Abstract

An exploration of poetry at play in one woman’s life, this poetic inquiry seeks to highlight existing relationships between language, poetry and poiesis, life long learning, and a pedagogy of lived experience. This thesis inquires a/r/tographically into some of the relationships between inner knowing, self-expression, the poetic arts, and the value of their confluence for pedagogical practice. As witnessed through the roles of artist (poet and writer), researcher (academic and community), and teacher (visiting artist in the classroom and community educator), I explore what it means to live and learn poetically – as writer, poet, performer, social researcher, and educator. The resulting métissage of poems, autobiographical life writing, and analysis documents the pedagogical intermingling of persona and life activities, using poetic inquiry to (re)present the practice and process of learning in and through the arts, art-making, and teaching. This represents a journey through physical places, actual experiences, the author’s heart and mind, and pedagogy as “a poetic, emotional, personal, spiritual commitment and experience” (Leggo, 2005, p. 439), exploring the value of these processes to learning, teaching, and living skills. Also investigating poetry as practice, in place, and through multiple sites of learning, observed within an ongoing aesthetic of poetical engagement in the world, this view of poetry in research and praxis emphasizes "curriculum" not as a pre-defined set of steps to a pre-determined outcome, but as exploration emphasizing process rather than end product. This brocade of words further investigates poetry as an essential pedagogical tool, suggesting that through poetry, language, learning, and teaching become journeys of self-exploration and creativity, no longer separating “arts” from “humanities,” nor learning from imagination and self-expression.
Preface

All of the work presented henceforth was initiated and completed within the Department of Language and Literacy, in the Faculty of Education, at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver campus.

A version of the chapter entitled “Riding the Bus, Writing on the Bus: A Self in Transition” is currently in press [Borhani, M. (in press). Riding the bus, writing on the bus: A self in transition. UNESCO observatory multi-disciplinary research in the arts-eJournal, 2, 3. University of Melbourne.]. I was the sole investigator, responsible for all areas of concept formation, data collection and analysis, as well as manuscript composition.


Finally, a version of the poem entitled “The Thief” is currently in press as well [Borhani, M. (in press). The thief. Shark reef: A literary magazine, 22. Retrieve from http://sharkreef.org/]. I was the sole author of this poem.
I was the sole investigator and author for all other projects described in the Prologue, Found Poems & Theory, Poems & Field Notes, and the Epilogue. I was responsible for all major areas of concept formation and development, data collection and analysis, as well as all manuscript composition. Carl Leggo was my supervisor on this project, and involved throughout the project in overseeing concept development and content.
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Dedication

To my beautiful daughters

Petra Wilhelmina and Elena Rose,

who give meaning

to everything.

In loving memory of Geri Ryan Hamrock (1996-2012),

chanteuse of poetry in song and motion.

To Robert Bly,

for reunion with the caravan.
Prologue

“Si cunta e si ricunta...”
It is told and retold...

~ Gioia Timpanelli,
Traditional Sicilian storyteller
1. **brocade** _n._ A textile fabric woven with a pattern of raised figures, originally in gold or silver; in later use, any kind of stuff richly wrought or ‘flowered’ with a raised pattern… Cloth of Silke, Brocardo, and di(v)ers other sorts of merchandize which come out of Persia.

2. **bro'cade**, _v._ To work with a raised pattern….

    ~ Oxford English Dictionary

The true alchemists do not change lead into gold; they change the world into words.

    ~ William Gass

I have always marveled at language’s breath, moving in and through us, connecting (and severing) us in ways intentional and otherwise. Words, and writing, have been my constant companions, for as long as I can remember. As a young girl, I safeguarded bold, blue words penned in a white vinyl-covered diary, and wrote terrible, emotionally clichéd poetry throughout high school, getting in touch with all that roils in the teenaged heart. During undergraduate days as an English and Mass Communications major, I studied mostly on my own, informally, blessed by numerous mentors who excelled at their art and guidance. All this, and a life steeped in place in Northern California, and on islands off the coast of Washington state, amidst a community of writers, activists and performers, feeds my interest in language as communication, as art, and as a political act – language as written, embodied, spoken and performed. Living with and by words in the world is what compels my inquiry.

Through poetry and autobiographical life writing, my research explores intersections between poiesis, that is, “creative production, esp. of a work of art; an
instance of this” (OED, 2013, para. 1), life long learning, and a lived pedagogy of the moment (Borhani, 2013). My inquiry lingers in the overlaps between lived experiences, inner knowing, self-expression, the poetic arts, and the value of these confluences for pedagogical practice. Interdisciplinary and experiential explorations of literature, theatre, art, ritual, and mythology, especially as occurring in places and situations outside of traditional classroom settings, loop in and amongst the fabric of my writing. I am intrigued by experiences “in the field” and unexpected learning moments, by our lives everywhere, at once; I want to know what ignites us, and how we learn to notice and ultimately honor that in our fullest expression of ourselves. Through inquiry into my own experiences, as witnessed through the roles of artist (poet and writer), researcher (Master’s scholar), and teacher (visiting artist in schools, and community educator), my research seeks to highlight how to better allow and accommodate for unexpected learning moments as they arise, and for unconventional, “on-the-ground” experiences in our pedagogical practices. That is, how can we – parents, teachers, educators – truly open up and make room for that which is “out of the box,” in the margins, on the borders and in-between? For dislocation, for being at home everywhere? For encounter, transformation, and liminality? For the poetical, and the “4th person singular” (Ferlinghetti, 2001, p. 25)? For embracing all these possibilities as fraught with pedagogical significance?

The journey is long, life is short, the earth we love
The flower unfolds, snow falls, the aching heart
On the shoulders of giants we stand
Reaching out, reaching out…

~ The Journey (Richardson, 1991, track 5)
How do we live poetically? Can we embrace each moment, the unknown, change and possibility, as poetical endeavors? Inquiring a/r/tographically into what it means to live and learn poetically – as a writer, poet, performer, social researcher, and educator – I present a métissage of poems, stories, and analysis documents some of my engagements with poetry and poetic living. Engaging with poetic inquiry to (re)present the practice and process of learning in and through the arts, art-making, and teaching – an exploration of dwelling poetically (Heidegger, 1971) – this work represents a journey through physical places, my own heart and mind, and pedagogy as “a poetic, emotional, personal, spiritual commitment and experience” (Leggo, 2005, p. 439). As such, I hope to underscore the value of these processes to our living, learning, and teaching skills; to offer poetry as a lens on multiple sites of learning; and, at best, to model this process of “living poetically” (Leggo, 2005, p. 441).

A/r/tography is defined as an educational research methodology that unites A/rtist, R/esearcher and T/eacher to create new understandings of the dynamic, holistic interplay between these interconnected identities and their practices (Irwin & de Cosson, 2004; Sullivan, 2005; Irwin & Springgay, 2008; Sinner, Leggo, Irwin, Gouzouasis, & Grauer, 2006). A practice rather than methods oriented research approach (Sinner et al., 2006), “the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any artform and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create additional and/or enhanced meanings” (Irwin, 2005, para.1). This may include “a subjective position of intuitiveness and responsiveness” (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1229), thus invoking an affective exploration of one’s artistic and teaching practices, in which process is as valuable as product. This
work occurs at the confluence of one person’s experience with another’s, where the reflective process (the sharing of that experience) potentially bears import for others, enacting “research that matters” (Chambers, 2004, p. 7) by writing honestly about experiences of being and becoming in the world.

Rita Irwin describes how

*Theory as a|r|tography* creates an imaginative turn by theorizing or explaining phenomena through aesthetic experiences that integrate knowing, doing, and making: experiences that simultaneously value technique and content through acts of inquiry; experiences that value complexity and difference... (2004a, p. 31)

Thus, “data” is a painting, a musical score, or a poem, where content – and technique – are valued as *mutually inquiring*. Art-making, research, and teaching coincide and conjoin, becoming mutually informative in their meaning-making, and sometimes performative, activities. Irwin (2004b) further explains that “as educators consider metaphoric and metonymic ways of perceiving their lives and their engagement with curriculum *and* pedagogy, they are engaged in the process of unfolding aesthetic in/sights” (p. 46), and opening to possibility in in-between spaces.

Contiguous with one another, bumping into and overlapping one another, we enact the “*lived poiesis* of the ‘mandorla’” (Deardorff, 2004, p. 37) through these processes and practices: a third space altogether. This liminal space of the mandorla is where the inquiry of technique and content meet, where discovery and transformation flourish. As Daniel Deardorff (2004) explains, the mandorla is that creative “*coincidentia oppositorum*, the crossroads” (p. 38) where boundaries blur, one becomes
many, and thus investigation, inquiry, is enriched through the perspective of many lenses, many techniques, and many methods explored cross-disciplinarily and inter-personally.

The Mandorla is an ancient symbol of two circles coming together, overlapping one another to form an almond shape in the middle…The space within the overlap is the place in which we are called to "remain", the "liminal space"….This is the place where you arrive after you leave one room and have not yet entered another. In this place, you are living on the threshold and this requires faith. All transformation takes place in liminal space. (Kyrie, 2008)

Deardorff (2004) emphasizes, “What is needed is the generative tension lived in the mandorla” (p. 40), and I believe that as a/r/tographers, we understand and live in that fertile tension. As a/r/tographers, we transform vision by performing as artists, teachers and researchers, unfolding and reconstructing aesthetic and cognitive sensibilities and possibilities.

Experimenting with what is becoming, a/r/tographers often lend their “attention to what lies outside the acceptable” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx) in their investigations and portrayals. Like Sappho, we’re not afraid to prod the beach rubble (Barnstone & McCulloh, 2010). Thus, an a/r/tographical inquiry is “often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess” (Sinner et al., 2006, p. 1224), which by their very nature overlap, interpenetrate, insinuate, envelope, reflect, and resonate within and among each other. Through these processes, then, we give form and voice to the (sometimes messy) intersections of artist, teacher, and researcher.
A/r/tography also implies working at the margins, in a littoral wash where identities and forms are free to mingle like tides on a shifting strand (there’s that beach rubble again). For many poets, historically, this borderland between avocation and employment, between artistry and scholarship, results in a life of literally dwelling in the margins of society and her material fortunes; for some of us, it’s an endless search for that room of our own (Woolf, 1929/1957). Yet with such margin dwelling come strange gifts, as well. Poetry offers transformation, possibilities for being, possibilities for becoming (Leggo, 2004); nomadic processes, full of rhizomatic “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9) that can lead any and everywhere. By extension, my living inquiry, and thus my research and writing, seeks these fertile breaks or “ruptures” (Van Parys, n.d.), those liminal spaces where ideas spark and epistemological potential bumps up against paradox, and the unknown. Where knowing isn’t certain, new ideas emerge. Georgia O’Keefe says, “Whether you succeed or not is irrelevant – there is no such thing. Making your unknown known is the important thing” (n.d.). How can poetry be used to tease apart what we think we know, to let our unknown come forth? What does paradox have to do with it? Just as complexity thinking in education examines relations among relations among things, rather than one single thing (W. Doll, lecture notes, March 6, 2013), so does this poetic inquiry range among topics, and relations among relations among topics, addressing personal, professional, educational, and universal concerns.

Ultimately, this work aims to shed greater light on certain interstitial experiences of the artist, and this dance of living poetically and pedagogically in the world, suggesting differently adapted ways to live and learn, to teach and to conduct research. One such way, métissage, is
a counternarrative to the grand narratives of our times, a site for writing
and surviving in the interval between different cultures and languages,
particularly in colonial contexts; a way of merging and blurring genres,
texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy and
pedagogical praxis. (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009, p. 9)

This description matches well the background, artistic approaches, and pedagogical
outlook I bring to this thesis. It is intended to imply a sort of braiding: of stories,
perspectives, of methodologies and methods, and perhaps in the end, of results and
conclusions (or (in)conclusions); just as we braid a life from many strands, those given,
gathered, or inherited, and those made by our own hands, in love with poiesis.

The world calls them its singers and poets
and artists and storytellers;
but they are just people
who have never forgotten the way to fairyland.

~ L. M. Montgomery (as cited in Narayan, 2012, p. )

Engaging in poetic inquiry (Prendergast, 2009) becomes “an expression of living
aesthetically as a researcher in the field” (Leggo et al., 2011, p. 244), offering poems as
notes and testimony to lived experiences. Unlike traditional social science research, well
steeped in its Descartian certainties, poetic inquiry welcomes the uncertainty of
potentially (in)conclusive results, as well as the traceable messiness of a researcher
seeking to reveal, not hide, her presence within the research. According to Iranian poet
Nilofar Shidmehr,

poetic inquiry focuses on the answerability of an act/experience which
scientific inquiry completely dismisses. Poetic inquiry, thus, is a
performative act in which the researcher, recognizing the uniqueness of her being and her participation in the world, actualizes this uniqueness in her inquiry. (2009, p. 102)

With that uniqueness may come confusion, chaos, or, a shining actualization in the world. A/r/tography, and poetic inquiry, are like this. We must aim big, sweep a wide brush, and collect the stardust that falls from that grandiosity. We can’t predict what stardust looks like, or how it colors and shines in the brocade of our life’s tapestry. Through unabashed homage to the body (my own, the world’s), to the spirit, to corporeal and sensual attention in the world, interconnection within nature, prayers to what is holy, and embracement of related perplexities (Elza, 2009), this inquiry aims to embody such an ontology of reckless grandeur, of a poetics in love with the world. These essays and poems seek to explore how we make our place where we find ourselves, amidst glittering scraps of memory, lost words and found topographies. What emerges from that pile of scraps and beauty is our life, and our witnessing of that grand and mysterious experience.

**What Can the World Give**

What can the world give
what can I give to the world,
each day a sun peels back
orange tinged with violet at
the ocean’s edge, a curl of foam
all we see on the shore coming in
but so much more than this teeming
puddle of cellular conjunction
salt brine and slippery weeds.
What can the world give
what can I give to the world,
a holy exchange of meaning
our lives, communion, living agape.

Living, and learning “in the moment,” in an ongoing pedagogy of the moment, fuels my work. “Pedagogy of the moment” here is stretched beyond its original definition of “the decisions made by educators, based on their observations made when meeting the child in its different environments” (Aman, 2006, para. 18), to indicate an on-going openness and attentiveness to choices practiced by the individual, based on her observations of meeting herself in different (learning and life) environments (Borhani, 2013). This constitutes a form of educaré, or a drawing forth of that which lies within (Sathya Sai Baba, n.d.).

Trusting to educaré, like brocading one’s life, one pulls out and illuminates gold and silver threads woven in and amongst the warp and weft of daily existence, placing them in relief (sometimes sharp, sometimes muted) against the ongoing fabric of time. Not just a flowery, nor solely Western European notion, the origins of the word “brocade” point to Persia, and roots in fabrics woven with a raised relief against brightly colored backgrounds. Persia is also home to a rich poetic legacy – and my own paternal ancestry – and remains a consistent corporeal and metaphoric thread in the weave of my own brocaded life. This coincidence between the roots of the word, and my own roots, I discovered after settling on this title for my research. Such is the way of a/r/toraphic inquiries; we are led to what we need to know.

Brocade suggests a pattern, texture, depth, contour, often a story told – and qualities of luminescence, reflection, and beauty. Silk shimmers. There are tears, and stains, in the fabric. Living poetically, practicing the arts of attentive observation and
storytelling, weaving the brocade, involves openness to performativity (the story unfolds), to impromptu moments of theatrics and possibility (in the warp and weft yet unwoven). This is experiencing the world as the breathing, living, dying, transforming, dynamic poem it is. We are all part of that performance. We are all shimmering threads in the weave.

Living poetically, brocading the fabric of our lives, is a bit like “(s)tealing sugar from the castle” (Bly, 2005, p. 97), when a passion becomes a sweetness that sustains: “The only thing I hold in my ant-like head / Is the builder’s plan of the castle of sugar. / Just to steal one grain of sugar is a joy!” (p. 97). Mythologist and educator Joseph Campbell (1988) echoes, “If you are following your bliss, you are enjoying that refreshment, that life within you, all the time” (p. 120). That life within you. Drawing forth that which lies within. The self-refreshing tapestry of the inner life.

