

**A Deconstruction[†] of
“*The Degree of BSc (Honours)
in Computer Games Technology
with Japanese Studies
at the University of Abertay Dundee*”**

Perspectives on Professional Practice

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[†] throughout the rest of this essay *deconstruction* is written with a small ‘d’ for internal consistency

Table of Contents

<i>Why deconstruction</i>	3
<i>The deconstruction</i>	
<i>The University of Abertay Dundee</i>	9
<i>BSc Computer Games Technology</i>	14
<i>Games</i>	15
<i>Computer/ing</i>	16
<i>with Japanese Studies</i>	18
<i>Conclusions and Analysis</i>	19
<i>References</i>	22
<i>Appendix</i>	24

deconstruction [f. DE + CONSTRUCTION]

- a. The action of undoing the construction of a thing.
- b. *Philos.* and *Lit. Theory.* A strategy for critical analysis associated with the French philosopher Jacques Derrida (b. 1930), directed towards exposing unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language.

(Oxford English Dictionary, 1989)

deconstruction n. 1. The reverse of construction; taking to pieces, *rare*, L19. 2. A strategy of critical analysis of (esp. philosophical and literary) language and texts which emphasises features exposing unquestioned assumptions and inconsistencies. L20.

(The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1993)

‘What’s the use of their having names,’ the Gnat said, ‘if they won’t answer to them?’

‘No use to *them*,’ said Alice; ‘but it’s useful to the people that name them, I suppose. If not, why do things have names at all?’

(Carroll, 1872)

Why deconstruction?

From 1996 - just after its (re-)founding – and to date I have been intimately involved in the development of the novel degree programmes in *new media* at the University of Abertay Dundee; degree programmes in video games programming, digital time-based artistry, digital music and sound production and new media production control. It was for the years 1996-2002 “a novelty-loaded context” and “a fast and irregularly changing situation” (Toffler, 1970,

p319); one which deeply affected many involved, creating immense strains that caused no less than a “distortion with which we perceive reality ... [which] interferes with the ability to “think” (ibid p318). This does not overstate the case.

I hope and intend that deconstruction will provide a useful, deeper, broader, suitable (to me and to the text) and even courageous look behind, within and outwith to deeper meanings, contradictions, dichotomies, strains, political, economic and other forces that played out on all those involved. This essay will consider the first undergraduate, and often considered the most radical (although all were unique at roll-out), programme in what became a series of offerings.

“... Derrida warns against ‘neo-idealism’: the idea that nothing really happens, that all is an illusion just because it is set within a structure by the media. Rather, he wants to emphasise that deconstruction is about getting down to an event, to a ‘singularity’, to what is irreducible and particular in an individual happening.”
(Thompson, 2003, p189)

“The degree of BSc (Honours) in Computer Games Technology with Japanese Studies at the University of Abertay Dundee” was, and remains, very real. In attempting to understand this ‘text’ several different approaches can be taken and validated. In the recent past I presented (Sutherland *et al*, 2002 - see appendix) an *account of practice* informed by *sensemaking* (Weick, 1995). This proved cathartic, releasing many demons of personal subjectivity embedded in a many-years-long set of events and person-person interactions which continue to affect and to be affected. To take this approach again risks becoming the pub bore, and turns away from an alternative and a potentially further and deeper understanding that will inform my professional approach to education as an educator.

“This scholar, let us call him an analyst, may also be, for example, a sociologist, an anthropologist, a historian, whatever you prefer, an

art critic or a literary critic, perhaps even a philosopher. You or me. Through experience and more or less spontaneously, each of us can to some degree play the part of an analyst or critic of rituals; no one refrains from it.” (Derrida, 1993a, p3)

I approach as a tyro doctoral student, with an academic background in Computer Science, Biology and Mathematics. But one with a unique understanding of the ‘text’ and with a personal background also in half a dozen universities (as grandson, son, student, fiancé, father and town-and-gown local) amongst much else which offers a potential breadth of memory and experience to draw upon; also, as an Edinburgh student with relevant staff and mature cohort support, and with access to five major libraries (the university libraries of Abertay, Dundee, Edinburgh and St Andrews and the National Library of Scotland) to assist subject understanding.

