I owe the discovery of this image to

the convergence of a student and a photocopier

The culture of reproduction has meant that for most of these students of the Renaissance a copy of the Arnolfini portrait was the Arnolfini portrait. The concepts of Eco, Baudrillard, Jameson are clearly of use here, as is the work of Greenblatt, Montrose. So too the work of Foucault: institutional space (academy, library), technology (photocopier, slide-projector), and de Certeau: pragmatics of the everyday (1.45pm dentist, 3.30pm Renaissance seminar, 5.15pm train, 6.30pm TTVT). The man is Giovanni di Arrigo, a merchant from Lucca who lived a great deal at Bruges and was buried there in 1472. The lady is Giovanna Cenami, the daughter of another Lucchese merchant who lived at Paris. The picture would have been painted at Bruges where Van Eyck, who played an important part in the discovery of oil-painting technique, was working in the service of the Duke of Burgundy from 1425. Although its painted images are two-dimensional, its potential of illusionism is far greater than that of sculpture, for it can suggest objects possessing colour, texture and temperature, filling a space and, by implication, filling the entire world. (John Berger, 89).

Pedagogy, in its modern, instructional mode, is equivalent to the realist novel, the fourth wall of naturalist theatre, the epic poem. Any alternative pedagogy must align itself with the avant-garde critique of representation; more than an engagement with a subject, it must implicitly be an engagement with engagement. Artaud's theater of cruelty or Mallarme's Mime are not to be concepts: the act of enunciation exploring its origins, reflecting on its presence in time and space. The paratactic text works in a similar way, committing the reader to a disjunctive, diachronic act of reading. By making unexpected juxtapositions, it shakes coherence between disparate elements, the systematic collation of detail into motifs, enframes the textual contract in a highly interactive way. The manipulation of chance by the intervention of choice provided the image with heuristic force. Quotations, like titles, provide signposts; not to the centre (what it means), but to possible ways in. Textuality, like orienteering, requires the active formation of a guide on how to "read" the terrain. What I look for rather is a confrontational teaching of the humanities that would question the students' received disciplinary ideology (model of legitimate cultural expectations) even as it pushed into indefiniteness.
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the most powerful ideology of the teaching of the humanities: the unquestioned explicating power of the theorizing mind and class, the need for intelligibility and the rule of the law.

(Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak).

"Hyperrealism is the limit of art, and of the real by respective exchange, on the level of the simulacrum." (Jean Baudrillard).

The choice of a quotation is a kind of grafting, and it involves a us out of complacent habits of apprehension... by facilitating diversity, it perception of relation which can be suggestive, resonant of many others. The making of relations is what makes such activity empowering to the student, not necessarily the relation. A particular relation may turn out to be axiomatic, but the conceptual process is distinctive, epiphanic. The map is open and connectable in all of its dimensions; it is detachable, reversible, susceptible to constant modification... A map has multiple entryways, as opposed to the tracing, which always comes back 'to the same.' The map has to do with performance, whereas the tracing always involves an alleged 'competence' (Deleuze & Guattari, 12-13).
Postmodern thinking makes us acutely aware of what the texts are that we deal with when studying Renaissance culture, and the important (usually prohibitive) social and economic factors which prevent a different order of text to be available for consideration. The field-trip, proximity to the authentic, is usually the privilege of academic minorities. Apart from revisionary attitudes within Renaissance scholarship, for most students the very notion of what constitutes the cultural material of the Renaissance is a product of copies. Despite possible anxieties over such a realization, the fact remains that without the intervention of technology, the critical discourse on the Renaissance would simply not be possible. Teaching something contributes to the textural impact of the many-sided work, turning language into like the Renaissance from the point of view of a heuric pedagogy means calling into question available categories, such as disciplinary framing (what do we mean by the Renaissance, chronologically as well as substantively), hierarchies within source material (can we sustain divisions between primary and secondary material), and contemporaneity (who are "we," and what ideologies, political, cultural and intellectual, have informed our reading and interpretive habits). The metonymic drive of such a pedagogy means that the classroom situation is never static, nor an end point. It is merely one node within an ongoing play of dynamic links. The shift from literate to electronic epistemologies, of alterity of these elements reunited in a course, means that the active pursuit and formation of knowledge of Renaissance literature may be replaced by the relatively question of all the illusions of sedentary accessing (rather than representation. (Group Met). reading) of information (rather than texts) from the data-base. 