Like this many-colored brocade, poetry weaves pictures and ideas in words. Though often composed in solitude, poetry, paradoxically, draws us into community in its outward expression, listening together, enveloped in feeling. Unfurling its imaginative banner, typical barriers to language learning, creativity, and connection break down. Amidst laughter and experimentation, we learn that word play can be fun (and profound), as we tumble through metaphor, discover rhythm, and sometimes express our deepest feelings. Poetry helps move us beyond practices that box language learning into expected outcomes, as Rumi describes (Barks, 1995):

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing
there is a field. I’ll meet you there. (p. 36)

That field of open invitation comes alive when writing poetry, enabling students and teachers alike to find their own unique relationships to language. Language learning, and
teaching, become journeys of wonder and possibility, no longer separating learning from imagination and creative self-expression. By playing with poetry, we learn to engage a pedagogical tapestry of many colors and designs, an open field where we cultivate, in turn, attunement to inner knowing, artistic practices, and a questioning mind. In our outer fields of learning, where “learners-and-educators” (Shidmehr, 2013, p. 123) – teachers, parents and students – interact as learners, together, in a pedagogy of the moment, what emerges is valued as is. Carrying no expected outcomes, trusting that what is learned is valuable because it arose from our own life experiences, this work could be dubbed the play of the uncanny and unexpected (D. Trueit, personal communication, April 13, 2013).

Playing with poetry helps educators to better understand the importance of inner processes to our teaching skills, and the value of sharing these (and artistic practices) with our students. A transformative experience, poetic inquiry inspires students and teachers alike to embrace their own artistic drives and processes. I have consistently witnessed young people, labeled as problematic or unable to write, find their own voices and positively channel their crises through poetic expression. Some teachers, at first often stunned at the change in their students’ writing, become enthused, and begin to co-create such transformations in their own explorations with poetry. As Carl Leggo (2005) notes, “the heart of pedagogy is revitalized by poetic knowing” (p. 439). That knowing inspires greater creativity, and diverse streams of engagement with any number of disciplines and media. Poetry’s introspective practices are essential skills, and keen sources of inspiration, in naming and navigating the terrain of today’s tumultuous world, while its un-standardized forms can be immensely freeing for those struggling with uniform definitions of aptitude and proficiency. Poetry enlivens language arts classrooms, and can
“foster living creatively in the…larger pedagogic contexts outside classrooms” (Leggo, 2005, p. 442). Language, learning, and teaching become journeys of words, song, theatrics, and self-exploration, no longer separating “arts” from “humanities,” nor learning from imagination and creative self-expression. If, as Hannah Arendt believed, “education’s central task…is to create conditions for understanding and for the possibilities of renewal” (Naqvi & Smits, 2012, p. 2), then poetry surely wends its way through the heart of this endeavor.

**After a Neruda Question Poem**

What sword grew  
    in the heart of eternity?  
Did volcanic rock sprout  
    from seeds of the lily-palm?  
Where did the Dodo bird nest  
    before Noah sailed by without her?  
Why do leaves love the parachute of descent  
    falling through time to the waiting earth?

My research is rooted in "the most archaic values on earth" (Snyder, 1969, viii) – those of the poet. I find understanding where it emerges from the interplay of the fertility of the soil, the magic of animals, the power-vision in solitude, the terrifying initiation and rebirth, the love and ecstasy of the dance, the common work of the tribe. I try to hold both history and the wilderness in mind, that my poems may approach the true measure of things and stand against the unbalance and ignorance of our times. (Snyder, 1965, p. 551)

Like Snyder, this personal ethos permeates my life and work, arising out of an embodied sense of place, or what poet John Haines calls a “place of sense” (Hamill, 1990, p. 69): an
aesthetic and spiritual presence here on earth that is attentive to *where* we dwell, and also to all – animal, plant, elements, star fire – with whom we dwell. There, in place, I become “a kind of cultural historian” of my own life (GMC, 2013, para.7), gathering details of my “herstory” (Morgan, 1970, xxxvi), transforming life’s ups and downs into writing fodder, finding a way in which it all adds up to “good material” (personal communication, Karen Fisher, February 28, 2010).

Brian Wattchow (2012, p. 18) believes that “place, movement and language become entangled in each other,” where living, poem making, and explorations of language and culture intertwine. Judy Pinn describes how poetry can offer an “enfolding of self with place, of the outer with the inner” (2003, p. 45-46), where boundaries are porous, and dialectic is a kaleidoscope of currents, places, voices and visions. I believe this enfolding, of the outer with the inner, similarly informs my inquiry, just as for Heidegger, “poetry and dwelling belong together, each calling for the other” (2000, p. 93), melding the worlds of living, writing, and being.

Growing up in a territory that ranged from the San Francisco Bay Area, to the great Sacramento Valley, and northeast into the Sierra Nevada mountain foothills and alpine high country, of northern California, my connection to place was nurtured amidst this ethos of watershed and biosphere, with the languages of First Peoples and their intimate, cultural, ecological knowledge of dwelling on the land, and through mentorship with other poets and writers in remote communities dwelling close to the earth. This lifelong connection to place has since migrated north, to years raising my daughters on

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1 Usually after getting their family (three kids, dog, two adults) into one scrape or another - for example, the time the truck was stuck in 3 feet of mud up to its hubcaps down a dead-end dirt road in the middle of nowhere in the middle of the night – Karen’s husband Dave, a cultured Scotsman, would invariably and cheerfully declare, “Well, it’s good material!” (for Karen’s writing endeavors). Now a time-honored truism.
islands in the U.S. San Juan Archipelago, and now in Vancouver, alongside this Salish Sea and these jagged mountains to the north, further, deeper into British Columbia. Reflections on time spent in these locales (and the elusive realm of reminiscence and recall) become integral to this poetic inquiry, informing context as well as flushing out mundane, unexpected and extraordinary details of memory and ancestry, and connecting epistemological and ontological wonderments and concerns.

Whitman talked about the need for time to loaf for poems to come. I think Lew Welch talked about the need for “wild idleness.” So much of it is internal; I guess it wouldn’t be very photogenic…like those Chinese landscape paintings where the human figures are so small…and the landscape so large. It’s easy to imagine those figures being the authors of those great poems. (P. Woods, personal communication, November 10, 2012)

Before ever reading Kenneth Rexroth, Gary Snyder, Jack Kerouac, and Lew Welch, among others, I had already discovered (and mastered, to the detriment of regular employ) that urgent need to ramble and do nothing, save for walk and sit and gaze and wonder; to rest and play and dream in those wild places, in service to the mind of poetry. As a way of writing with and to the mind and body of nature,

Ecopoetics asks in what respects a poem may be a making (Greek poiesis) of the dwelling-place – the prefix eco- is derived from Greek oikos, ‘the home or place of dwelling’…it could be that poiesis in the sense of verse-making is language’s most direct path of return to the oikos, the place of dwelling, because metre itself – a quiet but persistent music, a recurring
cycle, a heartbeat – is an answering to nature’s own rhythms, an echoing
of the song of the earth itself. (Bate, 2000, pp. 75-76)

Mary Oliver (1992) says,

I don't know exactly what a prayer is.
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
which is what I have been doing all day.
Tell me, what else should I have done?

~ Excerpt from The Summer Day (p. 94)

These acts of attention bind us to places, and nurture a sense of belonging. We humans
share a responsibility in our presence there, in remembering these places, and their
stories. In a song entitled “Evermore,” musician Rex Richardson refers to these “times
that can end” (1991), highlighting the profound urgency with which we consider
our ethical relations to place, and what happens, whence we might
forget….our obligation to take care of our stories and to take care of the
land where such stories unravel, as a matter of physical and spiritual
survival, as part of the webs of responsibilities that bind all living and
nonliving things. (Ng-A-Fook & Rottman, 2012, pp. 8-9)

Our stories unfold within a paradoxical backdrop of nature and empire, and the tension
between the two, held in a fragile balance. How to reconcile these fraught and seemingly
polar opposites? Environmental educator David Greenwood (2010), like Mary Oliver,
points to the simple acts of taking time and paying attention, of “slowing to open to the
more-than-human others, to the experience of habitat…to the interactions between land
and people…” (p. 13). Working together to create what Pramod Parajuli calls “resiliently
abundant lives” (lecture notes, March 1, 2013) that embrace relationships between each other, nature, paradox, these troubling contradictions, and uncertainty, “How can the spirit be separate from the body/the senses, if it is embodied and known from the heart? All members are present here in that beat and in each breath” (Kramer, 2012, p. 128).

In Chinese, “poetry” comes from the characters for “word” and “temple,” which depicts “a hand shielding a new sprout” (S. Hamill, personal communication, November 23, 2012), creating a temple of and for the word; a word-seedling tenderly en-earthed by the hand, protected by the spirit (temple). I believe poetry lives in us, in the earth, in our bodies, lungs, breath, and skin. Spirit and seedling. Temple and song. “Beyond the unseen is the unimaginable, beyond the unspeakable the ineffable. Or perhaps within” (Cole, 2006, p. 108).

**Living Inquiry**

Field notes of self and other

memory and time
language and place

all come together as one understanding

when I see the illustration on Gary Snyder’s *Axe Handles*,

Mayumi Oda’s blue green blizzard “*Treasure Ship, Goddess of Snow*”

Japanese goddess playing her shakuhachi flute red cheeked, bare breasted, cross legged in her restless boat,

single sail at her back amid snowfall
on choppy water
red head sash flying ~

I am twenty three again
riding restless waves

off California’s churning coast
reading Snyder by day

Robert Bly by night,
learning about treasure ships

snow goddesses
poetry, and dreams.

Thirty year later,
what has changed?

Now what was my time spent
is a memory retrieved,

restless boats floating
on rivers of blue desire

amid snowfall
bare breasted

sailing my treasure ship
home, to where

time and memory
language and place

self and other
unite in living,

inquiring from within,
from the outside in

each day an awareness
each inquiry, a living thing.
Riding the Bus, Writing on the Bus:

A Self in Transition
The bus came by and I got on,  
That’s when it all began…  
(Garcia, Weir & Kreutzmann, 1968, track 1)

Shortly after arriving in Vancouver, a topsy-turvy landing with an international learning curve, I was finally enjoying my own (new) bed for the first time in over three weeks in a bright, colorful room in Kerrisdale, on the southwest side of the city. Just settled enough to start feeling lonely, a funny thing happened on my way to campus one day. I was riding the bus slouched down in the seat I’d flung myself into, catching my breath after the sprint I’d just made not to miss the lumbering silver coach. Thoughts elsewhere, I absent-mindedly sat up straighter, and could not believe what caught my eyes: There, on the inside wall of the bus where advertisements usually blare, a poem had been posted. My joy at seeing a poem (anytime, anywhere – but on a bus?) was enough; but when I noticed the poet’s name – Daniela Elza – I recognized instantly a new acquaintance met the year before in the company of other local poets. That recognition, that unexpected familiarity, welcomed me into a circle of connection, community and commonality, a stranger in a new place. Arrived here for a new life “chapter” I hadn’t as yet even begun to unearth (laying the official mantle of motherhood a little bit to the side, for the first time in over 23 years), Daniela’s poem came winging down to reference, root and locate me in my new milieu, to uplift and comfort me in a way only poetry can. Although I didn’t realize it at first, Daniela’s poem, and myriad others on tasteful Poetry In Transit placards that I came to look for, expectantly, whenever I entered a city bus in the months that followed (The Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia, 2011), wound their way into my a/r/tographic process and inquiry, becoming a central set of threads weaving in and amongst my explorations and discoveries around the city, in
my writing, and in my new sense of self. As Daniela describes in her excerpt posted from *Interpreting the Winds*, I smoothed my worries into something to share.

```
what the world is    is how we age
its grapes    in cellars

at a constant 12 degrees Celsius.
how we    drink them
over tables    smooth    with worry
at the end of the day    when    you have

nothing    in your grasp    but perplexities
and the best we can do .... is

share them    with each other.    (Elza, 2009, p. 10)
```

In a/r/tography, “emphasizing living inquiry and reflective practice through examination of the in-between spaces of art-making/researching/teaching” (Beare, 2009, p. 163), we “linger in the liminal spaces of unknowing/knowing as each individual inquires into…her own practices. The result may be an occasion for transformative meaning making” (Leggo et al., 2011, pp. 239-240). My a/r/tographic research began as just such an inquiry into (some of the) elements of becoming – one woman’s journey (back) to herself through processes of movement, change, and transition within an ontology of poetics and place. Through a process of living inquiry, “where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, xix), I sought to engage with questions about my life as a woman, writer and educator “in transition and translation and transformation” (C. Leggo,
personal communication, October 31, 2011). Locating myself in place (here, in
Vancouver), within a practice of poetic inquiry, and with a fierce commitment to
educaré, or drawing forth that which lies within (Satya Sai Baba, n.d.), I began. My
inquiry coalesced into a more focused concentration on my own writing, fed by deep,
thirst-quenching gulps from other poets’ works, unexpected explorations of my new city
and home, and attention to the process of becoming, through writing, surrounded by
change: nothing short of a recycling of the self.

A/r/tography can take as many forms, simple or elaborate, as possible definitions,
each a weave of uniquely chosen colored strands. Media combine, overlap, tangle;
explorations fall apart; new threads arise out of nowhere: the a/r/tographer’s job is to
seek, to attend, to catch the flying array of change incarnate as it wheels by, expressing
through our art, evoking through our instruction, recording through our research. Through
my (initially unexpected) reflexive journey on buses around the city, steeped in my
mobile-reading of the poems posted there, and in the writing and gathering of my own
poetic observations and compulsions, I was “free to tell and retell and not ‘get it right,’
but rather ‘get it’ contoured and nuanced” (Gouzouasis & Lee, 2002, p. 126), thereby
“negotiating the messiness of field research through living inquiry, and…the messiness of
day-to-day practice…engaging in poetry from a perspective of living inquiry” (Leggo et
al. 2011, p. 250).

A/r/tography

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return return return
smoky evening fires by morning, ashes, charcoal remains add water paint the page reflecting self auto bio graphy in between worlds metis in other words, assemblages self reflexive wonderment a perpetual state of mind northern place of mind, place of mine in artful consort with breath, frog chorus coyote women howling all the way from California all night cavorting in forest, on shore, flocks of starlings flung skyward untethered flight upending the night,
cast an arc
perfect swerving
reckless swoop
past the silver moon
licking the horizon
toward the fine narrow
line dividing
tomorrow from today

And so it came to pass that riding the bus became a most meaningful ritual in my day, as I anticipated the twice-daily poems, riding back and forth to campus for class, infusing me with a sense of communion and prayer as I solemnly read the words I found posted there. I was always bereft when, for some unknown reason, the customary poem placed above the front section of seats on the driver’s side was absent. The bus became a sort of home-away-from home, a place where the familiarity of poetry, found in a public place (so often devoid of the personal), reminded me of a community stretching backward and forward in time, from which I am never separated – the community of poets and lovers of poetry. Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye (2002) describes how after the fall of the twin towers,

I found myself, as millions did, turning to poetry...Why should it be any surprise that people find solace in the most intimate literary genre? Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details…We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing, for the way language and imagery reach comfortably into experience, holding and connecting it. (xvi)

The poems on the bus were a familiar language in an unfamiliar landscape, helping to ground my new life path, my (re)location, in something and someplace ancient, a place I
can always visit, wherever I may be. I came to see the bus rides themselves as moving metaphors, incarnate, for the literal transition I was in: riding on the bus, in transit, my self in transition, transiting, heading somewhere, rolling along through glistening rain-drenched streets, a coach ride through a city of sparkling water and sunlight. My jostling, sometimes careening bus rides caused me to muse more than once, Are we ever NOT in transition, in this journey we call life?

   How does it feel
   To be without a home
   Like a complete unknown
   Like a rolling stone? (Dylan, 1965, track 1)

One day I met the celebrated local driver known to many as Tommy Transit. A smiling, welcoming, cheery fellow, he pointed out interesting trivia all along the city artery we traveled, as I began to grow more familiar with the route, the neighborhood, and my own steps in this new life as a graduate student (the very reason for the daily rides!). He gave me his card when I departed the bus that day; this led me to a website containing many treasures, not the least of which was an award-winning film from the Gulf Island Film and Television School located on Gabriola Island, BC. A very moving short film about place, change, and transition (coincidentally?! or not?), *The Journey of the Unicorn* speaks to that which I, too, have come to appreciate in my own journeys on the bus and in life, as I settle into a new routine, (re)situating myself: “All people are on a journey. A journey that can take them wherever they want to go…Every person, every story, is unique…‘Be brave/things change/I’ll love you anyway’” (Wright, Moss & Gerber, 2007). The film’s closing moments remind us that wherever we travel, wherever we disembark, love follows in the wake of change. Liminality hovers like wings on the
heels of what was, as change propels us forward, our feet flying. So, too, was the bus a liminal space: a container for my inner and outer journeys, a (moving, changing) location of practice for my poetic inquiry as both reader and writer (scribbling in my a/r/tographic journal enroute), and a visible symbol of the ritual movement I was navigating inside and out. The bus ride was finite, it had specific pick-up and drop-off points, and it traveled on time; but that predictability and continuity lent necessary contrast to those things liminal about my experiences around town and on the bus, things as yet unformed. In an excerpt from *Incoherent State*, posted on the #16 bus, I found a mirror for this feeling:

```
If you are horribly alone,
like a heaven-sent ladder
......
just counting the rungs
could save your sanity. (Israel, 2011, p. 84)
```

They did save my sanity, those poems like ladder rungs, and that predictable bus that always ran on time. Through directed attention to “the circumstances that produce knowledge and understanding through artistic and educational inquiry laden processes” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, xxiv), my a/r/tographical explorations rooted and spread in internal and external landscapes alike, framed by poetry and movement.

