

**MEDITATIONS ON/IN  
NON/DUALISTIC PEDAGOGY**

by

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## DISCLAIMER

The chapter of this dissertation entitled *Rituals of violence, absence and silence: Remembered pedagogies of school and family* describes my personal history of childhood sexual abuse. This alleged version of events may or may not be disputed by others.

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a collection of essays that meditate upon the concept of non/dual pedagogy. The text is an expression of my longing to speak beyond the limitations of dualistic pedagogy, in its diverse forms and locations, and to actively seek out those non/dualistic pedagogical traits that for so long have been split off, denigrated and dismissed within dualistic educational systems. Dualistic pedagogies devalue the body, the spirit, the emotional, the passionate, the subjective, the intuitive, the non-rational, the chaotic, and the sacred. My purpose is to go some way to revealing the richness, vivacity and complexity of non/dualistic pedagogical experience. As the dualistic organization of pedagogical cultures leads to the experience of disembodiment, and reinforces other inequalities such as sexism and racism, this study may be considered both an ethical and political undertaking.

Paradoxically, the very word “non/dual” infers dualism in its structure. Thus, I dwell in the hyphenated space between “non” and “dual,” a space of great possibility. This liminal space touches upon areas that mainstream curriculum theorists consider somewhat impure, taboo even – including, the erotics of teaching and learning, and the interrelationships between pedagogy, violence and desire.

This text contains spaces of struggle and resistance as well as spaces of contemplation and meditation. Although I do explore non/dualistic pedagogy in formal educational institutions, including schools, and teacher education and graduate programs, I have chosen to make forays into other less examined pedagogical sites, meditating on the pedagogy of Zen arts; the public pedagogy of popular culture; and, the pedagogy of family. I also muse upon the practice of ritual; the powerful effect of place on the embodied self; physical and metaphorical notions of “voice,” lived fictions of identity and dis/placement; and, the interplay between embodiment and dis/embodiment as a legacy of childhood sexual abuse.

I suggest that non/dualistic knowledge, arising out of specific locations, contexts, and circumstances is dynamic, generative and unpredictable, and refuses the convenience of objectification and the order of stable systems of categorization.

Thus, a non/dualistic relationship to knowledge is characterized by uncertainty and contingency, and is necessarily cultivated through a vitally creative approach.

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Faith Shields, an editor of the journal *Educational Insights*, closely read a paper that was to become the dissertation chapter entitled *The way of the flower: Meditations on a softhearted pedagogy*. I acknowledge her editorial care and vision, which allowed me to stylistically “open up” the final page of this chapter.

The pages of my dissertation are populated with numerous characters, some of them living, many of them dead. I pay tribute to these people – living family members, the many ancestors I have never met, former teachers and students -- who have enlarged my life, and inspired and made possible the work that I have undertaken here. In order to protect the identity of my former students, and any former teachers who are still living, I have changed or omitted their names, and occasionally disguised details of their stories. I have also omitted the full names of several living family members, and referred to one or two only in terms of their relationship to me. It is my sincerest wish, however, that in telling my family’s stories, I am able to do them justice, honouring the spirit of my ancestors and elders, even as I recount weaknesses and lapses of judgement on their part, all the while hoping that they will forgive any weaknesses and lapses of judgement on mine.

Affectionate thanks must go to my Uncle Michael and to my sister, Elizabeth Kirsty. Michael gave me access to old family correspondence and photographs, and provided me with a great deal of genealogical information. Kirsty helped me sift through memories of childhood events during our many long distance telephone calls.

She listened to me read the family narratives I had written, and was always ready to give feedback, critique and encouragement. I would not have been so bold a writer without her support and love.

My husband, Robert Pryer, always says: “love is a verb.” Throughout the long dissertation writing process he has cooked me countless hot meals, provided stress-free computer maintenance services, brought me hot water bottles and home remedies when I was sick, amused me with his wickedly lovely sense of humour, steadied me whenever I was fretting about writing problems, shared his thoughts on any ideas I bounced off him, and delighted in all my triumphs, large and small. His love has truly nourished me, and for this, I feel gratitude beyond words.

## FOREWORD

Several chapters of this dissertation have already been published, or will appear in forthcoming publications shortly.

Small portions of *On memoir: An impure research methodology* have been published in the following publications:

Pryer, A. (In press). Lessons in “cultural sniping”: The visual narratives of Jo Spence. *The Journal of Gender Issues in Art and Education*.

Pryer, A. (In press). A pedagogy of self: Jo Spence and the art of healing narrative. In R. Irwin, K. Grauer & E. Zimmerman (Eds.), *Women art educators V*. Canada: Canadian Society for Education through Art.

“*what spring does with the cherry trees*”: *Towards an erotics of pedagogy* has already been published:

Pryer, A. (2001). “*what spring does with the cherry trees*”: The eros of teaching and learning. *Teachers and teaching: Theory and practice*, 7, 1, 75-88.

Another much revised and condensed version of this chapter was also published:

Pryer, A. (2001). *Breaking hearts: Towards an erotics of pedagogy*. In B. Hocking, J. Haskell, & W. Linds (Eds.), *Unfolding bodymind: Exploring possibility through education*. (pp. 132-141). Rutland, VT: Foundation for Educational Renewal.

*On intellectual nomadism: Finding home with/in liminal spaces* has been accepted for publication in an edited volume, which is currently under review:

Pryer, A. (In press). Living with/in marginal spaces: Intellectual nomadism and artist/researcher/teacher praxis. In R. Irwin & A. de Cosson (Eds.), *A/R/T as living inquiry*. Victoria, Australia: Common Ground.

*For the love of the game: The public pedagogy of popular culture* was published recently:

Pryer, A. (2001). The aesthetics and erotics of hockey. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 21, 3, 73-76.

*The way of the flower: Meditations on a softhearted pedagogy* will appear in 2003:

Pryer, A. (In press). The way of the flower: Meditations on a softhearted pedagogy. *Educational Insights*.

For Robert. And for our unborn baby,  
kicking and turning inside my womb.

Perhaps it would be better not to do a book. Nor a movie, nor a soap opera, nor anything that has chapters or proceeds from a beginning to an end. Maybe this text can be used like a city, which one enters via the path of the cultured, of the popular, or of the massified. On the inside, everything gets mixed together; every chapter refers to all the others and thus it is not important to know the approach by which one arrived. (Canclini, 1995, p. 3)

## INTRODUCTION: MEDITATIONS ON/IN NON/DUAL PEDAGOGY

The world is not just. The worldwide non-justice that we all know politically has spread all the way to our imagination. It goes so far that we are not just with the earth, with the stars, with ground, with blood, with skin. In advance, and without our even being informed, everything is already ordered-classed according to a scale, which gives primacy to one element over another. All the time. And in an unfounded manner. (Cixous, in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997, p. 11)

If human consciousness can be rejoined not only with the human body but with the body of the earth, what seems incipient in the reunion is the recovery of meaning within existence that will infuse every kind of meeting between self and the universe, even in the most daily acts, with an eros, a palpable love, that is also sacred. (Griffin, 1995, p. 9)

## Doubtful beginnings

Since becoming a graduate student I have occasionally allowed myself time in the library when I would simply browse the shelves of whatever section I fancied, trusting that I would serendipitously find just the right text for me at that particular time. Often I wouldn't know what I was looking for until I found it, but I regularly discovered works that were more significant to my development than the prescribed or recommended selections that were on my course reading lists.

On one such afternoon several years ago I came across a text that not only spoke *to* me, but really spoke *for* me. It was a paper written by Kathleen Rockhill (1986) of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education entitled *The chaos of subjectivity in the ordered halls of academe*. In this paper, Rockhill -- who at the time held one of the few cherished feminist faculty appointments in Canada -- expresses great sadness about her experiences within academic culture, and voices many doubts about how she might continue to participate in academe meaningfully, never mind finding a way to work towards changing it. Her language is at times almost halting as if she struggles, not to form her thoughts, but to express them so publicly. She voices her fear of speaking of her innermost pain and desires so openly and ardently within an academic context.

Rockhill (1986) talks of the terrible splitting of self that is an inevitable outcome of working in a culture that so despises the subjective, and that prohibits the expression of the passionate. She writes:

I feel paralysed by constraints – taboos against the personal, the bleak, the chaotic, the emotional, the sexual – in the university. (p. 2)

She continues . . .

Whereas once I despaired over my incapacity to force my restless spirit into the straightjacket of academe, now I think it's a miracle that at least some vestiges of that spirit have survived. The chaos of subjectivity: this is what I have lived, in a deep splitting between my sense of self and what I saw as demanded of me in an academic world that prided itself on its intellectual excellence. (p. 3)

She goes on . . .

[W]hat disturbs me most deeply about scholarship is its location in the mind, in logic, in a form of discourse which totally erases the body, the emotional, the symbolic, the multiplicities and confusions – and in all ways orders the chaos of our lived experiences so that we can no longer feel their power, their immobilizing conflicts, as we live them. (p. 7)

I quote Rockhill's (1986) words here at length as they had such a great impact on me when I first read them, and whenever I re-read them in later months and years.

When I first drank in these words I was beginning my Master's degree at a (by Canadian standards) quite conservative university, in a small faculty that was not research oriented, and did not offer any doctoral programs in education. I had begun to think of going on to a doctoral program, but I was already becoming increasingly concerned with the culture of the academic world as I was experiencing it then, and

was finding it difficult to imagine any place for myself in it. Wherever I looked I saw successful professors, but they all seemed to be “walking the split” imposed on them by the orderly rules and constraints of academic life (Rockhill, p. 10). Even the one or two role models that I did have in my Master’s program – those brave souls who championed feminist politics and alternative research methodologies such as narrative inquiry -- appeared to have great difficulty in healing this split to any degree.

Although I was a Master’s student, I could clearly see that the conservative academic environment -- or more precisely, the people who constituted this environment -- could, and would, find all manner of ways, large and small, to punish those few who rocked the scholarly boat.

When I read Rockhill’s (1986) paper, I was comforted by the knowledge that I was not alone in my profound longing for a different kind of academic culture. I felt less alone knowing that there was an academic “out there” who had voiced my fears. Rockhill’s (1986) courage in speaking out about her personal experiences of loss and disenchantment in her academic life, and her courage in hoping for alternative pedagogies and professional expectations in academe gave me the feeling that perhaps things could be different in the future.

bell hooks (1990) expresses perfectly just why Rockhill’s (1986) words made such a difference to me back then:

The oppressed struggle in a language to recover ourselves, to reconcile, to reunite, to renew. Our words are not without meaning, they are an action, a resistance. Language is a place of struggle.

(hooks, 1990, p. 146)

Although Rockhill (1986) so accurately and vividly describes the painful symptoms of this academic splitting, she struggles to name the root cause. She recognises that this split quality of academic life is characterized by a binarization of values, and that it has much to do with a sense of disembodiment, as well as the inequalities and violence of our male-dominated culture. Rockhill wrote her paper in 1986, however, and since then feminists have worked extensively on this problem, which has been given the convenient label of “dualism.” Indeed, according to Grosz (1994), the problems of dualism now underlie the preoccupations of a great many contemporary feminist theorists.

Rockhill’s (1986) text impressed me so much back then, and indeed still continues to impress me, because she does not flinch in the face of naming and describing that which is distressing and unjust. She places herself in the midst of the problem, and decides to live with the difficulty of trying to press beyond its boundaries, beyond “the boundaries of the speakable” (p. 9). In beginning to explore the characteristics and limitations of dualism, she enables others – such as myself -- to reach beyond those limits, and speak beyond the confines of traditional, dualistic academic culture. Although I first really began to think about the multitude of ways that dualism impacted my life as a graduate student, the wider problematic implications of dualism as it affects pedagogy in its diverse forms and locations began to interest me more and more.

## **On/in dualism**

Dualism is the belief that all aspects of the universe, and even all modalities of thought used to conceptualize the universe, can be divided into two parts: body/mind, human/animal, culture/nature, physical/mental, masculine/feminine, spirit/matter, public/private, sacred/profane, intellect/emotion, thought/feeling, analysis/intuition, metaphor/logic, rational/irrational, and so on (Griffin, 1995; Grosz, 1994). In western traditions, this binary splitting simultaneously objectifies, classifies and orders all existence, with one part of existence being exalted and privileged over the other. So thoroughly ingrained is this manner of thinking that in western culture “the idea of logic, reason, even the capacity for insight, thought or clear-mindedness have been situated so firmly in the duality between intellect and emotion, mind and body, spirit and matter that to challenge this duality must seem like a threat to consciousness itself” (Griffin, 1995, p. 40).

Western cultures have stringently ordered and organized themselves in ways that maintain and reproduce these dualistic patterns. Such organization splits off and artificially limits vast areas of experience. In a dualistic culture such as mainstream North American culture, people experience disembodiment, which Bai (2001) describes as “failing to ground ideas, concepts, and thoughts in sense perception” (p. 88). This results in our sensory perceptions moving to the background of our awareness and into a mode of “semi-consciousness or even unconsciousness” (Bai, 2001, p. 89). Such experiences of disembodiment affect all our activities and social interactions, including the activities and social interactions of pedagogy. For

example, bell hooks (1994) describes the confusion and indecision she felt when, as a neophyte teacher, she realized that she had to go to the bathroom in the middle of her class: She simply did not know what to do in this situation (p. 191). She had never imagined that teachers ever had to go to the bathroom! With astonishing frankness, hooks (1994) also describes her experience of another taboo topic – her unconscious sexual attraction to one of her own college students, and the difficulties that this caused both her and the student (p. 192-193). She writes that educators “enter the classroom to teach as though only the mind is present, and not the body” (p. 191).

The pernicious presumptions of dualism further reinforce other inequalities, not just the supposed superiority of mind over body, namely the inequalities of sexism and racism. The “masculine” mind is more valued than the “feminine” mind. The “white” masculine mind is more valued than “Other” masculine minds, and so on. Ultimately, the spurious notion of the existence of an objective, masculine, white mind is crystallized into the concept of the universal human being. This fabulous creature, the universal human being, looms large as the disembodied voice of neutrality, independence and ahistorical objectivity in Western science, and in its pseudo-scientific progeny, which traditionally have included the social sciences and education. Our belief in the myth of the universal human being may allow us to entertain the fantasy of an escape from everyday material existence, thereby making possible modernity’s promise of constant progress and limitless knowledge. In return for the fantasy and the promise, however, we must sacrifice a great deal.

According to Griffin (1995), what is sacrificed in a dualistic culture is one’s experience of being immersed in a community that is larger than oneself, the

knowledge of a “deep and continuing relationship with all other forms of existence” (p. 84). Embodied knowledge, by which I mean sensuous knowledge that is situated in specific, unique contexts, is generative: one body interacts with another, creating new, diverse, surprising and unpredictable patterns of knowing and becoming. When one experiences a sense of disembodiment, losing touch with sensuous and emotional ways of knowing, one does not experience knowledge as located in a particular place, formed by particular circumstances, arising directly from experience of one’s own and others’ bodies, and the body of the earth. As independent, atomistic entities, isolated from the company of other beings, cut off from the nurturance of what the poet Mary Oliver (1986) calls “the family of things” (p. 14), we begin to lose awareness of the wildness and truth in our own bodies, which can exist only in communion with other living bodies.

It is not surprising then that members of a dualistic culture tend not to value or pay attention to everyday mundane acts of physical labour -- washing, dressing, feeding, cleaning, caring for ourselves, our children, our neighbours, our homes and gardens and workplaces. Since this labour is devalued, it is often performed by the least powerful, more marginal members of our society – women, immigrants, the working class, the poor, those who have had few educational opportunities. As a culture, we derive little comfort, pleasure, or inspiration from these activities, which are life sustaining, and hence, sacred.

For example, in teaching, the education and care of younger children is considered by many to be the least prestigious work, as it frequently brings the bodily, physical, intuitive and creative aspects of pedagogy to the fore. I remember,

when I was studying for my Bachelor of Education degree with a specialty in Early Childhood Education, how some students in the Secondary Education program would scornfully call my chosen work “babysitting.” Younger children delight in play, make-belief, story, dance and music. The naysayers would wonder if these were valid areas of rigorous academic study for an education student. And, of course, every now and then a teacher of kindergarten or primary students must deal with mishaps and accidents caused by their students’ lack of bodily control and fine motor coordination – spilt paint, a child bloodying her knee in the playground, the temporary loss of bladder control.<sup>1</sup> Should professionals spend their days cleaning up messes, putting sticking plasters on bloodied knees, and changing children’s underwear? And if they do willingly participate in these acts of physical nurturance, caring for children’s bodies, is this work any the less thoughtful, rational or professional? How would such labour be characterized in a non/dualistic pedagogical culture?

For most North Americans, it is extremely hard to imagine what life could be like in a non/dualistic culture. In *The body social: Symbolism, self and society* Anthony Synnott (1993) traces the long, European history of dualism with its accompanying hatred and denigration of women, and mistrust and revulsion of the body. He writes of the strong dualistic tenets that are present in diverse western

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<sup>1</sup> In choosing to use only the feminine pronoun “her” here (i.e. “a child bloodying her knee”), I do not intend to imply sexist bias. Rather, in deciding to use only one pronoun in such cases where the gender is non-specific, I wish to make the text more readable, avoiding the distracting awkwardness of the repetitious and clumsy *his/her* and *his or her* constructions. I have consistently maintained this approach throughout the whole text (i.e. *her* instead of *his*).

philosophies both ancient and modern, in religious thought (Synnott examines Christian religious leaders in particular), as well as in political movements and scientific theory across the ages: from Orphism, to Pythagoras, Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, the Stoics, Saint Paul, Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Saint Augustine, Saint Francis of Assisi, Meister Eckhart, Saint Teresa of Avila, Ignatius Loyola, Rene Descartes, Thomas Hobbes, Emile Rousseau, Hegel, John Ruskin, Charles Darwin, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Nazism. This long list is, of course, not exhaustive.

I do not intend to investigate the long history of western dualism in this dissertation, but mean only to give the reader pause, to ask the reader to consider the daunting challenges of pushing against the seemingly monolithic structures of dualism that are embedded into the very foundations of our culture's institutions. As an educator, I believe it is vitally important to challenge the institutional structures of dualism as they manifest themselves in our formal educational institutions, as well as in other diverse pedagogical sites.

Ted Aoki's (1997) marvellous description of "the educated person" underscores the importance of working towards further understandings of non/dualistic pedagogy, and reminds me that such work is at heart a deeply ethical practice. He writes:

The educated person . . . knows that an authentic person is no mere individual, an island unto himself or herself, but a being-in-relation with others, and hence, at core an ethical being. . . . The educated person, thus, not only guards against disembodied forms of knowing,

thinking and doing, that reduce self and others to things, but also strives, guided by the authority of the good in pedagogical situations for embodied thoughtfulness that makes possible living as human beings. (p. 1)

## **Meditations on/in non/dual pedagogy**

This dissertation is a collection of essays that meditate and muse upon the concept of non/dual pedagogy. Of course, the very word “non/dual” paradoxically infers dualism in its structure. In the text of this dissertation, however, I dwell in the hyphenated space between “non” and “dual,” a space that is dual *and* non/dual, neither dual *nor* non/dual, a space of liminality, and, hence, great possibility. This marginal space touches upon areas that many curriculum theorists and educators consider somewhat impure, taboo even – including, the erotics of teaching and learning, and the interrelationships between pedagogy, violence and desire. Such topics are currently “ob-scene,” which literally means off stage, in the theatre of education.

In exploring non/dual pedagogy, I actively seek out those traits that for so long have been split off and denigrated in our dualistic society and educational systems. Mainstream North American schooling practices and pedagogies devalue the body, the spirit, the emotional, the passionate, the subjective, the intuitive, the non-rational, the chaotic, and the sacred. Yet, these “shadow traits” of human experience do not simply disappear in dualistic educational cultures. They are present . . . in the shadows. Hence, the locus of my research into curriculum and pedagogy lies in these shadow areas of praxis.

Pedagogy takes place in diverse sites, not only in kindergartens, schools, and universities. I define pedagogy as that which acts upon and acts with human beings

in such a way as to transform their embodied consciousness, thereby producing meaning in the process. I agree with Carmen Luke (1996) that:

Learning and teaching . . . are the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life. They exist beyond the classroom and are always gendered and intercultural. (p. 8)

She writes:

[P]edagogy cannot be conceived of as an isolated intersubjective event since it too is fundamentally defined by and a product of a network of historical, political, sociocultural, and knowledge relations. (p. 1)

In this dissertation, although I do explore non-dualistic pedagogy in educational institutions, including schools, teacher education and graduate programs, I have also chosen to make forays into other less examined pedagogical sites, meditating on the pedagogy of Zen arts, the public pedagogy of popular culture, and the pedagogy of family.

As the mind is embodied, I believe the body itself is a primary educational site. It is at once a site of struggle, pleasure, desire, control, fear, shame, and pain. The embodied self simultaneously constitutes and is constituted by the discursive environment, becoming inscribed with discursive practices in so doing. The pedagogical act is a “material series of processes, where power actively marks or brands bodies as social, and inscribes them, as an effect of this, with differentiated attributes of subjectivity” (Grosz, cited by Kamler, 1997, p. 371). Thus, I devote some attention in the succeeding chapters to embodiment and pedagogy. I explore the erotics of pedagogy -- the passionate desires and embodied encounters that infuse

pedagogical relationships and the processes of coming to know. I contemplate the importance of everyday ritual, by which I mean embodied practices of power that transform the world and one's experience of the world. I also meditate on the physical and imaginary presence of places and their effect on the body-self, as well as musing on physical and metaphorical notions of "voice", lived fictions of identity and dis/placement, and the interplay of embodiment and dis/embodiment as a legacy of childhood sexual abuse.