“Between the actor and the analyst, whatever the distance or differences may be, the boundary therefore appears uncertain. Always permeable. It *must* even be crossed at some point ...” (Derrida, 1993, p3-4)

Derrida goes on to talk of “rituals”, a “*critical* moment ... the very unfolding of the symbolic process” (ibid). This deconstruction – through background reading, thinking and writing – of, through and in the ‘text’ - is intended to be that crossing, that analysis of the moment which moved Computer Science out of its post 1970’s curricula.

“... the disruptive effects of language. His [Derrida’s] aim is always to draw out these effects by a critical reading which fastens on, and skilfully unpicks, the elements of metaphor and other figurative devices at work in the texts ...” (Norris, C 1982, p18-19)

“Above all, deconstruction works to undo the idea ... that reason can somehow dispense with language and arrive at a pure, self-authenticating truth or method.” (*ibid*, p19)

“What is repressed ... is the idea of language as a signifying system which exceeds all the bounds of individual ‘presence’ or speech.” (*ibid*, p27)

It would be too easy to read the ‘text’ or any other and conclude that it has a simple meaning: that there is a *university* called - or *of* or even *at* – *Abertay Dundee* which runs an *honours degree* programme in *computer games technology* that somehow comes *with* a minor in *Japanese studies*. There is a face validity, but even at first reading there are problems, as in, for example, there being nowhere – no human gathering place - called *Abertay* to be *of* or *at*. And, aren’t almost all degrees now *with honours*? It is this combination of all of this ‘text’ that has caused personal, institutional, sectoral and observational shocks that, even after the initial lightning strike, continue to rumble and flash like a receding storm. This calls for careful analysis.

“On this account [that is, of *Gasché*], the aim of a deconstructive reading is to draw out those moments of ... paradox ... by reflecting on the endlessly elusive character of meaning and consciousness in general.” (Norris, C, 1988, p216)

There is always a paradox in the definition of the words in the text: *in, the, Japanese, of, degree, with*, the elipses, *studies, honours, games, university, Abertay, computer, Dundee, technology*. It can be argued that all and each of these is wrong, even that they are deliberately misleading. That this is no *degree*, that *computer* has no valid meaning in this context, that *university* is a similarly debased term, that *Abertay* is – formally – a sandbank near a town called Leuchars and that there was and is already a university *at* and *of* *Dundee*.

“Since deconstructive criticism is not the application of philosophical lessons to literary studies but an exploration of textual logic in texts ... its possibilities vary, and commentators are irresistibly tempted to draw lines to separate orthodox deconstructive criticism from distortions or illicit imitations and derivations.” (Culler, J, 1983, p227)

“... the opponents of deconstruction ... pluralistically allow de Man and Derrida a perverse originality but reproach graduate students for mechanically imitating what lies beyond their reach;”
(*ibid*)

Is deconstruction something too great for anyone but the great, the *cognoscenti* to perform, identify and/or rationalise? Or is it an exercise performed in an academic circus, as lampooned in *The Onion*'s “Grad Student Deconstructs Take-Out Menu” (The Onion, 2002)? There is certainly a great difficulty in approaching deconstruction. Even Derrida said, “... ‘deconstruction’ is a word I have never liked and one whose fortune has disagreeably surprised me” (Derrida, 1983). I could, weakly, here justify my choice of a deconstruction of the ‘text’ by hoping it will be all’s-well-that-ends-well; but this carries the risk of all-not-being-well.

“ [a text is] no longer a finished corpus ... but a differential framework, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines) – all the limits, everything that was set up in opposition ... (speech, life, the world, the real, history, and what not, every field of reference – to body or mind, conscious or unconscious, politics, economics, and so forth).” (Derrida, 1979)

So it appears with the ‘text’ I have chosen to deconstruct. It has had wide effects – psychological, sociological, philosophical - when spoken, written or read. It directly affects the lives of people from Japan, the UK, Canada, South Africa and other countries. It has historic significance, challenges paradigms, attracts political lauds and opprobrium, raises millions of pounds in multi-billion-dollar industries (video games and tertiary education) which are indulged in by individuals, scores, hundreds, and even millions.

But, is the ‘text’ too small to deconstruct? Not according to Derrida:

“[D]econstruction moves, or makes its gestures, lines and divisions move, not only within the corpus [of a writer] in general, but at times within a single sentence, or a microscopic element of a corpus” (Derrida, 1993). Is it too non-literary or non-philosophical? Again, “it is no longer a question of deconstructing discourses and semantics, but also and primarily institutional and political structures.” (Derrida, 1992).

