

Editorial: Reflections at the Crossroads

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1. A Road Less Travelled?

Frost's 1916 poem *The Road Not Taken* is often misunderstood. Seen by most as "paean to self-assertion" (Orr, 2015), this common reading misses the essential point: that each road, in Frost's terms, is "really about the same." It's not that the path that appears less travelled is of greater value than the one worn bare by previous travellers; it's that each path leads to the same place. Whatever our choices, whatever our intentions, we're always exactly where we are. Hindsight grants us the benefit of valuing one choice over another (by virtue of its consequence) and thinking that our choice "made all the difference." The point, however, is that our choice made little difference. We rarely had a choice. The path was chosen for us. Frost's poem, then, isn't about self-assertion (as many readers believe); it's a poem about how we rationalise the lack of self-assertion, how most decisions are made for us, prescribed prior to our intervention, and motivated largely by the circumstances that define us at any given time.

In the first editorial I wrote for this journal, I argued in favour of PRISM as a 'third space.' I celebrated this 'third space' as an alternate forum, *created* as some sort of panacea to the dominance of corporate academic publishing. Indeed, PRISM has become a third alternative, nestled between the corporate giants and the self-published fanzines so rife in the digital sphere. The conceit, however, was to propose that *we* defined this space: that we somehow chose to walk the road not taken, as though conscious deliberation spotted an overgrown

path ahead. This was never true. As Frost tells us, it's hindsight that makes all the difference. Outcomes rarely seem inevitable in retrospect.

PRISM was born from necessity, not intention, and necessity, as we well know, is often the mother of invention. It's necessity that made all the difference. Operating in a College-based environment, a space woefully under-represented in terms of research and scholarship, with little to no resources, prior experience, or available funding, there was only ever one path ahead. And that's the path we walked. Whether we walked it well or not is a task for hindsight.

I took over the helm at this journal rather unexpectedly. There have been many trials and achievements along the way. Occasionally, I have stopped and peeped through the undergrowth to see how other travellers fare. They largely fare the same. Those on higher ground struggle with the altitude and yearn for the comfort of the forest floor. Those on the forest floor dream about the higher ground, its landscapes and its vistas. While each is different to the other, the destination remains the same. We're peddlers of ideas. Each word, from the first to the last, is a step along the path that chose us. What we make of it is hindsight's claim. And on that rather obtuse point, I sign-off my tenure as PRISM's Editor in Chief. Before I depart, however, I leave you with an even more obtuse Chinese parable¹. Mischievous or meaningful? I'll let hindsight decide.

Once upon a time there was a farmer. His only horse ran away. The farmer's neighbours came to pay their condolences. "What a terrible thing," they all said. "Maybe, maybe not. Who's to say?" replied the farmer.

2. This Issue

Much like the obtuse linguistic refraction above, this issue is highly experimental. We never intended it to be this way. There was no call for papers, no elicitation from the fringe. It simply happened this way, and what an interesting happening it is.

In our first article, **Deterala and Villar** present a reflective dialogue on disaster and how one "knows" what one knows when knowledge is mediated and received indirectly. What we

¹ Adapted from Watts (1957) *The Way of Zen*. New York: Pantheon.

know, or what we think we know, is often transmitted via natural language *vis a vis* our interactions with others. The authors practise a dialogic reflexivity to trace the paths between what they call “constellations of meaning.”

Continuing PRISM’s tradition of supporting early career researchers, **Hamilton** follows with a mixed-methods approach to the way autism is represented in the British press. Refracting traditional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) through the lens of critical theory (with a touch of the Frankfurt School tradition), Hamilton challenges the media’s often insensitive, sometimes brutal, othering of the autistic community as somehow non-normative or problematic.

Shukie follows with a meditation on chaos and connectivism in the context of learning theory. Drawing from a heady range of thinkers, from the French philosophical tradition to information theory, Shukie challenges the orthodoxy of mechanistic teaching and learning strategies.

In a more grounded piece, **Shepherd, Fishwick, Crighton and Starkie** curate a roundtable discussion on the effectiveness of Augmented Reality (AR) in classroom teaching. Based on an experiment conducted by the team, the authors evaluate students’ responses to AR, revealing some surprising results.

The penultimate piece may be a first for any scholarly journal. **Husband, Murphy and Petrie** present a play in two acts. (Yes, a play!) Aimed at addressing the lived experience of workers in the Further Education sector, the authors (or playwrights?) use the form of a dramatic dialogue to tease out the concerns and dilemmas that may resonate with those working in the sector.

Finally, **John Harrison** reviews *The Principal: Power and Professionalism in FE*. Bringing a wealth of experience in HE management, and a critical eye, Harrison appraises the accuracy and value of a collection designed to both challenge and enlighten its readership.

References

Orr, D. (2015). The Most Misread Poem in America. *The Paris Review*, 11th September 2015.

Watt, A. (1957) *The Way of Zen*. New York: Pantheon.