The heart of my writing – indeed the heart of all writing -- lies in storytelling. Parts of this text consist of remembered stories of my own life recounted in the manner of memoir. My methodological approach to this field of inquiry allows my material to speak, and affords me the opportunity to question and play with some of the common dualistic polarizations that prevail in the North American educational research culture – the personal versus the professional, the remembered versus the scientifically measured, the imagined versus the real. I employ hooks' (1990) approach to the use of memory:

Fragments of memory are not simply represented as flat documentary but constructed to give a "new take" on the old, constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation. (p. 147)

Through the use of memoir, I insist that the personal, the remembered and the imagined infuse everyday educational research with a certain colour and quality of meaning that are not, and indeed often cannot, be expressed solely through technical-rational approaches to research. Although I challenge some of the limitations of quantitative approaches to educational research, I do not intend to disparage such

approaches. Rather, I believe that only through the complementarity of a wide diversity of methodologies and styles of educational research can our research community ever hope to express the depth and breadth of that most human, and most mysterious of experiences, which we call pedagogy.

In order to cross disciplinary boundaries, I have had to draw widely from various pools of knowledge and wisdom, including: feminist and ecological philosophy; postmodern, postcolonial and critical theory; diverse samplings of the vast literature on narrative inquiry, autobiography and life writing; the work of Buddhist writers, as well as writers from other spiritual traditions; and, most importantly, the work of many curriculum theorists, especially that loose group of scholars known as the reconceptualists.

In seeking a language for my work, I have made the political choice not to fall foul of the dualistic tendency to dichotomize the beautiful with the practical, or the aesthetic with the ethical. Thus, as I elucidate in the chapters on my methodological approach, I consciously speak a dialect of curriculum theory that I hope the reader will find both beautiful and practical, expressive of a non/dualistic aesthetics as well as ethics.

I do not expect to provide any definitive answers or neat solutions, to prove any theory correct or incorrect, to plug any holes, nail anything down, or to tie up any loose ends by the time I have reached the end of this dissertation. Rather, my purpose is to go some way to revealing the richness, vivacity and complexity of non/dualistic pedagogical experience, much of which lies neglected and ignored. I have given myself the vital task of speaking of those things that are oft left unspoken.

Sometimes I can only gesture towards areas of experience for which I do not yet have words. So much will depend on your responsiveness and creativity, dear reader, as this is a text that has many gaps and openings. I trust that you will see such spaces not as textual failings but as textual entryways, as generative possibilities, and that you will willingly join me to experience the un-decideable and the practice of not knowing, thereby making this text your very own.

**ON MEMOIR: AN IMPURE  
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

[T]here is no such thing as immaculate perception, . . .  
there is no objective knowledge devoid of the  
subjectivity of the knower. (Eisner, in Saks (Ed), 1996,  
p. 405)

[T]he ultimate function of research is to enlarge human  
understanding. I do not define research as a species of  
science. I define science as a species of research. And  
there are many ways to do research, of which science is  
one. (Eisner, in Saks (Ed.), 1996, p. 409)

## **In living memory**

“You can’t get wet from the word water,” Alan Watts once said. Still, writers continue to search for words that will breathe life into their texts. They struggle to capture the eros of everyday life, hoping to trap it like a pressed wild flower between their heavy pages, so that we, their readers, might one day discover and share what they see and feel and taste and smell and hear, and imagine. Such writing may be thought of as an act of love, an erotic performance, a desire to become intimate with the Other. Nancy Mairs (cited in Rainer, 1997) writes:

I lie in bed, run across a playground, eat favourite foods, listen to the radio, tease my sister, roll in new snow. All these acts, happening to me as a body, shaping my awareness of my embodied self, form my erotic being. It is that process I seek in all my writing to capture and comprehend: how living takes on an erotic tone. (p. 210)

Every moment and memory has been written on our bodies, and lives on as knowledge stored in our every cell. Even if we are not conscious of it in our daily lives, “the body has been there all along, a seismograph recording every emotional tremblor” (Rainer, 1997, p. 202). Thus, when setting out to write memoir, authors often begin with their embodied memories. People, places and events long past flood their consciousness with streams of sensory detail. Much of the pleasure of writing lies in coming to know one’s body in this way, as locus of one’s lived, and living, knowledge. Paradoxically, many of the impossibilities of embodied writing stem from the awareness of the body as locus of questioning, as home of the unknowable

and the unknown.

The act of writing is a source of sensual pleasure, of *jouissance*. As Anais Nin (cited by Spence, 1997) notes: We write to taste life twice, in the moment and in retrospection (p. 136). Nourished by reminiscence and imagination, the memoirist must ruminate on the past, slowly savouring favoured moments and memories. While the genre of memoir seems to promise the writer a double concentrate of lived and living experience, this is illusory. Barthes (cited by Beaujour, 1980) writes that the adjective *living* is “the instrument of this illusion; whatever it says, by its descriptive quality alone, the adjective is funereal” (p. 320). Beaujour (1980) provides some commentary on Barthes’ statement:

The funereal adjective is unavoidable insofar as it builds a cenotaph that the subject describing himself erects for himself in his own lifetime, as a subject who is already dead in his writing, in his retreat and his withdrawal from life. (p. 321)

Writing memoir is the process of dying; it is “learning to die” (Cixous, 1993, p. 10).

The practice of writing the memoir is a practice of writing the self and destroying the self.

*Writing myself* . . . I myself am my own symbol, I am the story which happens to me: freewheeling in language, I have nothing to comparte [*sic*] myself to; . . . to write on oneself . . . , it is also a simple idea: simple as the idea of suicide. (Barthes, cited by Beaujour, 1980, p. 321)

Paradoxically, in coming to know the embodied self, in making the story of

the self, the memoirist also “unmakes” and loses her self. Through the practice of memoir, the self unfolds and unravels, and is lost. Knowing that the writing of memoir is simultaneously an act of love and an act of death should not perturb a writer. Through the writing and then the losing of the self, the memoirist comes to an understanding of narrative uncertainty, and the inevitability of such uncertainty.

Gretel Ehrlich (1985) writes that the “lessons of impermanence taught me this: loss constitutes an odd kind of fullness; despair empties out into an unquenchable appetite for life” (p. x). The practice of memoir begets both uncertainty and hope -- a hopeful uncertainty.

## **Into the labyrinth**

Memoir is not so much genre as practice, far more process than product. It is a “search for self-knowledge, even if this knowledge of oneself can never be reached” (Baisnee, 1997, p. 5). Indeed, one can never truly know one’s self, as the self is defined in great part “by where it is not, when it is not, what it is not” (Pinar, 1994, p. 220). Nevertheless, memoirists set out on valiant quests for knowledge and meaning, hoping to understand the self through their own mysterious, thoughtful, imaginative narrative movement.

We write to be able to transcend our life, to reach beyond it . . . to teach ourselves to speak with others, to record the journey into the labyrinth. (Nin, cited by Spence, 1997, p. 136)

A memoir traces the tracks of the writer into the labyrinth. It unfolds “like a game that inevitably moves beyond its own rules and finally leaves them behind” (Foucault, cited by Graham, 1991, p. 147).

As with the practice of walking the labyrinth, the practice of memoir makes the familiar foreign. The desire to know, to completely lose and then re-find one’s bearings, sifting for signs amidst the strangeness of the journey, is pleasurable, puzzling, and perilous.

We need to lose . . . a world, and to discover that there is more than one world and that the world isn’t what we think it is. Without that, we know nothing about the mortality and immortality we carry.  
(Cixous, 1993, p. 10)

Although there may be many paths to the labyrinth's heart, as every labyrinth walker knows, it is the heartfelt journey -- the journey with heart, with courage -- that heals, transforms and liberates. And the writer of memoir truly needs courage for this journey:

Writing is not arriving; most of the time it's *not arriving*. One must go on foot, with the body. . . . One must walk as far as the night. One's own night. Walking through the self toward the dark. (Cixous, 1993, p. 65)

Really there can be no final arrival; there is no finding, only searching . . . and re/searching.

## **An impure research methodology**

The writing of memoir is many things: hermeneutical process; point of entry into a community of discursive relationships; creation of fictions – reproductive and resistant -- that tell of both self and of culture; intimate textual intertwining of writer and reader; catalyst for critical and compassionate inquiry into emotional truth; ruthless and loving practice of destroying the self while simultaneously writing the self into being; and, living practice of hopeful uncertainty. Because of these qualities, as well as others that I will discuss below, I choose to employ the practice of memoir not only as the *genre* of this doctoral dissertation, but also as the research *practice and methodology*.

However, the practice of memoir is messy, fictional, subjective, seductive, unreliable, uncertain, contingent, contradictory, personal, partial, passionate, emotional, and erotic – in short, impure. Does this impurity disqualify the practice of memoir from being employed as research methodology?

The impure qualities of memoir are of course extremely problematic within the traditional bounds of mainstream educational research. But the old scientific paradigm that was developed from the theories of Newtonian mechanics – a paradigm that has fostered and sustained a distinct culture of positivistic academic research in mathematics, the physical and life sciences, engineering, as well as the social sciences – has now collapsed (MacPherson, 1995). The Newtonian premise is that:

the universe is a deterministic and predictable place and that science's principal aim is to discover its deterministic rules and use them to

predict and control the future. . . . In empirical science we have, therefore, sought encompassing formulas and regression equations, equations that can foresee the end from the beginning. And the project seemed to go well, particularly in the physical sciences. (MacPherson, 1995, p. 263)

However, recent scientific developments have demonstrated that the old Newtonian view of the universe as being mechanistic, determinant, causal, computable, atemporal, and static is no longer tenable. Mathematical theories of chaos have overturned Newtonian concepts, and have caused a revolution in all the sciences.

All of a sudden we have the answer to the age-old question of whether or not the universe is a deterministic place – it doesn't matter. . . .

[T]he universe is a chaotic place. In general, effects are not continuous functions of causes. There can be few general encompassing formulas. In principal, parts of the universe are unpredictable. And if parts of it are, so is the whole thing.

(MacPherson, 1995, pp. 264-265)

Other scientific theories have also contributed to the erosion of the Newtonian worldview. For example, as long ago as the 1920s the mathematical physicist and philosopher Werner Heisenberg demonstrated that it is impossible to observe a phenomenon without interacting with it. This means that researchers can no longer objectify that which they study as they themselves are “inside” the phenomenon that they are studying. As Elliot Eisner (in Saks (Ed), 1996) so succinctly puts it: [T]here

is no such thing as immaculate perception, . . . there is no objective knowledge devoid of the subjectivity of the knower (p. 405). Thus, when doing “good science,” as it is always impossible to eliminate the observer, it is of vital importance to observe the observer (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Ironically, the living subjectivities of the researcher-participant that traditional academic culture has for so long tried to suppress and devalue, should now be an integral part of the research process.

We researchers in the social sciences must continue to nurture alternative means of exploring the subtlety, variety, complexity and chaos of human experience, by developing methodologies which do not precipitate the artificial closure of discourse, and which do not overlook the profundity of the researcher’s presence and subjectivities. This can be achieved through the development of research methodologies that I will call “artistic” for want of a better word, as well as through the transformation of “scientific” methodologies. Eisner (in Saks (Ed.), 1996) writes:

I do not define research as a species of science. I define science as a species of research. And there are many ways to do research, of which science is one. (p. 409)

Of the multiplicity of research methodologies that are available to me as an educational researcher, I have chosen to employ memoir, a distinct form of life writing, as it fits closely with the purpose of my research. The purpose of this doctoral project is, of course, to meditate on non/dual pedagogy. Memoir provides an ideal methodological vehicle for this inquiry as it breaks down many of the dualisms that are prevalent in much mainstream social science research. I employ memoir as a feminist form of research in defiance of the overwhelmingly masculinist culture in

which I find myself situated. It is also an approach to research that dissolves the dualisms of body-mind, public-private, intellect-emotion, thoughts-senses, and self-other.

In employing memoir as a research methodology I explore the ways in which human experience is endowed with meaning, seeking to enlarge understandings of “the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain world” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 744). By so doing I hope to enlarge and deepen my, and perhaps others’, understandings of our discursive community, making possible more interesting conversations about pedagogy and culture in ways that permit a thorough questioning of our shared and individual experiences and understandings. Thus, I perceive the practice of memoir to be a highly generative process, a research methodology that refuses premature closure of conversation. Continued conversations provide fresh ways of seeing the world, and this in turn leads to new areas of meditation and exploration.

At first glance, the focus of memoir may seem to be set firmly on the self. However, for the purposes of my research in the field of education, the focus is not on the self, but on the space between educational practice and the self. Family stories, photographs, personal and family artefacts, letters, conversations, anecdotes, and memories comprise the data for my research, and act as a springboard for the study of the self – of myself – and of other people in context, enabling me, as researcher, to seek patterns in the complexities of everyday experience that illuminate cultural and social structures, identity formation, and lived experiences of power and possibility. The reflexive qualities of such a methodology allow me to incorporate personal,

emotional, sensual, embodied responses to the data. Such a tactic is deliberately evocative, sometimes provocative, calling the reader into the intimacy of textual spaces, inviting recognition, insight, and interpretation. Readers therefore must become active co-creators of meaning, participating in the construction of their own knowledge when they read the text.

I do not presume the text of a memoir to be directly representative of experience. Rather, the text is a story about experience, a fictional account, or even recounting, of actual events. To remember is to engage in a powerful act of fiction.

The power in telling and re-telling stories of our younger selves lies with the possibility for revising and reinterpreting not only the stories themselves but the lives to which they are connected. (Chambers, 1998, p. 14)

Thus, new stories permit new kinds of relationships with others, enabling the production of new kinds of possible worlds, reinventing notions of self in community, yielding collective as well as personal benefits (Chambers, 1998; Dunlop, 1999; Eisner, in Saks (Ed.), 1996). In willingly submerging themselves in fictions, writers and readers may resurface with different appreciations of the socially constructed nature of our communal reality, bringing into a heightened awareness many forgotten stories and suppressed stories, as well as a keen sense of the old stories that were perhaps camouflaged behind sentimentalizations, simplifications or obfuscations.

Such immersion in fictional waters can be profoundly transformative.

It enables us to examine our life writings as texts, to see our lives as part of something much larger than our private “selves,” to connect in

a deep way with communities and histories from which we may have  
always felt apart (of), or consciously have tried to remain apart (from).

(Chambers, 1998, p. 14)

Through reading and writing fiction, we begin to make a home for ourselves not just  
on paper, but in the wider world (Chambers, 1998).

## **The impure, evocative text and considerations of quality**

Any researcher who employs alternative methodological approaches to inquiry comes up against the problem of how the quality of their work can be assessed and judged by other members of their scholarly community. Methodological approaches such as memoir, as well as other forms of life writing, are not part of the old positivist academic tradition, and accordingly the quality of such work cannot be judged according to positivist criteria. Frequently, many members of the academy simply choose to dismiss research work undertaken using alternative methodologies, as they have not fully explored the kinds of criteria that could be used to assess its quality.

Questions of accuracy, reliability, truth, validity, reproducibility, generalizability, ambiguity, and unintended and inappropriate interpretations of the text inevitably arise when a diverse group of social scientists begin to discuss how to assess methodological approaches to inquiry that rely on life writing, whether that be narrative inquiry, personal practical knowledge, biographical and autobiographical writing, autoethnography, personal essays, lived experience, sociopoetics, or any of the other diverse forms of life writing methodologies that now proliferate.<sup>1</sup> Many of the old criteria for judging the quality of a research project, however, are no longer applicable to these forms of research.

Neither substance nor form [*of a research study*] should be

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<sup>1</sup> See Ellis & Bochner (2000) for a comprehensive listing of such approaches to social science research.

prematurely dismissed because it does not fit outmoded, no longer defensible conceptions of what research is and what research ought to be. (Donmoyer, cited by Dunlop, 1999, p. 41)

Still, as many social scientists express doubts about the strength and applicability of *any* methodology that employs life writing as the central focus of inquiry, I feel it is necessary to address here the kinds of concerns that might be raised about the relevance and quality of this method of research.

First of all, it must be stressed that the qualities of a methodological approach such as memoir that speaks in the language of fiction can never “be judged algorithmically” (Eisner, in Saks (Ed.), 1996, p. 408). According to Eisner the strength of fiction lies in evocative moments of innuendo, implication, mood, and in qualities such as insight, coherence, and emotional power. These qualities enable the text of fiction to connect with the reader on intellectual, sensual, emotional, and perhaps even spiritual levels, thereby making possible the empathic participation of the writer in the lives of the readers, and vice versa. The strength of evocative fictions, such as those contained in memoir, enable the reader to actively participate in the creation of meaning, and to bring her own experiences to the text so that commonalities and differences can be explored in ways that illuminate the uniqueness and universality of both reader’s and writer’s lives. The reader must think, feel, imagine, remember, sense – in short, the reader must contemplate and respond fully with her whole being (Dunlop, 1999). A good memoir must call out to and seduce the reader, taking her beyond the text itself, while simultaneously bringing her home to herself. The quality of this experience will be different for each reader, and will

depend not only on the strength of the text, but also on the strengths that the reader brings to the text. Evocative texts then can only be assessed through connoisseurship (Eisner in Saks (Ed.), 1996).

Both writer and reader must ask critical questions of the text when assessing its quality.

The crucial issues are what narratives do, what consequences they have, to what uses they can be put. These consequences often precede rather than follow the story because they are enmeshed in the act of telling. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746)

Of course, the writer can ask these questions before, during, and after writing the text, even revising and editing the text in the hope of producing a different set of textual consequences. But the writer cannot “cover everything” in anticipation of all possible consequences. A memoir is a selective interpretation of life: it is never complete, and is always partial and tentative. Language is slippery; textual slippage is unavoidable in life writing, leading to inexactness, indeterminacy, even vagueness (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Indeed, much of the power of fiction, such as the fictional texts of memoir, lies in the author’s “constructive neglect” when producing the text (Eisner, in Saks (Ed.), 1996, p. 408). The author must decide what to include in the text, and more crucially, what to leave out.

It is patently clear that no writer of partial, indeterminate texts can exert full control over the way in which the reader will interpret or misinterpret the text. The text once written and set free becomes its own creature, a feral fiction not easily cornered or captured by a reader, or even by the writer. The “good memoir” takes on

a life of its own, and even though it may not be a generalizable form of research, it is certainly generative.

Wherein lies the truth of memoir, given that it is a hermeneutical text woven from fictions? Timothy Findley (1990) once wrote: Truth slips in through whatever doorway it can find (p. 191). The fictional texts of memoir can provide just such a doorway.

Fictions are not the unreal side of reality or the opposite side of reality: they are conditions that enable the production of possible worlds. In this sense, fiction can become a premise for epistemological positionings. (Dunlop, 1999, p. 3)

Naturally, orthodox notions of validity, reliability and accuracy cannot apply to a methodological approach such as memoir. As ambiguity can never be completely eliminated, and other readings/misreadings as well as other interpretations/misinterpretations by readers are inevitable, textual interpretations can never be rock solid. Rather, the content of a memoir drifts like a desert sand dune. With the shifting winds of each reader's participation, the dune changes shape, texture and even position.

## Considering writing and ethical practice

The way in which we choose to write is an ethical issue. In his essay *Textual violence in academe*, John Shotter (1997) explores monological and dialogical forms of writing, claiming that a conversational, dialogical text takes up a certain ethical position quite unlike that of the traditional monological academic text, where exposition, explanation, and closure rule with deadly precision.

Shotter (1997) cites Bakhtin on monologism:

Monologism, at its extreme, denies the existence outside itself of another consciousness with equal rights and equal responsibilities, another *I* with equal rights (thou). With a monologic approach (in its extreme pure form) *another person* remains wholly and merely an object of consciousness. No response is expected from it that could change everything in the world of my consciousness. Monologue is finalized and deaf to another's response, does not expect it and does not acknowledge it in any *decisive* force. . . . Monologue pretends to be the *ultimate word*. It closes down the represented world and represented persons. (p. 25)

In contrast to monological texts, however, dialogical texts fully acknowledge the other, the reader, by anticipating that they *will* have a response. Recognizing that words are relational tools, "two-sided acts," the writer of the dialogical text is more able to bring people into sensuous contact with one another (Shotter, 1997, p. 21).

By playfully drawing readers into dialogical, textual conversation, the

memoirist could easily be accused of being a manipulative writer. However, the skilful memoirist also acknowledges her readers' humanity, and respects their agency as textual co-performers, and co-creators of meaning. Thus, the dialogical text is an open, unfinalized work in which "new spaces may be opened up and others closed down freely, moment by moment" (p. 21). Such a text is full of wild, living spaces that allow the reader some breathing room.