Deconstruction n. not what you think: ... *what remains to be thought* (my italics)

(Royle, 2000, p11)

Thus I would propose grounding my choice of deconstruction – “a strange strategy without finality” (Derrida, 1981) - of the ‘text’: to attempt a fuller understanding of the “network of coincidences and cyclic collisions” (Sinclair, 1997) as effects of the ‘text’ upon “society, politics, diplomacy, - economics, historical reality, and so on” (*ibid*), “shaking up, dislocating and transforming the verbal, conceptual, psychological, textual, aesthetic, historical, ethical, social, political and religious landscape” (Royle, 2003, p26), to look into “meaning and intentionality” (Norris, 1988, p132) behind “a certain mystique of origins that works to efface real history – the history of civil and political institutions” (*ibid*, p153).

Further, as I look to my further studies and professional work, deconstruction itself is under question to see if and how “deconstruction is an earthquake” (Royle, 2003, p25)

from which “there emerges a pattern of interlinked thoughts about language, politics, historical identity ... that carry added charge of significance” (Norris, 1988, p193), as, quite separately, am I by the University of Edinburgh.

The deconstruction

The University of Abertay Dundee

In 1992 the administration of Prime Minister John Major removed the binary line, changing almost all the Polytechnics and Central Institutions into universities. Almost all, with notable exceptions; in Scotland these excluded were specialist tertiary institutions and those deemed too small to change; in the latter category was the then Dundee Institute of Technology. This wasn't the first time the institution was thus passed over: in the 1960's it failed to accompany equally long-established and degree-offering establishments such as The Royal Technical College in Glasgow into university status.

Being left behind by apparently equal establishments, such as Paisley College of Technology, was a severe blow. A frantic, desperate *long march* was forced upon the staff, to raise numbers from 2,800 students to the magic 'university' title boundary of 4,000. The Principal was changed. New degree programmes – previously almost impossible to get permission to roll out – proliferated like rabbit kittens in summer. New staff entered in dozens. New students in scores.

At last, the magic 4,000 was in reach. All that was left was to name the new university. Staff were polled and Professor Colligan's 'Abertay' was chosen. We all dutifully trooped up to the top of The Law for a photo shoot and I threw my hat in the air: the University of Abertay Dundee was born.

The *whativersity of where?* To take the name first - Abertay Dundee – speaks of a tension. Two proper names for one establishment, joined by no grammar. With no

apparent meaning. Why was the name *Abertay* selected? This question caused confusion amongst staff and students. Was it to head to the almost-top of the alphabetic university indices: an *Aardvark University* or *AAAAAA Plumbers* effect. Perhaps so. It was justified as being ‘an old name for Dundee’. What? – a city re-founded 800 years ago as the Royal Burgh of Dundee by David I, King of Scots, once the largest and most prosperous city in the nation, the active national base of the Reformation, yet a name that *Abertay* apparently questioned. A further justification was in it being ‘the most southerly use of the prefix *aber-* in Scotland’; which it is not. This is a *university* without geographers. A better argument could have been that *Aber-* is a Welsh/Brittonic prefix, predating the arrival of the Picts and Scots, showing the multi-layered, multi-cultural city that is modern Dundee. This too is a *university* without historians.

There were discarded names submitted. *The University of Perth* was a semi-serious submission to provoke a move from a run-down city to a pretty town nearby. *Claverhouse University* was almost taken (the institute occupied his – Bonny Dundee’s - home, Dudhope Castle) until someone pointed out he systematically killed Protestant women and children during the 1715 Jacobite rebellion. A dangerous pit into which De Montford University fell with its new *nomen* and its implications of anti-semitism.

Certainly, the double-name was chosen quickly. There were huge economic and political pressures upon the institution. Student numbers might not keep up without graduates achieving a *university* degree. Others argued that a ‘Dundee Institute of Technology’ degree was a unique offering in a world of me-too universities, and didn’t the Massachusetts and California institutes of technology survive very well without the title *university*. But, Dundee is not in America nor was DIT an educational rich-kid. Further, the University of Dundee was seen as predatory. It probably wasn’t, but the perception, and other fears rushed events along.

