, can start to come to the fore of explorative learning experiences. The array of concepts and tactics from Barthes and Debord form an initial basis for a political revival of pedagogical practice. Fortunately, it is still possible – just – for fresh academic and democratic opportunities to unfold, where learners can be freed to collectively embark on adventures, divine and rearticulate refracted pasts, and begin to posit them as unspent possibilities for alternative future scenarios. The Barthesian and Debordean tactics can be used to construct learning opportunities that can, 'rectify the past, to change the psychogeography of our surroundings, [and] hew our unfulfilled dreams and wishes out of the veinstone that imprisons them, to let individual passions find harmonious collective expression' (Vaneigem, 2004, p. 234). The insights presented by Barthes, Debord and the Situationists could become tactical vehicles through which step-change and experiential revolutions of everyday life emerge. As flexible mechanisms for alternative forms of curricular engagement, they can be malleably implemented and subjectively received, in ways that recognise and enable fractured searches for latent nubs of expressive hope. Through such open and flexible spaces collaborators may set out to *détourner* conceptual fragments, and through their own troves of poignant shards, start to re-inhabit the flexible parameters of discovery and learning encounters. Equipped with these tactics, pro-dynamic practitioners and learner-collaborators might start to challenge and depart from the staid, pre-specified and fatalistic consumer infected present, and in so doing start to conceive of practices and possibilities that strive for new and alternative futures

## 6. Disclosure statement

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