

## **The Daily Dose of the Good (and Not So Good) Words: Go Fish! From Bishop Bishop**

For those of you who have been following The (Not Yet Despite the Best of Intentions) Daily Dose, you know that I relish tongue in cheek exaggeration- the image of my cheeky tongue is quite tasty, is it not? I believe that there is a place in our intellectual adventures for hyperbole, for exaggeration, for the purposeful yet ethical misunderstanding of something- some artwork, some text, some idea.

We learn not only by careful attention to what we think is right in front of us. We learn not only by playing by the rules- the rules of the thing we think is in front of us, the rules of a class, the rules of the academic enterprise, etc. and so forth. We also learn by the mischievous and even malicious twisting and turning of something. Bend it out of shape. Pull off its wings. Snap its back. Not all violence is bad- sometimes it gives back more than it takes away.

Besides, understanding is just the flip side of misunderstanding and is just as violent. Both are constrained by a game of rule following and rule breaking. Neither one is freer. Neither one is truer. Neither one is more fixed. They are different ways to approach something.

This will be provocative. Of course, with that sort of promise is just as likely to fall flat. The tyranny of hydraulics has impeccable timing, but I am getting ahead of myself. Remember that tongue firmly planted in my cheek? Good. And I warn you now, I will mix metaphors- the previous slash and burn Daily Doses used an (over)extended thematic of trails and blazes and hikes, oh my. Now we go deep-sea fishing. Let's rock the boat. Let's cast our nets and see what gets caught.

Instead of going to class, let's go on a date. And I don't mean one of those dates looking for love in all the wrong places. I am not writing a love letter. We want to score. We want to get some. We meet Badiou or Derrida or Judd, or some other someone/something, we really, really want to get to "know." We literally do not meet them in the flesh; we meet the body of their work. Though, in some ways we literally meet them in the flesh, at least our flesh meets their text or art or idea, but that channel hides lots of rocks that could break our hull so we will chart another course for now.

More often than not we meet a small part of the body of their work. It is playing dirty to call someone a fetishist. But I mean no insult when I say our date, our encounter, with a small part of a body of a work is sexually charged. Badiou's void just begs us to try to penetrate it. We never will, because his void is the ultimate cock tease. I speak, of course, of the academic cock that we all hold in our hands, regardless of our supposed biological sex or culturally constructed gender. We all strain toward the void, wanting to get inside it.

There are ways in which our encounters, our endeavors to keep going (and going and going and going) are extended circle jerks. We surround a text, an idea, an art work- we strain toward it, eager, hungry, wanting. We cannot touch it, and we are not alone in our hard straining towards. We spend lots and lots and lots of words trying. And we look at the words others have spent

trying to get inside something. If you recoil at my imagery or think it an insult, then I ask you to think long and hard about why you have that reaction. I mean no insult.

I pause for a moment. The tension and anxiety builds, and so I lash out to deflect imagined blows. If Paul McCartney can place an animatronic sculpture of a creepy, middle aged man fucking a knothole in a tree in a pretend public park into the art gallery, and we take and talk about it seriously, then I can place the image of a not quite middle aged woman wearing a strap on and trying to fuck the knothole in Badiou's text into the classroom and expect to have it taken and talked about seriously. I get to be an intellectual bad boy, too.

But I have to be careful. I am getting tangled in my own net. I twist and turn. I am deep-sea fishing. It is risky. I might fall off the boat into icy waters. I want to catch something in my net; something I can never hold. And my net is woven with sexually charged imagery. That is the net that comes to my hand.

The reason for all this sexually charged imagery is because I wonder about the untouchable void out of which the next not quite touchable void emerges. The imagery is gendered in ways that could replicate ideas I find troubling. It is not an uncommon trope to imagine intellectual pursuits as an unmessy, disembodied birth, a strange abstract with no heat or color, no taste or noise.

What if instead of a void that we try to but cannot penetrate, we are penetrated by an encounter? We take it in. We envelop it. We cannot capture it, but we momentarily hold its motion. It slides in and out- moving, seldom resting, never staying. Slick, warm, wet. It marks us. We mark it. It comes, and then it goes. The thing we took in, that we asked to penetrate us, cannot stay. But it leaves behind sticky traces of the encounter. And parts of us cling to it even though we no longer hold its movement.

I am not interested in replacing the disembodied void that gives birth bloodlessly with my envagination that holds but cannot capture the in and out maneuvers of some thing. I want an expanded field. A bigger net.

Much of academic discourse is like bad sex. There are rigid rules about what you can say and what you can do, and too often, it is deadly boring because people are afraid to take risks because no one likes to be laughed at when their pants are down, literally or figuratively. Now there is a (very good) place for rigor, and marking and limiting our field of inquiry means we explore things in depth. A boundless field of possibility will remain forever unplowed. Rules give us a place to play. The narratives we use to talk about ideas are necessary fantasies. But we have to be careful, to not get caught up in thinking that there is only rule set, in thinking that there is only one right way to play this game. There is more than one way to skin a fish.

We might need to be open to the notion that sometimes we need to spice up our intellectual life by greeting ourselves at the door wrapped in saran wrap. We might need to be willing to be ridiculous; to cast our net in shark infested waters. There is nothing wrong with the missionary position that most academic work takes; it is just important to remember that it is not the only position. Other positions are not better, you don't have to be kinky to have a good time, but rigor without rigidity is something to strive for.

It is not just because I am a sadist and enjoy imagining you squirming in your seat, and I do very much enjoy the image of you squirming in your seat, that I weave my net with sex. I want to give y'all a gift. I want my willful distortion to be so out there that you can't help but think, "Damn, if she can do that, then what I want to do and say shouldn't be a problem at all."

Here I am an idealist.

I want each and every one of you to feel like you have the right to take in, envelope, envaginate any art work, any text, any idea. Let fluid motion get you and it wet. Be greedy like Derrida, try to capture everything in your net knowing that you can never keep your catch. You must release it. You will be left with traces. The net you use is not the same one that Derrida (or Badiou or any other thinker) used though you might weave some of his rope into your web. I imagine that almost no one will try to weave my ropes into their nets.

You must remember that you did not spin most of the rope you use to weave your net. The fibers were selected and spun together by conversations that stretch back for generations. I say this because what you capture in your net, what you choose to take in, what you mark with your wetness, is not just determined by you. You are not so much outside of the net, using it as a tool. You are caught in it. I am caught in my net. I writhe in it.

Despite being as much caught as a catcher, we still must try to catch things in our nets. Go fish. Just remember that the net you use, the net that uses you, limits the type of fish you will find squirming in your net.