But, why *Abertay Dundee*? It hasn’t stuck very well. Almost everywhere it is written as *Abertay comma Dundee*. It just isn’t grammatical: two nouns beside each other,

and *Abertay* can't easily be seen as a gerund. With the return of city-county status the full address often becomes:

The University of Abertay Dundee
Dundee
Dundee City

Compare this with the powerful and elegant:

The University
Glasgow

of my youth. *Abertay* is a university without any English or Linguistics scholars.

Other titles were rejected by their association with the University of Dundee, such as The University of Dundee Institute of Science and Technology (cf UMIST.) The loss of the word *institute* was sorely felt. The loss of *Dundee* too was unthinkable in an institution which took almost all its students from Dundee, Angus and Fife. The concession of so much territory, indeed the city, to The University of Dundee – whose students came most notably from England and Northern Ireland, and which was recently only a college of that perceived pseudo-Scottish horror, *St Andrews* – was illogical and could be fatal. No. *Dundee* had to stay. And so, the title speaks of fear.

The small words- *The* and *of* - in the university title are odd. It has already been shown that *Abertay Dundee* has a tension as a kind of divorced *Buda* and *Pest*. For Paisley, Robert Gordon and Napier there was no problem. But for *Glasgow Caledonian* there was the same issue. For there is a – indeed *The - University of Glasgow* as well as there being *The University of Dundee*. If *Abertay* is synonymous with *Dundee* then are there two *The University of (Dundee) Dundee's*? No, because *Abertay* is now recognised by that single word. Time has moved on; Dundee University now attracts a large number of local students and Abertay boasts (which is the right word) the largest proportion of overseas students in Scotland. So, the title speaks differently of and to its times: past, present and future.

As to the structure *The University of Somewhere* there remains a power of construct over *Somewhere University*. There is little doubt that this construct was an attempt to

gain fuller membership of a group often coded as “elite” (Mills, 1956) based on age. Strathclyde University and Heriot-Watt University are grammatically obviously of lesser age, and implied status, than The University of Edinburgh or The University of Aberdeen. But, this shows a parochial viewpoint, for worldwide few would suspect the age, or implied status of The University of Glasgow over The University of Bradford. However, for what was and to an extent remains a parochial university and country, this title construct, the only one such in the Scottish 1990’s universities, remains important to Abertay, even if it has the air of gold bath taps in a former council house.

And so the title of *The University of Abertay Dundee* relates a tale of its time. At the Fife campus it is *The University of Abertay*. The sheer nonsensical nature of the word *Abertay* becomes a *Diageo*. It reflects the almost complete break from the past whose continuity was seen in titles such as *The Dundee Institute of Art and Technology*, *The Dundee College of Art and Technology*, *The Dundee College of Technology* and penultimately *The Dundee Institute of Technology*.

And as there is little left of *The Institute* in the name, so of substance in *The University*. On title change those with a *university* background and those from a *college* background changed roles. Formerly the *university*-types lived in a strange world of always-teaching; now they knew what a *university* was. A feeling of uselessness came upon the *college*-types. The previous, 25-year-in-office Principal, Dr Harry Cuming, had famously said, ‘those who were here before I arrived are surplus’. He had only just left, and a ghost of these words stalked and threatened the *college*-types. The sheer exuberance of the *university*-types who alone understood this word-implied new world were now dominant. Activities strange to the mere teachers broke out: research grants were applied for, accepted refereed papers flaunted on notice-boards, research sabbaticals – a whole new world of words and phrases indicated that whatever the *Dundee Institute of Technology* was was now gone. *The University of Abertay Dundee* was now something new and different. But something that appeared not as a blank slate, but as a half-written document ready to be completed by the select few, those who understood it and its new world order.



figure 1 – the UAD logo

But, the entry of Abertay into the world of universities cannot be done in a short timescale. The use of *Oxford blue* as the institute colour, of a carefully laid out use of the shield and words (see figure 1), mock-ancient graduation ceremony complete with *gaudeamus igitur* and Widor's symphony 5 *Toccata*, even having an ancient peer – The Earl of Airlie - as the Chancellor, do not make a university. *Différance* is also about time and deferred realities. A university is deferred beyond generations. In the 1960's Strathclyde could not be easily perceived as a 'university' against Glasgow with its ancient stones, Latin matriculation, Pictish kingdoms internal voting practices and respected past Professors (or 'Masters' as they were called when they were alive) in Medicine (Hunter), Physics (Kelvin) and Theology (Barclay). But this is to forget that Glasgow's 'ancient stones' are based upon a nineteenth century railway station design (compare Charing Cross and Gilmorehill), that Glasgow gave few degrees until the late nineteenth century; or that St Andrews was effectively a bankrupt establishment based in a run-down fishing village until the 1960's.