In her desire to coax the reader into conversation, and more active participation in the co-creation of the text, a memoirist may explore areas of powerful emotional experience, employing language and literary techniques that heighten such emotionality. Indeed, the very qualities of memoir (as both genre and methodology) foster such emotional exploration. However, academic inquiry into emotional experience is more often than not described -- quite derogatively -- as "soft" or "touchy-feely" (Boler, 1999).

In *Feeling power*, Megan Boler (1999) challenges dualistic notions of emotion as universal, private and natural. She explores how our emotions "reflect our complex identities situated within social hierarchies, [and how they] "embody" and "act out" relations of power" (pp. 3-4). Boler argues that emotions reflect particular historical, linguistically embedded cultural and social arrangements: Structures and experiences of race, class and gender are shaped by the social control of emotion. Thus, Boler claims that the study of emotions is a vital and necessary form of political work, which uncovers and names the invisible spaces located between ideology and internalized feeling. Such spaces are sites of control, struggle and resistance, and are characterized by complexity, ambiguity and generativity. Critical inquiry into

emotion not only uncovers the centrality of emotions as a “source of knowledge,” it also makes possible radical cultural interventions (p. 116). Autobiographical forms of narrative inquiry -- such as the practice of memoir -- by virtue of their exploration of emotionality, may play a valuable role in such cultural intervention.

However, in their exploration of personal narrative and emotion, writers of memoir become increasingly vulnerable as they strip away layer upon layer of story, teasing meaning out of each small remembrance. They become “vulnerable observers” of their own lives, inviting the reader to become vulnerable observers with them (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 753). Such vulnerability invites response (Leggo, 2000).

The reader’s response to a memoir is crucial. Experience is more than sensation, it is the sharing of sensation (Gunn, 1982). A writer may be hampered in her abilities to properly share her text with a voyeuristic reader, a spectator of the writer’s experience. Thus, the writer may try to seduce the reader into becoming a witness to the writer’s narratives, and to the reader’s own responses to these narratives.

What is the difference between witnessing and spectating?

Witnessing in contrast to spectating, is a process in which we do not have the luxury of seeing a static truth or fixed certainty. As a medium of perception, witnessing is a dynamic process, and cannot capture meaning as conclusion. (Boler, 1999, p. 186)

Witnessing does not shut down experience. Rather it permits continuously changing readings, and growth in understanding. Witnessing is an active, rather than passive,

process in which the reader becomes co-performer of meaning.

The witnessing reader enters into conversation with self and with the text of the memoir, reading not just to find out who the writer is, but to find out who *they* are. One could say that both the reading and the writing of memoir are autobiographical acts.

## **Fictional texts and an ethic of care**

The text of a memoir may well be composed of fictions, but these fictions are the author's interpretation of actual events. The memoir is peopled with characters, including the character of the fictional protagonist who is closely identified with the author, but these fictionalized characters are textual interpretations of actual human beings, both living and dead. When I write that the text of a memoir is woven from fictions, I do not speak flippantly. Fictions have tremendous power to both heal and harm. Indeed, it is precisely because of the power of this kind of research that I have chosen to engage with life writing throughout my graduate studies.

It is obvious to any researcher that considerable care and responsibility must be shown to the people about whom they write. In order to protect the identity of many of my subjects I have omitted their names, and occasionally disguised details of their stories, thereby shielding them with the dual strategies of anonymity and fictionalization. I have sought to write with attention so that their stories will nonetheless live vibrantly within the text of this dissertation, and with solicitude so that I do not silence their voices or negate their experience.

When writing about family members, things become much trickier, of course. I have protected the identity of several living family members by omitting their surnames, or referring to them only in terms of their relationship to me. In many instances I have decided to edit out family stories that are both relevant and fascinating, mainly in order to protect family members who would not wish to read such stories in print. In other cases I have decided to honour the spirit of ancestors

who are no longer living by removing some of my interpretations of family events from the text, sensing their potential disapproval even from the grave.

My text also contains many difficult stories, the most difficult of which to write was the story of growing up with a man who was physically, sexually, and emotionally abusive. The text I have created about this time in my life is, of course, an interpretation of childhood events. My abuser's interpretation of these events differs starkly from my own: They simply did not happen. My late mother's interpretation of these events: These things happened, but it is best never to talk about them. My sister and I have both publicly maintained a silence about what we both knew had happened. Neither of us has ever spoken the truths of our childhood, apart from confiding in each other, our spouses, and a few trusted friends.

I break the silence here, not to seek revenge or garner pity. Rather, I want to explore the ways that children who are experiencing or who have survived childhood violence and sexual abuse are often silenced not only within the family, but also within schools. I also want to explore the ways in which teacher educators and curriculum planners are complicit in this silencing, whether knowingly or not. The embodied pedagogy that comprises the sexual abuse of children and violence against children is exceptionally powerful and sadly pervasive. Educators and educational researchers have given scant attention to the violence of the curricular re-silencing of sexually abused children within the context of public schooling. This is why I have now decided to write about events that occurred decades ago.

The inspired hermeneutical processes of memoir have an indomitable power and optimism, even though dependent on the most fragile of materials – memories.

Memory is a form of hope. . . . [A] sad memory is better than none. It reminds you of survival. (Findley, 1990, p. 4)

For this reason, I remember and re-remember, and write on.

**SENSUAL WISDOM:  
PEDAGOGY  
AND THE EMBODIED SELF**

To be sensual or sensuous is to be in the presence of  
your own soul. (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 59)

I do not work on the insignificant: the shedding of  
tears is a mystery throughout all our life. . . . When  
I begin to write it always starts from something  
unexplained, mysterious and concrete. Something  
that happens here. I could be indifferent to these  
phenomena; but I think that these are the only  
important phenomena. . . . When I write a book, the  
only thing that guides me at the beginning is an  
alarm. Not a tear [*larme*], but an alarm. The thing  
that alarmed me at once with its violence and  
strangeness. (Cixous, in Cixous & Calle-Gruber,  
1997, p. 11)

## **The sweat of the heart**

Lately, I have been wondering, what makes my student teachers cry? For the last couple of years, I have supervised students in the one and two year Bachelor of Education programs in elementary education at the University of British Columbia, accompanying them on their practicum journeys, the very beginning of their careers in teaching. I found that all my students enjoyed the brief first and second practicums, but the third practicum, thirteen weeks long, was the one that caused them the most anxiety and trepidation. When we met during the first week or so of this final practicum, we frequently discussed their fears, and found ways that they could deal with them, so that they might stay focussed for themselves and their students. But just when they seemed to be coming into their own as neophyte teachers, approximately half way through this long practicum, something strange happened. Many began to share with me, not just their fears, or their joy and satisfaction at their progress, but their sadness. Several of them cried.

What made my student teachers cry, then? Was it that they were so very tired, completely worn down by the gruelling work of their long practicum? They seemed always to be on the move, running from one class to another, from meetings with parents, staff, social workers, then on to training seminars, and off to the library for materials. Their own students required constant attention. The environment constantly assaulted them with school noises and school smells: The phenomenal sound of hundreds of small bodies rushing through corridors on their way out to the playground: The strong chemical stench of cleaning fluids that seem only to be used

in schools and hospitals: The plastic taste of microwaved food that they were almost too fatigued to eat: The contagion of their sneezing, coughing little charges during flu season: The vomit on the carpet, the traces of glue and glitter on the chairs, and the bloody nosebleed splashes trailing all along the hallway down to the door of the school office.

The joys and travails of my student teachers' personal lives added to the extraordinary stresses of their practicum experiences. Of course, they could not leave the personal aspects of their lives behind as soon as they passed through the school gates. One of my student teachers, a marathon runner, complained that she had never experienced such total physical exhaustion. Another student teacher broke her leg early on in the practicum, yet insisted on continuing to teach. Another was being terrorized by a violent ex-partner. Another insisted on working through a case of pneumonia, adamantly refusing to take any rest. Another struggled to find good childcare for her own child who was off school and sick at home. Another student teacher's grandmother was dying alone on a faraway continent. And yet another fell head over heels in love quite unexpectedly, and had to manage the exhilaration of a nascent romance along with all her nightly marking and lesson preparation. Of course, the same communities of peers and mentors who nurtured the student teachers' professional practice also became personal confidantes and gave supportive advice in staff room lunch hour conversations. These communities kept the student teachers going through the tough, draining times. Still, my student teachers cried. Once they had become so tired, it was the daily -- sometimes small, but always

significant -- injustices and struggles that their own students faced, which triggered a flow of tears.

One woman, who had grown up in an idyllic rural setting, took her students on daily nature walks to the local park. She felt so saddened by the way that she always had to tell the children that they could look at the piles of autumn leaves on the ground, but they could not run through them. The beautiful heaps of leaves held arsenals of used needles, condoms and broken glass. This socio-economically privileged student teacher began to understand the physical reality of poverty: her students would not be able to frolic in rustling gold-russet-red leaves as she had once done when she was young. She shook her head and her lips trembled as she told me her story.

Another young woman confessed to me, with tears in her eyes, that she had been so worried for the safety of one of her kindergarten students that she had felt constantly nauseous all week long. Her kindergartner's legs had been covered with suspicious bruises and marks. What was to be done? In the meantime, she met the parents every day at school when they picked up and dropped off their child. Earlier in the practicum, this student teacher and I had had a long talk about how she might express affection and caring for her students. The student teacher, sensing her students' strong need for warmth and love, wanted to hug the children without being "too physical," without becoming "too parental," while remaining "always professional."

Another student teacher, with mascara stains still on her cheeks, shook as she told me what had happened in her class earlier that day. One young fellow had gone

missing. She had looked for him everywhere, and had begun to panic. All available staff commenced a thorough search of the school and surrounding area. The police and parents were called. Meanwhile, my frantic student teacher had to go back to her classroom to continue with the day's lessons. Soon after, the missing boy, feeling able to return to class, simply popped his head up from behind the sofa at the back of the classroom!

Another student teacher broke down in tears when she told me about her favourite student. She told me that she knew she should not have favourites amongst her students, but that this boy needed extra attention. He was a "real sweetheart" she said, so shy, so kind, so quiet. She always sent her students home with homework assignments, but this student, her favourite, never had a bag for carrying his books. In fact, he never had a pencil, or an eraser, and he never had a coat if it was wet outside, or a sweater if it was cold. He never got the new shoes he so needed. He never had breakfast. Unlike many of his classmates, no grandparents visited the school at lunchtime bearing hot lunches made especially for him. My student teacher decided to buy the student a backpack with her own money. She thought he would like a *Pokemon* one. She stocked his new school bag with all kinds of novelty stationery supplies, and gave it to him when there were no other students around.

"Is that alright?" she asked me. "Is that professional behaviour? Is it O.K. to be so involved with your students' lives? Will his Mum and Dad mind? Will the gift embarrass the parents, or make the child seem different from his peers?" She told me that she loved this boy, that he was special, that she would never forget him. Then, the very next week he suddenly left her class; his parents had moved away from the

area. My student teacher sobbed when she related the news during her prep period. Fat tears dripped onto the photocopier as she told me she never thought teaching would be this way. She never thought she would have her heart broken on practicum.

I had also cried when I was on my long practicum, I assured my student teachers. And when I was working as a teacher, I sometimes cried then too. "It's all right to find a quiet place, like the supply storeroom, and have a good cry every now and then," I would say. Handing them a tissue, I would then half-jokingly give the following advice: When you emerge puffy-eyed, if it is summertime tell your students you have hay fever, and if it is winter tell them you have a bad cold. My student teachers and I both knew that although teachers are human, it is not considered "professional" for them to be seen crying, least of all by their elementary school students. Nonetheless, the act of teaching exposes educators to many deep sadnesses.

*I was working as an English language resource teacher in southern Japan. That day I was at a junior high school, which I visited several times a month. It was late in the monsoon season, and thick clouds clung to the lower slopes of the densely forested mountain, against which the school was nestled. The air was cool from a heavy rain shower and the schoolyard was flooded with huge puddles, reflecting grey lakes of light back up at the sky. I was drinking strong coffee in the staff room, trying to clear the fog out of my head before my first class. I had just returned from my mother's funeral in England, and was somewhat jet lagged. Although I was emotionally fragile, I seemed to be coping well enough with the tasks of everyday life.*

*An older male teacher burst through the door, bringing with him two boys into the stillness of the staff room. He was berating them for some sort of "bad behaviour," and began to raise his voice. He told the boys to kneel down on the concrete floor, a common enough form of punishment in Japanese schools. Then, quite suddenly, he began to hit one of them, picking him up by his neck, throwing him across the room onto a desk. After cuffing him around the face, he dragged him into an adjacent storeroom from which I could hear the sound of the boy's body being thrown against shelving and filing cabinets. The second boy, who remained kneeling in the staff room, began to shake. The other teachers went on reading their newspapers and drinking green tea, quietly minding their own business, as if all was well with the world. Seized by a flood of grief, I fled to the sanctuary of the women's washroom, locked myself into a cubicle, pressed my forehead to the cold, celadon-coloured tiles, and sobbed uncontrollably for a long time.*

I did not tell any of my student teachers this story. I was their teacher, their practicum supervisor, and it was supposedly my job to be present for them while they cried, not to reveal my tales of shed tears to them. In truth, I was ashamed of how I reacted to witnessing the Japanese boy's beating. I did not confront the violent teacher, or ask other teachers for assistance, or report the matter to the school principal. I keenly felt my youth, my gender, my foreignness, and my sense of powerlessness. Later on, weeks after the incident, I was still deliberating about whether to act or not. In the end, I decided to remain silent. I knew what had happened was not considered culturally inappropriate or grossly abnormal within that

particular educational context. I was an outsider in the Japanese school system and wanted my contract to be renewed for a further year. And I was tired. I was grieving for my mother.

Many years have passed since then. Now a teacher educator, what strikes me as most remarkable is not that my student teachers would cry for themselves and their students, but that they all felt their crying was an unnatural act for a teacher. They struggled to retain their “professionalism,” an emotional neutrality and distance, whenever faced with heartbreaking, unjust situations. My student teachers, without exception, showed no such reserve when expressing pride in their students’ accomplishments, or happiness when a lesson unfolded magically, or joy when those special and rare teachable moments appeared. Their desire for emotional neutrality and distance only appeared when a situation looked hopeless, when they did not know what to do, when progress or resolution seemed impossible. Subconsciously, they felt perhaps that this freezing of their emotions would offer some protection from hopelessness, and not knowing and impossibility. But when they were too tired to fight them back, the tears came anyway. My students cried privately if at all possible, choked back sobs when meeting with me, and apologized profusely if any tears did begin to trickle. They found the tears humiliating.

The word “humiliation” is derived from the Greek *humus*, meaning “of the soil” (Whyte, 2001, p. 125). The humiliating tears were, in a way, bringing my weeping students down to earth, returning them to “the ground of their being” (Whyte, 2001, p. 125), making them acknowledge the physicality and materiality of pedagogical practice. When you are humiliated you pray that the earth will open up

and swallow you whole. In a way, to be humiliated is to wish for a small death. To be humiliated is a transformative experience, which may then lead to a rebirth of spirit. In my role as practicum supervisor, I acted as midwife or doula during this rebirth of spirit, helping the tearful student teacher birth the new self into being, attending to their needs while they were in a state of vulnerability.

My student teachers were not prepared for the intense physicality of the teaching experience. They had not yet come to terms with the materiality of their own and their students' bodies in their classrooms, and the multitude of ways that their own personal lives were interwoven with those of their students, all crisscrossing the professional territory of teaching in unpredictable ways. Poverty, racism and child abuse were no longer abstract concepts, but were written on the living bodies of their students. Some of my students had been seeking economic security, social respectability and upward mobility, as well as a path of professionally rewarding service to the community, by becoming teachers. Suddenly, they found that they loved students, and that they were experiencing fear and anger and sadness as part of their teaching practice. They began to experience the emotional labour of teaching. Their tears were the physical manifestation of the "sweat of the heart" – the heart, which labours to give birth to itself and is never completely born (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 6).

## Coming to our senses

My student teachers did not always feel at home with the rhythm and wisdom of their senses and emotions. And why should they? As Virginia Woolf (cited by Chicago, 1982) pointed out many years ago, developing a strong mistrust of the senses and emotions is all part of the process of becoming a successful professional:

If people are highly successful in their professions they lose their senses. Sight goes. They have no time to look at pictures. Sound goes. They have no time to listen to music. Speech goes. They have no time for conversation. They lose their sense of proportion – the relations between one thing and another. Humanity goes. . . . What then remains of a human being who has lost sight, sound, and sense of proportion? (p. 197)

The majority of the educational institutions of North America – so many of our schools and universities entrusted with educating professionals, such as teachers - - are rooted in long traditions of dualism, which repudiate the emotional dimension of “bodily-sensorial understanding” (Bai, 2001). The tearful student teachers with whom I worked came face to face with the problems of dualism. Each student was well schooled in disciplinary, academic thought. Yet, each suddenly found herself located at a juncture, feeling the power of bodily-sensorial and relational experience, while simultaneously immersed in the prevalent dualistic ideologies of the school workplace and the university. This place of critical convergence was physically marked with the falling of their tears, a flowing of somatic truth. In retrospect I can

see that their tearful release was also my own, as the tears freed us to move forward together to new kinds of conversations about teaching and learning.

Naturally, at the beginning of their long, final practicum, most of my new students yearned for a sense of security and certainty. As their faculty advisor, I tried to help them to experience sufficient security and certainty that they might be able to proceed without freezing up in a state of fear when teaching. "Plan, plan, plan!" I enthusiastically advised them. "I know you can't plan everything, but a good plan gives you a wonderful springboard for successful lessons." This was something my student teachers could hold on to, I surmised. They had all been trained in planning: lesson plans, unit plans, timetabling, planning of assessment, booking resources, fieldtrip planning . . . In one of our first seminars, we discussed the purposes of planning, what could and could not be planned, and why a teacher might plan anyway. We discussed the kinds of things that could derail even the most thoughtfully conceived plans. I thought that at least I was helping them to take some of what they had learned in their university courses into their elementary school classrooms. I was providing a sense of empowerment, a steadying focus. Yet, I felt somewhat unsteady and nervous about giving this advice.

I was advising them to maintain a tightly controlled, objectifying relationship with knowledge. I was prompting them to attempt to eliminate the mystery of human beings and of pedagogical processes and to put themselves in charge of the object-world. This orderly technical-rational approach to teaching, which most North American Faculties of Education promote, and which I was endorsing, reduces school students' educational experiences to "a set of competencies to be performed" (Miller,

1988, p. 26). As such, I felt I was intentionally asking student teachers to enslave themselves and their own students to a set of technical procedures, to become compliant, passive and conformist in the interests of productivity and efficiency, rather than making themselves available to their students in a pedagogically meaningful way. I felt as if I was misrepresenting myself, and everything in which I believed.

Somewhere deep down, however, I knew that no matter how much my student teachers followed my advice to “plan, plan, plan” they would still have to rely on intersubjective, eclectic, intuitive, liberatory, complex, creative, sometimes magical, perhaps even spiritual approaches to teaching, approaches which are not necessarily predictable or quantifiable. When I witnessed my student teachers crying, it was clear to me that I would not have to ask them to undermine the dualistic foundations of their own training: Instead, their tears had already torn apart many of their former assumptions about teaching.

Their tears were emotional expressions of intellectual discomfort and psychic sadness and pain; a release from frustrated expectations of how teaching ought to be, how they were taught that “good” teaching should be; communicative of disorientation and indecision in the face of complex dilemmas; symbolic of a flood of transformation from an old to a new self during a period of intense change. These tears were a wake up call – as Cixous (1997) would say, not a “*larme*” but “an alarm” (p. 43).

Although one or two of my student teachers were still clinging firmly to their lesson plans at the end of the practicum, I had noticed that several of the “tearful

students,” those who had cried on practicum, had noticeably changed their practice. At first they had always felt continually pressed for time, and were unable to slow down enough to experience vital pedagogical moments. The all-important schedule had a mechanizing effect on their days, and on their bodies, reducing the sensuality of their lives to greyness, squashing their creativity and their energy. The world of the teacher-as-curriculum planner is a world of linear progress where time is always running out, a world in which time is “emptied of presence” (O’Donohue, 1998, p. 89). Towards the end of the practicum experience, however, these student teachers frequently displayed a more visible ease with the rhythmic complexity of each teaching day. They still planned, but were somehow more comfortable with the unfurling recursivity of non-linear time, expecting, sometimes even welcoming, the inevitable interruptions – the fun and mock-horror of the earthquake drill and the fire drill, the drama and excitement of the Halloween party, the pride and angst of parent-teacher conferences, the student who has something pressing and important to say in the middle of a lesson. My student teachers now seemed to relax into their own and into their students’ sense of time, a time “swollen by subjectivity, passion, and dreams haunted by reality” (Vaneigem, cited in Jensen & Zerzan, June 2001, p. 52). I, too, was more able to relax into this temporal space.