Above: details from "Wedding Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini" by Jan Van Eyck
Interactive technologies, though, promise a high degree of intervention and involvement in knowledge production: the student/user of new writing and electronic cultural technologies is a self-directed learner, the locus of a network of directed graphs, nodes, links, and cybernetic runs. The electronic toolkit complements the pen, hypspace the page. Pedagogy, like hypertext, becomes a non-sequential process, a network of intersecting paths: some established (prescribed reading), some implied (suggested reading), others improvised (chance associations, initiative, idiosyncratic links). (Serendipity is where you find it, Greil Marcus). This ... involuntary memory is an unruly magician and will not be perception of the overlying of imported. It chooses its own time and place for the performance of its miracle. I do not know how often this miracle recurs in Proust. I think twelve or thirteen times. But the first – the famous episode of the madeleine steeped in tea – would justify the assertion that his entire book is a monument to involuntary memory and the epic of its action. The whole of Proust's world comes out of a teacup... (Samuel Beckett, 34).

I would like to imagine an entirely improvised curriculum, a dynamic exchange would be set up around it (moderator/students), and would be driven by a chosen context ('How do we understand Renaissance culture,' for example). The image would be a kind of graphic incipit, the commencement of an unrehearsed profusion of paths to be pursued. Specific topics would be generated speculatively (as opposed to input from given, expert sources), concepts, practices, historical events would be incorporated by accretion, and in appropriate contexts of relation, as opposed to the requisite inventory of received formulations on the topic. One possibly gets better at manipulating the marks that have been made by chance, which are the marks that one made quite outside reason. As one conditions oneself by time and by working to what happens, one becomes more alive to what the accident has proposed for one. (Francis Bacon, 53). The challenge of a heuristic approach to teaching the Renaissance involves, first, helping students to overcome their anxiety over not being told the story, given the answer; secondly, empowering students to feel confident with, and stimulated by the idea of knowledge as production – the answer, if that is indeed important, has in no way been previously established; thirdly, encouraging students to cross boundaries of specialization, to follow trains of thought that synthesize disparate texts and ideas; in this sense, even the questions/areas of interest are entirely open to invention. Teaching as a transitive act ("teaching the Renaissance"); teaching as an intransitive process ("teaching the Renaissance"). Implode both practices ("teaching the Renaissance").
It was clear during the course of that discussion that the breakdown of hierarchies should be a guiding feature of a heuretic text, as we conceived it. The collapse of hierarchy (academic/popular/personal) is, after all, a defining feature of the postmodern, along with significant paradigm shifts in thinking (linearity~laterality), structuration (syntax~parataxis), authority (readerly-writerly), and signification (sign~signifier). The (Adrienne Rich).