Universities thrive today – another aspect of timeousness – on their perceived anciency. So, the press perceive Edinburgh as ancient (I would propose it is merely *old*) and the 1960's Kent as mediæval by association with the word 'Canterbury' and by its associations with such as St Augustine (which, if it were that old, the university would predate Oxford and Cambridge by centuries.) These perceptions of the word 'university' go way beyond logic and enter into a world of debate on education that lead from John Henry Newman's "... any kind of knowledge, if it really be such, is its own reward" (Newman, 1852) to Alexander Sutherland Neil's, "... I make the same point against mathematics that I make against Latin and Greek: What is the use of teaching quadratic equations to boys who are going to repair cars or sell stockings? It is madness" (Neil, 1962); a dichotomy and debate wonderfully spoofed by Joanne

Kathleen Rowling in “Defence Against the Dark Arts – A Return to Basic Principles” (Rowling, 2003) yet powerfully portrayed and even propounded in other popular works (Mackenzie 1913; Waugh, 1945.)

Abertay has yet to see, perhaps particularly as a non-classical university, that its efforts are based in and of their time and location. Christian preachers have often said, ‘there are no young saints’, indeed there are probably no young universities either.

BSc Computer Games Technology

When I returned from my sabbatical in Japan as a Visiting Professor in Virtual Reality the remit was “to develop the games degrees.” It would be fair to surmise that a high proportion – probably greater than 95% - of university- based and/or –trained Computer Scientists were also avid video games players. This tradition of the *geek* evidenced in early games, such as Tank Attack®, Star Trek® and Space Invaders®, shown in Disney®’s TRON film (Lisberger, 1982.)

The origin of the three words – *computer games technology* - is lost. Like *The University of Abertay Dundee* (UAD) the remit was: make it quick and make it work. The new UAD was in decline, finding the brave new world of the *university* very hot to handle, with a confused and misdirected staff, under new management. The timetable was to start work on designing the new degree in February and have it working with an intake by September. Like the UAD title, this was not the first choice. The original was *Computer Games Technology and Virtual Environments*. The issue of required respectability was still there, and *virtual reality* was respectable, and was my field.

The loss of *and Virtual Environments* is another ghost that haunts the programme. Although now effectively removed from the BSc CGT, it still exists, not in the title but in the teaching in the slightly later BA (Honours) in Computer Arts. Other

discarded words include *programming* seen as too narrow and lightweight, despite the fact that this describes precisely what the students do and graduates will do. Another silent word is *Mathematics*. Prospective students shun this as being 'hard'; which it is on the BSc CGT. It also underpins the entire course academically; but it isn't mentioned explicitly, perhaps causing dozens of students each year to fail.

The word *Computer* has been blamed for the very low intake of female students. This may be so as it has a strong geek factor. A less value-laden word would have been *Video*, a word entirely interchangeable with *Computer* when combined with *Games*. But, this isn't to avoid the fact that *Computer/Video Games* are very much a male-dominated area. Only recently has the course team and games developers begun to see past the word *Computer* to see the foundations of game-playing in non-computer games, such as board games, field sports, conversations, humour, learning and other places where humans 'play games'.

And so to the terrible power of the word *Games*:

Entry Word: **game**

Function: *noun*

Synonyms: fun, jest, joke, play, sport

Contrasted Words: business, duty, labor, study, toil

(Merriam-Webster Thesaurus, 2003)

Much of the problem lies in these 'contrasted words'. To contrast them again, you get avocations such as: hobby, inactivity, liability and inaction (ibid). The word carries with it a heavy charge of the non-academic. This isn't an impossible barrier to hurdle, but hurdled it must be.

Why did it take an *Abertay* to propose an honours degree programme with the partial title *Games*? Why didn't it appear at St Andrews, Cambridge or Manchester? Why does it still not exist as a degree at any of these places, nor at world-leading Computer Science sites such as Tokyo Daigaku, Massachusetts Institute of Technology,

California Institute of Technology or The University of California at Berkeley? Yet it does at The Queensland University of Technology, The Rochester Institute and Oulu University. This is an industry that annually turns over some €25bn, in the same order as the other entertainment media supported widely by acadæmia world-wide: films, television and music.