John Zerzan in an *Utne Reader* (in Jensen & Zerzan, June 2001) interview describes the difference between linear time and the swollen subjectivity and dream-like passion of non-linear time:

I’m talking about time not existing. Time, as an abstract continuing “thread” that unravels in an endless progression that links all events

together while remaining independent of them. That doesn't exist. Sequence exists. Rhythm exists. But not time. Part of this has to do with the notion of mass production and division of labour. Tick, tick, tick . . . Identical seconds. Identical people. Identical chores repeated endlessly. Well, no two occurrences are identical, and if you are living in a stream of inner and outer experience that constantly brings clusters of new events, each moment is quantitatively and qualitatively different from the moment before. The notion of time simply disappears. (p. 52)

What remains when linear time slips away is a flow of bodily reciprocity, an openness to the sensual improvisation of one being meeting another, with the possibility that the experience contained within even the briefest of moments might imprint deeply upon one's life, changing one forever.

## **Sensual wisdom**

From a non/dualistic perspective, “being is generated from the body” (Griffin, 1995, p. 65). The mind is embodied (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1995), and bodies never exist in isolation, but in community with other bodies, and the body of the earth. A person’s emotional/intellectual/sensorial understanding of space and time always arises out of specific locations, contexts, and circumstances, from dynamic, generative interactions with the body of the intelligent universe. One embodied mind is continuously born from another (Griffin, 1995). Non/dualistic knowledge, emerging from the chaotic mingling of body-minds, is unpredictable, refusing the convenience of objectification and ordering into stable systems of categorization. Thus, a non/dualistic relationship to knowledge is necessarily uncertain, unstable and contingent. According to Helene Cixous (in Cixous & Calle-Gruber, 1997), this quality of uncertainty, what Derrida calls the undecidable, “is indissociable from human life” (p. 52). Uncertain knowledge is complex, contradictory, precarious, indeterminate, ambiguous, awkward, messy and difficult. These confounding characteristics should be welcomed, however, as they necessitate a creative approach in dealing with uncertain knowledge, an approach that one might call “wisdom.”

Wisdom is not a thing, but a practice located in the space between knowing and not knowing, believing and doubting, certainty and uncertainty, questioning and answering (Arlin, 1990; Meacham, 1990; Sternberg, 1990). Wisdom is called into play when one is confronted with the inherently thorny problems of life, such as the

tricky situations my student teachers faced on their long practicum. What does a teacher do if she suspects a child is being physically abused, but is not really sure? How does a teacher nurture a child who seems neglected (even if possibly loved) by his parents? A young teacher requires more than professional, procedural knowledge in such situations, more than pure intellect or abstract rationality – although these skills and qualities can surely be of great help. Relational ways of knowing, such as sensual, emotional and intuitive knowledge, are also required. Yet, these relational ways of knowing usually cloud the situation, leading the teacher down paths of uncertainty. In contrast, certainty may prematurely closes down one’s intuitive responses, and ability to adapt to continually changing circumstances. So, gathering together her accumulated experience and wisdom, a teacher must go forward carefully with this awareness of uncertainty, an intuitive sense of what she can and cannot know, certain only that she may have to act, and act decisively.

Perhaps the desire to become a teacher, the sense of vocation which most of my student teachers felt to one degree or another, is a longing to manifest love in the world through everyday physical and emotional and intellectual labour. This love may be manifested through the daily practice of sensual wisdom, a practice that opens and unfolds with a free-flowing ethic of care for the Other. It is a practice that infuses even everyday acts with “an eros, a palpable love, that is also sacred” (Griffin, 1995, p. 9).

**“WHAT SPRING DOES WITH THE CHERRY TREES”:  
TOWARDS AN EROTICS OF PEDAGOGY**

I will bring you happy flowers from the mountains,  
bluebells, dark hazels and rustic baskets of kisses.

I want

to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.

(Neruda, 1924/1993, p. 55)

Pederasty is undoubtedly a useful paradigm for classic Western pedagogy. A greater man penetrates a lesser man with knowledge. . . . The student is an innocent, empty receptacle, lacking in his own desires, having desires “introduced” into him by the teacher. (Gallop, cited by Simon, 1992, p. 70)

## **The dance of eros**

*Who does not remember the first time they fell in love? I was four years old when first stricken. Her name was Miss Britton.*

*I had just entered kindergarten at the Church of England school across the street from the Royal Opera House in Covent Garden. My mother took me to school each morning and left me crying at the classroom door. Pretending not to hear my sobbing, she would steel herself and walk away. School was terrifying -- such a confusing place, full of labyrinthine corridors and cavernous rooms. But during prayers at morning assembly, at the risk of being spotted by a teacher, I would always sneak a look at the pictures of Degas' ballet dancers hung high up on the walls. They were so reassuring, so familiar.*

*My family lived in a Victorian tenement building behind the old Coliseum Theatre, home of the English National Opera and Sadler's Wells Ballet Company. On summer days, the dancers would throw the stage doors open and we would watch them practice in their black tights and leotards, sweating in the stifling heat. Sometimes, if we were lucky, we would see the prima ballerina practice. I had been to many performances already: Giselle, La Fille Mal Gardee, Swan Lake, The Nutcracker. While listening to my mother's old ballet records at home, I dreamed of my debut in the corps de ballet, and my rise to stardom as prima ballerina. I just knew I wanted to be a ballerina when I grew up.*

*My mother, knowing how much I yearned to become a dancer, enrolled me in ballet school. As I lived in constant anticipation of the next ballet lesson, my days at*

*kindergarten trudged past slowly. Eventually seven days would pass and it would be time again. I think my mother sensed how unbearable the last fifteen minutes of this weeklong wait was for me. If we had a little time to kill before the beginning of class, she would take me for a vanilla ice cream at the Italian café with red tablecloths, spending money on a treat she could ill afford.*

*Before each lesson the littlest ballet students would gather in the cramped changing room. We hurriedly changed into our uniforms: pale blue leotards and pink socks and pumps. Mothers pulled their daughters' hair back into tight knots secured with hairpins, black hairnets and regulation pale blue hair bands. Many of us needed help criss-crossing and tying the silky, pink ribbons on our pumps. With only a few moments to spare, we rushed into the practice room, rubbed our feet in the chalk box and stood in first position while Miss Britton, the teacher, and Miss Grace, the pianist, entered. We curtsied and said "Good Afternoon" to each of the ladies in turn. Then we began all the floor exercises, the barre exercises, the music theory, and finally, the dancing. Miss Britton watched each of us and would command: Head up! Tummies and bottoms in! Point those toes! Gentle fingers!*

*Ten very small bodies were disciplined for one hour. I never minded this discipline. I loved it. Most of all, I loved Miss Britton. The attraction was physical. She had a lithe and supple body, milky-white skin, and blond hair that never fell out of its chignon, even when she leapt right across the room, stirring up the still air so that it caressed our faces. I marvelled at the ripple of her thigh muscles when she jumped high in the air. I lived for her smiling praise and the twinkle in her blue eyes when I had done well. I felt a jealous stab in the chest when she complimented*

*another pupil. Miss Britton embodied a whole world, the world of ballet made flesh. This was the world of which I dreamed when I fell asleep on hot, sticky London nights, listening to the wafts of ballet music that drifted in through my open bedroom window. My desire for her body was a desire to enter the world of ballet, to become a part of that world.*

*At four years of age, I discovered that learning was all about passion and desire, all about love. These moments in ballet class were perhaps the happiest of my life. Whenever I return to London and pass by the Italian cafe with the red tablecloths, the pangs of unbearable desire return. The ballet studio is long gone -- demolished by developers. What remains to me now is the strong presence of eros.*

## **Breaking hearts**

Eros, like passion and desire, is ineffable and intangible. It is a feeling of “impossible conceptual definition, but also strong experiential presence”, and what constitutes the erotic varies “sociographically, socioeconomically, sociopolitically, and sociohistorically” (Savigliano, 1995, p. 136). It is eros that creates the desire to unite with others, whether through “affectionate attachments and friendships of the Platonic sort, maternal and paternal love, kin tie and social bonding with work mates or with a community of identity” (Ferguson, 1989, p. 78). Eros is the energy that creates and maintains the strong human bonds that are required for people to survive individually and collectively (Ferguson, 1989). Clearly, gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, as well as one’s physical embodiment are all tightly interwoven with notions of love. Ferguson (1989) believes that, in western culture, sexual and social energies (what I call eros) have been “socially defined, focussed and organised” in such a way as to create and perpetuate a system of male dominance over females, as well as other forms of dominance (p. 62). Thus, sexual and social energies are an inherent part of the patriarchal capitalist system of economic production. Paradoxically, we may experience the flow of sexual and social energies as desirable, pleasurable, sensuous and connecting, even while they promote social and psychic violence (Martusewicz, 1997).

But eros is not only that which creates and maintains systems of collective human bonding. My understanding of “eros” is informed by Schroeder’s (1998) definition of the term:

Eros, in the broad sense, is not confined to the erotics of sexuality, but is that which infuses life into all our partnerships and interactions. Eros is in the partnership of ourselves and creation, between one person and another, between colleagues, students, friends, lovers, and ultimately in relation to our own selves. Eros is the life force. (p. 13)

Eros, the life force, is the vital coupling and uncoupling and re-coupling of the self with environment, an intercourse that gives rise to the reproduction and evolution of both self and environment. This process of coupling is what Maturana and Varela (1987) call “intrapersonal autopoiesis.” We can feel the life force in the rhythmic rising and falling, heaving and rippling of oceans and grasses, kelp forests and sand dunes, winds and rivers. This same force pulsates within our own human bodies, as we too are part of this continuous flow of life.

The recessive and ecstatic qualities of the human body invite erotic intimacy with the world. As recessive-ecstatic beings, we are doubly “absent” to ourselves, once in the internal depths of our viscera, and again in the everyday sensorimotor engagement of our body-senses with the world (Leder, 1990). Leder celebrates this absence of the body to itself:

It asserts that the body is in ceaseless relation to the world. As recessive being, these worldly relations are organic and preconscious. As ecstatic being, we are in a conscious and purposive intercourse with the environment. There is a two-sided linkage, flesh and blood, ecstatic and recessive, each dimension of engagement mirroring the other. (p. 160)

Our bodies form what Leder calls “one organic/perceptual circuit” with the world (p. 160). The flow of energy along this circuit is eros.

This erotic flow “cannot be felt secondhand” (Lorde, 1984, p. 59). Still, writers and thinkers have tried to capture the intriguing magic of eros in their nets of words. Like butterfly hunters, they stalk their prey knowing all the while that by the time they have caught their creature and pinned it to a collector’s board, it will surely be dead. I too am hunting eros. To guide my way, I summon the multiple voices of others who have gone before me in their search for the heart of eros . . .

“All of life is eros, an erotic encounter” says Schroeder (1998, p. 168). “My life and the world’s life are deeply intertwined . . . The world and I reciprocate one another,” writes Abram (1996, p.33). “Intimacy is the secret law of life and the universe,” says O’Donohue (1997, p. xvii). Eroticism is first and foremost “a thirst for otherness,” declares Paz (cited by Schroeder, 1998, p. 122). Eros, firstborn child of the Goddess Chaos, was a central figure in the ancient worship of “sexuality as a primary life-force,” notes Walker (1983, p. 283). Griffin (1995) gently reminds us that the erotic is of the earth: We eat of the earth, we take shelter in the earth, our bodies respond with sleep, blood, semen to the rhythms of the material universe (p. 42).

Eros is a communal gift, a heaping of happy flowers, bluebells, and dark hazels, that is passed around when one meets another, when I meet you, when spring meets the cherry trees. Eros is an opening and receiving, an attunement to the unique gifts of the other that releases swells of joy, passion and desire in the body. Eros is an endless becoming, a perpetual birthing. Eros is fecundity, awakening, change,

growth, a wet flow of creative energy.

Of course, eros is impossible to pin down! It is always in movement, always in relation, always in/complete: Becoming, birthing, flowing, breathing, awakening, changing, growing, opening, releasing, receiving, giving, yearning, heaping, intertwining, responding, reciprocating, encountering, coupling, uncoupling, re-coupling. Living. Being.

All you can say of it is that it is, and it is, and it is. No beginning, no end. All middle.

(Le Guin, cited by Houtekamer, Chambers, Yamagishi, & Striker, 1998, p. 143)

It is a chaotic flux, an entropic process, polysemous, defying “the tyranny of conclusions” (Renta, 1999).

It never stops, is never sated. It continually tempts the hungry monster of desire -- that monster living within each of us -- with tiny morsels of fullness. “Have you ever desired another because you believed the other could fill you, could fill the empty, lonely, dark places in your heart and imagination and spirit and mind?” asks Leggo (1996, p. 236). Yes. What happens to the boys and girls and men and women who meet the monster of desire? Theirs is a story about “the nagging recognition of lack and absence and separateness, a story about the unending desire for wholeness and fulfilment and completeness,” warns Leggo (1996, p. 236). Forsooth:

The human subject desires the Other and desires the Other’s desire.

We spend our lives seeking the Other that will complement us and make us whole again as we believe we were once whole. Of course,

the wholeness never existed, and hence our desire for the complementary Other will never be satisfied. Desire is always frustrating and frustrated, always fruitful and freewheeling, frequently foolish, but fullsome, too. (Leggo, 1996, p. 236)

With experience, we may come to understand all this -- that desire is always frustrated and frustrating -- and, knowing this, we may try to resist the heavy sweetness of its intoxication.

The dance of eros is strange. We find ourselves pushing towards the Other and then pulling away, desiring and fearing, yearning while foreseeing danger. These feelings of tension and ambivalence are present in a poem by Jacopone da Todi (in Harvey (Ed.), 1996), a Medieval Christian mystic, who meditates on his love of God.

Love, I flee from You, afraid to give You my heart:

I see that you make me one with You,

I cease to be me and can no longer find myself.

(p. 195)

Eros creates intimacy between you and me, dissolving the boundaries between us, creating a “transparent self” (Schoeman, cited by Grumet, 1988, p. 165), or transparent selves. This transparency of self allows a “fluidity in friendship, in love, in spiritual communion” (Grumet, pp. 165-166). It is warm, open, and receptive to the other. Yet, the awareness of my own transparency may also be unsettling and disorienting: “. . . you make me one with You,/ I cease to be me . . .”, I am no longer as I was, I am no longer myself, I am something else, someone else, I am a reflection of you, I am you, I am a stranger to myself, I am living somewhere between

“me” and “you.”

We become porous, membranous, wounded when we open to and are opened by eros. We enter and are entered by eros. We break form when we are transformed (Schroeder, 1998, p. 91). We are broken by eros.

My heart is broken,

open.

(Ingram, cited by Jardine, 1992, p. vii)

The erotic encounter causes a break in the heart, forcing an opening in the psyche.

This opening, even if only a tiny crack, becomes the entry to spiritual growth.

The agony of lovers

burns with the fire of passion.

Lovers leave traces of where they've been.

The wailing of broken hearts

is the doorway to God.

(Rumi, in Chopra (Ed.), 1998, p. 17)

The erotic is a paradox of pleasure and pain. Eros is a gift of happy flowers and the face of death.

## **I want to do with you . . .**

Pedagogy is a special kind of erotic encounter, a meeting of teacher and student. The student may find joy in learning something new purely for its own sake. She may find pleasure in fulfilling her desire to become more knowledgeable or skilful or wise or powerful or competent. She may also enjoy successfully meeting the expectations of teachers, parents and community, thus becoming a part of that wider community. But sometimes teacher and student know all the steps of the erotic, pedagogical dance by heart, finding comfort and safety in its predictable order. Then the pedagogical process degenerates into mere routine. Too much comfort and safety and predictability are anaesthetizing: You cannot sleepwalk through the pedagogical experience. The pedagogical dance is a wild and chaotic process, a struggle that is sometimes joyful, sometimes painful.

Simon (1992) calls the agony of pedagogy “disorganization.” Pedagogy, he says, is “a practice within which one acts with the intent of provoking experience that will simultaneously organize and disorganize a variety of understandings of our natural and social world” (p. 56). When students step into this space of pedagogical chaos, they risk the “destruction of their ability to return to a safer, more certain place” (Simon, p. 71). Like the shaman taking an apprentice on a magical journey of initiation, the teacher breaks the student, bringing the student into the death space in order to give new life.

The erotics of pedagogy, its joy and pleasure, as well as its chaos and agony, is truly grotesque, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word. It is a process of wounding

that is mortifying and revivifying, humiliating and life giving. According to Bakhtin (in Morris (Ed.), 1994), the grotesque is characterized by “degradation, that is the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (p. 205). Pedagogy ruptures the student’s everyday understandings, permitting teacher/other knowledge to enter the student. The student merges with that knowledge, becoming, embodying, living out that knowledge in her everyday life. Eros is precisely this process of “natality” which we call education (Jardine, 1990).

Contemporary western educational practices are both “enabling and constraining” (Simon, 1992, p. 56). It is the constraining aspects of the power relations within technical-rational schooling practices that Gallop (cited by Simon) likens to “pederasty,” an act of violent imposition (p. 70). Griffin (1995) describes this violent process of coming to know within the technical-rational system of education -- what she calls the “scientific” knowledge system -- with a startling clarity of perception:

Here there is no easy posture of receiving. No casual meeting. No subtlety or free play. No sultry slow descent to an erotic knowledge by which, just as one takes in knowledge, one is entered by the known, capsized, transformed. Rather the motion is all swift, driven, edged by anxiety, aimed like a weapon is aimed, aggressive, conquering.

Because dominating every effort to know in this terrain is an unmistakable atmosphere of terror. (pp. 136-137)

She continues:

Because to know is an erotic act, one is made vulnerable to what has been before unknown; all knowledge enters the self as the force of change. Yet the Western self, ordered as it is around dominion, does not want to submit. (p. 137)

Griffin portrays the process of teaching and learning within the technical-rational educational paradigm as a battle to the end. Like anyone who has survived a public school system, I know this kind of warfare well.

*When I was seven, my family moved to rural Scotland, and my sister and I were sent to the little school with the thirty-five other children from the village and its surrounding farms. One of my clearest memories of elementary school is from the time when we were being taught how to multiply big numbers, numbers like  $24 \times 953$  and  $589 \times 7102$ . I was always a bright and diligent student, and I knew the steps of the pedagogical routine off by heart. But these big numbers were a complete mystery to me, even after Mrs. Lawrence's hour-long explanations. Mrs. Lawrence would scratch chalk marks across the blackboard furiously, until her fat breasts and tummy were covered with chalk dust, and her hair was dishevelled. Finally, exhausted by her efforts, she would snap, yelling and throwing the remaining bits of chalk at me. Still, I had no idea where to begin with an impossible sum like  $3871 \times 6468$ . And, anyway, why would I ever want to multiply 3871 by 6468? After being warned twice that I would be punished if my math lessons and my math homework were not completed successfully, Mrs. Lawrence decided enough was enough.*

*She ordered me to the front of the class, reached into her desk drawer and*

*pulled out the coiled, leather strap. The whole class was watching, breathless: The strap was for bad boys and Alison was a good girl. I knew what I had to do. I had already seen lots of boys being belted. First, wait until the teacher has finished reprimanding you. Then, hold out your hands steadily. Wait for the sharp stings of the lashes. Do not flinch or move your hands. Apologize to the teacher. With eyes lowered, return to your seat. Somehow, I managed to get through the ordeal, although I was quaking inside. My eyes watered, but I did not let any tears fall.*

*Of course, after receiving the lashes from the strap, I was still unable to do Mrs. Lawrence's math homework. I told myself "I can't do math, I can't do math" thereby rendering myself virtually unteachable. This personal mantra -- "I can't do math" -- stuck with me all through high school.*

Even the best-intentioned teacher may engage in pedagogical warfare of one kind or another. Simon (1992) bravely confesses that as a pusher of liberatory pedagogical practice he has "designs" on his own students. The promise of the lustful lover is also the seductive promise of the teacher:

I want

to do with you what spring does with the cherry trees.

(Neruda, 1924/1993, p. 55).

I want to be your sunshine, I want to bring light to your life, to open you, make you grow. I want to change you. Simon (1992) wonders what alternative there might be to "an eros, which expresses love through the negation of the lived grounds of the other" (p. 71). Is there such an alternative? Are the processes of teaching and

learning so fraught with the tensions of teacher and student desires that conflict and change are inevitable?

Indeed, they are. Teaching, learning and knowing are all erotic acts. Eros is always in movement, always in relation, always in/complete. Eros is a chaotic flux, an entropic process catalyzed by desire. Desire can never be met, filled, satisfied or placated, and is therefore experienced as a lack (Leggo, 1996). This is no bad thing in itself. Leggo writes that the “ongoing experience of lack is a reason for celebration” (p. 240).

Lack refers to the hole in the heart that desires filling. This sense of lack drives me to love others, to want to be with others . . . Desire from a personal sense of lack can be liberating, strengthening, encouraging.

(Leggo, p. 240)

But does our desire, our innate sense of lack, necessarily drive us to negate the “lived grounds of the other” (Simon, 1992, p. 71) in a violent and coercive way? Leggo does not think so:

Lack defined institutionally suggests that people must be programmed, filled, activated (as opposed to actualized), prepared for roles, but a poetic sense of lack suggests experimentation, risk-taking, mistake-making, trying on different masks or subject positions. (p. 240)

Clearly, our collective, sociocultural understandings of terms such as “desire,” “lack,” and “eros” greatly effect the nature of our pedagogical theories and our daily educational practices.