Ideas sprouted and spread, like prolific weeds; not orderly like a seedbed, but wandering, entirely rooted in trust. And so, I was told, “Make a rhizome. But you don’t know what you can make a rhizome with, you don’t know which subterranean stem is going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 251). Poetry making is *like this* (Barks & Arberry, 1990, p. 135); a/r/tography is *like this*. Experiment. Making an umbrella of flowering paper and
leaves and spoken word and “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9), living
wheels of human ambulation – as I did, in the end, when all these poems were written,
the “experiment” almost complete – is like this, an experimentation in poetry,
performance, visual aesthetics, sense of place, and protest. A surprise. Rumi says,

When Shams comes back from Tabriz
He’ll put just his head around the edge
Of the door to surprise us
Like this (Rumi, Barks & Arberry, 1990, p. 135)

When our work surprises us, the changes it takes, the unexpected directions in which it
leads us, we’re living like this.

This must be poetic inquiry. At first, I didn’t think I was writing enough. I didn’t
think I was writing anything “good.” I didn’t know where I was heading. I was worried
my poems weren’t emerging when beckoned. “Enjoy the writing as full of surprises.
Honor the writing as wild, as wide wilderness, as wonderful wildness. In addition to
calling out to your poems, let the poems call out to you. Lean into the process....” advised
poet Carl Leggo (personal communication, October 31, 2011). And like a rhizomatic,
niggling sprout of crabgrass, the words of educator Pat O’Riley kept teasing at the edges
of my questions, reminding that “(t)rickster discourse creates contradiction between
presence, absence, and silence...It is not about prescription, but wonder, chance, and
coincidence” (2003, p. 36). In a break with prescription, the words of errant poems tried
to jump off the page, like they were listening to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987)
encouragement to “(a)lways follow the rhizome by rupture; lengthen, prolong, and relay
the line of flight; make it vary, until you have produced the most abstract and tortuous of
lines of n dimensions and broken directions. Conjugate deterritorialized flows” (p.11). I
had a poetry rebellion on my hands, and I loved it. What would come of such experimentation? How was my poetry capturing the experience of transition, translation, and transformation?

**Night Rhythms**

Tired at eight, wired by eleven, 
unwind, go to bed, 
wade across a narrow floodplain 
ripped tides and up-tipped 
scallop shells, 
dawn water in muted pink cups, 
venus brine rocking 
back and forth 
on sandy shores of the moon’s 
full conundrum of fate.

No two were alike, but poems were beginning to flow: as testimony and witness, as acts of attention, as voice to desire, reverie, and delight; poetry as constant companion and mental health barometer, writing to stay alive. Instead of a nice, neat “answer” or packaged end result (a few poems reflecting my experiences of transition in a clear, linear manner), I had a handful of scruffy looking rough drafts, and a lot more questions than answers. The research question and conceptual parameters had shifted; in addition to writing poems, now a plethora of visual artwork and an ethos of protest were dominating my days with the advent of the worldwide Occupy movement and its local Vancouver scene and encampment.

My old roots in media, broadcasting and stage work were promptly utilized in that new (rhizomatic) community, and I juggled my time spent on site “occupying” at the
Vancouver Art Gallery with my coursework, often reading in UBC’s satellite campus next door, or writing (bundled against November’s chill) on the steps above the Robson Street skating rink. My bus route had changed, too, as a result of these new activities: now I was riding down Arbutus Street, to Broadway, then Granville, across the bridge, all the way downtown. No more student-packed coaches on the short ride to campus; here rode workers, grandparents, kids in love, lost souls, a variety and flavor missing in the university–bound busses. I was still writing poems (mostly when they spoke to me rather than trying to coax them), continuing to journal, and shooting off some old rolls of black and white 35mm film I’d been carrying around for years.

The photographic eye was a counterpoint to my writing, even though many shots were of more words, the powerful signage that so characterized the Occupy movement. Words staring in grainy black and white relief, shot at deliberately weird angles, or a lone autumn leaf, a crack in the sidewalk, held in a milky still. Reflections of a faceted inquiry into the nature of expression, documented while on the move, marking place and time with language and image. I was in a whirlpool of aural and visual input, sensory overload, and not always sure what I – as researcher – was doing, and what was being “done” to me by the process, the questions, and all the information – poems, photographs, new experiences and new questions – pouring in. (Re)calibrating myself to the (re)verberations, excesses, openings, contiguities and metaphor/metonymy (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) of a/r/tographical practice, I was reminded that:

We each need to learn to be in the flow of the whirlpool. We are not fighting the whirlpool; the whirlpool is holding us. We are in process…Re-search is about searching again, and again…..Research has ear in the middle to remind us about
learning to listen; research is connected to the heart – we always hear with the heart. So, your research is your daily living inquiry, your ways of being in the world, your ways of learning to live with others in words. Your research is searching for holiness and wholeness and holes. (C. Leggo, personal communication, October 31, 2011)

Just as Flow Theory describes an “experience of complete absorption in the present moment” (Nakamura & Csikszentmihalyi, 2009, p. 195), this living field of inquiry absorbs me, inspiring and inviting attention and regard, regenerating threads of personal, social, and artistic meaning-making back out into the world. Recycling. Flowing.

**Beauty**

curved lines of shadow
flickering patterns of light
collect on the ice rink floor
like mercury spilled between rigid iron bars,
breakdancer bending leaping on shiny cement,
fractured sunlight filtering down
through a clear geodesic dome onto
his ballet against a backdrop
of curved shadows, underwater sunlight,
limbs intersecting unfettered space
black lines and wobbly light,
the unseen dancing out of shadow

Scurrying movements on the street above.
No one looks down
to see his spontaneous ballet
in striated netting of shadow and light,
light as air, fluid Gumby breakdancer
skating on smooth unfrozen cement
to the edges of the people’s rink
in the unknown watery world
of poetry in motion

(In)quiry – to inquire, to query, to query within – like educaré – to draw forth –
artistic inquiry, living inquiry, poetic inquiry – suggests an ongoing process, a living
investigation into things intangible and non-specific. Inquiry leaves room for the
imagination. Inquiry is alive, not static or dead, or simply relegated to the past (though at
its best, it will thoroughly mine the past). Inquiry is situated firmly in the here and now.
As an artist, researcher, and teacher, inquiry is the occupation (both as vocation, and
interior/exterior political locale), and it is everywhere, omnipresent. Learning fields are
everywhere and anywhere. Activism can happen anywhere, and everywhere. Art making,
learning, and teaching engaged as forms of (re)search are co-creative states of awareness
and radical self-empowerment, capable of a humility and grandeur not unlike we’re
“passing through the iris of the world” (Cockburn, 2011, track 1). I was living
a/r/tography.

On many days, while riding the bus, I wondered if other riders noticed the
elegant, well-crafted poems posted on its curved silver walls. Few seemed to ever look
up, let alone take notice of the versified text, rich metaphors, and poetic narratives.
Rarely did anyone echo my own inadvertent and satisfied smile at the well-worded twists
and turns; for me, they greeted, and sometimes framed, the rest of my day. The teacher in
me wondered about this seeming lack of interest in poetry, or even the self-edification
this innovative program nobly aimed to address. What would it take to enliven a greater interest in poetry in our culture? (Humble suggestions forthcoming, dear reader.)

Though more immersed in pursuing a degree than teaching at this particular time, I nonetheless appreciated *Poetry in Transit* for making the effort to “normalize” poetry amidst our everyday life activities like going to work and riding the bus. I hope this kind of public exposure to poetry will continue to spread its “news that stays news” (Pound, 1934, p. 29), in rhizomatic fashion, through riders and readers like me (and you), winding its life-affirming golden thread (Blake, 1904) that we “don’t ever let go of” (Stafford, 1998, p. 42) in our conversations, our artistic practices, and our classroom explorations.

**The Way It Is**

There’s a thread you follow. It goes among things that change. But it doesn’t change. People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread. But it is hard for others to see. While you hold it you can’t get lost. Tragedies happen; people get hurt or die; and you suffer and get old. Nothing you do can stop time’s unfolding. You don’t ever let go of the thread. (Stafford, 1998, p. 42)

But *how* do we learn to see like this? In part, by attending to the unknown. How do we *attend* (come into) the unknown? One writer has suggested, “It is through the intense and scrupulous attention to the known that the unknown begins to become fathomable” (Haas, 2002, para.13). In the practice of poetic inquiry, intersecting lines of flight, in flow, we tease open the known, passing through in-between and interstitial
places on our way to the unknown. Where we end up may not be where we began – as I discovered in my a/r/tographic process, framed initially as an exploration into “a room of one’s own” (Woolf, 1929/1957, p. 1). Although this served as my point of departure (for what led to many Deleuzian lines of flight!), in the end, my inquiry wasn’t about the room at all. The journey took me outside, into different modes of transit, and different modes of being and becoming-ness: I walked, I rode, I sometime drove or was driven; the journey took me outdoors, into nature, public spaces, art as activism, and ritual as activism; and the journey took me out of the ordinary, into fluid and liminal places of becoming, in moment, a dance in consort with the unknown. A mystery.

**Dream**

I dream of black cowrie shells
reach for them
under curtain of falling water
tucked behind coral trumpets
throng of tangled seaweed
    a tawny bed of sand

I see my outstretched fingers
can’t reach
    shells  glistening
beyond my grasp
can’t reach
desire
    black as night

Marble green water
fingers waving lurid white
over pearly black cowries
pursed lips tiny teeth
littering the ocean floor

Citing visionary musician, artist and poet John Cage, Pat O’Riley (2003) notes that “poethics regard knowing as not only about knowing or not knowing, but a willingness to not know...thinking as letting go and receiving rather than capturing and assembling/ordering” (p. 38). In a similar vein of praxis, American poet Robert Bly has long insisted on values that do not strive for:

- perfection, but a record of imaginative enactment...a reckless grandeur
- over the virtue of meticulousness...not just a poetry of psychic leaping,
- but a poetry of devotion, an ecstatic spirit which disdains the fidgety
cautions of the intellect. (Hoagland, 2011, p. 46)

This aesthetic is well suited to poetic inquiry. Without mystery, without “spiritual intensity...as an essential poetic value” (Hoagland, 2011, p. 43), without devotion, how can we practice trust in the poetic act? Where will the words lead us? Where will those things we pay attention to lead us? Where will the things we ignore lead us? Spiritual intensity as a poetic value means walking “on the road to find out” (Stevens, 1970, track 9). We carve a space for the poetic, a place for the unknown to come in and start a nother line of flight. Like those mystical poets from the East – Mirabai, Rumi, Hafez, Kabir – we practice tuning:

- more sharply to instincts which had been there all along – the liberating force of paradox, and the way in which crisscrossing lines of thought, images, and competing claims can be used poetically to deliberately pull apart the tight
certainties of “knowing.” (Hoagland, 2011, pp. 46-47)
Similarly, environmental educator David Greenwood (2010) points out the ways in which poetry functions as a site of resistance to what is traditionally understood as “knowing”:

Like...time I seek out on the land, poetry engenders another cultural way of knowing. It is a dissident minority tradition within my own colonized and colonizing culture. Stopping for poetry is an antidote to the morning news...to the voice of reason that governs research method...Poetry...helps me to recover my wilder self. (p. 13)

_Coyote Song_

Waking early,
before my soul
out wandering all night
has jumped back into my body,
I think I hear coyote’s
lonely distant dawn yearning
howl

then, my eyes focus
see the house right next door,
know I’m in the city now.
There are no coyotes here.
Was that me I heard?
Out wandering some lonely highway
peering sideways at the dawn?

“If life is mythically conceived of as a heroic journey, if the myth includes trials, errors, and failure as part of one's necessary education” (Hoagland, 2011, p. 45), then are not a/r/tographical explorations the field notes from that journey, the lived myth returning
from the sojourn, evidence of a newly “certified” teacher of the self? Sometimes they are literally field notes: poems written outside at the Vancouver Art Gallery, on the bus, at home curled up on the red settee below my window; emails from classmates, my supervisor, old friends; inspiring one-liners on Facebook and snippets of text from the internet. One of these guided an important methodological consideration for this poetic inquiry, arriving at a timely juncture during some of the early “confusion” over what constituted “(re)search.” Thereafter, I kept it front and center on my desk, its message reminding me of a vital and easily overlooked tenet of any journey worth taking: “The purpose of life is not to find yourself. It is to lose yourself” (Brooks, 2011, para. 14). So instead of worrying that I was getting “lost,” I learned to relish it, better understanding that being lost is what makes a finding all the more rewarding. These poems and musings are my findings, my way-making; they are my understandings. As Indigenous scholar Priscilla Settee (2011) points out, “Writing, in fact, is vital to cultural and racial survival because it is not just to communicate; writing is for discovering oneself” (p. 438). At the heart of a/r/tographic work, deeper discovery of oneself guides the intersections between art-making, living inquiry, and the practices of educaré; the many ways in which the world draws us forth.

**Listening to Grieg’s Peer Gynt, Suite 1 (To Robert Bly)**

Dear Robert, did you listen
to this soaring primeval music
on silent mornings
when the white mantle
lay deep on the land,
working your translation
of that (foolish) hero’s journey
(unknown) into the self
and (nimble)
back again?

When first setting out on this journey into a/r/tographic research, the idea of a
finished, final product was somehow so appealing. But along the way, the messiness took
over; in translation, the woman and writer in transition did indeed transform, into a
(re)searcher and exploratory artist grounded in a new milieu, looking to find out. Rather
than a neat, packaged envelope of poems, my process was allowing “these dynamic
practices and identities to interface and collide with one another so that meanings,
understandings, and theories become…multiple, tangled, and complicated” (Springgay,
2008, pp. 158-159). Through the practice of writing, through the practice of “Occupying”
politically in that season of global unrest and “occupying” myself, in (that new) place, on
the bus, at home, in class, and on walks to and from these locales, I found that “delight in
turbulence does not deny the messiness and ironies of real life” (O’Riley, 2003, p. 38),
but rather, enfolds them within and amongst other moments of ongoing, inexplicable
beauty and unexpected grace. My bus riding, walking, protesting, and writing immersion
endeavors underscored that “theory as practice becomes an embodied, living space of
inquiry” (Springgay, 2008, p. 160), where the line(s) between my lived experiences, art-
making, and reflection on it all began to grow very entwined. In-betweens abounded.

An interesting shift in understanding and process emerged from questions I felt
percolating, related to performance, “found” art, and the poem on the page. Throughout
the (re)search, I kept wishing to move beyond a purely linguistic, flat, one-dimensional
way of making poems. The photos I’d taken, though interesting ethnographically, were
not high quality. I’d collected fascinating scraps and picture tidbits, intending to make a
collage documenting the (re)search, but somehow, amidst other demands, that didn’t
happen. An initial mandala of ideas for my research, scribed in a circular formation and
colored with wide sweeps of beeswax crayons in spiraling rainbow swathes, which hung
above my desk, kept the ideas and concepts flowing; but what was the form I was
unconsciously seeking?

What you seek
is seeking you. (Rumi, n.d., para. 1)

I found out what it was (or at least began to piece together the jigsaw-like pieces
of my clues) one very blustery day walking home from my neighborhood coffee shop,
where I saw protruding upside down from the corner garbage bin a strikingly beautiful
umbrella. Momentarily confused – why was this beauty in the trash? – I pulled it out, sure
there had been some mistake – and saw the broken spines that had led to its truncated
existence as a whirly-gig in the rain. At first, I was still troubled, wishing for some way to
repair, reuse, or recycle the beauty; then, my dismay slowly shifted to renewed curiosity
and inspiration, as I examined the dusky-blue leaf pattern on the silver-periwinkle fabric,
convinced that the umbrella could be made into a piece of “trash fashion,” at the very
least – an \textit{haute trash} designer skirt or hat (Haute Trash, 2012). In addition to the lovely
fabric, the umbrella had a classy, thick wooden handle and spine – clearly this umbrella
had seen some days, and might yet sport some more! Originally, I thought I’d pass it on
to designers who relish such projects. But when I took the broken-accessory-about-to-
become-art home, then my fun really began!
“We have to understand the artistic process not only as an attempted solution of a paradox, but as the paradox itself. What one knows, one cannot say, and once said it is no more the same” (Hess, 1975, p. 55). Hoping to create a next (even better!) incarnation of this classy umbrella, I glued photos taken at the Vancouver encampment to the leafy blue fabric, along with some fresh red and gold autumn leaves that, amazingly, held up under the delicate pressure applied in the gluing process. I added scraps of poems, tucked between its fabric and spines, or impaled onto ends of the spines, and christened it “the poetry umbrella.” When I twirled the broken device, spines collapsing as I spun, the photos revolved in a peculiar bent and shapely way, like an improvisational dancer, and leaves fluttered in time to the rhythmic breeze of the spin. Natural materials, recycled objects, and narrative documentation combined in a photo-leafed moving montage of a place, events, and words in time.

