Barbarism, Otherwise
Studies in Literature, Art, and Theory

1. Although barbarism is traditionally viewed as the negative offshoot of “civilization,” it can be recast as a creative concept in cultural critique: it can unsettle the logic of binary oppositions, imbue dominant discourses with foreign, erratic elements, and chart alternative modes of knowing.

2. In our globalized world, societies should not wait in vain for the barbarians, but be more open to encounters with others on terms other than their own.

3. Attempts to resignify old, saturated concepts tend to be less effective when we try to police and narrow down their definitions and more effective when we pluralize their meanings and uses, and explore the tensions between them.

4. Constructing neighboring nations as “barbarian” is not motivated by their radical difference, but rather by their similarity, which threatens the assumed superior identity of the national self.

5. The researcher in the humanities should be less like Norman the librarian and more like Conan the barbarian.

6. In doing academic research we should not lose sight of practice, but we should also not let practice dictate our research, because then we may lose sight of creativity and imagination.

7. Productive reading does not necessarily consist in following an argument, but also in focusing on a sentence that sticks out and puzzles us or bumping into details that are baffling, estranging, refreshing, or unbearably annoying.

8. “The lie is simply the old age of truth” (C.P. Cavafy, 1902). This is a useful guideline for approaching knowledge and “truth” in our research fields.

9. Since Western Europe has always claimed to owe so much to the Greek civilization, it seems that the time has come to pay back the debt—with interest.

10. “A loud voice cannot compete with a clear voice, even if it’s a whisper.” (Barry Neil Kaufman)

11. Writing a dissertation is like flying in a hot-air balloon: you have to take distance from the rest of the world, suffer from vertigo, and sacrifice a lot of excessive weight to get where you want. In return, you get a slightly different view of the world.