

The copy cheats win

When the plagiarism committee meets, it seems the last thing they care about is stopping student cheats, as DR ERUDITIO SEDIF explains in this Faculty Monologue

Today is dreaded plagiarism committee day. The chair is cultural studies Professor Gerhard, now gesticulating at the front of the room, proudly recounting his mastery of cyber-tools. He's an eager mid-30s fox always ready to spruik-up techno-therapies for the digital age of education.

"What use is old technology, I mean like actually meeting physically, in a square room? So 20th Century!" the recently elevated Professor opines, "Students have taken the lead, and we have to catch up. Let's hold our seminars online."

Sitting to the left is the philosopher Dr Frostbite who can hardly defrost enough breath to bother uttering a response. "Bullshit," she finally says. Then, more loudly, "No, actually it's fucking bullshit." Her Mancunian accent turns fuck into "fook", somehow giving the profanity a poetic lilt.

This, the professor can not let pass, "Actually, I trialled it last week. We booked a computer lab and held the tutorial in a chat room." Dr Frostbite lets her glacial eyes unfreeze for a moment in mocking astonishment.

The Professor, impervious to even the most unsubtle gesture, continues, "You should have heard the fury of the key boards. We banned speaking, and no one dominated. There's a record of everything everyone contributed, which I store, as per University policy on record keeping. I can see who does what, what files they look at, how long they stay on line."

I'll admit that you can't fault the Prof. for his altruistic connectedness with the student body. Now he is looking at me, "Yes, there is nothing

like being available 24/7, popping in and out to see how the chat is going. Such connectivity will help all staff get better student evaluations at the end of the semester." It is such evaluations that have made him the Faculty's most popular teacher and which landed him the professorship – a Chair, as it is known. Four crooked legs if you ask me.

Professor Gerhard goes on about new tools to detect plagiarism while Frostbite looks over at me, hoping for some sign that there is intelligent life here. I oblige. I have to; she's now on a disciplinary committee examining claims of sexual misconduct against me. Her philosophical stance on the nature of existences gives me hope. So I interrupt Gerhard, "Can we begin, please, I have a disciplinary meeting about allegedly popping in and out in an hour."

And so the meeting begins. For its duration Dr Frostbite, not without pleasure, makes a home for disdain on her face. When she is most content, her mouth becomes a permanently contemptuous snarl on the cusp of barking at life.

It's been said that if you address Dr Frostbite on a bad day you immediately commit an unforgivable offence – a presentist *non sequitur* – for you have assumed she is there, but just because you see her it does not follow that she is there. This does have the advantage, at least, of making university challenging for her students.

As for Frostbite's views on students, these were made well-known at the last Learning and Teaching Day (although she will deny she was there): "Once they've stopped fooking each other and the brain activates, they might have some worth." Her classes consist of less than ten part-time mostly divorced mature-age male students whose possible point of commonality is impotence. She likes it that way, apparently sharpens


the mind on the finer things.

Frostbite's last philosophy seminar paper "Am I really here: and if I am why are you there?" was widely reported on campus. A greying haired student asked if he could demonstrate how to dissolve the here/there problem and, invited to do so, sat on her lap slightly exposed. Frostbite, in a now legendary response said, "Well no, the here/there problem is not a lapidary problem requiring your drilling tools; such a proposition belongs entirely to the mind of an adolescent who can't work out to use his tool." With the student's wilting tool returned to toolbox, the seminar continued.

But I digress. The third member of this committee is me, a middle aged male academic, recruited to weed out plagiarism as an extra administrative duty to make up for my research inactivity. It is rumoured my motivation for staying in academia is that I have learned that you can win a night's solace from many a tender heart with erudite reference to the romantic authors of yore. When that mojo-thing goes, I'll start my brilliant research career.

Somehow, the meeting is over and I have ended up being assigned to write the committee's draft plagiarism policy. Well, I will certainly be writing up something – an underground manifesto on beating plagiarism rules for students. I never said I'd be the baton boy for plagiarism rules! Fook them!

As we leave, Frostbite speaks to Gerhard with excruciating honesty, "You are a pedant," she says, "a ghost of a man hiding behind techno-jargon and bureaucratic rules. I say this not to hurt you, but to disclose to you how everyone sees you. But don't worry, you are not really here, you're there," she says, pointing to a computer, "Go get a fooking second life!"

"I already have one" he replies, before realising he'd fallen into the, perhaps non-existent, trap. 

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