For a presentation about the inquiry, inspiration blossomed into a performance piece out of the beautifully decorated umbrella parked in my study. When considering the form of the presentation, I knew I didn’t want to stand still, reading my poems at a podium – that felt too static, and inappropriate to all the movement and motion that had characterized this journey thus far. Having recently seen a video of Vancouver artist Rebecca Belmore’s street performance, entitled “Vigil” (2002), I was inspired to unite my research on the streets with a performance that embodied that aspect of the work. What ensued was a poetry reading centered around the umbrella’s movement within an indoor space, inspired by Deleuzian lines of flight suggested by its akimbo spines veering off in all directions, as if they could help my poems rise on the wind, carrying reminders
of the threads of writing, transportation, transformation, protest and community that were woven into the development of the inquiry.

Thus freshly adorned, the umbrella was now destined to become the “roof” of an improvisational “bus” in which I would “ride,” periodically stopping to disembark and present a poem. To transform the broken umbrella spines into my lines of flight veering off from within the imaginary bus, I tied long pieces of (many) colored wool yarn to each one. In the spirit of true improvisational theatre, actors (selected from the assembled audience of fellow-presenters) were asked to fulfill their roles only moments before we “moved.” A handful of yarn strings was held by each of four comrades, who formed a loose rectangular shape around me, standing in their midst, holding the curved wooden handle of the umbrella that united us all (metaphorically, and literally), its colorful strings flowing from our center in unpredictable yet fluid ways. Like balloon strings, but without the buoyancy of an actual balloon to hold the strings aloft, each person’s strings twisted, sagged, and tangled in a particularly satisfying enactment of rhizomatic play! At the front of the rectangular(ish)-shaped space that the lines of flight delineated, a sixth participant – my “driver” – commanded, like a steering wheel, a hand-painted cardboard sign (which we had found in our classroom, painted in another class?) that read, “This Space Is Occupied.” The four comrades were meant to represent the wheels, or four corners, of the bus, and I, the passenger in their midst, with the driver of our “bus” leading the way as we moved around the room. The driver and four “wheels” would halt in unison (their lines tangling more magnificently each time) when an iPhone’s doorbell chime rang for the “stops” on our route. There, I would step out from the intertwined configuration of lines of flight that draped the imaginary walls of this improvised transport, and toss-
spread-rain a shower of colorful autumn leaves from a shopping bag at my side, suggesting movement between indoors and outdoors, on the bus and off, cityscape and nature, as well as blurring those distinctions, since this mimicking of outdoor activities was being performed indoors on a gray November afternoon in liminal space and time. I read one poem at each stop, then stepped back into the “bus” as we kept rolling throughout the room, “all around the town” (Wickstrom, 1998, p. 4). With the amorphous swish of movement as we swerved and shuffled around the long and narrow, low-ceilinged room, the flurry of leaves tossed and blown about the space, the ethereal tone of the bus-chime, and the reverent delivery of my words, our improvisation captured the in-betweens, excesses, metonymy and liminality of a/r/tography as live performance.

Our audience seemed intrigued by the mode of presentation, at times even entranced, and perhaps therefore more receptive to the poems, curious about their delivery, the context, and what it might say about the words themselves as part of a moving, vibrating, intertwining whole. Not everyone “got it” that we represented a bus, yet they were swept away in an imaginary world, experiencing the poetry of movement, the words recited, the impressionistic tangle of colored yarn and moving bodies and flying leaves, sensing wind. A/r/tographer Alex de Cosson describes that just “as nature claims for itself the twines of its existence, so an (inter)relational walking/writing temporal space of being-becoming is in continual flux within each of us as we come to terms with our teaching and learning practices” (2009, para. 17). So, too, did my role as artist, researcher, and teacher – how I communicated meaning from my poetry – gained new depth and scope that day, as I strode more solidly from poet into performer, incorporating visual art, sound, dance, and theatre into my expressive work. And perhaps
for having ritualized their initial foray out into the world, the poems did come alive off the page, their voices the echoes of a budding a/r/tographer, finding hers.

**For the Missing Women**

“Because the night belongs to lovers,
because the night belongs to love....”

- Patti Smith & Bruce Springsteen

the night is my lover
when I walk past
darkened buildings
shiny streets
last gold leaf hanging
from a blackened branch
fluttering alone,
echoed in an oily mirror
– shadow reflected
in an elliptical puddle –
at the empty bus stop

the night is my lover
grand solitude in darkness
salty air dotted stars
alone
under cover

fully exposed
impenetrable

fully enclosed

companioned by loose, curling thoughts

the mysterious wind that carries them away
Transition, translation, transformation. Maybe transition never ends. To keep translating ourselves bears witness to change, and honors who we become. Transformation, I think, is a daily thing, absorbed in the process of writing ourselves into being. Poems, and poetic inquiry, reflect the wonder of this process, also reminding us of ecstasy and devotion, of slowing down on the journey. Strange synchronicities guide us; impossibilities dissolve; poems blossom like night flowers lighting the way through darkened streets and times. “John Keats is right. This is a vale of soulmaking….so full of unanswerable questions, the real ones, Who am I? being foremost” (Barks, 2007, p. 59-60).

Who am I? Who is that transformation translating the transition? Becoming. Ever-changing. Like a falling leaf, a wind blowing in from the sea, an old idea – or fabric – recycled. Poet and scholar Carl Leggo honors and celebrates these ways in which “(a)r/tography invites you to linger with the living. A/r/tography honors process, and the complex intersection of diverse identities, and the generative questions that call out in the midst of each moment’s oscillation…We write in the spaces that are available” (personal communication, October 31, 2011). We linger in the liminal. We dance the littoral. Together, transforming. We are all on the bus.

There was Cowboy Neal
At the wheel
Of a bus to never-ever land (Garcia, Weir, & Kreutzman, 1968, track 1)
Found Poems:

Theory and Methodology

“…theory could even be poetry…”

~ Jean Baudrillard

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2 These found poems are composed of words extracted from source articles and a personal communication, arranged poetically by myself. For sources of the quotes found in Levertov’s essay, see Appendix B.
Some Notes on Organic Form

(A found poem, after an essay of the same name by Denise Levertov, 1965)

there is a form
in all things
(and in our experience)

the poet can
discover and reveal

*inscape* ~ intrinsic form
the pattern of essential characteristics
in single objects
and objects in a state of relation
to each other

*instress* ~ experiencing
of the perception of inscape

the *apperception* of inscape
(extend reference to sensory phenomena
to include
intellectual & emotional experience)

*the inscape of an experience*
sequence or constellation
of experiences

organic poetry is a method of apperception
of recognizing
what we perceive

intuition of order
a form beyond forms

Such a poetry is exploratory

felt by the poet intensely
is brought to speech
the condition of being a poet
a constellation of experiences
demands wakes this demand,
*the poem.*
beginning fulfillment of this demand
contemplate
meditate
the heat of feeling
warms the intellect

Contemplate
from “templum, temple, a place, a space for observation, marked out
by an augur”
not simply to regard
but to do these things
in the presence of a god

Meditate
“to keep the mind in a state of contemplation”
its synonym
to muse
from a word meaning
“to stand with mouth open”
think inspiration ~
To breathe in.

the poet stands
open-mouthed
in the temple of life
contemplating experience
moment of vision
crystallization

Faithful attention to the experience
from the first moment of crystallization
let in to the possibility of the poem
letting the experience lead
through the world of the poem

elements of the poet’s being
in communion with each other
heightened
ear and eye
intellect and passion
intuitive interaction
between all the elements involved

Content/form
state of dynamic interaction
only discoverable in the work
not before

rhyme chime echo reiteration
knit the elements of an experience
density of texture
returning circling perception
transmuted into language,
apperceived

if this return occurs more than once
a refrain
not decided but
directly because of demands of content

repetition variation
corresponding images
a kind of non-aural rhyme

out of fidelity to instress
a design that is the form of the poem
rhythmic relationships
of syllables
within the line
and line to line

“form follows function”
“the reality of the building
lies in the space within it,
to be lived in”

“ask the fact for the form”

in organic poetry
metric movement the measure
is the movement of perception
extended onomatopoeia
imitate the feeling of an experience,
emotional tone, texture
varying speed and gait

the peculiar rhythms of the parts
are modified, if necessary
to discover the rhythm of the whole
like painting from nature,
the character of the whole
arise out of the parts
yet when closely juxtaposed
in the actual painting,
you may have to lighten or darken
sharpen or cloud
to produce
air, light, dust
shadow, and distance

In organic poetry,
the form sense
ever present
*along with*
fidelity to revelations of meditation

a sort of Stanislavsky of the imagination:
putting a chair two feet downstage
thickening a knot of bystanders upstage left
raise his voice
that actress
enter more slowly
(*all in the interest*
*of a total form*
*she intuits*)

the form sense is a sort of
helicopter scout
flying over the field of the poem
taking aerial photos reporting

form sense
the sense the poet’s ear has

of some rhythmic norm
peculiar
to a particular poem
from which lines depart
and to which they return

the horizon note
beat or pulse underlying the whole

“the health of the eye demands a horizon”
poetry of linguistic impulse
absorption in language itself
world of multiple meaning revealed in
sound, word, syntax

as much a constellation of perceptions
as the instress of non-verbal
sensuous and psychic
events

Form is never more than a revelation of content.

no loading of the rifts with ore
because there are to be no rifts

alongside this truth another truth

there must be a place in the poem for rifts too
(never to be stuffed with imported ore)

great gaps
between perception and perception
must be leapt across

magic
when we come to those rifts
make those
leaps

religious devotion to the truth
to the splendor of the authentic
brings us to undreamed abysses

we find ourselves sailing slowly over them

landing on the other side –

that’s ecstasy.
The Poetic Thing (On Poetry and Deconstruction)

(A found poem, after an essay of the same name, by J.W.P. Phillips, 2011)

“A text is not a text unless it hides from the first glance, from the first comer, the law of its composition and the rules of its game.”
- Jacques Derrida, *La Dissemination* (1972)

poetry does not come
except by way of announcement
of its disappearance
the poetic
the name and the thing

in ‘Che cos’è la poesia’ Derrida situates the poetic between visual arts and music by way of the kind of aesthetic classification traced from Kant through Hegel, poetry characterized in terms of its powers of condensation the dense compressions of dream substitutions poetic rendering the idea itself secretly accessible through memory learned by heart

deconstruction
writing lets itself be affected by the signature of that to which the writing is given (the other) the structure of the signature of the other (the poetic)

the answer to the question What is poetry? to what the question refers (poetry itself) both subject and object

Poetry must (be the) answer (to) the question what is poetry?
even though it remains inapparent,  
    since disappearing is its law  
(to the extent that anything ever appears,  
    disappearing is its law)

Derrida writes,

\textit{You are asked to know}  
\textit{how to renounce knowledge.}  
You need to know how to write  
without knowing

the poet serves as a kind of ‘radio’  
able to collect transmission from the ‘invisible world.

‘I am a dictation,  
pronounces poetry,  
learn me by heart,  
copy me down, guard and keep me,  
look out for me,  
look at me,  
dictated dictation [dictée],  
right before your eyes:  
soundtrack, \textit{wake}, trail of light,  
photograph of the feast in mourning.’

deconstruction and poetry:  
the common ground might be teaching.  
Poetry as a kind of teacher:  
in Hegel’s classic formula,  
‘poetry has always been and is still  
the most universal and widespread teacher  
of the human race’

Derrida’s no less classical axiom  
‘the poetic:  
that which you desire to learn  
by heart;  
\textit{imparare a memoria.}’

slight incline between poetry,  
as the teacher,  
and the poetic,  
as that which you desire to learn  
from poetry  
suggests without revealing
an interval
where much may happen
in the course of teaching

paradox of philosophy in deconstruction
our inability to know exactly what it is
that survives
(remains, endures)

poetry (or the poetic)
a complex set of transitions and distinctions.
distinct from prose,
more primitive, more fundamental,
predates prose

(‘a knowing that does not yet separate the universal
from its living existence in the individual’).

Poetry is the original form of human expression.

Poetry is prose bewitched
says Mina Loy,

‘a music made of visual thoughts,
the sound of an idea’

the language of poetry
figures the universal of philosophy
in secret
through the mediation
of the language of things

‘The aim of poetry
is imagery and speech
not the thing talked about
or existence in practice’

Derrida/Francis Ponge
the law of the thing:
‘dictated as if in the first person
by the thing
with an intractable rigour,
as an implacable command.’

(garde et regard)
the being lost of what must be lost
‘poetry, the art of speech,  
the totality which unites in itself  
the two extremes,  
visual arts and music’

Derrida’s allusive repetition  
captures in its image a wake,  
a sillage, as in light trails  
in night photographs:  
time passing  
captured as a trail of light

what one sees  
must be kept and reserved for the gaze  
in terms of its loss

(garde et regard)  
constant attention paid  
to the structure and law of the loss  
of lost things

what makes it possible:  
the hallucinogenic qualities  
of these fragments of word  
(the shriveling and shredding,  
the snipping of the tips)  
which so much produce in its absence  
a memory that is absent

the mislaid key  
can only be given  
in the form of a mislaid key:  
the key is its loss.
Theory and Play of the Duende

(A found poem, after an essay of the same name by Frederico Garcia Lorca, 1933, translated by A.S. Kline, 2007)

Longing for air and sunlight, I was so bored
I used to feel as though I was covered in fine ash

‘You have a voice, you understand style,
but you’ll never ever succeed
because you have no duende.’

‘All that has dark sounds has duende.’

Those dark sounds are the mystery,
the roots that cling to the mire that we all know,
    that we all ignore,
but from which comes the very substance of art.

Goethe, in speaking of Paganini
hit on a definition of the duende:
‘A mysterious force that everyone feels
and no philosopher has explained.’

the duende is a force
    not a labour,
    a struggle
    not a thought.

‘The duende is not in the throat:
the duende surges up, inside, from the soles of the feet’
    truly alive:

meaning, it’s in the veins:
the most ancient culture of immediate creation

    the spirit of the earth

The duende I mean, secret and shuddering,
is descended from that blithe daemon,
    all marble and salt,
    of Socrates,
whom it scratched at indignantly on the day
    when he drank the hemlock,
and that other melancholy demon of Descartes,
diminutive as a green almond, that, tired of lines and circles, 
fled along the canals to listen to the singing of drunken sailors.

Every step that he climbs in the tower of his perfection 
is at the expense of the struggle that he undergoes 
with his duende,

not with an angel, nor with his Muse. 
This is a precise and fundamental distinction at the root of their work.

The angel guides and grants, like St. Raphael:
defends and spares, like St. Michael:
proclaims and forewarns, like St. Gabriel:
dazzles, but flies over a man’s head

The Muse dictates, and occasionally prompts. 
She can do relatively little 
since she’s distant and so tired 
(I’ve seen her twice) 
that you’d think her heart half marble.

The Muse stirs the intellect, 
bringing a landscape of columns and an illusory taste of laurel, 
and intellect is often poetry’s enemy, 
since it limits too much, 
since it lifts the poet into the bondage of aristocratic fineness, 
where he forgets that he might be eaten,

suddenly, by ants

things against which the Muses 
who inhabit monocles, 
or the roses of lukewarm lacquer in a tiny salon, 
have no power.

Angel and Muse come from outside us: 
the angel brings light, 
the Muse form
Golden bread or fold of tunic, 
it is her norm that the poet receives in his laurel grove.

While the duende has to be roused 
from the furthest habitations of the blood.

forget our fear of the scent of violets 
that eighteenth century poetry breathes out,
and of the great telescope
in whose lenses the Muse,
    made ill by limitation, sleeps.

    The true struggle is with the *duende*.

The roads where one searches for God are known.
    Seeking the *duende*,
there is neither map nor discipline.

We only know it burns the blood
    like powdered glass,
that it exhausts, rejects
    all the sweet geometry we understand,

    that it shatters styles

tear down the scaffolding of the song,
    but allow through a furious, burning *duende*,
friend to those winds heavy with sand

She had to rob herself of skill and safety:
    that is to say,
banish her Muse, and be helpless,
    so her *duende* might come,
and deign to struggle with her at close quarters
    worthy of her pain and her sincerity

The arrival of the *duende*
presupposes a radical change
    to all the old kinds of form

    ‘Allah! Allah!’
    ‘Olé!’
    ‘Viva Dios!’

deep, human, tender cries
of communication with God through the five senses,
    thanks to the *duende*
that shakes the voice and body
    a real, poetic escape from this world

Naturally
    when this escape is perfected,
everyone feels the effect:
but in that crowd of Muses and angels with lovely forms and smiles, who could earn the prize
   but her moribund duende,
sweeping the earth with its wings made of rusty knives.

