**Message To Those Who Write Papers for Classes Offered Under My Name (Frank)**

**(English 4371, Fall 2015)**

I am interested in every facet of your papers--in everything you say from the level of the individual syllables’ intersonority as it were through the individual words as they relate to other words within 1) their sentences, 2) their paragraphs, 3) the specific argument of which they’re part, 4) the paper-as-a-whole, 5) the texts it derives from and those texts’ disciplines, 6) the culture all these are embedded in and in part constitute. In short, I am interested in your words’ resonances at all distances and in how you set these resonances up. I am interested, delighted, and eager for more every time you pull something off with language, either well or ill. Either way, I notice, and I applaud--in the second case less for more of the same than for the fact that we get to focus on it with a view to deciding if it is an example of where and how in this case you want to be (in language).

I am interested in your ideas and how they speak-write themselves. I am interested in their connections with the texts at hand (object text, argument text) and in how they connect these to each other. I am interested in how you work with your literary “object” across the argument your writing develops out of and at the same time in how the object feeds/nourishes the argument (for it does). It is the rare paper that, in coming into being, can avoid feeding the text/texts it grows from, as a child “feeds” those who feed it.

I am interested in the overall form your papers take, in how they establish themselves in their progression from one of their phases to another and in how these are related--in sequences of development or otherwise. I am interested in the connection between every word and its neighbors; in the connection of every sentence to its forerunner and successor (in how the one predicts, makes room for, the other, or brings the other into being, acknowledges it, and/or takes leave of it).

I am interested in your simplicity. I am interested in your complexity. I am interested in the density of thought you achieve. I am interested in your clarity. I am interested in your style, in the general level of your discourse, and in the multiple levels of meaning you orchestrate simultaneously and inter-orchestrate.

For me, each of your papers is a work of art, an aesthetic object (in a good, rather than in the hermeneut’s pejorative, sense), and treated with a corresponding deference. At the same time, I look on each as existing to fulfill a particular function, that is, as having a particular “use value” (here not in the narrowly Marxist reading that normally limits one’s response to this phrase, but in a broader hermeneutic sense [the sense in which everything brought into being by us is already embedded in a particular involvement and exists to fulfill its particular assignment, which, even in the case of art with a 100% aesthetic function, is probably not merely to “be itself” as has been shown pace Kant with copious examples, since itselfness is scarcely thinkable in any case except as a function of a relation]).

I am interested in looking at your papers from the inside out insofar as this is possible for another being--in seeing where they (you) are coming from. Once this is known, everything in them--whether this is demonstrable on the surface or not--becomes possessed of a precise coherence with everything else, since their parts are parts of larger, already organized and essentially coherent reflections/extensions of their loci of origin (which I am assuming embody coherence in their own right). What the paper that does not display its own principles of coherence on its surface by example, or on the still visible sub-surface, will be aiming for is to come to be aware of these principles and come to show them.

I am indeed buying here into the ancient dream of coherence (now sometimes--and as a strategy of theoretical one-upmanship--considered naïve), buying into it not only as a model for the superficial self, which goes without saying, but also as a model for that construct whose existence one can posit underneath the superficial self now so thoroughly undone by psychoanalysis. I am buying into it as one way of understanding, and being comfortable with, understanding. Even if one does not buy the ancient dream of reason, coherence, symmetry, it still seems that whatever nodes/knobs/rhizomes the personality and its products do consist of appear to be essentially coherent within themselves and on speaking terms with one another. If they are not precisely intersystematizable (although I in fact believe they are this, too), they appear to be speakers of the same or at least the same family, of languages.

The dream of coherence and wholeness may indeed be but a dream of consciousness--that is, a dream on the part *of* consciousness, which creates the unconscious to perpetuate the dream. The unconscious certainly does everything possible to bolster, defend, support, and dream the dream on. (This is odd, since the unconscious’s own very existence is said to invalidate the dream.) The mere, and relatively superficial fact that we are now and have been since Freud able to posit a center of personality that is not the ego/consciousness does not necessarily mean that all coherence is gone. The acknowledgment that the ego does not control the personality, i.e., that it is not its core/sole center, does not destroy such coherence as the personality may possess beyond the ego’s dream, which in any case may be less a dream of coherence than a demand to dominate. It does not destroy the coherence of personality any more than the discovery of the sun rather than the earth at the center of our part of the universe destroyed cosmos. Displacement is not the same as incoherence.

I am interested in your “nailing” the arguments that underlie, give rise to, constitute the texts of this course, and in your doing this in coherent, integrated form. Not because coherence is the only possible value here, but because I need--and want (as does this university)--to see your having taken possession of and having appropriated, a given argument as an integrated whole in your language/in your speech. To have done so is not unworthwhile. Nor is it necessarily easy. One relatively sure way of understanding what makes a car go is to take it apart (deconstruct) then reconstruct it--its engine, in particular, and the connections between this and the transmission. Then, when you see it running, you at least know how if you don’t know why. In the case of argument, the deconstruction/reconstruction can deliver the argument to your store of mental equipment--your enginry--and be used both to decode the presentations of others that are susceptible to its systematizations and to encode your own when you have need of what it can do.

I am also interested in your independent thinking, though “independent” is a bit of a proud word to account for the infinitesimal increments by which we extend knowledge, when these are measured by the expanses of what has gone before in the sense of the tradition, both as embedded in language and in the sense of the tradition that feeds and undergirds the various disciplines and varieties of thought. Still, there *is* independence (uniqueness), and I am interested in seeing you pitch into it (yes, doing so can seem like pitching into an abyss.).

If, as you read my markings or comments on your papers, you feel I have missed a quality your work demonstrates, failed to recognize a phrase or new level of self-development you have achieved, or even only missed a connection, please set up an encounter between us so that you and I and the paper may look at this. Such an encounter will probably contribute to the development of all three of us. It is difficult for you and your work to develop as rapidly as possible if what has been achieved remains unacknowledged and thus in the way, obstructing the forward movement of what is waiting behind it.

This sentence is an explicit acknowledgment of your having read this material and a request of you to modify it as you might wish. What, in your view, wants to be here that is yet to be included? What appears here that you would be just as happy without?

Thanks ahead of time for your careful work.

LTF