

Metaphors; Dangerous or Welcoming?

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The world begins at a kitchen table.

– Joy Harjo, “Perhaps the World Ends Here”

Whenever someone asks me, “What are you studying?” I always pause. Do I say Integrated Studies, see the blank look, and then wait for them to ask me what it is? Or do I just simplify things and say Cultural Studies? But of course, that answer is usually followed by more questions about what type of culture I study. Or what about Cultural Studies? These are all perfectly valid questions of course; but, after two years, even *I’m* not so sure how to tackle these questions with any amount of accuracy. Is this bad? Well, I don’t think so. Why? Because Integrated Studies has given me a *voice*. That is to say, I have found my voice, calling and passion in Integrated Studies.

While I do not recall specifically when this happened, it has happened nonetheless. Perhaps the memory of plodding through my first reading of Marx and thinking *there is no way I will ever understand this* remains too fresh. *Really, what am/was I thinking?* Karl Marx, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Friedrich Engels, Martin Heidegger, and Roland Barthes were all late great men with immensely important things to say; things I initially felt I would never be able to comprehend. And don’t get me started on trying to tackle Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” (Oh, I really must remember to finish that one.) Of course, there are others as well, some very much alive and still producing work like Stuart Hall, bell hooks, Joe Moran, Natalie Fenton, Henry Giroux, and Paula Allman (Paula Allman passed in 2011, and Stuart Hall passed in February of 2014 - Ed). There were also others I didn’t like at all, although it is possibly a good sign that I can’t recall any of their names.

I was so scared upon writing my first paper that I elicited help from a colleague and friend: something I would have never dreamed of doing before, ever. Help? I don’t need help. Well, I am glad I reached out as I learnt a lot working with her. I will forever be grateful for her patience, which must have been difficult since I had chosen to apply *masculine hegemony* to a modern day article. (Thankfully, she knew a little on the subject.) So with my first paper under my belt and a respectable pass I knew I was going to be all right.

Yet, it wasn’t until I was reading Marx again that something clicked. I was actually understanding what I was reading and, lo and behold, I was enjoying it too. I was not only finding pleasure in what I was doing, but I was also dropping other things, like work and friends to work on assignments or postings. Furthermore, I no longer feared my courses, but rather devoured them, excitedly opening all my textbook packages, examining and reading ahead if I could. In one situation I had finished a whole book before the class had even started.

To me, Integrated Studies is my metaphor and is dependent upon me noticing things, building links, and trying to make connections. Sometimes it is things I may have known before, but wasn’t quite sure how to articulate. Other times, it may have been some point of view I hadn’t even considered; nevertheless, those old men and, of course, some women as well, have helped me find my words and voice. This is my relationship with them. They are my resources, my material, and what I use to express myself. I am no longer afraid of them. They are my friends and will remain so for many more years to come.