Spain, country of ancient music and dance, where the duende squeezes out those lemons of dawn, a country of death, a country open to death. In every other country death is an ending. It appears and they close the curtains. In Spain they open them.

When the Muse sees death appear she closes the door, or builds a plinth, or displays an urn and writes an epitaph
   with her waxen hand, but afterwards she returns to tending her laurel in a silence that shivers between two breezes.

When the angel sees death appear he flies in slow circles, and with tears of ice and narcissi weaves the elegy we see trembling in the hands of Keats

The duende won’t appear if he can’t see the possibility of death, if he doesn’t know he can haunt death’s house, if he’s not certain to shake those branches we all carry, that do not bring, can never bring, consolation.

With idea, sound, gesture, the duende delights in struggling freely with the creator on the edge of the pit. Angel and Muse flee, with violin and compasses, and the duende wounds

and in trying to heal that wound that never heals, lies the strangeness, the inventiveness of a (wo)man’s work.

The magic power of a poem consists in it always being filled with duende, baptising all who gaze at it with dark water,

since with duende it is easier to love, to understand, and be certain of being loved, and understood
We have said that the *duende* loves the edge, the wound, draws close to places where forms fuse in a yearning beyond visible expression.

The *duende* works on the dancer’s body like wind on sand.

The *duende* never repeats itself, any more than the waves of the sea do in a storm.

In the work with the cape, while the bull is still free of wounds, and at the moment of the kill, the aid of the *duende* is required to drive home the nail of artistic truth.

Dark sounds, behind which in tender intimacy exist volcanoes, ants, zephyrs, and the vast night pressing its waist against the Milky Way.

The *duende*….Where is the *duende*?

Through the empty archway a wind of the spirit enters, blowing insistently over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents
**Found Advice**

(A found poem, after correspondence with a friend)

Yeah, well,
ask a tame person
what you ought to do
and they'll tell you
tame is good.

Ask a wild person,
you'll get a different answer.

Guess you have to decide what you're most afraid of.
And then do that, if you want to be a poet.
If you want to be an academic,
do the opposite, what's safe.
Unless teaching is your art, which it might be,
and then you'd be in the right place.

Refuge is where art dies.
Poets need sharp teeth.
Keep your momentum.
The opposite of refuge is exposure, exploration,
expression. Hopefully not also expiration,
but if you're not flirting with that,
you won't have much of interest to say.
Do you want to arrange flowers, or bloom?

In My Arrogant Opinion.

Sorry,
I just have to do this to myself
every morning.
Because I am unaffiliated.

So if you don't want to sound like me....
River Journal

(Ecopoetic Practice: Writing the Wounded Land)

(A found poem after an essay of the same name, by Brian Wattcho, 2012)

not just a record
(observations, experiences)
but a meaning making exercise

paddling by day
contemplation meditation
at night

metaphorical journey
how no place is untouched,
every day
encounters with the whole ecosystem
forest river animals people

where place means
environments implicated and enfolded
by each other
(and their creatures)

where metaphor immerses us
in relations among things
devotion to sensuous particulars

culture and nature wrestle with each other
and emerge changed
(though we perceive ourselves separate)

we begin the process of reattachment
by apprenticing self to a place

listen deeply to a landscape
balance of natural and cultural forces
dynamism of a place
how it changes through time
how we are changed as a result

river floodplain families communities
ecologies that sustain them all

place, movement, language
become entangled
in each other

Ecopoetics: a poem making (Greek poiesis)
the dwelling-place—
the prefix eco derived from Greek oikos,
“the home or place of dwelling”
poiesis in the sense of verse-making
is language’s most direct path of return
to oikos, the place of dwelling,
metre itself a quiet but persistent music,
a recurring cycle,
a heartbeat
an answering to nature’s own rhythms,
an echoing of the song
of the earth itself. (Bate, 2000)

Poetry awakens
“the momentary wonder of unconcealment”

as for Heidegger,
poetry can quite literally save the earth

Poetically Man Dwells:
“ poetry and dwelling belong together,
each calling for the other”

poetry offers
an enfolding of self with place,
of the outer with the inner

and a way of pursuing knowing
most often suppressed
and relegated
to the margins

tied to the immediate and the immanent
to the processes of ‘being there’
and sensual saturation

poetic writing
as a form of research activity
relies on a paradox, say Van Manen, “distances us from lived experiences but by doing so allows us to discover the existential structures of experience”

ecopoetics is, quite naturally, an extension of cultural poiesis,

immersion and self-conscious saturation potential to access and represent aspects of human experience otherwise impossible to realize in the research process.

There is a pace and rhythm to poetic writing that mimics the natural rhythms and cycles that we may have lost sight of in the headstrong rush of culture.

sitting at my desk several hundred kilometres from the river distance does not lessen the pull the river has on me.

The initial inspiration for a poem is often hard to trace begins with a kind of “emotional picture” at the edge of rational thought.

we realize our indebtedness to the more-than-human world
Poems & Field Notes

I no longer try to describe where I’ve been. It is not possible to capture in a few sentences the essence of a journey, a pilgrimage that is of the mind and heart as well as of the body. I am learning that a pilgrimage is a private thing, not easily shared. There are places we go where the people we love cannot follow.

~ Gelareh Asayesh, Saffron Sky: A Life Between Iran and America

We knew that gypsies were properly another race. They inhabited the land of eros….You encountered them in broad daylight, going about their usual business, yet there was always a feeling that they were coming towards you out of storytime…there was an extra-ness in the air, as if a gate had been left open in the usual life, as if something may get in or out.

~ Seamus Heaney, District and Circle: Poems
Memory

Memory is a fictitious device.
As soon as we head back
on that long voyage forward
connecting two ends of the same strand
we lose our way,
invent or embellish details
meant to save the sinking story,
this leaky boat we bail furiously
to keep from going under,
some part of ourselves
stuffed in the hull,
hoping for release.
But “it’s already too late;”
and we’re sunk before
the voyage begins
lost, adrift, at sea.
Memory is no help at all.
Make it up
and you just might
swim to shore.
Ink Blots

Ink blots on my fingertips, from changing the printer cartridge, but it looks like I’ve been slaving over the ink well all night. Writing of writer-ly things, dreaming poetic things, like night fish wandering through deep blue subterranean caverns, or edges of sky parting for a sliver of lightning to sneak through, stenciling blackness with its immanent flash. The inkblots fade slowly, leaving clean thumbs for another day’s imprints, etchings, impressions, blots, marked evidence of my presence here on earth.

Song of Place

In search of place: where we write, where we land, where we are home. I seek out the lonely, less habited places, to sit alone with my journal and a certain amount of disengagement from the rational. Sinking into the sensuous, this dry, matted grass, nearby downy thistles, this patch of sunlight, and the further, distant – almost missing – sound of traffic: tires on asphalt, sirens, voices from a faraway sidewalk. Instead, a whistling towhee holds my attention as it relaxes, perceptibly, in the grander quiet that reigns here on the hillside behind the museum, overlooking all of English Bay. Faint conversations of the groundskeepers pruning along the fence line above the steep embankment float my way. Tenor hum of bees, foraging the last of summer’s vetch blossoms, underscores the deep bass chugging of a tanker’s slow ascent up the bay in the waters far below. A steady soprano peep-peep-peep; bullfrog joins in, early for his evening serenade, but signal to me that the afternoon wanes. At the choppy sound of a helicopter overhead, he stops. The grounds crew drives out the service road. Gazing a long time at the heavy sky lowering over the bay, blue mountains rolling northward into infinity, bullfrog begins his song again. I rise to go.
Blossoms

To paint the divide between dark and light, the blacks and whites with all their possibilities for shade and shadow, tone and texture, thick and thin inky lines, erotic curved snaking through blackened horizon, unveiling the naked sky of night, spiral throats of the flowering earth brimming with stars in the lush shower of complex creation, aquamarine, a black violet bloom.

The curved opalescent whorl inside moon snail, capricious curl of petunia’s will-not-be-deterred upward blooming growth. Breathing color from the backs of the eyes, cobalt, indigo, rose as red to pink as – (did Georgia ever paint a rose?) – the way the white impatiens blurs against the dawning light of day until the blossoms’ whiter white distinguishes their shape, against the paler, creamy expanse of widening sky.

Crescent moon hanging
in a violet sky

white sickle
in the dark hollow
of her throat

Venus appears
just before light of day

Mt. Baker
etched against a growing horizon

The mountain lies down.
“Its Feet Are the Ears”

Writing, a way between the worlds and beyond, to what’s really going on. Robert Bringhurst calls the hands “uprooted feet.” We feel and shape our way through life, everything we touch or craft a part of our sensory hand “walk.” Like making our way through visual landscapes, seeing (that is, touching) things with our “hands of the head” (our eyes). Or listening with the toes of our head’s hearing feet, walking through aural landscapes, dancing what we (h)ear.

The feet are the link
between earth and the body. Begin there.
The lungs are the link between body and air.
The hands, these uprooted feet, are the means
of our shaping and grasping. Clasp them.
The eyes are the hands of the head;
its feet are the ears.

~ “Sengzhaò,” from *Pieces of Map, Pieces of Music*
(Bringhurst, 1986, p. 21)

Sam Hamill speaks of the ears and eyes as one sense organ, of no duality between vision and the other senses. Like listening to the piano player’s fingers caressing, boldly dancing across the black and white keys, the tempestuously thick resonant jam unfolding between rhythm, bass, lead guitar, drummer and pianist, unfolding, infolding, a Deleuzian rhizome of aural space, a musical symphony in its live manifestation of cosmic stories embodied through our listening, our sensuous responses. The space within the music pulses with “…intimate communication and spiritual transformation” (Lesh, 2005, p. 269), a communal heartbeat, like that found in poems. Present to receive when the gift arrives.
Writing

Sitting at my desk writing
inviting something to come
a word a world an idea
some flip of the switch
an urn of possibility turned upside down
on the table of my mind
(what does a writing desk have
in common with a raven?)
bits and pieces of feathers and dust
float to the ground
textured wind
fractal complexity of beatific rain
the simple shower of things
dressed as words
falling around my eyes ears tongue
heat and taste
sound and vision
shadow and light
I don’t know the language of my ancestors, a fleur-de-lis of grief for that loss of ancestry, the poetic tongue that Farsi is, and for my own avocation in this lifetime toward writing and the poetical. I can’t help but wonder how life would have been had I learned Farsi when I was young, and grown up reading, hearing, and speaking its musical tones and mélange of emphatic murmurs. A Persian friend, a mother like myself, recently assured me that had it been a woman, not my father, who had emigrated from Iran, I most surely would have learned my mother tongue, my ancestral langue. What is lost, what is left behind, and what is found, years later, buried where no one who came from that place thought to look?

Mountains etch a razor sharp edge of sky; no haze, no blur to the clarity of cliff, sky, and sea. This, too, is a language, buried in the land, in our genes. Cellular geography. Breath, solar flares, ashes from a sacred fire. Living language. I’ve heard it said poets are the cartographers of the mythic realm. Do we map emotional springs, memory, gesture, and silence? Imprint of what we knew, but were never told? The way in, and back out again. In reverse. An ache. Tangled perspectives; an open passage through exiled heights.

**Daughters  (For Petra & Elena)**

Their twin pools of brown eyes pinned resolutely on the future journey back centuries to streets of Shiraz, Isfahan, Tehran where great, great grandmothers gazed from wide dark pools like theirs, like my father’s, like mine.
Dream of Mashad

I trace my ancestry back
to the people of Mashad,
who walked in from the desert
with carpet laden camels, kashk,
Eshrat’s granddaughter in Amrika.
I carry your memory inside me.
Sunlight, pomegranates, apricots, figs.
Saffron. Roses. Fragrant inheritance
of a past your son tried to forget
I was born to remember,
Grandmother, Maamaan-bozorg,
Nemat’s youngest daughter you never knew
looking through eyes like yours,
    lines of your face
perfectly mirrored
    in mine,
I remember the places he left behind,
blooming orchards, mountains, Caspian Sea,
your smile, the old ways, how things used to be.
Language Is a Pink Martini

I cannot extricate myself from language, language from place, or place from memory dragged backward behind me like a slow slack tide through everything I’ve ever known, on my way far out to sea. Writing about language embodies so much more than words, or spoken-written thought: return to the language of the senses, pre-verbal articulation: pure experience. Heidegger once described poetry as living phenomenology before phenomenology was “invented.” The sensuous language of the body. Sunlight. This cream-colored rose cluster, blush of red at each petal’s pale tip, tiny brown rosehips at the center of each, silky petals falling; this too is a language. The language of rose, shedding.

What does the heart say? Is transience a language? Migratory patterns, are they languages? I don’t mean birds, necessarily; I mean, me. My migrations. The poet memorizes experience, image, gesture and word, added to the language of sleep and dreams. Where do we travel in dreams, that convoluted map of memory gambled away in trickster’s hand, gone by morning, the taste of it awakening us all day long? What about the language of things? Where they come from, and where they go.

Like the gold-wrapped box I saw outside The Penthouse Nightclub on Seymour Street, midday, on a sunny Saturday afternoon in October, such a vivid contrast to the dingy niche of front doors draped in shadow in a dark corner sleeping off the day. I saw it as I hurried past on my errand to the stationary store, half a block away, and then slowly turned back around to stare at it, suddenly uncertain of what I was seeing, so incongruous was it to the usually crisp city streets, snappy shoppers, and the sleepy patina of a blackened theatre front by day.

The box was sitting like it was left for a Goodwill pick-up, jauntily perched atop two stuffed black garbage bags, red-tie handles knotted and leaning akimbo against one another. Tucked into the wall of the sleeping theatre, not curbside where trash would
normally reside, the whole be-bowed gold presentation contrasted too sharply with the dark gray sidewalk and gritty, windswept street. Was I the only one who had noticed?

I wondered, then, if it was a bomb; I yearned to know its origin, its destination, its contents; what language it spoke. Marie France says language is, can be, a bomb. Can we hear language ticking, when it goes off, or does it explode silently, as quickly as it mysteriously arrived, in gold as well as brown-paper wrapped packages? Is it spelled into our palms, a series of finger shapes to denote letters, words, and meaning? Is language a part of the self, subsequent or antecedent to it?

Master Dogen says, “We study the self to lose the self. Only when you forget yourself can you become one with all things.” When I returned from my errand, the box, and the bags, were gone. That doorway, now empty, acted like it had never known any different. I looked up, and saw the floating pink martini painted on the side of the building, promising nightly pleasure, and thought of the mysterious box floating off into the city, bright, shiny and gift-wrapped, to who knows where. A part of me floated off after it, spirit-body tethered to earth and language, ever in search of it, one with all things.
Language Is a Gypsy

Moon down over Yew and Vine,
streetlights a mock mirror
for that pale orb half obscured
by wane and early dark of winter.
Language, more than words,
more than speech and action
drips down around us
like moonlight, stalactite,
saltwater brine,
breath.
We are what we know.
A raised eyebrow,
shiny gaze whispered
in tangled green undergrowth,
cuff to the head
or palms cupped
round a diamond flame,
lightstruck
offering Haq
or spirit,
a breath,
now wind
Crowsong

Crow party overhead, in whispering maple leaves

their raucous cawing breaks the day like bread
scattered bites for hungry mouths to feed upon

crowsong
  boisterous clacking
  clicking marbles in your beak
  softly swallowed wooden beads
  rolling in your throat

whoosh of wings scraping fir boughs
  a wind between the trees

flood of grey sky
  alight,

now stealing away
Are We Not Thus All Crows?
(After A Considerable Speck by Robert Frost)

Quoth Henry CrowBard
#OccupyWildernessSinger

on Frost’s speculative poem about
the mind of ink

following a drop of ink
on the page
onyx cabochon
willing, we
pick it up in shiny black beaks
pose, like Raven, who got away,
our black marble sun held aloft

till it spills back down on a solid page
liquid messenger scrawled by talon,
guided by mind met by mind of its own
in the (willful) black drop of ink

on the page,
the writer kindly
stands out of the way
ink forming words flowing
into script, into lines
into more lines, wound
into knowing

an unobtrusive vine
that climbs into your soul
these words a flowering,
small shiny leaves
twining between almond white toes
up twirling limbs
tangled
round twin trunks,
down your rippling spine
till you are caught,
a wingéd leafy creature
no longer mere medium
jet black, fluid
let loose on the page, empty
like a gold warmed sky
your spilt message
as grateful as downpour,
black river filled with stars
raining onto parched earth
painting
how it will be
onyx cabochon
depicting dark hills, white dunes
across a sky of empty horizons

“….and recognize / Mind when I meet with it in any guise” ~ Robert Frost
Renga Chain

Red leaves flutter past
pale light of a fading sun,
gold orb spilling honey.