## What spring does with the cherry trees

Sadly, there is a pervasive fear and mistrust of the erotic among western educators and curriculum theorists. To illustrate my point, I will take a look at Madeleine Grumet's (1988) book *Bitter milk: Women and teaching*. At the beginning of her book, Grumet declares: The very ground of knowledge is love. Yet, Grumet chooses to approach love circumspectly, warily touching on the themes of mutuality and intimacy, barely mentioning the erotic. Indeed, these themes are threaded in and out of the text at quite sparse intervals.

Grumet (1988) is almost silent on the topic of the erotic, displaying a confounding, barely disguised hostility toward it. For example, she mentions the erotic once with regard to motherhood:

Motherhood . . . permits the woman to reclaim her body and her breasts from their status as erotic objects hitherto perceived only in their capacity to attract and seduce man. (p. 26)

She discusses the erotic again with regard to teacher/student relations:

[T]he ideal of equality fosters an eroticism that ensnares both teacher and student in their reciprocal gaze. Buber imputes the same objectification to eroticism that he locates in the will to power (pp. 115-116).

Grumet is confusing the erotic with the pornographic. It is the pornographic, not the erotic, which objectifies.

According to Audre Lorde (1984) the erotic is often misnamed or confused

with the pornographic. She writes that our culture has turned the erotic into:  
the confused, the trivial, the psychotic, the plasticized sensation. For  
this reason, we have often turned away from the exploration and  
consideration of the erotic as a source of power and information,  
confusing it with its opposite, the pornographic . . . [P]ornography is a  
direct denial of the power of the erotic. (p. 54)

Lorde believes that the erotic has been denigrated precisely because it is so  
empowering, because it is a source of creative energy. Eros is power is knowledge.

Grumet (1988) does not capture the full spirit or power of eros in *Bitter milk*.  
Instead her discussion of love is mainly confined to the love of “we women” for our  
children. She paints a sentimentalized, romantic portrait of maternal love,  
essentializing the heteronormative, North American, white, middle class ideology of  
motherhood. Grumet’s (1988) saccharine flights are punctured by a few brief  
disclaimers:

The family is a social, historical, and cultural construction. There is  
always the danger that the “family” will be construed as a natural  
rather than a social construction, even that its most sentimentalized,  
confining and oppressive characteristics will be seen as necessary. On  
the other hand . . . (p. xvii)

Then she deftly lets herself off the hook by expressing fears that if she thinks too  
much this way she will “slide into the discourse of political theory, cognitive theory,  
and educational theory” (p. xvii). She does briefly caution the reader to remember  
that some families are not so loving, and that some are even neglectful of their

children. She also points out that the “structure of the school replicates the patriarchal structure of the family” (p. 85). Yet, throughout the text she dichotomizes the loving bosom of the family with the harshness of the school, even going so far as to say that home is a “real living place” (p. 21) whereas “school is not the real world” (p. 162).

Grumet (1988) is leading herself down blind alleys with this kind of argumentation. Perhaps Grumet (1988) is struggling with the paradoxical notion that motherhood, like love, is a real performance, a fiction made flesh. Might “we women” not recognize -- and, if and when we feel like it, enjoy -- the fictional, performative qualities of the institution called motherhood, while simultaneously delighting in the fleshly, sensuous, connecting, empowering erotics of it too? Does it so endanger “our” own gender performance to realize that there are many, many ways to love?

Grumet (1988) does not attend to the many ways in which the erotic is always present in our lives as teachers and students. What is more, she contends that “schools repudiate the body” (p. 129), and that schooling practices sever mind from body (p. 53). I disagree with both of these claims. The body is not rejected by schooling. Indeed, Grumet’s belief that mind *can* be separated from body betrays the dualistic assumptions of her own theory. Schooling is deeply concerned with the disciplining of the body because we experience the erotic flow of desire -- ours and others’ -- within, on, through our bodies. Discursive practices are accomplished “not only through language, but through bodies, through ways of moving, dressing and talking, and through ingrained bodily dispositions or habitus” (Kamler, 1997, p.

373). Thus, the body is a site of daily struggle for power and meaning.

Luckily, no matter how harsh, disciplined, efficient and rational a system of schooling might be, it is impossible to colonize every moment, every body, every daydream, and every corner of every classroom. Eros flows into these wild spaces just as water flows into the earth after a long drought.

*As a schoolgirl, I was a “dreamer.” That is what it said on my report card in Mrs. Lawrence’s barely legible scrawl: Alison is a daydreamer. I would stare out of the classroom window, way into the distance, to the place right on the other side of the village where the wind roared through two hundred year old beech trees and the crows flew in swirling formations, as if they were black iron filings being pulled this way and that by an invisible magnet. My mind ran free, like the wind in the sky, unhindered by what was happening in the classroom. Dreaming was my way of resisting, of withdrawing to a space of freedom. By giving the crows and the treetops my full, loving attention I entered into a meditative state where eros flowed freely.*

As an English teacher in Japan, I once again found myself in a public school system similar to the one I experienced as a child in Scotland. In Kagoshima City, all the school children wore uniforms, they all sat at single desks that were arranged in long rows, they worked in a lock-step fashion from Board approved textbooks, they continually had tests and examinations, they stood when the teacher entered the classroom, they were not supposed to speak unless spoken to, and there was the real possibility of being beaten if they stepped out of line.

As a young, female, foreign teacher I had little status in the school system. I struggled to create classroom environments that were conducive to learning English, but I was forever banging my head against those institutional walls. What can you say to an English teacher who demands total silence at all times in his classroom, even during English conversation class? How do you tell a teacher that his students are not likely to risk making mistakes in an English lesson when he is patrolling the classroom with a seven foot long bamboo stick? What did I do?

I began to look out of the classroom window again. This time my “daydreaming” was more furtive. After all, I was the teacher now. Sometimes I could only sneak a look. Often I would have to wait until the students were quietly writing a test, their heads bent low over their desks. From the classroom windows of Kagoshima City, I had a clear view of a volcano called Sakurajima.

*In Kagoshima City life is lived to Sakurajima's irregular, explosive beat. The volcano erupts every day, usually many times each day. Sometimes there is just the slightest wisp of white smoke, more often there is a billowing cloud, growing, expanding and falling like a perfect atomic mushroom. Occasionally the volcano coughs out little individual puffs of smoke and ash as if it were trying to blow smoke rings. Or it creates a flat flag of ash, blown horizontal by the wind, which sinks slowly downwards, eventually disappearing into the sea. Most of the explosions cannot be heard in the city and so the movement of poisonous gases, ash, and rock through the sky performs a silent, hypnotic choreography.*

*I watched the volcano from the windows of every Kagoshima school that I*

*ever taught in, and I worked in about thirty-six schools in all. I never tired of Sakurajima's chameleon-like persona. It is a red, flaming mountain like the rock at Alice Springs; a pink and orange mountain, shot through with gold, like a young woman's kimono; a flat, black ink mountain against a grey sea and paper white sky; an alpine mountain, each arete finely detailed against a Bavarian blue sky; an icy steel mountain, hovering over cold bands of pale blue cloud and navy blue sea, a floating world. Sakurajima is a slowly developing bruise which never heals -- red, blue, green, purple, black, grey, yellow -- each new colour coming into being not just because of the play of light over its surface, but through seemingly mysterious, internal happenings.*

In time, I learnt that my students were really as untameable as Sakurajima. My orderly classes would often erupt into laughter or disintegrate into chaos. Like the time I told my students that some people of European descent had green eyes. "You mean like space-alien?" they screamed in delight; several little boys laughed so hard they fell off their chairs and rolled around on the floor. Or the time that one boy's ten inch long, poisonous, pet centipede escaped from its box and all the girls squealed and jumped onto their desks. Or the time that two boys decided, completely unannounced, that they would take over the class to perform their stand-up comedy routine, replete with blue jokes in Kagoshima dialect that I could not understand. Or the time that another teacher told my students that my mother had just died, and the students' eyes filled with both sympathy and horror, the thought of a parent's death being unimaginably awful when you are only twelve. Or the time that a sixteen year

old girl stopped our lesson by standing on her chair and giving an impromptu speech in English about how hard it was to communicate with words you cannot understand, and about how her experience of learning English was linked to her love of her classmates and her English teachers. With cheeks flushed red, she stammered and struggled through what she wanted to say. When she finished, her eyes filled with tears, and she received rowdy applause, hugs and cheers from the all-girl class.

How can Grumet (1988) claim that “home is a real living place” (p. 21), whereas “school is not the real world”? (p. 162) School is the real world. It is a real living place, a place full of eros. Beatings with bamboo sticks, school uniforms, tests and examinations cannot dehumanize students. Although the presence of desire is necessary for education to occur, it is impossible to fully control or tame students’ desires. My students would often tell me about their longings, fears, pleasures and dreams in hallway conversations and in the notes and letters that they slipped to me after class. Teachers also confessed their own hopes and dreams -- for themselves and their students -- over cups of green tea in the staff room. Within a technical-rational system of schooling, students are thought to be lacking in knowledge and desire, and the purpose of the schooling process is to fill students with particular kinds of knowledge and desire. Teachers, mere instruments of implementation in this system, are supposed to suppress their desires to ensure the smooth functioning of the schooling process. However, technical-rational systems of schooling are never watertight. Wild eros flows into the cracks in the system, and the cracks are everywhere, in the hearts of all teachers and students.

Teaching and learning are erotic acts. The processes of teaching and learning

involve the ecstatic abandonment of self to the Other, the continual losing and finding of self in the Other, the intimate, sensual engagement of self with the world. It is eros, catalyzed by the bittersweet yearnings of ever-unfulfilled desire, that moves each of us to seek union with the Other. This vital, erotic coupling of self with environment, giving rise to the reproduction and evolution of both self and environment, is educational in the broadest sense of that word. Clearly, an understanding of eros is crucial to the development of an ecological, non/dualistic ethic of embodiment, and holistic educational theory and practice.

By uncovering, musing on and recounting our own experiences of eros -- stories of passion and yearning, pain and loss, betrayal and forgiveness, as well as the blank indifference which is the death of love -- we may begin to understand the role of eros in teaching and learning. But eros is elusive. We try to grasp it, and it slips effortlessly through our fingers. In remembering and retelling stories of eros, we simultaneously unravel and re-create its mystery.

**ON BE/LONGING:  
DIS/PLACEMENT AND  
HYBRID IDENTITIES**

Identity is always conceived in the 'twixt of displacement and reinvention'. . . . [W]e could say that representations of identity are at best a 'rear-view' of a part of the past that is pushing us forward into the future. (Papstergiadis, 2000, p. 193)

I am a foreigner to you, and you are a foreigner to me, and yet we play this game of deception and pretence that we are *not* foreign, that we know one another, that we understand one another, that we acknowledge one another. Let's confess our foreignness, our alienation, our separation, our lack of understanding. (Leggo, 1998, p. 180)

## Who am I?

*I come home, drop my keys and bag on the floor, and press the button on the answering machine to check the messages. This woman has left my husband a message. "Hi Robert, Sweetie. How are you doing? . . ." Anger surges within me . . . Who does she think she is calling my husband like this? . . . I rewind the tape and listen to the message once more. It dawns on me that the voice on the answering machine is mine. That strange woman is me. I listen to the disembodied voice again and again. Breathy. Too girly for my liking. Flirtatious. A mongrel's voice.*

On first hearing my voice, people often ask me: Are you Irish? Or: Are you English? Or: Are you Scottish? Or: Are you Canadian? I have also been asked if I am Finnish, Swedish, Polish, German, French, Dutch, South African, Australian, American, or a New Zealander. I was born in London, England. Yet, when I first meet people from south-eastern England they usually ask me, "Where are you from?" It is hard for people to place me. This voice of mine sometimes gives me away, revealing parts of my identity, and sometimes conceals and disguises my identity, deceiving even me.

After many migrations, even I no longer recognize my own voice. I am and am not Irish, English and not English, brought up in Scotland but not Scottish, Canadian but not a "real" Canadian. I now have three passports. I have lived, worked, travelled and studied on four continents. I have set up home, and packed up

and moved on more times than I can count. After arriving in Canada, I began to dream about my sense of displacement.

*I wake up, finding myself in a strange room. I lie in bed, looking up at a high ceiling. Peppermint green paint is peeling off the walls. I'm not sure what time it is or how long I've been sleeping. In my foggy state I wonder: Where am I? What country am I in right now? What language will I be trying to speak today? I begin to strain my ears for sounds that could help me gain my bearings: the mournful cry of the sweet potato seller, a police car siren, the quiet roar of traffic, the screech of a peacock, a gentle lowing and the clip-clopping of cows on their way to milking, the call to prayer from a mosque. Now I really do wake up, leaving the dream behind me, yet remaining in a state of disorientation. Only at this point do I remember that I am in Vancouver, Canada.*

If the experience of displacement has become the paradoxical starting-point for understanding the parameters of belonging in the modern world, then this entails a challenge to the conceptual framework for understanding identity and culture. (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 188)

As every doctoral student knows, each new graduate course begins with a round of introductions. The teacher usually says: Why don't we go around the class and each say something about ourselves, about who we are? As the semesters went by, I ended up saying less and less about myself. I would say my name, that I was a

student in the Centre, and that I had interdisciplinary interests, and simply leave it at that. I had quickly learned that simply being British carried considerable baggage. (For example, my physician informed me, "Of course, you're getting migraines. British people are all so stiff necked, walking around with their locked jaws." I changed doctors.) Basically, the less said, the less there would be for others to dislike. Whenever discussions of postcolonial theory came up in other graduate classes, I occasionally found myself a "safe" target for some students. In a system of advantage based on race and ethnicity, if I was white and British, I must be the colonial oppressor incarnate. Because of the inherent power differentials that exist within a racist society, the prejudices of those who identify against the dominant group are not usually considered as destructive as those who identify against less powerful, minority groups (Tatum, 1992).

*The tendency to seek safe targets reached an extreme in one graduate class. There, the students, feeling intensely vulnerable – emotions of shame, guilt, anger, despair and embarrassment having been aroused by the material they were studying -- vied with one another for the approval of the teacher to be "the most socially oppressed." The students turned first on a woman student who held a senior university administrator's post, then on the only man in the class, and so on, first isolating, then picking off those whom they felt to be the most socio-economically and culturally advantaged, tearing into them publicly with seemingly no provocation, pushed on in their hunt for validation and belonging. One woman hid the knowledge of her loving little family, the husband and child with whom she lived, from the other*

*students, and claimed at the beginning of the course to be a lesbian community activist – all, I presume, for the benefit of the voyeur-teacher. When discussing issues of social justice, it was easier to pin convenient labels to oneself, to feel guilty, to throw blame at one another, and to call one another names.*

*In the first week of the class the solitary male student more or less said: Don't point your fingers at me. I'm gay, and I may be white, but I'm Irish. He then felt free to direct various anti-British comments my way. Not to be outdone, I also childishly decided to assert myself, and said, in front of the whole class, "Well, I'm Irish too. I'm an Irish citizen, and I have an Irish passport. Are you an Irish citizen? Do you have an Irish passport?"*

*"No," said the man sheepishly. "I have neither," and he confessed that his sense of Irishness really only went so far as drinking green beer on St. Patrick's Day. From then on he, and some of the other students, looked at me differently, as if I were suddenly not the enemy; I was after all "more Irish" than he was.*

I had never before publicly claimed an Irish identity for myself. I may have said, "I have some Irish relatives" whenever someone asked about my ancestry, but I had never said I *was* Irish. I found it disconcerting to hear myself speak like this publicly, although it was true that I had Irish citizenship and an Irish passport. However, I had only set foot in Ireland the once, when I was a toddler.

Each of the students in that class had claimed some special kind of identity – Jew, gay, lesbian, working class, Irish, whatever, to fit into a hierarchy of suffering, and to be immune from "blame" for colonial brutalities and injustices. Whereas in a

supportive, respectful environment, our individual and different identities – our fragmented and contradictory stories, histories, cultures and topographies, those matrices of narrative borne out of complex experiences of race, ethnicity, gender and class -- might have been a good starting place for learning, a source of richness and fertility, the defensive pantomime of this class halted any helpful discussion. We were all too busy posturing as victims in order not to be seen as perpetrators. We had all decided *en masse* somewhere at the beginning of that semester to shirk our responsibility as students and as educators.

Oh, how proud my Irish grandma would have been of me – to be so insulted for *being British!* “Better their envy than their pity!” as she used to say. My grandmother, mother and father taught me mistrust, hatred and contempt for the Irish . . . for themselves, for myself. It is not so odd, then, that I should so grudgingly declare myself to be Irish in one graduate class, and simultaneously be the target of remarks about the British in other classes. Was I Irish or British? Had I been “passing” as British all along? Actually, I was caught between two nations, between two hatreds, living in the middle of inherited shame.

What a relief then, to begin a graduate course where the professor (Aoki, 1999) introduced the first class, not by asking, “Who are you?” but rather “What conditions make it possible for us to ask the question ‘Who are you?’” Such a question allows for the possibility of an anti-essentialist view of identity. It turns the concept of ethnicity “out of its anti-racist paradigm, where it connotes the immutable difference of minority experience, and into a term, which addresses the historical positions, cultural conditions and political conjectures through which all identity is

constructed” (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 190). Rather than locating identity in those all-too-familiar, fixed binaries – the dual polarities of black and white, Jew and gentile, hetero- and homosexual, etc. – identity may be conceived as an ongoing process of hybridity, in which one’s sense of self is continuously made and re-made. In such a paradigm, each person’s particular, subjective understanding of their ethnic, cultural, gender, and class locations provide a narrative wellspring of stories of self, which flow into and constitute the vast delta of broader cultural narratives.

## **Longing to belong: The family's stories**

My family's stories, the ones that were handed down to me, a few of which I shall now relate, weave a complex dance around the colonial axes of English and Irish identity. There are the "British narratives" of propriety and gentility, of middle class status, and modest inherited wealth, which were much beloved, and oft repeated, by both my parents. And then there are "Irish narratives" of immigration and hardship, of struggle, oppression, marginalization, and social upward mobility born out of prudence, cultural adaptation and hard work. My mother and father, preferring to think of themselves as British, chose to disregard their Irishness. Yet, the "Irish narratives" that they tried to conceal from my sister and me, simply would not fade away. They were revealed to us in throw away snippets of conversation, in unguarded asides, in papers that were stashed away secretly for years, in tall tales my father would tell us when drunk, and in the mutters of one parent maligning the behaviour of the other, blaming their spouse's failings on bad breeding and that damned Irish blood.

Employing Aritha van Herk's (1991) notion of the doubleness of "overt" and "covert" stories, in particular the doubleness of immigrant family narratives, I explore some of the stories about my family that I have gathered over the years. It seems to me that within my family I have taken on the role of watcher, listener, and keeper of family secrets. It is my sincerest wish that in telling my family's stories here, I am able to do them justice, honouring the spirit of my ancestors, even as I recount

weaknesses and lapses in judgment on their part, all the while hoping that they will forgive any weaknesses and lapses in judgment on mine.