rise of capitalism parallels the advance of romanticism
And the individual is dominant until the close of the nineteenth century. In our own time, mass practices have sought to submerge the personality By ignoring it, which has caused it instead to branch out in all directions... (John Ashbery). Sampling: the ubiquity of example, the denial of surrogacy. The post-critical essay incorporates its object of study, as well as demonstrates (enacts) its theoretical principles. Despite its example (exemplification of a different order) pedagogy remains a predominantly diegetic mode of communication, founded on instruction (an economy of the signified). A postmodern pedagogy should be staged as a mimetic performance: an instantiation of interest and action. In adapting to constant change, the reader becomes a quester of/encounter with postmodern concepts, not an instructional narrative about them. The formation of this image was aleatoric; the use to which it could be put (the conception that it could be put to use) was circumstantial, generated by association. The sequence of formation (design, motivation), accident (chance overlap), association (perception of relevance, establishment of link) is an instance of a new attitude to the production of knowledge. What made this chance occurrence so exciting was, first, its serendipity, the pleasure of the unexpected; secondly, the associations it sparked, the rapid and energised perception of its potential use across subjects, contexts. ‘...the bringing together of things that wouldn’t be together unless you brought them together’ (John Cage, 52).
The post-critical essay, especially in its heuretic form, is useful only insofar as it dramatizes a process of engagement with concepts, texts, practices, contexts. As an exemplar of a postmodernized pedagogy it can also have benefits. The Flemish cities where the new style of painting flourished—Tournai, Ghent, Bruges—rivalled those of Italy as centers of international banking and trade. Their foreign residents included many Italian businessman. For one of these Jan van Eyck produced what is not only his most remarkable portrait but a major masterpiece of the period... (H.W. Janson, 286).

Theorized from a postmodern point of view, this new image said a lot of things about the nature of images, in particular about their relation to reality and to other images, their reproducibility and their relationship to technologies of self-directed learning (heuristic).

Heuretic: adj., neologism: a mode of discourse, style of presentation which conceives of knowledge as inventive, creative (euretic); to reality and to focusses reader/spectator as productive locus through empowering discovery, of abductive negotiation their relationship of text via provision of guides to to technologies of self-directed learning (heuristic).

For whom knowledge of the text becomes a need to know and experience more of abundance. To write "about" teaching as a postmodern practice would only re-enforce the uncritical difference between teaching and "postmodernism;" the reassuring anteriority of academic discourse. To demonstrate the notion that teaching was itself discursive, in the form of a critical essay, was the challenge we faced. Somehow a method had to be devised that placed the reader in the position of the student pursuing conditions. Above all, a superior construction of postmodernism would be one that satisfied the criterion of interest. If as literary historians we
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Pedagogy still observes an ostensibly metaphoric logic, the play of difference within the spatial/temporal here and now; the centralization of peripheral research into decidability, nexus. A metonymic pedagogy dislocates and relativizes, posits that the here and is only part of a larger whole, the now an instant in an ongoing process. The classroom situation/the scene of teaching signifies equivalences elsewhere, to be pursued at another time. Classroom activity is provisional, the proverbial tip of the iceberg; unfinished, synecdochic. This analogy between possessing and the way of seeing which is incorporated in oil painting, is a factor usually ignored by art experts and historians. Significantly enough it is an anthropologist who has come closest to recognizing it. Lévi-Strauss writes: It is this avid and ambitious desire to take possession of the object for the benefit of the owner or even of the spectator which seems to me to constitute one of the outstandingly original features of the art of Western civilization. (John Berger, 83). Its very formation, and the associative force it engendered, was pleasurable, useful in itself. Of course, to use it in a teacherly way is out of the question: anecdote is the most appropriate discursive mode here. The anecdote locates its formation within the subjective context of its discovery.

How to teach the Renaissance in the light of postmodern theory? Clearly there is more at stake than simply co-opting postmodern concepts, or framing “the Renaissance” in terms of the formation of modernity and its fragmentation in the postmodern situation. The textuality of history, the historicity of reading, the anxiety of influence, the unpopularity of canonical literature, the contexture of subject positions— all inform an approach to such an endeavour. New historicism, cultural poetics, materialist feminism, women’s history, provide ideologies, conceptual frameworks. What of the mode of discourse? ‘Can you read my mind, Finn?’ He grimaced. ‘Wintermute, I mean.’ ‘Minds aren’t read. See, you’ve still got the paradigms print gave you, and you’re barely print-literate. I can access your memory, but that’s not the same as your mind.’ (William Gibson, 204).
Works Cited: