



Ivory Tower

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From the poetic notes written this morning for today's opening lecture - I communicated this but not as 'poetically':

A PhD today is an anachronism. It is hard to convince anyone in this day and age that it is legitimate to devote four years or so of your life thinking about one single thing. People will try to make you think that you are committing a sin by doing it. You probably think you are committing a sin doing it. The state no longer thinks that it ought to support you. Even the university thinks that the sooner you finish and stop being there the better.



Everything militates against its very possibility: it's not instrumental enough according to the increasingly narrow and impoverished conception of what is instrumental pedalled by the neoliberal assemblage that is trying to colonise everything today, and it is not enough of a money-maker for the supposedly money-starved universities.

In an age which claims to foster the Dionysian spirit as a mode of release, and which ends up being Dionysian in a very Apollonian manner, a PhD is exactly the opposite. It is Apollonian in a very Dionysian manner: it invites you to a life of thinking, and to take your time thinking, carefully, to reflect on what you are doing bit by bit, step by step, thought by thought.

It does so at the very moment when everything around you screams: speed, goals, rush. As such it is sacrilegious and here lies the source of its jouissance-inducing core: everyone wants you to feel guilty for doing it, you even feel guilty you are doing it, and yet you think you are getting away with murder. You are getting away with murder: Even if you succeed and become an academic, you will never experience the intellectual intensity, the passion and the torture of PhD time.

This is the kind of PhD we are going to live throughout this seminar. We are going to go up to the Ivory Tower - so called because ivory is a luxurious and yet impractical material, it defines the nature of your dwelling and your ethos as a PhDer: floating up high, luxuriously, impractically. We are going to go up to the Ivory Tower and stay there for a little while.

Twenty-thirty-fourty years ago dwelling in the Ivory Tower was attacked by the left demanding the dweller to come down and 'change the world rather than interpret it'. Today it is attacked by the right demanding the dweller to come down. The right finds the very sight of you unbearable. So there is no 'come down and' they just want you to come down. And so, to occupy the Ivory Tower is now an act of resistance.



Indeed we need to 'Occupy' the Ivory Tower. Occupy it and engage in these alter-temporal revolutionary practices known as: contemplating, thinking, slowly slowly, taking our time, like medieval scholars. Indeed we can say that what we are going to engage in is a form of 'strategic medievalism'.