*At the end of the nineteenth century, one half of my grandmother's family in Skibbereen, County Cork came into a small inheritance, sold everything, and sailed off to begin a new life in America. The other impoverished side of the family, my grandmother's side, made their way from Ireland to the east end of London.*

*"And what did they do when they arrived in London?" I asked my uncle, trying to piece together my family history now Mum was gone.*

*"Well, they were coal whippers," my uncle said, looking a little embarrassed.*

*"What's a coal whipper?"*

*"It's a man who carries sacks of coal at the docks."*

*The heaviest, dirtiest work, the work not wanted by the English dockworkers, was given to the new, young Irish immigrants. Soon after arriving in England, the remains of my grandmother's large family disintegrated. Three of her beloved brothers died in the trenches fighting for the British in World War I, as did two uncles. Another brother died of tuberculosis. Her aunt soon followed her mother and father to the grave. As an orphaned Irish girl in London, Grandma's life was hard.*

*When staying at my grandmother's old place, which was now my uncle's home in London, literally a stone's throw from where he and my mother grew up, I discovered a cache of papers. I was looking for old family photographs in a cupboard, and was surprised by my find. My mother had never shown me these old letters, or even talked about them. They were letters to Katie, my grandmother, from*

*two of her three brothers who had fought and died in northern France during the First World War. Katie's older brother, Timothy, whom she adored, was a kind of father figure to her after her parents died. He wrote protective letters home from the front saying, "Things aren't so bad," and "We'll be home soon," and asking Katie, "Do you need any money?" Clearly, while the boys were away the few remaining family members, mostly women, were finding it harder than usual to survive. The other younger brother, Daniel, wrote more open letters to Katie about the constant winter cold, the rats that nibbled on your feet when you tried to sleep, the way the trenches where the infantrymen lived for months on end were flooded and filled with mud, and how the officers had it easy. Then, at the bottom of the pile of letters, this fragile heap of brown crumbling paper, I discovered two more short letters, one from each brother's commanding officer, each in beautiful flowing handwriting, telling the relatives back home how the brothers had fought so bravely, and died so valiantly. There were also two receipts for the pitiful remuneration that my grandmother's family received for the death of each brother. Katie had kept these papers all her life. When she died, my uncle inherited them with her other possessions.*

*My mother had told me that she had three uncles who had died in the First World War, but that is all I really knew of them. Now I had actually read their letters, with their shakily pencilled handwriting, misshapen letters and spelling mistakes. I began to understand some of the struggles of these young workingmen, my great-uncles. I felt so sad that they should be forced to leave Ireland due to tenuous economic circumstances, and that they should die abroad under the flag of a country that so despised them. My mother always cried when she heard the hymn*

There will always be an England. *She said she thought of her poor dead uncles whenever she heard it. Now I also cry when I hear There will always be an England, because I think of my mother, and about Grandma who felt so alone.*

*My grandmother, Katie, survived her childhood, grew up, and became a barmaid who mixed cocktails at the Café Royal in Mayfair, London. She married an Englishman called Jack, who I am told was also an orphan. Jack was what my mother called a "heating engineer."*

*"You mean, he was a glorified plumber," I would tease, and Mum would insist, "No, a heating engineer; he designed and installed heating systems. He installed the heating system at Wembley Stadium," and she'd press her lips together in annoyance.*

*Jack, Grandma Katie's husband, was descended from a long line of Yorkshire Quakers. His grandmother and two maiden aunts, Rhoda and Polly, the last of the family apart from Jack, had taken him in after his parents were gone. The family, being Quaker, had traditionally worked hard at their family business for generations and lived simply and below their means, accumulating quite some wealth. But Rhoda and Polly's husbands had died, one from tuberculosis, another from alcoholism, leaving the women to fend for themselves as best they could.*

*Polly and Rhoda had been brought up as ladies, and knew how to play the piano and speak French, but they knew nothing of how to survive without a man to take care of financial matters -- "as women alone in the world" is how my mother liked to put it. They had never worked, except to model riding habits in an exclusive Bond Street store. Ignorant of so many worldly affairs, and reliant on predatory*

*hired help, they soon found their funds dwindling. After my mother died, my sister and I divided her possessions, and I chose to keep two pairs of full-length white calfskin gloves that had belonged to my great-great-aunts, Rhoda and Polly. The gloves were so tiny I could not imagine what small, slender hands my aunts must have had. "Does leather shrink with age?" I joked with my sister, "Or are ladies' hands so much smaller than other women's?" By the end of the Second World War, Rhoda and Polly's lovely house, their family heirlooms, and their money were all gone. Perhaps the Quaker side of the family had moved too much in the direction of gentility and too far away from their faith, and the life of duty and hard work that went with it.*

*When my mother was growing up, my grandparents, Katie and Jack, urged her to comport herself and to speak just like her Great-aunts, Polly and Rhoda. My mother was dressed beautifully: One of Grandma's sisters worked as a seamstress for a Bond Street couturier, and made each of my mother's tailored outfits. Mum's dark golden hair hung thick around her face like Lauren Bacall's, and she wore little white gloves whenever she went out. She left school at sixteen and was considered most fortunate to be sent to secretarial college so that she could then go on to work for a large London bank. She also worked as a waitress every night at the famous Grovesnor Hotel. The family could now afford vacations, and my mother eventually travelled to Italy, Switzerland, France, and as far away as Yugoslavia.*

*Mum often told me that she and Grandma had never really liked one another. Perhaps because my mother had become the young English lady, like Polly and Rhoda, that my grandmother never really could be. Of course, my grandmother*

*wanted the best for my mother. She wanted for her daughter what she never could have for herself: To be English: To be a lady.*

In the 1930s when Mum was growing up, racism against the Irish was still rampant: Indeed, she and my grandmother must have surely internalized much of it. At the end of the nineteenth century, when my grandmother's family arrived in England, the Irish were still being portrayed as monkeys in popular English cartoons and advertisements (McClintock, 1995). My sister reminded me the other day that up until the 1970s, when the Race Relations Act was passed, it was not unheard of for London pubs to have a "No dogs, no blacks, no Irish" sign above the door.

*My grandmother coped with all this prejudice by trying to become English through and through. She taught my mother to hate the Roman Catholic Church. Yet, she had my mother christened in the local Italian Church. Almost a year after my mother gave birth to me, I had still not been christened: Grandma was furious. "What if the babe dies? Don't you care about what will happen to her soul?" she implored my mother. My grandma, she hated the Church but loved churches. She would often stop in during the week with her shopping bags to light a candle and have a quiet prayer. Grandma also loathed the "Bog Irish," by which she meant those Irish people who had lived on subsistence farms just as her family had probably done for generations. And she despised the "Drunken Irish." But she always took care of her own alcoholic sister, making sure her house was clean, that there was food on the table, and that her sister's children were well clothed and shod.*

My grandmother's conflictive behaviours arose from the clash of two incommensurable cultures. Seemingly contrary on the surface, her actions in everyday life were a vital embodiment of the inner struggles of her hybrid identity.

[H]ybridity implies the coexistence of different conflictive belief systems, languages, styles, and linguistic consciences, separated from one another by an epoch, by social differentiation or by some other factor. (De Grandis, 1994, p. 221)

For my grandmother, the conflictive belief systems were those of colonizer and colonized, English and Irish, her personal Roman Catholic faith and the English national faith of the Protestant Church of England.

*When an "older" lawyer who worked at my mother's bank, a veteran of World War II in his twenties, asked for my mother's hand in marriage my grandmother would not allow it: Her English daughter would never marry a Pole! Imagine how infuriated my grandmother then was when my mother began to date an Irishman -- Irish and from the North. Whenever this Protestant man came to the house to court my mother, Grandma, the Englishwoman, would start to sing old, Irish Republican songs in Gaelic! Of course, my mother married the Irish man, who was to become my father. In turn, my father warned me: Stay away from those Catholic boys! And I grew up and went off and married an Irish-Canadian, a Catholic to boot.*

Whenever the process of identity formation is premised on an exclusive boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’, the hybrid, which is born out of the transgression of this boundary, figures a form of danger, loss, and degeneration. If, however, the boundary is marked positively – to solicit exchange and inclusion – then the hybrid may yield strength and vitality. Hence, the conventional value of the hybrid is always positioned in relation to purity along the axes of inclusion and exclusion. (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 174)

My Oxford English Dictionary’s (Pearsall & Trumble (Eds.), 1995)

definitions of Irish include:

1. of or relating to Ireland.
- 2 (a). of or like its people and culture.
- 2 (b). (of a statement or expression) paradoxical, (apparently) illogical.

So, to say, “That’s Irish!” is a derogatory colloquialism for something that is apparently completely paradoxical and illogical. That is, of course, what happens when you’re taught to hate yourself, when your heart becomes colonized, when your family still clings to fragments of a place and a time and a history long past despite successive migrations, with each generation fanning out across the colonies to do the Empire’s work.

## Orphans: Erased stories

I have been seeking the truths of my identity in the overt and covert stories of my family history. But in so doing, I have come to recognise that the history of my family, which for the most part is an oral history, has been told and retold in ways that change and reshape the meaning of events. These repeated tellings and retellings thrust certain characters, themes, family triumphs and sufferings to the fore, while pushing others out of sight. In seeking the clarity and truth of my identity amidst such a stormy sea of narrative, I have clung to my female ancestors' bloodlines as if they were lifelines, speaking their names like the recantation of a protective spell . . .

Daughter . . . Me (Alison Catherine)

Mother . . . Kay (Catherine)

Grandma . . . Katie (Catherine)

Great-grandma . . . Elizabeth

Great-great-grandma . . . Johanna

In the Celtic tradition to speak the true name of a person, creature or thing is to know the power of its spirit.

The questing after the name is in order to be able to summon that force or person, to call that person close to oneself, and to have relationship with that person . . . [T]o say a person's name is to make a wish or blessing over them each time their name is called. . . . In the naming

we discover personal and hidden meanings and the wildish beauty of womanliness. . . . (Estes, 1992, p. 122-123)

I yearn for the closeness of my ancestors, for womanly relationships of wildish beauty. Yet, with every retelling of my family story, I discover broken places in these ancestral lifelines, and wonder how they could ever be mended. My family story is not a narrative of love flowing gently and steadily from one generation to the next – although this is how I would like to tell the story and have it be known. It is more a story of interrupted love and unknown love, early death and tragic death, abandoned hope and abandoned children, a succession of orphaned generations.

The word orphan has more than one meaning. My Oxford English Reference Dictionary (Pearsall & Trumble (Eds.), 1995) reads:

orphan . . .

1. a child bereaved of a parent or usually both parents.
2. a person bereft of previous protection, advantages, etc.
3. the first line of a paragraph at the foot of a page or column.

A narrative orphan is a story that is left hanging at the bottom of the page. With my family story, when I reach the bottom of a page, I turn it over, seeking a continuation of narrative on the other side. But the next page is more often than not completely blank. A narrative orphan is also an erased story, a story that is too horrible, shameful, or sad to tell, a story that is incommensurable with the public face of the family, or the expectations of a community, nation or Church.

*The Great Starvation*

*I remember my battered elementary school texts, with their tales of Cecil Rhodes, Stanley and Livingstone, Edmund Hillary, Robert Scott, General Wolfe, and my favourite, Florence Nightingale. These were tales of noble aims, valiant deeds, and outrageous derring-do. In elementary school I learned that the British Empire brought peace, justice and stability to the “uncivilized world.” The stories in the schoolbooks always happened so far away, in the Crimea, Antarctica, Africa, and Canada. But what of Ireland? It was as if the story of our neighbours were erased from textbooks altogether, a story that could not, would not, be told.*

Skibbereen, where my Grandmother’s family came from, is famous today for only one thing. It was the epicentre of one of the most appalling social catastrophes of the nineteenth century – the Irish Famine of 1846 to 1847. The word “famine” suggests a widespread hunger caused by a natural phenomenon. Indeed, the Irish Famine is usually blamed on the fungus that ruined the potato crop, which was the only source of sustenance for the poor peasant class. In recent times many Irish scholars, recognizing that the Irish Famine was not a natural disaster but an ethnic cleansing fuelled by genocidal policies (see Fogarty, 1995; Hughes, 2002; O Snodaigh, 2002; Roden, 2002; Sweeny, 1996), have searched for a more apt name to describe the extermination of millions of Irish people. Many now prefer to speak of the Great Starvation, or the Irish Holocaust.

The Starvation was only one short period in a long history of genocide, however. Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I approximately one and a half million

Irish peasants were killed or starved to death (Hughes, 2002). Then, under Cromwell's rule a further one third of the population was wiped out, and tens of thousands of Irish boys and girls sold into slavery in the West Indies (Hughes, 2002). Historians argue about the actual number of Irish people who died in the Great Starvation: The number of dead are estimated to be in the millions, and the numbers of those who emigrated as refugees during the period of the Starvation are similarly high (Fogarty, 1995; Hughes, 2002; Roden, 2002). To put these huge figures in context, the current population of Ireland is just over 3.6 million people.

As much as the history of the colonization of Ireland has been buried, the prevailing attitudes of the English towards the Irish at the time of the Starvation can clearly be seen in the headlines, articles and editorials of the *Times* of London, and in public statements made by prominent citizens and Members of Parliament. The potato blight was seen as a blessing, an answer to English prayers, and a solution to the "Irish problem." In 1847, one *Times* editorialist wrote: A Celt will soon be as rare on the banks of the Shannon as the red man on the banks of the Manhattan (cited by Fogarty, 1995, p. 1). Nassau Senior, who was Queen Victoria's chief economist wrote that he feared existing British policies in Ireland "will not kill more than one million Irish in 1848 and that will scarcely be enough to do much good" (cited by Fogarty, 1995, p. 1). Charles Edward Trevelyan, Permanent Under-Secretary to the Treasury, refused an American food relief ship entry into Ireland, and said of the Starvation, "We must not complain of what we really want to obtain" (Fogarty, 1995, p. 1).

At the time of the Starvation, the British were exporting enough food from Ireland to feed the entire Irish population twice over. The export of the food – dairy produce, grains, poultry, etc. -- was closely guarded by many tens of thousands of armed troops and policemen. The Irish were forbidden to fish in the rivers that were stocked with plentiful supplies of salmon. They were often forbidden access to the shore. When the blight turned the potato crop to a black mush, the majority of the people, who already lived in conditions of dire poverty, first ate their seed potatoes, and their poultry and livestock. The starving populace pawned or sold all their possessions, including their furniture and clothing, and their means of making a living such as farm equipment, and fishing boats and nets.

If people could not pay their rent, they were evicted. Often their humble cottages were torn down so that they could not return. It was an offence to be found out of doors after sunset (Fogarty, 1995). Further, the dispossessed could not turn to friends or relatives for help; it was forbidden for good Samaritans to take in the homeless on pain of losing their own homes (Roden, 2002). Corpses piled up at roadsides: people dropped when they could no longer go on, skeletal, wizened, naked, with their mouths dyed green from eating grass. The living were too weak to bury the dead properly. Bodies were hastily covered by a few inches of earth. In Skibbereen, one mass grave contains between 8,000 to 10,000 bodies. There are many such mass graves in Ireland. Many corpses simply rotted where they fell, however.

Despite their history of resistance and political struggle, the Irish have suppressed stories from the time of the Great Starvation. People did not tell their descendants about what they had lived through, and chose not to discuss the horrific

years of 1846 and 1847 – perhaps to protect their children, or so as not to have to relive the pain of those times. There was a kind of ethnic and national shame attached to the subject that prohibited talk of past suffering. Descendants of the survivors from this period are only beginning to rediscover this aspect of Ireland's not so distant past.

I did not learn about the Starvation from my own family. Indeed, my mother and uncle never mentioned a word of this family history to me: They never learnt about our Irish family history from their mother either. We have no family heirlooms from Ireland. The earliest family photographs dating from the late nineteenth century, the family Bible, and the odd piece of family jewellery are all from my mother's father's side. What was passed down to my sister and I was a great silence, and a deep shame.

Perhaps this story, the story of the Great Starvation, is the most significant and complete erasure from my oral family history. I find the totality of the absence of the Great Starvation story from our family lore absolutely stunning. It is an example of how one immigrant family, one among many, can suppress their story until it is almost extinguished.

### *Family betrayal*

*Although there had been periods of widespread hunger in Ireland several times after the Great Starvation, my family probably never had the financial means to leave County Cork until the receipt of a small inheritance. This inheritance enabled*

*them to move away from the starvation and sufferings of life in Ireland, and it also split the family in two.*

*My great-great-grandmother, Johanna Corcoran, was born some time during or just after the Great Starvation – under what circumstances she and her family survived I will probably never know. Anyway, she and her husband, a man named O'Donaghue, emigrated from their home in Skibbereen to London with some of their fully grown children -- one of whom was my great-grandmother – as well as all of their children, including my grandmother, Katie. Apparently, no one had ever wanted to go to England in the first place; my side of the family lost a huge dispute about how the meagre inheritance was to be divided. The family members who won the dispute used a sizeable portion of the inheritance to pay for their passages across the Atlantic to a new life in America.*

*The plan was for my relatives to wait patiently in England until money could be sent for their fares so that they might also emigrate to the United States. While the “fortunate” side of the family sailed away, those who stayed behind lived and worked in squalid conditions in London’s East End. The family members in London waited and waited, but the fares for their passages never came. Eventually they gave up all hope. My great-grandmother died young, leaving her youngest child, my grandmother, Katie, an orphan. As Katie was unable to fend for herself, she was sent to live with the matriarch, Great-great-grandma Johanna. Poor again, and with so many mouths to feed, there was absolutely no chance for the family to emigrate to the States.*

*From the way the story was told to me, the London relatives felt that the American relatives had betrayed them, and that they were now doubtless all prospering in the New World. Yet, no one really knows what became of these Irish-American relatives. I wonder if they even survived the Atlantic passage on what were then called the "coffin ships?" The ships with their cramped cabins were pestilent, disease-ridden death traps.<sup>1</sup> If my relatives did make it across the Atlantic, did they really find their fortunes? Or did they struggle to get by? Maybe they didn't speak much English. Maybe they saw those "Irish Need Not Apply" signs when they looked for worked in America. I will never know: My mother just whispered snippets to me about "The Family Feud."*

I have heard that the traditional Irish Gaelic language has no word meaning "to emigrate." There is only the word for "exile."

#### *Icelandic blood*

*My mother told me on several occasions that we had Icelandic blood in us that came from her mother's side of the family, but that she didn't know anything about exactly how or when this Icelandic blood came to be flowing through our veins. Did I have an ancestor who sailed to Iceland on a whaling ship or in search of shoals of herring? Looking back at the names of my grandmother's ancestors, I see only Irish names: Kirby, Corcoran, O'Donaghue. No Icelandic names there. He's not*

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<sup>1</sup> To illustrate the how terrible the conditions on the ships were: Of the 100,000 Irish people who arrived in Canada in 1847, only 60,000 were alive one month after landing (Fogarty, 1995).

*likely to have married into my family then, if it was an Icelandic man. It probably was a man: Why would a woman be travelling so far away from home without male relatives? Perhaps my Icelandic ancestor was a sailor or fisherman who stopped for a while on the west coast of Ireland? Did he seduce one of the women in my family, or was she raped? There would be no records of any births from such an encounter. And it is not the kind of story a good Roman Catholic family would like to repeat in public. No one else in my family, no one who is still alive today, has ever heard this story before. Not even my sister. Now, why is that?*

#### *Wartime evacuation*

*My mother and her brother were not orphaned in the strict sense of the word. But my mother and Michael were bereaved of their parents' company for quite some time. In a way, one could say that they were temporarily orphaned. During the war, the siblings were evacuated to escape the constant bombing of London. Along with thousands of other children, they were put on trains and sent to live in the countryside far away from the city. All I know of this period is that my mother tried to run away from the foster family with which she was placed. One day, she was discovered leading a ragtag band of children back home on the road to London. They were all recaptured by the police and returned to their foster families. Mum never told me anything about life during the evacuation, except to proudly relate this story of the one time she almost made it home.*

In the stories of my family, there are countless narrative gaps, shadows, and silences, which abruptly interrupt the flow of the known, and which work to magically dissolve the seemingly solid Irish and English polarized identities of my ancestors.

*Great-grandma Maryann*

*My mother always told me that her father, my grandfather, Jack was an only child and an orphan. Jack's mother, my great-grandmother Maryann, had died young, soon after she had married. That's why, as a young boy, Jack had been sent away to live with other relatives. He never really knew his mother at all. And so my mother had nothing to tell me about Maryann.*

*A few months ago I happened to be talking to my Uncle Michael and I asked him if he knew how Great-grandmother Maryann had died. I expected to hear a story about a tragically early death from an infectious disease that is easily preventable nowadays. Instead, my uncle told me that Jack's mother, Maryann, did not die young, and that Jack was not orphaned. Michael said that after Maryann's husband died, she went back to live with her German Jewish family of birth. Not only that, Michael went on to explain that Maryann had been married to Jack's father for sixteen years, and Jack had three other siblings.*

*I could hardly believe this story. Why had no one ever mentioned to me that my grandfather's mother was a woman of German Jewish descent? Did my mother lie to me about Maryann's heritage, or did she just not know? My Uncle Michael knew. How could my mother not know? I tried to get more facts out of Michael. Did*

*Jack really have no relationship at all with his mother when he was older? Did he really never visit her? Did she ever write to him? Did anyone know where she lived? Michael simply said that no one knew anything. I remember my mother telling me that I was related to a Jewish man, who founded a famous publishing house that bore his name. Was this man a relative of Maryann's? I wish I had been more inquisitive while my mother was alive.*

*How odd to say that Maryann, who had four children, would not be a part of our family, the Winterton family -- after all, she had the Winterton name. Why would she go back to her family of birth?<sup>2</sup> Did the Wintertons not think of her as part of our family? She had been married to my great-grandfather for sixteen years, but she was still quite young. Why would a mother abandon her four children like that? Maybe she wanted to remarry, but didn't want children from a previous marriage in a new relationship? Or was it the case that my family was so anti-Semitic that they made it intolerable for her to stay? Did they force her out? I remember my mother telling me that one of our ancestors had married a Jew. "But they married out of the family, not into it," said my mother, as if to reassure me that my blood was a "pure" mix of Irish and English.*

*Lately I've been thinking that maybe Maryann did not abandon her children. If she were Jewish wouldn't she have raised them in her own faith, in her own traditions, in her own community? I wonder what life was like for my grandfather,*

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<sup>2</sup> The surname "Winterton" is a pseudonym that I have employed for the purposes of this research. I have done so in order to ensure the anonymity and protect the identity of the remaining living members of this side of my family.

*Jack, in the 1920s. Did he face discrimination in the trade he practiced? Perhaps he converted for an easier life? This version of the story seems the most plausible. Did my Jewish relatives cut my grandfather off in disgust at his conversion, or did my grandfather remove himself completely from contact with the family so that no one would suspect that he had a Jewish mother, sister and brothers? I am guessing at so much here.*

*My mother and uncle have both tried to bob and weave around the family's Jewish heritage for so long, I'm beginning to think that whenever they told me that a family member was dead, they really meant "dead to me" or "dead to our side of the family." I'm beginning to believe that my family simply "disappeared" its Jewish members -- disappeared them narratively speaking, as well as in the breaking of all physical contact. But these narrative disappearing acts caused significant repercussions in the lives of all the family members concerned. The various threads of each relationship were simply broken -- brothers, sisters, mother, son, grandchildren, aunts, and uncles, all torn apart. What did my Jewish relatives think of this narrative disappearance? Did they also "disappear" the Winterton side of the family? Even though the narrative annihilation of the family circle occurred before the Holocaust of World War II, it must have been felt as a devastating blow, a betrayal, an injury to the heart.*

Secrets will out. The old family stories do not hold water, and at the slightest narrative prodding they fall to pieces. The limited dualistic polarities of my Anglo-Irish family history, a narrative that struggled to hold itself together despite

incoherences and inconsistencies, could not contain one further dangerous chaotic element, that of Jewishness. In my family's narrative of binarised identity this third element seemed untenable, dangerous even, and would have acted as a counternarrative to the tales that had been carefully spun by my family members over generations. In continuing the narrative suppression of the family's Jewishness, my uncle and my mother, chose not to know, did not seek to ask, and decided never to tell. However, their complicity and ignorance must have been shot through with some knowledge of our history. "[W]hat we know and what we don't know are always co-implicated" (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 76).