But, it is an industry with a double-handicap: the word *games* and an unsavoury reputation, possibly not seen since the effects of soft porn on the early home video industry. Yet, behind much of the work of ‘leading’ universities is *computer games*-related research, often seriously funded. MIT do so, but behind the textual safety of their Medialab. Others have used such alternative terms such as *multimedia*, but now the word *entertainment* (e.g. BEng Electronic Entertainment and Consumer Technologies at the University of Strathclyde) has begun to appear in degree titles.

Computer

Behind the ‘subtext’ *computer games technology*, has anything really changed. To a significant extent, the answer is ‘no’. A leading Computer Science academic said the course was simply one in traditional Software Engineering, the applied branch of Computer Science, dating back to the early 1960’s. To understand this better involves taking a closer look at the word *computer*. This places the degree firmly within the area of accepted Computer Science practice. A degree called *Computer Whatever* that taught students to read books, paint or play the clarinet would be too far to go. But, what if the new area of academic endeavour falls outwith our current categories, as did Computer Science in the 1960’s. How do we find a word for a new academic field that has come to exist? In part the answer is probably: don’t ask a traditional Computer Scientist.

And here lies a greater and deeper problem to be overcome. The words *Computer* and *Technology* pull the field back to computer programming or engineering. They ‘belong’ to established groups of academics. So with the *Computer Games*

Technology degree, which was not defined as a traditional Computer Science or Software Engineering degree. Good grief, it had subjects such as Art, Creativity and Japanese Language. But once placed before the chosen teaching academics, Computer Scientists and Electronic Engineers, it became a degree in the software engineering of video games, because that was what the title *Computer Games Technology* said it was to them.

The use of the *BSc* prenom also helped fix this perception, but more weakly. For, degrees of BSc in Computing are already widely defined. It could have been, what else could it have been, a Bachelor of Arts degree. But, no, for Computer Science falls into two categories: *hard computing* (BSc degrees in programming, generally for men) and *soft computing* (BA degrees in systems, generally for women.) This was a programming degree with hard Mathematics. In retrospect, the *BSc* pre-nom was set by the degree designer's contextualisation as well as affecting those of the degree teachers.

The issue goes further to: was any other title possible. That is, were the degree designers capable of producing a different degree idea. It has already been said that the words *Computer Games* conjures up major issues: sociological (young male players, female stereotyping in games, interactive violence), economic (£40 top-title games, children as consumers, the rôles of Microsoft and Sony), political (Western goodies beating up darker-skinned baddies, Gulf War and Black Hawk Down -type games), psychological (child development, playing trances) and other issues that fall clearly into the broader field of Humanities. Could a group of Computer Science degree designers see these as real issues for students and graduates, could they put together an acceptable format of words into a 'text', and could this 'text' be used to sell a novel degree concept, without missing the target audience: young *Computer Games* players. Even with hindsight, it is hard to see if a different 'text' for the degree title could have been produced in so few words. For the maximum number of words acceptable in a degree title is firmly fixed in the minds of many, leaving little room for manoeuvre.

A degree title is a restricted verse form like Haiku:

*games for computers
study them at Abertay
learn to program them.*

with Japanese Studies

This was a useful coincidence: I, the principal degree designer, had recently returned from Japan, had a strong network of contacts there, enjoyed return visits to the country, and was now in a field dominated by three nations: the USA, the UK and Japan. What better way to help students overcome the barrier to understanding the workings of Sony, Konami, Sega, Nintendo and other Japanese major players, than by offering them a minor course in *Japanese Studies*.

By now the flying-by-the-seat-of-our-pants syndrome was clear. We were stretched too far, yet had to continue to entrench and make safe the new market for students. By coincidence an *Abertay* lecturer was married to a Japanese native speaker qualified to teach the language. Once again, the words used *Japanese Studies* did not manage to fit what was intended, but this time the field was so far from Computer Science that it could only be shrugged at. The course is in fact in *Japanese Language*. There is very little room for the cultural studies that make Japan such a difficult country for Westerners to understand, so ably expressed by James Clavell (1983).