Crimson fire, bare branches,
autumn sunlight falling to the ground.

Shadows light as leaves.
In the clouds, ice crystals form.
Seagulls call to an empty sky.

Voices come to us on the wind; listen.
Even the smallest among us sings.

Mind leans against roots.
Old stone wall, soul breathes sunlight.
Leaves drift through still air.

Nothing in this world outlives the sun and moon.
Celebrate your losses, and sing praises, morning, noon, and night.
This Poetic Inquiry (In a Nutshell)

(A found poem, from titles off the spines of books stacked on my desk)

Changing your story
    a book of ours
    poetry at stake
    becoming animal
    the coral sea
    the practice of the wild
    Indigenous storywork
    a poet’s work
    pieces of map, pieces of music
    reclaiming Indigenous voice and vision
    caring
    poetry as method
    Babel
    dancing at the devil’s party
    Wittgenstein elegies
    early work
    Rimbaud complete
    the Cubist poets in Paris
    moon and the virgin
    thinking about enacting curriculum in “frames of war”
    the tree of meaning
    everywhere being is dancing
Eros and the Philosophers

How can I study philosophy
in springtime, when Eros’ sap
flows molten inside me
golden honey, slowing my mind
green fire, burning from within

I am caught in my own trap
the wildness inside my veins
draws me out, ceaselessly
flames of love breathed into life
flowering, fearlessly ablaze
The True Friend  (for Ostaad)

This morning I planted primroses
in the garden beyond my door,
one step away, outside the house,
a small teeming world, afire,
new green clambering
tight red buds unfolding
a handful of miracles
leading the way.

Like this day, Mevlana’s teachings,
the garden where we grow together
thirsty for water and sunlight,
thriving on the touch of a true Friend.
**Pear Flesh**

everything is waiting for you
the elder poet said
and I followed
wandering dirt roads
wide desert plains
pebbled for centuries with lust
and desire, not the same thing,
nothing
but lost on those back roads
settled with a patina of yearning,
sepia tint, burning sheen

my skin,
that pale thin covering threaded across
pear flesh, dripping invisible fruitiness, sticky
messiness of juice and pulp
pear flesh, the sweet tasting yielding
melt in your mouth incandescent butter
of soft flesh, fruit
of your desire, bursting pear
flesh, pulp and skin, gritty and sweet
in the belly of union
body of all this thirst
the holy third
flesh, core, and yearning.
The Thief

When I stepped out
into the purpled night air
even the rain smelled like you,

harvest of flowers, citrus,
sadness spiced with hard-earned salt.
A prayer of dusky cinnamon.

How is it
you carry
the gardens of Lebanon

in your tousled, refugee
hair? The scent of you
under an unfaithful moon

disarms me,
the rain washed world
a blanket of storied scent

blown roses, dripping cedar boughs,
bite of lemons
and you

moving through the marketplace
half a world away
across town

without me.
Wreck Beach

mist clings to a low bank of trees
West facing on this slack curved cove

a ferry chortles past to the Sunshine Coast
gulls shriek and fade in the morning air

September, almost equinox, a rippled wake
rushes up to meet damp sand

in the shade of tall cedars, alders leaning
from the steep embankment overhead

smoke from a wood fire bites the salt air
its musky cloud promising eggs, bacon

the bay fills with pleasure boats, a sailboat’s
single mast bobbing in a blue robin’s-egg sea
For Robert, On the Occasion of his 85th Birthday

Last night I dreamed a tangle of lines
raven stole back to the sky.
Blackest bird, decided by design,
thinks everything belongs to him:
bundle of words, shiny gems,
winter’s blue lace agate eye.
By dawn, nothing was left except
paper dissolving in rain.
But the dream arose,
spectacular, improbable,
like you,
a dream of fierce love
all that sings on a turning earth,
winter’s concert of snow and fragrant
viburnum in the darkest month
a panoply of vigor and vim
tangled terrain for a gentle white bear
ambling through slumbering mindscapes.
Third daughters lost in these modern forests
and in need of a ride keep an eye out for you.

Dream of kingfishers
  December birds, like you,
diving in wind-tossed cerulean seas
rakish crests blown skyward,
  like yours,
wild sails for halcyone days we spend with you
adrift in our small boats rocking
on waves of desire, grief and awe.
Lingering with you, chatter departs.

The weight of ecstasy dwells in between.
Tide’s tempestuous sway
mystery of moonrise,
lost pearl swimming in a jet-black sea.
Luminous signs all around,
like your hands dancing in the radiant air
to the sitar’s sinuous notes,
a private symphony only your ten fingers know,
conducting the score for the secret Friend
hidden in the folds between every note.
Ghazal

When morning fog kisses night’s fading shadow from the toothed leaves of the holly tree, then we will know how long the cure takes, and where lies the remedy.

In forests of fascination where we lose our way, burdened by excess and the dark weight of gold, days of endless night do not bring the remedy.

The orange tabby curls in a perfect circle, her thick fur a blazing mantle, like soft fire I can caress in my search for the remedy.

Rumi traveled a long way in search of his Shams. Lorca was shot for dissent against the State. So it’s no wonder remedy lives on the run.

When Rumi got to Tabriz, he saw countless birds fly out of Shams’ mouth and into Lorca’s cantos, centuries before the remedy reached these shores.

Here in the morning light, writing poems to old Friends, the Guest holds a polished mirror up to my face, says See? Here is remedy, looking back at the cure.
In the Company of Musicians  (For Kathy Ann)

I wish I was, I dreamed I was,
I would rather be
playing, writing, music
finger like rivers flowing
over the blacks and whites,
plucking, strumming taut corded strings
horse hair and steel issue reverberating twang
harmonics hum in notes wound in the air
whistling whittling a poem of sound.
Whereas words, words are so clumsy,
they bruise and bite when
I don’t mean them to,
curse and fall hopeless at my feet
when I most need them to stand up
and speak for themselves.

Hardly an enemy,
living in my mouth, tools of my tongue
breath of mantra, whisperer of all
to freely exalt in praise, humble words
make my resonance your chord,
these words my strings my
black and white keys,
my hammers and softly padded stops,
my musical compositions
my uncommon melody
my improv
my song.
Death at the Encampment  (For Ashley Gough, 1988-2011)

Death at the encampment.
Living and dying in a public place
living and dying
in a tent in the rain
as D.O.A. took the stage.

Her heart stopped.
What makes a 23-year-old’s heart stop?

She came to Occupy
because she felt safe
to set up camp and spend the night
maybe to party
maybe to protest
maybe to play
to live the dream
like the rest of us there
free to give and receive
all we need

She went to sleep and never woke up
sailing on sister morphine’s seductive
dreamless sea of sleep
Dead on arrival, her exodus
right as D.O.A. took the stage
smack took her center stage
dancing with veils of life
just out of reach
that last rush
one last sleep.
Her death haunts us (is important)
like unfinished dreams
like chasing fireflies
on an already fleeting summer night
like empty parents’ arms
that nothing will fill

Death at the encampment
a community grieves
while the pundits post their twitter feeds
    that feed no one
except rumor
who’s been camped out here the longest
the one the city councilwoman
best beware, not the dirty hippies on parade.

The pundits still boast and swill.
We bank and curve like swallows
against a grievous sky
domes carried aloft in the march
    moving camp
now we soar and free-fall
joyous in the convocation we are
Deleuzian line of flight migrating
toward the sign of life,
fleeing injustices everywhere
    by running toward them, naming them
call and response,
only to turn up underground
    in your back yard
on your front lawn
in your courthouse
in your head
in your teapot
in your bed
in your wildest dreams

with our tents
our people’s library
food not bombs
looking to write what is unwritten
looking to rise like lions from our slumber
to shake off our chains,
to build the commons again.
Her name will not be forgotten.
Ashley’s life led her here
this movement mobilizing millions
what we are standing for,
why we are here,
why we Occupy.
For Ashley,
looking for a place to sleep
looking for a hot meal
a free concert
maybe for some free smack
tainted smack circulating the community
some ponder it was planted there
not by the addicts, but by political foes
let her blood stain their hands.
For Ashley,
for residents of the DTES,
for the alter-abled,
for people sleeping on the street
for the hungry
for children who never see their parents smile
for the jobless
for all the casualties
of capitalism
the real “collateral damage” whose faces
we never see on the evening news
who are countless, uncounted, but not
nameless

For Ashley
for the hungry
for the children
for addicts who want to get clean
for addicts who still want a fix
who need community
anyhow.
For all of us
around the globe
who need some kind of fix
all we need is love
“love is for everybody,”
in our hearts
she will never die.

For Ashley we Occupy.
Preferring Revolution

(for Edward Snowden)

I can’t watch the news
listen to the radio
read so many online updates,
without losing myself in the morass:
it’s just more genocide
and politician’s lies about
what I never agreed could be done
in my name.

Now it’s election time,
and they want to persuade me
the outright lies of one are worse
than the secrets the other never tells.

My friend who writes novels tells me,
Never watch Democracy Now.

It’s too depressing and you’ll never
write a thing. How can our small words
begin to approach
the weight of that boulder?

I know she’s right, my pen dries up
while my mind, my heart
try to make sense
of what’s incomprehensible.

I want to chop wood again,
carry water, be grateful
for what I don’t know.
I want to drink wine

my friend Zhenya pressed
by hand, ask her how it was
in Russia, when the people had
no voice, no bread, no hope

but stuck together,
knowing revolution would come.
Why I Keep a Square of Flowered Paper On My Desk

Origami
working with the hands
folding origami
keeping hands busy
fingers folding, folding
folding prayers in each new crease
each new crane

remembering folds and patterns
more important than ever
since Greg’s diagnosis with glioblastoma
keeping fingers nimble and precise
folding, folding
new creases, new prayers, new wings

folding cranes for healing
folding cranes for grace
folding cranes for the tumor
hated honored guest
living inside
our friend’s brain

folding cranes for intention
folding purpose and prayer
into a thousands cranes
flying
free
Leaf Collage

Wet compost of leaf collage
piles of serrated edges sluiced
with smooth, a mosaic
of citrine, crimson, carmine, red
gold bodies entangled,
wrought into another form.
Sidewalk beauty others pass by,
unnoticing,
the bright moment before compost
living kaleidoscope of place and time
form and color, tannin and rain
matted together in decomposition,
waiting to be found.
Knowledge

what is knowledge
everything under the sun
forgetting everything
that crawls in the night

knowing
all that is unseen
all we overlook

everything under the moon
remembering everything
that the daytime forgot
Lies and Taboo

What can’t be said and
why?
why can’t it be said?
whose taboo
whose pride

(any lie is an act of complicity)

who is complicit
with me
in not
telling?
Is it
a lie?
or just a painful
truth?
Found Poem

the divide between dark and light, the blacks and whites with all their possibilities
slaving over the ink well all night, writing of writerly things, scholarly things

shade and shadow, tone and texture, thin and thick inky lines, erotic curved lines
dreaming poetic things, like night fish wandering through deep blue subterranean

making their way to the horizon, unveiling the naked sky of night, spiral throats of
caverns, or the whole sky opening up for a sliver of lightning to sneak through

the flower earth echoing stars in the lush light of their faces, purple, dazzlingly
unspoken, hushed, hidden from view until the child reaches up and sees her

plain and simple, complex as creation, aquamarine and saffron, a black violet bloom
in search of place: where we write, where we land, where we ground; where we are

the curved opalescent whorls inside moon snail, capricious curl of petunia’s will-
home. I seek out the lonely, less habited places, where I like to sit alone, with my

not-to-be-deterred upward blooming growth. Breathing color from the backs of the
journal, and a certain amount of disengagement with the rational: that sinking into

eyes, cobalt, ochre, rose as rose as red to pink in every hue ~ yoni rose, blush rose,
the sensuous, this matted dry grass and nearby prickly thistles, this patch of

sunrise rose, red rose ~ (did Georgia ever paint a rose?) ~ the way the white
sunlight, and the further distant ~ almost missing ~ sound of traffic: tires on

impatiens blurs against the dawning light of day until the blossom’s whiter white
asphalt, sirens, the voices of people passing by on the sidewalk. Instead a whistling
distinguish their shape against the paler expanse of widening sky.
Bird holds my attention as it relaxes, perceptibly, in the grander quiet that reigns

(From an accidental print overlay of two field notes: it printed as couplets, as shown; one
line from each original piece against a line of the other, combined into something
entirely different and new.)
When You Don’t Know How to Say

sleisl'ksnlkg'a'hdlk
why don't you use one filter
retroactively
learn the language of lemurs or lemmings
right before they leap
Ernesto, Espen, Alfredo
ringleaders
learning WordPress
circling the lions
it's like selling you something
a little like blackmail
polite blackmail
make a statement with a question at the end
the notion of ground zero for language
like, you get meaning
through semantics
deviations from ground zero
evolution
derivations
all in a day's work
how the mother speaks
how a child learns
language is much more than analytical
corpus, Gaia, Eros, corazón
the structure of noun, verb, and
where in the visual
is that division
between theme and the new,
spark, imagination, poiesis?
The Gypsy Emigrates

We’ve all heard how language
slipped into the suitcase,
sailed across an ocean
and popped up in Minnesota,
disguised as snow.
Language, that vagabond,
gypsy and errant thief
escaped between prison bars,
like wind stealing through an iron grate
disappeared over mountains passes
dragging a misty, faded moon behind,
showed up on the baby’s tongue
in Palestine, crying through the night,
babbling words from the old country
*Ishtar, Salome, Jezebel, Eve,*
lamenting love to a traveling moon
remembering, naming, coloring things
with an old song in the new land.
Speaking of Place
(For Greg Ewert, 1949-2012)

Paying attention.
Being-in-the-world.
Sea-drenched fields
sweet salty grassy smell
winding through open car windows,
tangy and sweet
honey and hay
sunlight and grass
colder nights
making everything sweeter
salt breeze, sweet plums, dark plum colored nights
deep black star blinking nights
before equinox
tides in balance, before swinging out again
to whatever isn’t here now,
balanced in coming and going
with the tide,
with birth and death
with the sun and the moon
living and dying.

What Eleusinian mysteries we unfurl
words like puzzles in children’s rhyme
like bentwood boxes in the rain
the old shed roof
the whiteness of dawn
before the sun burns its hole in the sky
to climb through.
The living survive the dead
and go on living.
   Why then
   is it so hard?

Coming home again
they say you can’t
go home again
   but here I am
   returning
   returning
   lapping the shore
   to honor the dead

the dead pass beyond
the rites for those of us
   left behind
autumn afterglow lingers on distant headlands
   etched emerald cliffs
   fjords as blue as a dream

The water at twilight, this bewitching
   Salish Sea,
an undulating mirror of moonlight
   lapping, lapping between shores.
Unbearable beauty rippling all around
   swallows you,
   lapping, lapping between shores.
Epilogue

*Iddi arristaru filici e contenti*

*Eccà simmu nuatri senza nenti*

They remained happy and content
And here we are without a cent

~ Gioia Timpanelli,
Traditional Sicilian Storyteller
As a poet, I am not trying to memorize what I see. What I want is to revel
in what I am seeing, to see with the whole body, so that my body is
rendered alive, is written in the poems. (Leggo, 2006, p. 151)

In the North plaza of the Vancouver Art Gallery (VAG), a noticeable lack of
visuals is missing from a space formerly replete with symbols, stimuli, flurries of activity,
and visible cultural creations of one sort or another, from huge pots of food to declarative
banners, free-form dancers, and group painting sessions. During the space and time in
which OccupyVancouver congregated there, the plaza overflowed with people, colorful,
multivalent, vibratory. Now, bare grounds, an empty space “filled with ghosts” (J.
Ursino, personal communication, May 15, 2012) stares back. Yet sense memory
permeates the entire space, repopulating one’s sight. Pulling back our sense veils, looking
beneath, between, layers of what is “visible”—a plaza “cleaned” of rabble, a former
“city,” now deserted, a blue and green mosaic tiled fountain, gargoyles gazing from
above—to what is unseen to the naked eye; what the place holds, in its memory.

Does the ghost of Ricky LaVallie (1960-2012) – survivor of residential school,
abuse, and family genocide – come back here, where he felt loved and accepted? What of
young Ashley Gough (1988-2011), her life sacrificed to “the needle and the damage
done” (Young, 1972)? Does she come here to roost on the stone lions and watch the
“jubilee” unfold? (Hunter & Garcia, 1972, track 3)

M.C. Richards speaks of “a felt sense, a presence” (class notes, June 11, 2012),
palpable after Occupy’s physical body dispersed, leaving these ghosts in its place.
What else percolates, still living, once the throngs depart? Jill Bennett (2005) notes that
sense memory is about tapping a certain kind of process: a process
experienced not as a remembering of the past but as a continuous
negotiation of a present with indeterminable links to the past. The poetics
of sense memory involve not so much speaking of but speaking out of a
particular memory or experience – in other words, speaking from the body
sustaining sensation. (p. 38)

This is the body – in one’s person, and the world’s collective body – that speaks
in and through poetic inquiry: a body sustained in sense memory, (re)created in
processes of inquiry, and their resultant writings and performances.