The validation event for this stream showed up the lack of knowledge of the university world outwith *Abertay*. We had, as one staff member remarked, ‘accidentally walked into a tragedy.’ For *Stirling* and *Edinburgh* were in the last days of a fight-to-the-death over who would survive to teach *Japanese Studies* in a shrinking Scottish marketplace. *Stirling*’s department validated our new course then promptly died. Like us, *Stirling* and *Edinburgh* were only seeing what they wanted to see in the term *Japanese Studies*. Japan is one of the hottest topics in contemporary youth and alternative culture: Manga, video games, Zen, sushi, etc. This was

Abertay's hook to pull in even more students. But, did – or why did - Edinburgh and Stirling view Japan as a field of dry historical and linguistic studies? Their definition of Japan was not ours in Abertay, nor was it that of their target marketplace of potential students, generally aged and encultured decades younger than academic staff.

My view, as the proposer of the *Japanese Studies* novelty, was Nippon-centric. New students arrived and asked, 'why not Korean, Mandarin, etc.?' There is still no clear academic reason why not. Both have significant affects upon the worldwide video games industry. It just goes too far into the *other* to consider running with this, despite there being an established minor programme in Chinese Studies at Abertay and my having a good friend living locally who is a native Mandarin speaker who can also teach at university level. Abertay is a university filling niches rather than creating them.

Conclusions and Analysis

I want to finish by comparing the further insights gained by my use of deconstruction with the existing insights in the account of practice paper already presented (see appendix.) These will be used to construct a personal view of the potential usefulness of deconstruction as a technique I can use in my studies. This is not to preempt the work of the essay marker on my use of deconstruction, but to help me conclude, albeit it at an early phase, on where it might - or might not - be a *useful* technique to use further.

Firstly, it is a technique that appears to require regular use. I do not feel I have gained many new insights into the particular situation, but I have gained a new set of techniques – *pace* Derrida *et al* - to help understand further particular situations. In terms of the particular 'text' certain new features appeared, some of which I have mentioned, others are less directly relevant to the 'text' but are to my wider work. For example, the definition of titles for degrees could be seen as a marketing and

packaging exercise, but via deconstruction is more clearly a time, place and contextually embedded combination of spoken and unspoken assumptions, fears, gendered, empowering, barriers and other features that affect the ethics of the naming, of the setting of the chosen 'text' of the title.

It is also clear that any understanding I produce of the chosen 'text' is itself subject to the *spokens* and *unspokens*, for my words constitute a further 'text' and quite possibly not a final word on the subject. Derrida has his many critics, particularly those who would discard deconstruction as sophistry or nihilist ~~post-modernism~~, yet I feel this is to confuse the means and the end. I may use deconstruction as a means to further understanding my work as a degree-course designer (I am currently involved in writing three further entirely new programmes), but to use the techniques, words and phrases from a toolset that includes deconstruction is not to need to show these workings to those professional academics who will pay-the-mortgage by teaching on the courses. In today's "tide of consumerism", "what is the purpose of the universities which give us a living? Is a question ... which post-modern thinkers find singularly difficult to answer" (Boyle, 1998) is a statement that I may, and perhaps do, agree with, but it is not an airing that I would use in a 'text' which I had to sell to a group of modernist Computer Scientists who are going to use the work that results from my thinking. Here I must admit disappointment that nearly all the Derrida-explanatory printed texts are less understandable than Derrida can himself be. Deconstructing this phenomenon shows a scholarly tradition which I, a non-philosopher, do not feel bound to follow.

This essay has been particularly useful in understanding why a programme I write becomes something quite different when it is taught. I write, for example, 'creativity' with the meaning clear (I think) in my mind, and other academics redefine the term in a way that is alien to my intentions. I try to explain, adding further 'text' instead of just the context intention, creating more room for individual manoeuvre and sense-making by those charged to implement my 'text'. So my degree – which I perceive as a creative-person-creator – becomes someone else's and then appears as a software engineering degree; or another designed in my mind's eye for, for, well words fail me,

and so someone else creates their own words and context and sensemaking and it again becomes something else entirely. Knowing more of this effect through my understanding of Derrida's deconstruction replaces frustration and imparts a mixed sense of care-less-ness, a knowledge of job-boundaries and a need to express a better 'text' through more care and understanding of those I speak to and their sensemaking of my work.

Finally, deconstructing this 'text' as an attempt to further understand the 'text', such 'texts' and deconstruction itself may prove, time will tell, to be a further ordinance in the armoury as controversy and change – which have always accompanied universities in ever changing times – accompany the work of the academic or academic-designer.

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Appendix

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