Donna Haraway (2002) asks, “What other sensory powers do we wish to
cultivate besides vision?” (p. 289) For poets, these are multitudinous, even
extrasensory, incorporating elemental and “more-than-human” (Abram, 1997, p.
8) ways of knowing. Bennett (2005) wonders, “how is ‘seeing feeling’ achieved,
and how does this process yield information to the body?” (p. 41). If
“embodiment is significant prosthesis” (Haraway, 2002, p. 682), how do we feel
and see things not present in physical form – the un-seen, the not-embodied –
dwelling in a place? As with a/r/tography, we trust our instincts, that despite (or
because of) nebulous distinctions and perceived borders, new forms of meaning-
making may occur, in translation and transformation, not unlike the mystical third
body (Bly, 1973) hovering between lovers in embrace.

“A rhizome may be broken, shattered at a given spot, but it will start up
again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9).
The infrastructure of Occupy’s encampment was “shattered,” yet its pieces sprung
up again in unexpected places and times – including my own pieces, in embodied
rhizomatic hauntings, and un-embodied memory hauntings. As Deleuze and
Guattari (1987) muse, “How could movements of deterritorialization and
processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one
another?” (p. 10). A nomadic tide, unseen but swelling, finding new connections
and sending out new tendrils and green shoots. As a result of both the physicality
of OccupyVancouver, and later, its ineffable, non-physically located essence, so
too did my a/r/tographic process in this inquiry release, find, and wind around
new tentacles of growth and exploration. Poetry is good at making that nomadic
jump, off the track of the territorialized flow, into the unknown. We follow,
trusting.

The life of the nomad is the intermezzo, yet intermezzo is integral…. Becoming nomad is giving up a place that is safe, that is home, redefining
what home is (not)…this means giving up the safety of universals and
standards, the taken-for-granteds of hegemonic…discourses. (O’Riley,
2002, p. 29)

Nomadism interrogates what, and how, we see. In tangled threads of connection,
spun outward, spiraling between people known and unknown to one another,
wherever we are now we carry the essence, the ether, of encounters that occurred,
before, in time and space. *Can we see it, or apprehend it?* In the physical space,
the now empty plaza of the VAG, we see a “scar of a multilayered past, of which
the fragmented state of the entire piece of tapestry is the overwhelming metaphor”
(Bal, 2003, pp. 15-16). Thus fragmented, we are scattered to the four winds and
the four directions: “Wildflower seed on the sand and stone / may the four winds
blow you safely home” (Hunter & Garcia, 1975, track 3).

Metaphor. Metonymy. Contiguity. Excess. Everywhere. Traces of a community, threads, woven into my inquiry (search), my (re)search, my writing. Resonances. Mieke Bal (2003) speaks of “meaning’s fugitivity and resilience” (p. 15), suggesting fluidity, flexibility, strength, and transformation. Perhaps Bal refers to meaning’s fugivity both as necessity, a survival strategy in lean or censored times, and as preferred presentation (again, a survival strategy), like the mad farmer in Wendell Berry’s Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front (1997), who recommends

As soon as the generals and the politicos can predict the motions of your mind, lose it. Leave it as a sign to mark the false trail, the way you didn’t go. Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary, some in the wrong direction. Practice resurrection. (p. 97)

Resurrection is key, and available to us, as Berry points out, as something to practice. We may not be able to predict or control the outer motions of our lives within a greater cosmos, but we do have choice as to what we do with experiences – the sugar that we steal from that castle of our divine intent – that life gives us. As with the practice of a/r/tography, we never really know where the next footstep or path that opens up will lead, whether a thread will break, or the pattern reveal something hidden. In a world beset with threats to our very existence, it would be easy to lose our way. Meaning on the run. Like this a/r/tographer, after the
encampment was dispersed, when a part of me – and thus the place, and placement, of my research – also dispersed, becoming nomad, again.

Meaning surfaces in my writing, as a polished field note, a new poem, an abstract for a teacher-training workshop. I keep writing. In these increasingly stilted and jaded neo-liberal corporate-state-run times, it’s more important than ever that artists, poets, activists and a/r/tographers be that voice that does not forget the threads of connection between us, visible and invisible, vaporous and tenuous, strong as steel, that unite us. Especially urgent is the need to remember these connections as *antidote* to what Judith Butler (2009) points out in

(t)he operation of the frame, where state power exercises its forcible dramaturgy…. (and) there is an active…set of contents and perspectives that are never shown, that it becomes impermissible to show. These constitute the non-thematized background of what is represented and are thus one of its absent organizing features. (p. 73)

It is our job, as poets, artists, writers, to bring to view and shine a loving light on those absent features of our landscapes and lives, and those absented members thereof. As Irit Rogoff (2002) suggests, this is to

repopulate space with all the obstacles and…unknown images, which the illusion of transparency evacuated from it… the unrecognized obstacles which never allow us to actually ‘see’ what is out there beyond what we expect to find. (p.32)

Through our writing, through the embodiment of the sensuous and acute powers of observation in our artistic, research, and teaching practices, through noticing and noting,
we give voice and necessary presence to those images and ideas least likely to receive mainstream attention. We learn to see what is beyond what we thought we’d find, and to share that with the world.

**ATTENTION**

As a way to avoid

or climb out of

despair.

A form of praise.

Attention awakens us

*here,*

*now.*

Four tall cedars stand

in a narrow side-lot

near 40\(^{th}\) and Vine,

sentinels of a lost forest

next to the busy thoroughfare cars, buses, Starbucks,

people scurrying all day long,

heads bowed, fingers flying,

bubbles snapped tightly shut

never once looking up

to see majestic cedars

waving in the tawny October air.

Their presence, breathing, next to cold concrete and steel

calls my attention.

I look up, see four trunks, swaying.

Watched over by dancing cedars.
A black fan swishes by,
hollow teeth clicking
clacking an unsteady beat
crow, hidden high in green boughs.
Crow, me, sun, cedars,
singing, dancing, swaying,
we are dancing and singing,
swaying in this Longhouse
as open as the sky.

The energy of the space pulls you before you arrive – seeing, feeling, hearing,
sensing; tasting memories in the moist air. A ghostly haunting I was hearing in my head
was actually a softly strummed guitar, tweaked through a portable amplifier under the
sheltering fir tree, somewhat protecting its clustered inhabitants from the late afternoon’s
damp drizzle. I almost skirted past, feeling withdrawn; then remembered it was the plaza,
its ghosts, and their descendants that I had come to see. I ducked in under an overhanging
branch just to listen to the music-making, clearly the stranger leaning in on a group of
familiar friends; but almost immediately, a wizened member of the band offered me his
seat on a low branch, while a brassy-sounding young woman offered to sing me a song,
“For free.” In her best, gravelly voice (that opened up into a 3-octave range), Stacey (not
her real name) – former junkie who’d relapsed, and was now 8 months clean again (and
not a day over 20, by my guess) – laid it on me, landing right in the heart of a plea I was
sure I’d uttered myself, on another day:

But maybe it'll all be all right, Ma
Maybe it'll all be okay
Well, if the people are buying tears
I'll be rich some day, Ma
Look what they've done to my song       (Melanie, 1970, track 5)

Looking in her eyes, and she in mine, she grinning and singing to me, my own grew teary
at the intimacy of our hearts holding space between brand-new-met gazes in the moist air,
a bond built in moments that will, just as quickly, become another ghost. But the bond
doesn’t disappear. The meeting happened. That moment was. Amidst personal and
collective ghosts whom I visit in the ethers of my mind, savoring their presence-ness, in
this educative space-time-continuum, seeing others and ourselves as connected in these
nebulous and other more solidified ways, under tree branches dripping with clear,
invisible rain, the gift of a moment in song, a shared economy that is neither purchase nor
barter, was exchanged. How do we measure a gift? She reminded me of Ashley Gough –
the young woman who overdosed on heroin during the Occupy encampment on these
same plaza grounds – who I’d never met, but in whom I felt their shared history; Stacey
being the one who got away – alive. Psycho-kinesthetically, osmosis-like in the air,
underneath a protective fir tree, we stood rocking back and forth, bodies absorbing and
imbibing moments of presence.

Already mystically inclined, admittedly, after this meeting I became further
convinced that physical places and spaces carry and hold all the living energy, and
memory thereof, that ever happens within them, in the same way our bodies hold onto
sense memory, both peaceful and traumatic. Understanding the sensate patterns carried in
a space, however, are particularly mysterious.

Fluid and dynamic, amorphous and unstable, the ambience of a space is a
kind of energy not easily delimited or grasped by language. It is not a
thing, but an experience. Viscerally affective, it is the way in which a
variety of material and immaterial conditions come together to produce a poetics of space” (Schedel & Uroskie, 2011, p. 141).

This is how my poetic inquiry also came to pass: existing, arising from, informed by spaces in which I lingered. Writing in those places, speaking “out of” my experiences there, I feel part of an eternal flux of forms and individuals, becoming and dissolving back into a creative cauldron of forces and intensities. Things, and people, come and go. We might see them in the mist. Miracles, synchronicities, serendipitous events, and chance meetings occur. Questions are answered. Cauldron-like, we come and go and disappear again, chickpeas rising to the surface in a bubbling pot (Rumi & Nicholson, 1990), before being pushed under again to cook to a ripe, delicious wisdom.

On the Summer Solstice, I went downtown to meet a friend. Waiting in Victory Square, between Pender and Hastings, on this longest evening of summer, a young man approached and asked if I was a “big” supporter of the arts. Liking the optimism of his question, I looked up, smiling, and said, “Yes!” He showed me a painting he had for sale, babbling about a spaceship flying over Russia. Slowly, the memory crept in, how only days before I’d been wishing I knew how to reach the poetic kid who’d rapped at Occupy last fall, about the gargoyles overlooking the plaza, and their connection to city politics and longtime corruption. The song was brilliant. I was sure I’d never see him again. I blurted out my wonderment…”Are you...?” Trevor, laughing, reminded me of his name, and swore he’d just been thinking of me as well, two days prior – exactly when I’d been wondering about him. Did we “see” each other somehow, somewhere in the ethers between what is perceived and what is only felt, intuited, sensed? Did we “hear” each other? I’d never been to that particular park before, and this seemed like the most random
of coincidences. Yet, if thought – and vision, and listening – are “not so much a matter of perceptual proficiency, but more fundamentally a matter of orientation and attunement” (Schedel & Uroskie, 2011, p. 140), then perhaps we were never lost to each other at all. Living ghosts of a former home we’d shared in time and space, we (re)congregate new (de)territorialized flows. We hear one another call.

**Umbrella Poems**

gone out in the world
whirlygig riding on the wind
poems in the cold
in the dawn
on the lawn
down the drain
poems on the loose
poems run free
poems in the world
poems in mail slots
poems in bushes
poems on bus benches
poems on the bus
poems unglued from the whirlygig spines
rode out on a breeze
of music and sign
color and script
poems on the loose
poems in the world
poems under an umbrella
gone riding in the rain
looking for you
This then is my brocade, my poetic inquiry – a weft of gold and silver threads woven among a warp of plain and coarser ones – my lived pedagogy of the moment. Undoubtedly, there are loose threads; or sometimes, a whole picture might come into view, illumined by that raised weave, a contrast of textures, light, and detailed pattern: a tapestry, an ongoing (unfinished) picture of my life. Yet, a/r/tographically speaking, as a community of artists, teachers, and researchers, we tend a larger tapestry together, as it emerges, unravels, and is rewoven, collectively, over time. So as we weave in and through one another – an interweaving and intraweaving of concepts, activities, and feelings – we are creating fabrics of similarity and difference….Where… a third space offers a point of convergence…where differences and similarities are woven together. (Irwin 2004a, pp. 28-29)

Our collective tapestries reveal their own brocaded hills and open glades. Like in the heart of the mandorla, that almond-shaped third space, that liminal space where difference and commonality meet, we learn from each other’s tapestries and life stories, thereby creating diverse fabrics of new and recycled meaning.

Teaching happens best in that liminal, third space, and poetry, by its very nature, also lands us right in the middle of such uncharted terrain, somewhere between raw emotion and pre-determined thought. Intertwining disciplines, methods, and many performative genre, poetry and poetic inquiry not only engage “learners-and-educators” (Shidmehr, 2013, p. 123) with literary arts and practices, but these practices also cultivate emotional literacy (Steiner, 1997) through the self-reflective nature of the writing process, in general, and the permissive range of styles, responses, tones, voices, and formats that poetry can take, in particular. By encouraging poetry’s integration as an
ongoing (rather than occasional) and imaginative (rather than formulaic, fill-in-the-blank) practice within traditional K-12 classrooms, as well as within academic, community and informal or home-based educational settings, this work seeks to cultivate greater understanding of “the affective ‘we’” (Shidmehr, 2013, p. 123) that shimmers between us all, in every contact we have with the world around us, and which we can perceive so much more clearly with the help of poetry as both guide and tool.

Is all pedagogy poetical? I believe that by ignoring this possibility, we participate in one of the most egregious flaws of our current educational system, and the majority of its practices. I can think of nothing more poetical than an elegant math equation, or a game of cooperative double-dutch jump rope chanted to the rhythm of a rhyme our grandmother’s sang. Likewise, the found poem discovered on a golf coach’s list of technical terms helped his students to remember their meanings and applications, while a history teacher shared a poem to introduce a traumatic event succinctly and with verve. Writing poetry is about embracing all of our experiences, and living to tell the tale. I have yet to read a good poem that didn’t have pedagogical significance for the some aspect of this journey we call life. Embracing poetry as a pedagogical tool of empathic connection, we teach feeling-tone consciousness, emotional literacy, and connection as necessary life skills. Sometimes we are the learner, receiving, as in my encounter with Stacey at the VAG, where attention to this lived pedagogy of the moment allowed me to meet someone with whom I was otherwise unlikely to ever cross paths, and to hear her song, for a brief moment. We come together, learning what we have, or can make, in common.

Encountering poems on city buses, stopping to write a poem, sitting with my friend’s child on their couch and helping her compose a nonsense poem for a school
assignment: these are all pedagogical encounters, embraced in the moment, at play in the flow of life. Sometimes, invested in or locked into routines and schedules within schools and institutions, we can forget to just go outside and play. Poetry, including the gift of music and song, reminds us of this, and can be powerfully useful for “brocading the barriers” between students, or learning encounters, in all settings. By using instructive poems selected from current writers who will have relevance for today’s youth (in addition to classics), learners find their own ways to connect with the writing; usually, given the emotional content of poetry, it goes right to the heart of a language children already (still) speak. Even most “grown ups” are hard put to describe that “feeling” they get from a beloved poem.

Yet, when it comes time to “teach” poetry, many educators forget luminescence and reflection, and fall into the trap of trying to teach structural elements alone, often without loving the poems they are teaching, thus evaporating all the magic, rhythm, and passion out of the instruction. Structural elements are meaningless (and it is not poetry) without heart. Most of the time, such instruction doesn’t really work (except by rote). Another generation of kids grows up disliking poetry. This is not the way to teach poetry.

“I realized that fear of poetry was as prevalent at the university level as it was in my grade 8 classes” (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 119). So we need to re-educate teachers (and academics) how to “teach” and enjoy poetry, beginning with the advice to find poems they themselves like and relate to for using with their students. A good poem can teach a history lesson, offer practical advice, or impart a lesson on racism, on child abuse, on love. Two of my students’ favorite poems, hands down, offer such powerful instruction. The first, “Minor Miracle” by Marilyn Nelson (1997, para. 1) details an
incident of racial tension in the American Midwest that is, thankfully, resolved – but we
don’t know this till the very last line of the poem. Tension is high, and partly due to
Nelson’s raw language, students feel themselves in the midst of controversy that they
know all about, first hand, but which is mostly not talked about openly. Through reading
and listening to the poem together, we get the chance to release pent-up emotions and
tension, and to imagine better outcomes involving connection instead of conflict.
“Tapping into the affective and the sensory, as well as the cognitive, provides another
way of enriching learning experiences for students in our classrooms” (Fels & Belliveau,
2008, p. 117).

The other poem describes emotions displayed by a middle-aged train engineer
after he runs over a stuffed “child” that the narrator and her brother have left on the tracks
(Hales, 2003, para. 4). I don’t read the poem with children the age of the poem’s
protagonists, around eight to ten; it would feel too harsh, with its delicate comprehension
of the repercussions of an “innocent” childhood prank. But with middle-school students,
age twelve to fourteen, freshly “outgrown” such “childish” ways, the poem’s message
about the often mixed results of wielding “Power” (the poem’s title) is not lost on these
wise young people. While they are still young enough to remember being that child, they
also recognize in the grieved engineer’s emotions something they are only just beginning
to learn about: unnamable fear, deep loss, helplessness. Many teachers would be inclined
to “dumb down” this message, and not trust their students with such a ponderous poem.
But that’s a mistake. Students are capable of understanding a range of emotional nuances,
as are captured in good poems; we must give them the opportunity to experience these
reflective and expressive powers of art. This “POET-tential” lives in children and adults,
drawn out when we trust we can handle sharing mature, emotionally laden, complex poems describing real life dilemmas, loss, and pain. As well as joy. Hearing of situations — worded magically, poetically, intensely — where others, like themselves, have struggled, students unearth the courage to find these qualities, and where they live, in themselves.

As a visiting artist in public and private schools in the U.S., poetry is my ambassador. The poem is a living, breathing affective offering, connecting readers and listeners with themselves and the world. We experience the poem, and our responsiveness to it and each other — a shared space of vibrant affectivity. Community forms. Irish poet Brendan Kennelly speaks of poetry as a “bridge between separated souls…Though it is born out of one person’s solitude…[poetry] has the ability to reach out and touch…the solitude, even the loneliness, of others” (as cited in The Writer’s Almanac, April 17, 2013, para. 5). Like when Gary Snyder describes “How Poetry Comes to Me”:

……blundering over the
Boulders at night,…..
Frightened outside the
Range of my campfire
I go to meet it at the
Edge of the light (1993, p. 557)

We recognize, together, that we are all frightened. We take openings where they show up. Unexpected directions unfold. We don’t know what will happen. Yet we know poetry stirs responsiveness in us toward the other, our selves, and the language we speak. Karen Martin describes inter-related facets of a holistic approach to early childhood education that involves home, family, and community contexts inclusive of Western and Aboriginal cultural factors (Martin, 2013); similarly, with poetry we explore these “multiple contexts…past, present and…future…relational, cultural, political, and spatial” (Martin,
2013, para. 3) that our writing and our lives are rooted in. On this medicine wheel of experience and memory, emotion, and interrelatedness, writing poetry is not a pre-defined set of steps to pre-determined outcomes, but an exploration emphasizing process and interconnectedness. That we write many poems over the course of our weeks together becomes secondary to our cauldron of Becoming, where exchange and responsiveness are our currency. We are learning together, in this classroom community, and on the earth.

Performance and grades
do not always measure
smarts and ability.

How do we help teachers become more comfortable with, and less afraid of, poetry? One method is through the use of poetry Teacher Training workshops (Skagit River Poetry Festival, 2013), where a visiting poet strives to demystify poetry for classroom teachers, before coming in to their classrooms. This 2 to 3 hour session (even better suited as an all day retreat) offers the time and, more importantly, the container in which misconceptions, fears, wonderments, hesitancies, and many good “teachable” poems can be shared. Age-appropriate writing prompts, and a discussion of instruction techniques (based on elements of craft, as well matters of tone and emotion) help teachers begin to leave the world of the literacy “lesson” (device, structure), and enter the realm of the heart, and this pedagogical moment. There is no goal. We seek only to foster empathy, though we may gain some literacy skills along the way, in the midst of reading, reciting, and actually writing poems – which is the most important step, though too often left out of the study of poetry, especially in the older grades; or, if included (especially in the younger grades), it is in that formulaic “fill-in-the-blank” style described previously.
Choosing poems of pertinence for today’s youth – for example, from the extensive selection at the Poetry Out Loud website (Poetry Out Loud, 2012) – students discover poetry’s mystery, magic, and truth-telling possibilities for themselves, through the transformative power of a few condensed words. The poems we select to share with our students are pedagogical tools. Engaging students in that choice, by offering as wide a variety of poetic works as we can, we expand the possibility of what they may choose to investigate, encouraging a generative process in them.

One particularly poignant story from a high-school teacher in Tacoma, Washington, who used Poetry Out Loud with her students involves an angry young man who would never participate in her attempts to engage him. In one telling moment, as she leaned closer across a desk to try and get his attention, he suddenly sprang up out of his prone position where his head, stuffed inside the protective covering of a hoodie pulled down over his face, had been cradled in his arms, and screamed at her to “Back off!” She certainly did. But one night, when he was perusing Poetry Out Loud’s website (and who knows what drew him in to do so, for he had not seemed interested or inclined to cooperate with the assignment of finding a poem to memorize), he stumbled upon Dudley Randall’s poem “The Ballad of Birmingham” (1968). This young African-American man, already involved in gang activity and struggling to stay afloat in the culture of public school, surprised his teacher and classmates (who knew him as that surly kid under the hood), and perhaps even himself; by taking an interest in the poem’s historical account of the Birmingham bombing, told from the perspective of a mother finding only one of her child’s shoes in the rubble after that fateful attack. This young man later told his teacher that he’d never really been taught anything that had to do with his people, his family, or
the realities of his life. In talking with his mother, after first reading the poem, he learned that they had had family in Birmingham at the time of the blast. Studying the poem opened up a family dialogue that had previously been nonexistent, with powerful repercussions for this young man, who went on to memorize and recite the poem with impassioned tonal and emotional strength. Needless to say, this young man’s life was changed by his encounter with poetry as storytelling, as historical narrative, and as commentary on the challenges of our times as well as eternal themes of grief and loss.

One of the primary strengths of programs like Poetry Out Loud is their focus on the oral recitation of poems. A central (and oft-overlooked) element of poetry is its innate oral quality, and the importance of recognizing and working with these spoken and sound qualities when writing and reading poetry. We recite poems not to learn them, by rote, but for engagement with the sounds, rhythm, cadence, and the music of internal and external rhymes. Robert Bly, and others who study and translate poems in languages other than English, emphasize the importance of speaking a poem aloud, and hearing its inherent musicality. A return to understanding the roots of poetry as a spoken/sung/performed form of prayer, as sacred chant, is needed. Tracing the bridge between harmonics, linguistics, mathematics (syllable and stress counts), mythology, history, and philosophy, one begins to see not only the architecture of vowel-consonant (and thus, word) construction, but also the mystical construction of a spiritual universe underpinning the individual sounds and words we use. In tune with the magic of writing, we seek to harness the mystical, as found in the ordinary, in the sounds we pen to page.

Another important juncture for educators to embrace, which augments the importance of these aural/oral qualities inherent in poetry, is the link between poetry and
the dramatic arts. Staging full-length Shakespeare productions with K-12 students, I have been consistently amazed at their ability to memorize (fairly effortlessly, in most cases!) the Bard’s rhymed couplets and full-length monologues. But in truth, it makes sense. To hear aloud the poetical rhythm, melody, assonance, repetition, and rhyme in these expertly composed lines, the ear is employed in the service of the mind and the tongue, and memorization aided by this conjunction of all three. Memorization, as a classroom technique, is mostly a lost art. Perhaps over-utilized in past generations, it is in turn under-availed in our own (along with cursive handwriting instruction, sadly).

Incorporating the theatrical into poetry lessons reveals not only these rhythmic and musical elements, but also (re)introduces students to the sheer enjoyment of make-believe and imaginative play, as noted by Lynn Fels and George Belliveau (2008):

(s)tudents became less self-conscious, and they allowed themselves to “let go” and to interpret the poem through physical and vocal explorations.

Through choral readings and dramatic activities, they uncovered numerous possible meanings and they played with literary devices without really being conscious of doing so….Drama activities, when done effectively, enable students to feel that they are capable of understanding and engaging with poetry. (pp. 108-109)

No longer perceived as something foreign, or devoid of meaning in their contemporary lives, students embrace poetry’s meaning-making potential, and often find in it an unexpected ally. Furthermore, by not restricting poetry to the page or a bookshelf, its origins around a campfire, that original oral tradition and ancient form of evening entertainment, rich in cadence, adventure, and emotive and descriptive language, comes
alive anew. As Fels and Belliveau (2008) explain, these oral and performative aspects of working with poetry “capture the nuances and language play within the text. Poetry awakens many of the senses, so…we need to find ways to activate a variety of our students’ senses while studying the form” (p. 117). By engaging multiple art media and forms in the service of poetry, such as drawing, choral work, movement, and music (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 119), students discover a more sensory relationship to the works read, and thus are better able to “create meaning individually and collaboratively, and…discover how the poem relates to their experience” (Fels & Belliveau, 2008, p. 119).

Some teachers and poets have theorized that we should revamp the classic poetry canon used in schools, to reflect instead a curriculum based in local and regional authors (J. Lighty, personal communication, April 20, 2013), thus bringing relationships of place, the land, and our meaning-making there even more closely into alignment. Signs of winter in Nova Scotia are vastly different from those in Vancouver, just as animal and plant life vary greatly from region to region. How do we teach students about these bioregional subtleties, and our responsibilities therein? This is part of what Cynthia Chambers (2003) speaks of in her idea of poeticizing the world and its ordinary particulars. We are reminded “language’s primary gift is not to re-present the world around us, but to call ourselves into the vital presence of that world—and into deep and attentive presence with one another” (Abram, 2010, p. 11). In that presence, we come to know what poet Muriel Rukeyser meant when she said, “The universe is made up of stories, not atoms” (as cited in Malkin, 2011, p. 6).

With our stories in hand, we
position ourselves as feminist intellectuals, armed with maps of our own making, following paths that are evident, often to our eyes alone, but ones that we can narrate, account for, and exchange. (Braidotti, 1994, p. 165)

Like this inquiry, which has evolved as a braided, brocaded map of sensing, listening, looking, touching, and sniffing in the world around me, and inside my own heart and head. “An aesthetic of unfolding in/sights is an important concept for educators interested in attending to the qualities of experience…[A]esthesia unfolds in/sights by choosing attunement, engagement and/or embodiment” (Irwin 2004b, p. 44). Embodied in place, in the world, our inquiries metamorphose into a lived praxis of investigation, art, and stories, as we attend to our experiences with care in this unfolding of in/sights. After all, stories (like poems) are also research; research with soul (Brown, 2010).

“The communicative goal of an autoethnographic author is to perform as a creative, evocative, and engaging storyteller” (Lane & Reese, 2012, p. 2). Accordingly, I offer all of myself to this journey, and find a way for my wounded writer – for we are all “hideously flawed, sweetly so” (K. Allen, personal communication, May 31, 2013) – to draw relational connections in my writing that can help un-do structural and systemic hegemonies of social, economic, and environmental injustice. How, as an artist and educator, can I address these hegemonies, and help affect awareness and change?

One way is that I never forget my way to fairyland. Firmly attendant to the power of myth and the wonder of imagination, like Baudrillard I understand that poems, fables, stories, parables, and fiction are as “real” as anything else in this world. They permitted him to grant to events both a poetic
singularity and an analysis which was at home in radical uncertainty.

(Coulter, 2008, p. 145)

In light of such constant uncertainty, I practice being present and aware. To what is. Rendering this beautiful and blessed life as lived, inserting myself into the experience, extending the invitation to “look with me…we are the inquiry…as well as the answer” (K. Meyer, lecture notes, November 5, 2012). For that is how my lived experience of this inquiry has unfolded, a study of the self immersed in place and time, with and amongst others, swimming in language. Being there. It’s not just in fairyland, but also in Lorca’s land of duende that answers come to us. Poetry requires a committed attention to that “rag and bone shop of the heart” (Yeats, 1939, para. 5), the dark and dusty, but deeply rewarding places where we fear or hesitate to look. That attention, and its innate responsiveness, is the art of living inquiry.

As William Blake might say, No mistake that Art only exists in Practice. Indeed, he writes: ‘Practise [sic] is Art. If you leave off, you are lost.’…The Imagination, which for Blake is practically interchangeable with God, is not some ‘inner resource,’ some ‘mental quality’ which may be turned to ‘problem solving’ or ‘profit.’ It is the energy of life itself and what forms eternity. Practice. Practice. Practice. Buddha Blake. (J. Watt, personal communication, May 20, 2013)

This sounds like Eros again, crying the energy of life, and of creativity itself. Without Eros, we cannot live poetically. Without Eros to reveal expanded possibilities for poetry’s diverse applicability in teaching and research, and to gather these possibilities into a permeable container from which many disciplines and traditions may drink, poetry
is at risk of remaining in its oft-maligned position within North American letters (and our educational system), ill-conceived as a dead art written by dead white guys perpetuating their own ethnocentric views. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Through living poetically, a pedagogical act both in stance and in the works created from that stance, I seek to remember, and teach, that perhaps most importantly, the educator, as aesthete, would recognize the power he or she has to perceive the world for the beauty within the particular, at a moment’s notice, regardless of significance as considered by a world inhabited by those caught in anesthesia. (Irwin, 2004b, p. 46)

A fierce commitment to such pedagogy of the moment, believing in the beauty hidden there as well as the necessity of arresting anesthesia, has guided these stories and experiences as they have informed, unfolded, and infolded understandings of place and presence into the brocade of my life. I don’t think I can ever stop trusting in each moment as it unfolds (though sometimes, it is hard). In my studies, in classrooms, on the trail, and in cross-border incarnations of a woman yet in transition, I become a cartographer of each moment: writing as mapping my way. I discover, indeed, that “part of the a/r/tographic adventure is learning to make art while also learning to articulate our processes and struggles. A/r/tography is not unlike living and breathing” (C. Leggo, personal communication, November 18, 2012). As we live, breathe, learn, articulate, write and grow, we realize that we are doing nothing short of recreating the world.
We Are Not Separate,
So How Can There Be An Other?

Writing as process
writing as journey in/to the self
writing to come out of the self
writing to discover the self
writing to become one’s self
writing to uncover what’s hidden
writing to find what’s lost
writing to find the way in
writing to find what I’m feeling
or what I think
writing as my only song
writing as talking to myself
writing as me talking to you
writing as unknown, unfolding

writing as mapping
writing as wayfinding
Gretel in the middle
of dense woods, lost
and finding her way out
to the forest’s edge
the clearing,
Hansel dropping crumbs
clues eaten, gone, lost, but
stones sparked with moonlight
like words on the page
lighting, leading the way
writing my way into life
writing out of the dark
writing into all things,
We are not separate,
so how can there be an other?
I Live As a Poem

I live as a poem
my lines skip
    here and there
at times, steady,
at others
loose and flowing
    trembling
and uncertain
    not  solid
flowing
configured
shaped by the river’s banks
contained

now loose
    on the page
    again
    rambling running
everwhere  at once
    over
flowing
References


https://jwil.saintmarys.edu/files/jwil/Ah%20ha%20Moments.pdf


Appendices
A. Quotations from the Denise Levertov essay used in the found poem:

Inscape/Instress

– Gerald Manley Hopkins

The health of the eye demands a horizon.

Ask the fact for the form.

– Ralph Waldo Emerson

Form follows function.

– Louis Sullivan

The reality of the building lies in the space within it, to be lived in.

– Frank Lloyd Wright
B. Poetry Writing and Teaching Resources

ON THE WEB:

Poetry 180 - Library of Congress
http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/p180-list.html

Poetry Out Loud
http://www.poetryoutloud.org/

Skagit River Poetry Festival (Poets in the Schools Curriculum)
http://www.skagitriverpoetry.org/poetry-project/curriculum/

Pongo Teen Writing
http://www.pongoteenwriting.org/

BOOKS about teaching & writing poetry:

*In the Palm of Your Hand: A Poet’s Portable Workshop.*
Steve Kowit

*Poemcrazy: Freeing Your Life with Words.*
Susan G. Woolridge

Kim Addonizio

*The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises from Poets who Teach.*
Robin Behn

*A Poetry Handbook.*
Mary Oliver

Ted Kooser

*Wishes, Lies and Dreams: Teaching Children to Write Poetry.*
Kenneth Koch

*Rose, Where Did You Get That Red?: Teaching Great Poetry to Children.*
Kenneth Koch

*Getting the Knack: Twenty Poetry Exercises.*
Stephen Dunning and William Stafford
Hip Hop, Poetry and the Classics.

Alan Lawrence Sitomer and Michael Cirelli

Good poetry compilations to work with in the classroom:

Poetry 180: A Turning Back to Poetry.  
Billy Collins (Ed.)

Billy Collins (Ed.)

News of the Universe: Poems of Two-Fold Consciousness.  
Robert Bly (Ed.)

This Same Sky: A Collection of Poems from around the World  
N. Shihab Nye (Ed.)

Rock Paper Scissors: Youth Poetry Anthology on Saving the Environment  
James Dewar (Ed.)

Learn Then Burn: A Modern Poetry Anthology for the Classroom  
Tim Stafford & Derrick Brown

The Book of Questions  
Pablo Neruda