*It seems likely that Great-grandmother Maryann's children were not abandoned or lost after all. Maybe in abandoning his family, it was my grandfather, Jack, and his children who became the lost ones.*

## **The foreignness of family**

Family is more than just a small tribe of people who may or may not live together. It is a complex web of relationships, located in material contexts. My childhood family is the sound of the foghorn on a wet and windy Ayrshire night, the aroma of roast chicken on Sunday after church, the sting of my father's hand as it strikes my face, my little sister's freckles and brown curls, the softness of the silk scarves in my mother's top drawer, the swing of the billycan as I walk across to the farm to get the day's milk with the smell of the byre slowly filling my head.

Most people feel as if they know their families, all that loving and hating and good and bad, the difficult characters and weird personalities. I certainly did. I thought I knew the overt and covert fables of my own family of birth, thinking that their narratives were an unbroken tale that unfurled like a long scroll from the distant past to the present. Yet, the orphaned stories, those semi-erased and fragmented narratives, have convinced me otherwise. I suspect that there is an ocean of unknowable family story, which I will never hear or claim as my own. I will never really know who my ancestors were for sure. My relationship towards them will change whenever I change, or whenever I discover another snippet of family history about "how things were," thereby triggering a myriad of subjective memories, associations and responses.

Identity emerges as a sense of self, constructed through a continual process of assemblage, of location, relocation and recollection, rather than as something fixed and self-evident. (Solie, 1998, p. 3)

The quest for the origin of the self, the longed-for immaculate, singular "I", is futile.

Of course, this leaves one with the dissatisfying understanding that “self” and “other” may only be known partially, through incomplete glimpses and within silences. In many ways my own family -- their motives, actions, choices, thoughts, battles, and dreams -- remain foreign to me. How can I come to know these partial views, spaces and silences, which are foreign to me and yet are a vital part of my identity? In seeking to know my family, I must change my conception of what it is to know: Is “knowing” an act of seizing, fixing, defining, or pinning down? Or is “knowing” more of a gentle movement towards a stranger, a slow opening up towards that which is foreign?

Perhaps a critic would say that in my attempt to know and tell the stories of my family, I have “stolen” the lives of my relatives. I prefer to think that instead of robbing my relatives with an appropriating narrative voice, I have re-established narrative relations. Such narrative relations are constantly disrupted and nourished by orphaned and erased stories. Unlike the covert family story, which may present itself as a “truer” version of the overt family story, the erased story “offers itself as possibility” by its very absence: It is a story that “demands to be told by its lack of existence” (Herk, 1991, p. 186). The vague half-stories and erased stories of my mysterious Icelandic ancestor, my Jewish great-grandmother Maryann and her “lost” children, the Great Starvation, family emigration from Ireland to England, family betrayal and intergenerational abandonment pull me into the realm of the ambivalent, the imaginary, the speculative, and the desired, drawing attention to the fictional qualities of my understandings of self and hybrid identity.

The narrative fictions of a hybrid identity are chaotic, and may therefore be experienced as somewhat problematic. As Bhabha (1990) reminds us: Different forms of culture do not fit together well, and do not easily coexist. Thus, over the course of several generations, in the process of constructing a coherent, consistent, less chaotic sense of family identity, a narrative of identity in solidarity with the myths of nation that constitute England and the British Empire, my family has actively “disappeared” many narrative strands, rendering certain “untouchable” family members invisible. The continuous construction and reconstruction of such an identity of solidarity and belonging – what Bhabha (1990) calls a “sovereign notion of self” (p. 212) -- is therefore an alienating process. It is a process that resonates in my own voice, a voice from which I feel so alienated. The acknowledgement of my family’s hybrid identity, however, goes some way to ameliorating this sense of alienation.

[H]ybridity invariably acknowledges that identity is constructed through a negotiation of difference, and that the presence of fissures, gaps and contradictions is not necessarily a sign of failure. In its most radical form, the concept also stresses that identity is not the combination, accumulation, fusion or synthesis of various components, but an energy field of different forces. . . . Hybridity is both the assemblage that occurs whenever two or more elements meet, and the initiation of a process of change. (Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 170)

Bhabha (1990) calls this energy field of different forces the “third space.” Like Papastergiadis (2000), he believes that the third space acts as a cultural catalyst.

This third space displaces the histories that constitute it, and sets up new structures of authority, new political initiatives, which are inadequately understood through received wisdom. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 211)

The old essentialist notions of identity and nationhood, the sovereign notions of self, however, are still seductive, offering the powerful temptations of passing and belonging.

*On Canada Day at Canada Place in Vancouver, I had a lump in my throat as I swore my allegiance to Crown and country. A children's choir sang patriotic songs of unity and multiculturalism, songs that likened ethnic diversity to a rainbow. A Federal Cabinet Minister, Hedi Fry, gave a speech about what it means to be Canadian, to join this huge, wonderful community. Over one hundred people from thirty-nine other countries became Canadian with me that day, including very elderly people who were joining their grown children in Canada, and tiny babies who were carried onto the stage in the arms of their parents. I walked onto the stage and shook the hand of a strapping Mountie. Along with my Citizenship Card, I was given a little tree to plant so that Canada would be forever green and beautiful. I was overwhelmed by a longing to belong, filled with the feeling that I could finally be home here, as could all these other people. To become Canadian was to live a dream, to fulfill a hopeful fantasy, a fantasy that was shared by each of the new*

*citizens in the large hall at Canada Place that day. I felt as if I had the possibility of having what my mother and my grandmother could not have, what they could not even dream of having for themselves, or even for me.*

Still, the act of immigrating to Canada has not permitted me to leave my family's history behind. My ancestors seem set on haunting me. Rather, the act of immigration has allowed me to talk to these old ghosts, giving me the chance to reinvent and re-imagine my self, and to retell and reframe the family stories of the three Catherines and their kin: Grandma who was called Katie; Mum who was called Kay; and me, Alison Catherine. Perhaps it is in the reinventing, re-imagining, retelling, and reframing, in this ceaseless reiteration that I might find home.

**ON INTELLECTUAL NOMADISM:**

**FINDING HOME**

**WITH/IN LIMINAL SPACES**

Wherever you find yourself is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger.  
(Excerpted from a Pacific Northwest First Nation  
“teaching poem” as told to David Wagoner by an  
unnamed Elder, cited by Whyte, 1994, p. 259)

Liminality is the mother of invention!  
(Turner, cited by Driver, 1998, p. 166)

## *Yurtopia*

One Sunday morning a few years ago, I happened upon a large cream-coloured tent pitched in the middle of a white, sun-filled art gallery. As a child I had always loved to make “houses” and “tents” from boxes, and blankets and sheets, behind the living room curtains, in the bushes at the back of the garden, under the dining table, filling each temporary structure with a few prized essential possessions – maybe a favoured doll, my ballet tutu, and a small basket containing a couple of cookies. So it was with some childlike glee that I stepped inside this big, pale welcoming tent.

The interior of this tent was surprisingly spacious and light, its walls made of felt, and fabric, feathers, hair, fur and skin, an intriguing array of treasured objects lining the interior. The tent was in fact a *ger*, that is, a Mongolian circular communal dwelling, more commonly known in North America as a *yurt*. The *ger* was part of an installation created by Millie Chen and Evelyn von Michalofski entitled *Yurtopia* (Young Contemporaries Show, London Regional Art and Historical Museum, Ontario, September-October 1996), and served as a temporary museum-within-a-museum, housing a collection of nomadic artefacts, images and anecdotes that were collected by the artists as they travelled across the land and through communities around Lethbridge in southern Alberta.

During their nomadic journeying, Chen and Michalofski (1995), the creators of the *ger* installation, wore “museum costumes” covered with small pockets, embodying museum storage and display facilities, which they used for collecting

visual, written, auditory and oral histories. The artists (Chen & Michalofski, 1995) write:

These living-culture-costumes are body coverings, which acted, physically and metaphorically, as the border between the gallery and the surrounding neighbourhoods, between our bodies and other bodies of information. By transposing the institution of museum onto our own bodies, by becoming moving, permeable, sweating, mutable displays, we attempted to disrupt the habitual way in which information is interpreted and knowledge is conveyed and acquired.

(p. iv)

The process of the collection and utilization of these gifts and found objects is documented in their book *Yurtopia* (1995), which the artists intended to serve as a map of living history. After the project was completed, all the objects displayed in the *ger* were returned to whence they came, to their original donors and homes.

Having worked as a curator at the British Museum in London, I marvel at the cultural lightness with which these artists tread: it is in such marked contrast to the necrophilic culture of institutions that so dominate the western art world – what Deborah Root (1996) terms “cannibal culture.” I also revel in the ways that they assume the roles of artist, researcher, and teacher. Stepping into costume for the *Yurtopia* project (1995), they became vulnerable strangers in the world, marginal to the cultures through which they travelled yet open to the people whom they met. The two artists found that their eccentric attire attracted other local eccentrics whom they met on the road, and enticed others to reveal their more whimsical, individual

personalities, inviting stories, gifts, and much warm hospitality. The artists did not know who they would meet or what they would learn, plunging themselves into the movement and uncertainty of the creative/research/pedagogical process, brazenly overstepping institutional boundaries and playing on the margins of their identities.

Although several years have passed since I experienced Chen and Michalofski's *Yurtopia* (1995), the metaphor of nomadism, which is so central to the installation, has stayed close to my heart. I have long felt myself to be a kind of nomad -- a person marginal in many ways to the dominant society, a person in constant movement. I feel marginal in terms of my Irish ancestry within the British colonial context; marginal in terms of my propensity for geographical and intellectual mobility; marginal in terms of my ability to shift roles, to change jobs and careers; marginal in terms of my research interests within the Academy; marginal in terms of the terrain of my preferred research methodologies.

One of the professors at the university where I completed my Master's degree once called me a "drifter," a term which, I believe, she intended to carry a certain pejorative weight. I never took her words to heart, however, as I did not see myself as a drifter. But I did wonder about my colonial heritage, my life as daughter and granddaughter of Irish immigrants, as expatriate in Germany, Egypt and Japan, as recent immigrant to Canada. Could these many generations of hopeful movement, all this necessary hardiness of character amidst forced change, flourishing, suffering and loss merely be described as "drifting"? I did not think so.

One day, I happened to be talking with Carl Leggo, a member of my dissertation committee. I told him the story about the time I could not recognise my

voice on the answering machine, and how I felt so disconnected from my own voice. (This story is recounted at the beginning of the previous chapter.) I perceived this as a real problem -- after all, it is, to a certain extent, from our voices that we each obtain much of our embodied senses of personal, individual and collective identity. The voice is at once a physical reality and a metaphor for the way in which we present our spirit and energy to the world. My voice has somehow absorbed all the changes and movements in my life, including all the broken stories, hidden histories, and tightly held secrets. The voice, my voice, is permeable and mutable like the sweating moving bodies of the nomadic artists/museum displays, embodied by Chen and Michalofski (1995). Carl (Leggo, 2001) told me, "Well, you are like me. You're not from here, and your voice reflects your history. You should be brave and speak out, and learn to cherish the gifts that you bring to the world."

I think Carl is right. Perhaps the nomadic person, the person who was not born here, and can never be from here, must have at least one or two unique gifts to offer the world. If only by virtue of being herself, the nomadic person is able to look at and interact with the world from positions of marginality and difference, and possibly has the ability to give voice to this marginality and difference. These gifts are not always welcome, however.

[C]ultures are only constituted in relation to that otherness internal to their own symbol-forming activity which makes them decentred structures -- through that displacement or liminality open up the

possibility of articulating *different*, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities. (Bhabha, 1990, p. 210)

The nomadic Other, simply through being, is a disruptive cultural force, a presence that precipitates change and cultural movement. Although perhaps a small presence in relation to the seemingly monolithic dominant culture, the nomad has all the power of a single dandelion plant that is searching for sunlight, pushing through a crack in the sidewalk in order to flower.

*Do I merely flatter myself? Am I a nomad, a hybrid, or have I just spent too much of my life on the run?*

## Non-linear journeys in the fecund limen

Three years ago, a group of educators, practicing artists and researchers, many of whom were also graduate students in the Department of Curriculum Studies, began to work with Rita Irwin on a project that explored issues concerning their research and praxis. Together they created an exhibition of their artwork entitled *A Pied: Exploring artist/researcher/teacher praxis* (2000). In conjunction with this show, the group held a symposium, at which I also presented a paper. The purpose of the whole project was to examine and document the relationships between the three roles of artist, researcher, and teacher in the practice of arts-based educational research. Such practice is, of course, quite marginal within the space of the Academy.

Upon first learning about the work of the artist/researcher/teachers who participated in this project, I was instantly reminded of the nomadic metaphor contained within the *Yurtopia* installation. Many of the artist/researcher/teachers who contributed to the *A Pied* project reveal through their spoken words, written texts, and visual art a metaphorical preoccupation with movement through space, in particular non-linear journeying and border crossing. The metaphor of nomadism illuminates certain recurring thematic elements contained within the personal, theoretical and visual narratives of these artist/researcher/teachers, in particular: understandings of identity, space, place, boundaries, change, temporality, direction, orientation, presence and absence.

In their daily praxis, artist/researcher/teachers must cross many disciplinary, professional and cultural spaces and boundaries, often finding themselves living

with/in marginal spaces. The presence of these spaces and invisible boundaries are indicated by the small slashes located between each of the words: artist/researcher/teacher. Such spaces and boundaries are traversable and navigable. They are the gullies and gorges that comprise the varied landscapes and institutional terrains of academic culture, public schooling practices, and the often-hermetic art world. Rather than concentrating on each of the separate roles of artist, researcher and teacher, I wish to linger in the spaces and boundaries between, and movements with/in, these lived practices. Rita Irwin (2000), when talking of her own experience as artist, researcher and teacher roles, says: It's in that living space in between that we are residing. . . . We are alive in movement, in the intertextuality of visual and written texts.

For example, the art/research of Nicole Porter (2000) enters into "the spaces between school life and life as an artist." Her private studio space lives with/in the public high school art classroom, thereby challenging the fixity of educational borders and notions of "good teaching," subtly changing teacher/artist roles and their meanings, as well as teacher/artist/student power relationships and cultural attitudes -- all this by "simply" making new use of physical classroom/studio spaces. Hers is a practice of "creating spaces, and recognizing spaces," a practice of what she calls "vulnerability" in the face of uncertainty. As with all the artist/researcher/teachers who participated in the *A Pied* project, she says she was "not sure what would happen" when she decided to explore her multiple identities and negotiate her way through overlapping territories of practice.

Like some other *A Pied* artist/researcher/teachers, Nicole Porter plays with marginal identities in her subject matter as well as her practice. Porter's work explores notions of gender, fertility, motherhood and loss. Her feminine imagery marks her as doubly marginal: in her identity as woman/artist, and in her art/research/educational interests.

The political, cultural and social positioning of these artist/researcher/teachers, their consciously chosen non-fixity of identity, and the heightened awareness and simultaneous disregard for institutional frameworks and boundaries, marks them as marginal to mainstream artistic, academic and pedagogical practice. To use bell hooks' (1996) expression, in refusing the centre, these artist/researcher/teachers have chosen "the margin as a site of radical openness" (p. 48).

Is the metaphor of nomadism sufficiently accurate in describing the experience of the non-linear, marginal journeying of these artist/researcher/teachers? Or are more suitable metaphors available? Perhaps when undertaking discussion of spaces, limits, and boundaries and how to travel across them, it is advisable to bask awhile in metaphors. Indeed, Michel de Certeau (1984) believes that boundaries are themselves "transportable limits and transportations of limits" (p. 129), and also "*metaphorai*" (p. 129). Do artist/researcher/teachers travel as tourists, as vagabonds, as invading soldiers, as explorers in pith helmets, or as mendicant monks or nuns? Or do they travel as nomads -- like gypsies, tinkers, tribal herdsmen and other such travelling folk?

The choice of metaphor becomes evident when one examines the manner in which each kind of traveller moves through spaces and places. The vagabond

wanders aimlessly, alone, an outcast with no purpose beyond day-to-day survival. The explorer seeks to fix the unknown spaces of territories by drawing up colonial cartographies. The invading soldier strives to conquer, possess and control this territory. The tourist commodifies the whole experience of travel, remaining always a voyeur of an/Other culture. The religious traveller may seek to proselytize to the people whom he or she meets, or may make a pilgrimage to a fixed point, a destination that is already known. Only the nomad consciously, and continuously, travels and lives on the margins of a culture, asking always: To whom does the frontier belong? And, as de Certeau (1984) reminds us, this question is the “theoretical and practical problem of the frontier” (p. 127).

One of the primary mechanisms of semiotic individuation is the boundary, and the boundary can be defined as the outer limit of a first-person form. This space is ‘ours’, ‘my own’, it is ‘cultured’, ‘safe’, ‘harmoniously organized’, and so on. By contrast ‘their space’ is ‘other’, ‘hostile’, ‘dangerous’, ‘chaotic’. Every culture begins by dividing the world into ‘its own’ internal space and ‘their’ external space. How this binary is interpreted depends on the typology of the culture. (Lotman, cited by Papastergiadis, 2000, p. 185)

The frontier, the margin, the border between one thing and another, between this and that, known and unknown, knowable and unknowable may be called the limen. The limen is “a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of

possibilities, a striving after new forms and structure” (Turner, cited by Aoki, Low & Palulis, 2001, p. 1). Liminars are people who live with/in this fecund limen, existing in a "threshold state 'betwixt and between' existing orders" (Norton, 1988, p. 53).

Intellectual liminars, such as artist/researcher/teachers, might learn much from the ways that other liminary peoples have prospered and flourished in the midst of their marginality. Nomads are territorial liminars who are “beyond the effective reach of the law” (Norton, p. 65).<sup>1</sup> It is their very marginality, their distance from the centres of power, and their social impotence that is “the source of their liberty, . . . their equality, their fraternity” (Norton, p. 65). So, I turn to nomadism, to an exploration of territorial liminality, to enrich my understanding of intellectual liminality.

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<sup>1</sup> There are many other kinds of liminary peoples. As well as territorial liminars, there are intellectual liminars, political liminars, and structural liminars. Structural liminality may arise out of economic, class, ethnic, and gender differences. For a fuller discussion of these various kinds of liminality, see Norton (1988).

## Nomadic cultures

The term “nomad” means different things to different scholars who, as is their wont, cannot agree on a single definition. My understanding, drawn from the work of various anthropologists, geographers and sociologists is that a nomad is a person for whom movement is necessary for survival. The nomad does not wander aimlessly, however. Her movements are not romantic excursions, but gruelling treks, often across inhospitable terrain. Thus, a nomadic group only makes a move after first considering every available option.<sup>2</sup> As a liminar, the nomad must be ecologically attuned to the utilization of marginal resources. She knows and exploits “a variety of the resources of a particular region, managing a schedule of mixed productive activities, . . . constrained by the options [s]he has chosen” (Salzman, 1980, p. 175). Nomadic economies might depend upon pastoralism, fishing, farming, trading, the production of handicrafts, transportation of goods, managing the labour of others, and when necessary even smuggling, theft, raiding and making war on other communities.<sup>3</sup> At times, the nomad may seem to behave in ways that appear

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<sup>2</sup> For example, before moving camp, a nomad might consider details such as “travellers’ accounts, scouting reports on grazing conditions, a vast store of knowledge about grazing conditions in the past, including a detailed knowledge of where water and grazing can be expected, the political situation, the condition of the stock, an assessment of how much rain can be expected and where, and so on” (Johnson, 1969, p. 7).

<sup>3</sup> Although most nomads are tribal pastoralists, they may also be fierce warriors. The Great Wall of China failed to keep out invading nomads. The nomads Genghis Khan and Attila the Hun succeeded in conquering other lands and founding great empires.

contradictory, aberrant, or even mad and absurd to the outside observer.

*When I was a small girl living in a village on the west coast of Scotland, there were still some travellers who would roam the countryside. One day one of these gentlefolk knocked at our door and asked for some milk. My mother was terrified at the sight of this wild-haired man, his raggedy coat belted with a knotted length of bailer twine. In order to get rid of him as quickly as she could, she tried to give him two pints of milk.*

*"No, no," the traveller replied, "I just need enough for my tea, just a wee drop, please," and he held out his battered tin cup.*

*Although he was a man with few material possessions, he did not need to hoard supplies of food. Rather, he knew that he could depend on the hospitality of others, and that there would always be work for him to do, whether it was digging a vegetable garden or chopping firewood.*

Clearly, the nomad is not homeless, but has the ability to "recreate home everywhere" (Jouwe, cited by Chen and von Michalofski, 1987, II:3), constantly moving the hearth -- the heart of the home -- travelling light, taking only the most vital, treasured possessions, trusting that the earth will provide, and that the environment is giving. The accumulation of material wealth and property is not the foremost interest of the nomad. Rather it is that which has been learnt by heart -- the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, experiences and memories of a lifetime -- that is most highly prized by nomadic cultures. Unburdened by material possessions, gifted

with their guile and acute ability to glean meaning and interpret signs, nomads are mobile and adaptable. Indeed, mobility and adaptability are considered the most important resources within all nomadic cultures. A nomad does not fight to defend territory, only the right to leave it (Braidotti, 1996).

If in extreme difficulty, however, nomads will settle -- if only for a while (Salzman, 1980). This is how one Romany woman living in England described the painful process of her grandmother's settling and assimilation:

When Travellers started going into houses some of the old ones died of it. They couldn't stand it. Great Nan pitched her tent in her front room! 'Houses are alright' she said, 'but they've got them terrible walls!' (Brazil, in Cannon, p. 51)

While nomads may live *side by side* with sedentary populations, they do not live *with* them, choosing to maintain the cultural and social gulf between "them" and "us" (Khazanov, 1983, p. 231).<sup>4</sup> Thus, nomads are vulnerable to persecution. Bruce Chatwin (cited by Chen & von Michalofski, 1987) writes that "psychiatrists, politicians, tyrants are forever assuring us that the wandering life is . . . a sickness, which in the interests of civilization, must be suppressed" (II:13). Nevertheless, nomadic peoples *need* sedentary cultures, as nomadic cultures do not function in complete isolation (Cannon, 1989; Khazanov, 1984). Three Romanies discuss this

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<sup>4</sup> Nomadism and sedentarism are located on a continuum (Johnson, 1969). There are multiple degrees of nomadism and sedentarism, and throughout history various peoples have settled and desettled, adapting their behaviours in response to changing cultural, social, political and environmental conditions (Johnson, 1969; Salzman, 1980; Khazanov, 1983; Casimir & Rao, 1992):

conundrum:

“They should make us a country, like they did the Jews.” . . .

“You couldn’t give us a country because we needs [*sic*] *Gorjas* [sedentary, non-travelling people]. We couldn’t be Travellers without them. We survives [*sic*] off them!”

“We’ll always be a scattered nation. There’d be no Travellers without *Gorjas*.”

“And there’d be no *Gorjas* without travellers!”

(Smith, Brazil & Brazil, in Cannon, 1989, p. 45)

The nomadic culture needs the larger, sedentary culture. So too does the sedentary culture require the existence of liminal cultures, which serve to define the territories, customs, beliefs, and practices of the more dominant sedentary culture.

The recognition of the liminal marks the conscious differentiation of self and other, of the body politic from other bodies politic. The differentiation of subject and object, self and other, requires both an object of likeness and an object of difference. Liminals provide an object that is like, though demonstrably other than, the subject. They thus provide an object with which the subject can identify even as it differentiates itself. (Norton, 1988, p. 53)

The liminal culture is not always thought of as an “enemy culture” by the sedentary population, although it is often considered somewhat alien. Thus, the sedentary

culture might simultaneously repudiate and seek to assimilate the liminal culture.

Donna Haraway (cited by Braidotti, 1996) describes the situation of the intellectual nomad, or liminar:

High theory is a cannibalistic machine aimed at the assimilation of all new and alien bodies. Fortunately, nomads can run faster and endure longer trips than most; thus they cannot be assimilated easily (p.33).

Nomadic culture is a matter of bonding, of coalitions, of interconnections situated within living contexts, amongst growing relationships. When life is lived in movement, contexts and relationships must change. As Rainer (1997) says: Truth, like light, must be in motion (p. 173).

Nomadic cartographies need to be redrafted constantly; as such they are structurally opposed to fixity and, therefore, to rapacious appropriation. The nomad has a sharpened sense of territory but no possessiveness about it. . . . Nomadism, therefore, is not fluidity without borders but rather an acute awareness of the non-fixity of boundaries. It is the intense desire to go on trespassing, transgressing. (Braidotti, 1996, p. 35-36)

Although nominally a part of the Academy, intellectual liminars, such as the *A Pied* artist/researcher/teachers, challenge the norms and customs of the sedentary, dominant Academy through their daily practice. Considered somewhat alien by their peers within research and educational communities, the intellectual liminar may

sometimes feel alienated, punished even, in many ways. Their work may be criticized for not being rigorous, scientific, reliable or serious enough. They may find it difficult to get their work published, and so on. They might have to utilize the most marginal of economic resources, and even physical spaces – not by choice but by necessity. They will certainly feel the force of others within the larger academic community pushing them towards assimilation.

Unlike much of the Western European and North American literature on nomadism, which frequently valorizes, and occasionally even romanticizes nomadic cultures, scholars from the former Soviet Union were quick to point out what they saw as the somewhat problematic nature of territorial marginality, focussing their attention on nomadic peoples' resistance to collectivization (Khazanov, 1984). Braidotti (1996) recognizes a similar resistance toward collectivization with the dominant culture in the culture of the intellectual liminar. She writes: Nomadism is an invitation to dis-identify ourselves from the sedentary phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking and to start cultivating the art of disloyalty to civilization (p. 30). There is much freedom and power in the liminal life. Thus, the true liminar will continue to abandon the centre, choosing instead to speak from the margins, regularly shifting locations, roles and voices, continuing always to challenge the dominant culture around them.

Those who dwell on the margins of the Academy -- intellectual liminars -- are the most likely to notice academic, cultural and intellectual norms and boundaries. One could say that it is the positioning of the intellectual liminar that defines the very limits of the Academy. And, being mobile, the self-conscious *repositioning* of the

intellectual liminar constantly *redefines* the limits of Academy, destabilizing academic, cultural and disciplinary foundations. In recreating home anew, the liminar adeptly moves towards different possibilities, and novel ways of being. An intellectual liminar's existence is one of purposeful questioning and ceaseless invention.

Throughout this chapter I have written of both intellectual and territorial liminality. In using the metaphor of territorial liminality (nomadism) to elucidate my thoughts on intellectual liminality, I do not mean to dualistically imply that the one form of liminality is entirely mental or cerebral, or that the other is entirely physical. Indeed, could this even be possible? The mind can only ever be embodied. Both territorial and intellectual liminars are beings whose "inner world" of thoughts and feelings are constituted entirely within and through the context of the "physical world" of relationships with the earth, with culture, with community -- and vice versa. For example, my physical voice reveals my territorial liminality, providing glimpses of my life as expatriate and immigrant. My family history, a single strand in the giant knot of English colonialism, marks me as somewhat of an ethnic liminar. In turn, this ethnic liminality (as well as my gender liminality) feeds into my sense of intellectual liminality, which energizes and gives purpose to my academic work. I am growing to accept, and even welcome, my own liminality, and that of others. These multiple liminalities are sources of great strength and possibility. It is here, at the limen that the most exciting pedagogical spaces may open up.

We need nomad social sciences. (Canclini, 1995, p. 2)

**MARKING AND MAKING  
THE (EARTH'S) BODY:  
ON RITUAL, RELATIONSHIP, PLACE  
AND PEDAGOGY**

Rituals belong to us, and we to them, as surely as do our language and culture. The human choice is not *whether* to ritualize but when, how, where, and why. (Driver, 1998, p. 6)

Ritualizing is our first language, not our 'mother' but our 'grandmother' tongue, and as such it is something we do not outgrow. (Driver, 1998, p. 13)

## **“Our grandmother tongue”**

Our lives are full of rituals. Of course, the word “ritual” immediately conjures up thoughts of grand events such as weddings, funerals, christenings, bar mitzvahs, retirement parties and graduations. But countless tiny rituals fill our days and nights. These rituals are so small we may hardly notice their existence, and barely see their significance: the first morning coffee, the bedtime story, the daily walk home from work, the long soak in a bubble bath, the good night kiss, the phone call to distant family members on Sunday. When we ritualize, we engage in ludic labour and purposeful play, investing all of life with meaning. These silken webs of sacred meaning, spun through the constant processes of ritual, connect us intimately to the self, and to the Other.

Ritual is our primary form of communication. Tom Driver (1998) believes that, “[r]itualizing is our first language, not our ‘mother’ but our ‘grandmother’ tongue, and as such it is something we do not outgrow” (p. 13). Thus, the play-work of ritual is central to human life, as it is to all animal life.

Certain things can only be expressed in ritual. Ritual is without equivalents or even alternatives . . . that which can be expressed only in ritual is not trivial. It is, I think, crucial, and because of it I take ritual to be the basic social act. (Rappaport, cited by LaChapelle, 1992, p. 147)

Ritual carries phenomenal power. It is a “technology of transformation” (Driver, 1998, p. 47), which establishes social order, deepens communal life, and changes relationships with humans and with the wider community of living things, including the earth. Ritual is “world-making” (Driver, 1998, p. 149).

As a truly holistic form of communication, ritual incorporates and unites the material human body, the physical earth, and the non-tangible realms of emotion, intuition, spirit, rational thought, and socio-political and cultural values. The ritual process re-orders and re-balances the energy between and within all these diverse elements. Those rituals, which are directed towards ethical transformation, are liberating and increase individual and collective freedom (Driver, 1998). However, the transformative power of ritual may also be used to do harm, decreasing individual and communal harmony and peace. Clearly, with their relational and transformative possibilities, rituals perform a powerful pedagogical role. Many contemporary, “non-religious” North Americans recognize the transformative, pedagogical power of ritual, and yearn for its presence in their everyday lives.

*Last Winter Solstice, a community group in Vancouver performed several public ceremonies to celebrate the return of the light after the darkest day of the year. The group created a candlelit labyrinth in the gymnasium of a downtown community centre. So intense was the desire to ritualize through communal ceremony, that members of the public queued for up to two hours for the privilege of walking it. The line of people snaked all through the hallway and almost out of the building.*

*When my husband and I finally came to the head of the line, we were admitted into a dark, cavernous, enchanted space. As we entered I gasped at the magical atmosphere, so different from the linoleum floors, fluorescent lighting and detergent smells of the community centre's hallway. The only light in the huge space came from the hundreds of candles that were placed on the floor to mark the edges of the path through the labyrinth. They cast a gentle, soft glow that was just sufficient to see one's route, and the forms of the dozens of people who were walking the serpentine path all at the same time, each one hushed, and deeply engrossed in their own personal journey.*

*We waited until we were beckoned to the mouth of the labyrinth. I went ahead of my husband, focussing my concentration inward for the coming journey. Although a hypnotic Gregorian chant was playing, my heart was beating fast. I had walked a labyrinth before, and was aware of the tremendous waves of energy that could be generated simply by putting one foot in front of the other. I held my breath and was swallowed whole by the labyrinth. Following the path of candlelight, I took each step slowly, carefully, and soon found myself spiralling to the opposite end of the room, and then back around again, this time the other way. On one circling of the labyrinth I was at the outermost edge of the spiral, and then on the next I was close to the centremost space. It was impossible to tell which way the labyrinth would take me, and I was carried along as if in the arms of the bubbling white rapids of a mountain river. I became aware that I was praying. As I moved, I prayed. As I prayed, I moved.*

*Time slowed. Eventually I entered the heart space of the labyrinth and stopped for a while by the pink firelight ball of a luminous paper lantern. As people circled and swirled all around me in the dark, I wanted to stay forever in the labyrinth's embrace. But I moved with the flow of people out of the rosy centre, following the dizzying route step by step outwards and around, a single bird flying amidst a flock of one hundred. As I left the labyrinth, awakening once again to the outer world, like Jonah spat out of the whale's mouth, I became aware of the dozens of people who had been sitting around the edges of the room, watching the peaceful movements of the walkers, meditating in silent reverence on the flowing aliveness of our bodies through the dark Solstice night.*

## **The tree on White Mountain**

*I was so far away from my mother when she was dying that we had no chance to say goodbye. After the funeral in London, I returned to my job in Japan with my new husband. But, overcome by grief and guilt, I could think only of times past and of how much I wanted to be with her. I seemed to have forgotten about life as a newly wed, and began to suffer from headaches and dizziness. My doctor in Japan diagnosed low blood pressure, and gave me a prescription for some little white pills, which I didn't take.*

*After the funeral I happened to see a book on my mother's bookshelf, which had been written by my regular physician in London. This doctor, Christine Page (1992), wrote that in traditional systems of medicine, it was believed that breaking primal relationships with the earth leads to sickness, which manifests itself as mental or physical illness, and that making a reconnection with the natural world is a healing act. She wrote that in Tibet, traditional healers often prescribed walks in the forest as a cure for depression. For illnesses such as low blood pressure that were traditionally believed to be caused by soul loss, it was advised to find a tree and to physically connect with the energy that flowed from the earth, up through the roots and into the trunk.*

*I decided to try this traditional cure for low blood pressure. After all what did I have to lose? I made sure not to tell anyone about my plans, though. So I slipped away secretly, and took a walk in the forest on Shiroyama, the White Mountain, which lay just five minutes from where I lived, in search of the right tree.*

*As a child growing up in Scotland I seemed to know every tree and rock and hollow and stream within a mile's radius of our house. But, like most grown ups in our fast paced world, I had lost this kind of intimate connection with my own habitat. I climbed the mountain slowly looking for the perfect tree, a tree that seemed to be inviting. All of the trees on the mountain seemed unfamiliar to me, even though I had climbed this route many times before.*

*The forest backed an ancient Shinto temple, and was also the famed setting of an adventurous escape by a local warrior who had evaded an entire enemy army. The local people had cherished this forest for generations, so none of these trees had ever been cut down for commercial use. Most of the trees on the mountain were many hundreds of years old. I climbed on and on searching for a tree. Just when I thought that I would have to look elsewhere, there it was, some ways away from the stony path. A huge, ancient cedar.*

*It looked like the oldest tree on the mountain. The root system was colossal. The main trunk was dark and dead, and the bare branches reached way up into the sky. Perhaps the tree had been hit by lightening? The old trunk was completely hollow. I'm sure I could have crawled in and then have stood up completely to my full height. But I was too scared of the bats and snakes and spiders that might have called the hollow home. From the base of this lifeless central body, however, sprang another giant, living trunk – a whole new tree. One of the strong branches from this new trunk swung down in a low arc. It was quite easy to climb up onto this low branch. Broad and smooth, it was the perfect place to sit. Reclining was even more comfortable, and as I lay back against the branch, looking up at the light dappling*

*through the swaying green canopy, it seemed as if the tree were cradling me. I felt welcome here.*

*One of my earliest memories was of a time when my mother took me to a London park near our home. Lying in my pram, I looked up at sunlight playing on the leaves of an old elm. Now, lying back like a baby on this cedar branch, I dreamed of nothing in particular, letting thoughts simply come and go, relishing my solitude, soothed by the sounds of the mountain forest. As I relaxed into its bark skin, the energy of the welcoming tree branch flowed along my spine, revitalizing my whole body.*

*I came up to my secret forest cradle every day. One day, at a hairpin turn in the crooked path, almost a third of the way up the mountain, a snow-white cat stepped out in front of me and stretched its tail upwards as if in greeting. "Hello, cat," I said, a little afraid of the feral feline. The sleek, muscular cat meowed quietly and then rubbed its body against my shins. I gingerly stepped over the cat, and set off for my special tree. The cat followed. When I stopped, she stopped. It was clear that the cat wanted to walk with me. Again, I set off, and the cat accompanied me up the mountain until the tree was in sight. Then she disappeared into the undergrowth. Each day after that the cat, whom I called Shiro (which means "White" in Japanese), would magically appear at the same spot on the trail, as if she had been expecting my arrival. I would then be escorted by my familiar, the white feline spirit, up the twisting mountain path to within sight of my healing tree.*

*A week after I had begun my daily walks up the mountain with the gentle Shiro to rest in the cradling branch of my tree, my blood pressure had returned to*

*normal. I was still grieving for my mother, but I felt as if I were again in the land of the living. Although a Western doctor might believe that my cure was a happy coincidence, perhaps a doctor who practiced a traditional, earth-based medicine would say that, with the assistance of the spirit of the wild white cat, my mountain guide, I had been able to tap into the life energy that was flowing through the ancient tree. Even though I was feeling well, I still continued to climb the mountain regularly, accompanied by Shiro, to visit my tree. I got to know both Shiro and the tree pretty well. And, when I left Japan eighteen months later, I missed the tree, and Shiro, more than most of my human friends.*

What sparked my desire to perform this healing ritual, to make the daily journey to sit with the tree? According to Driver (1998), the strong desire to perform ritual stems from a “prolonged or acute absence of moral guidance” (p. 44). In my particular case, I did not know how to live after the death of someone I had loved so much. The symptoms of my grief gave physical expression to this lack of knowledge, and did not diminish until I turned myself over fully to the practice of the ritual.

In order to immerse myself in the flow of this special ritual, I had to find a place that was in some way set apart from my daily life as a teacher, wife, sister, daughter and friend, a place in which my social status and professional roles were not important. This in itself is a healing act. As Joseph Campbell (cited in Whyte, 2001) writes:

You *must* have a place to which you can go, in your heart, your mind, or your house, almost every day, where you do not know what you

owe anyone, or anyone owes you. You must have a place you can go to where you do not know what your work is or who you work for, where you do not know who you are married to or who your children are. (p. 157)

Such a place is a liminal space, a subjective space in which we are not defined by familiar social boundaries or expectations. The place of ritual may be set apart from the mundane world either spatially or temporally, or both (Driver, 1998). For reasons of privacy, I chose a tree that was secluded, very nearly at the top of a mountain, just back a little from the stony path, and reserved a small part of each afternoon after school to spend time there. It was my *intention* to ritualize that made the walk up the mountain and the daily meditation with the old tree a ritualized rather than a mundane act. For the healing to work, I had to respect an imaginary, but crucial, threshold between the workaday world and the world of ritual.

Although I did not at first consciously realize the significance of my chosen ritual space, I was fortunate to begin my search for my healing tree on a mountain. In many spiritual traditions across the world, mountains, in all their magnificent wildness, have been recognised as places of vision. Indeed, in ancient Japan the name *yamabushi*, which literally means “those who sleep in the mountains,” was given to Buddhist pilgrims of the Shingon sect who wandered mountains in search of enlightenment (LaChapelle, 1988). In the Shinto religion, many mountains were revered as sacred places, especially volcanoes. Shiroyama, where I took my daily walk, was a mountain that was flung up on the edge of a caldera after the volcano Sakurajima had exploded. Located on the edge of a tectonic fault line, a site of great

power, the mountain intuitively felt like the obvious place to begin my search for a suitable tree.

When I lived in Japan, I always marvelled at the beauty of the venerated trees that surround Shinto shrines. In Shinto, trees may either be the dwelling place of *kami* (Gods), or they may be recognized as sacred in their own right. As LaChapelle (1988) points out, in the West we would imagine that sacred shrines are provided with trees, but in Japan such sacred trees are often furnished with shrines. Since leaving Japan, I have learnt that many other cultures have also recognized the sacred qualities of trees: Christian mystics, Zen practitioners, the ancient Celts, and many First Nations peoples have valued the powers of trees, and have sought out particular trees to enhance the practice of meditation, to provide deep psychic and physical healing, to take away labour pains when giving birth, to mediate between the upper and lower worlds, as well as to aid in divination (Brussat & Brussat, 1996; LaChapelle, 2001; Pennick, 1996).

In Japan, it is not unusual to pass sacred trees, or rocks, or other sacred places beside waterfalls or on riverbanks as one goes about everyday life. Local people bring offerings – a cheap jar of sake, a few cigarettes, a Satsuma orange, flowers in a plastic cup, or a couple of sweet rice cakes. These places of devotion are sometimes located at busy city intersections, or even in the middle of shopping malls. No matter: the shrine, whether large or small, provides the necessary spatial threshold that is required to demarcate the sacred place from the surrounding hubbub.

A sacred place may seem elusive, but it is instantly recognizable to those who are attuned to its moods, and have striven to develop a personal relationship with that

small corner of the earth upon which he or she lives. If one moves through a place with attention, one may recognize such power points (LaChapelle, 1988). The sacred place is found whenever mystery breaks through into our consciousness, and is recognized and accepted. To a large extent, this requires a leap of imagination.

Starting from the premise, commonly held by many traditional cultures, that the earth is alive and infused by a vital spirit, which manifests itself through the material, Pennick (1996) describes how a person may bring the soul of a place into being.

[T]he landscape is filled with places where spirit is present. Every time we experience it, this presence encourages us to make an imaginative act that personifies the place to us. Then we perceive its qualities as a personality. This is the *anima loci*, the place-soul. When this is acknowledged and honoured, ensouled sacred places come into being. Our actions enshrine the *anima loci*, bringing the unseen into physical presence. . . . Traditionally, it is viewed as a presence or being that exists beyond the everyday realms of human cognizance, perhaps possessing its own consciousness and personality. (p. 13)

The knowledge -- that the earth is alive and that all is in balance and relationship -- is central to any understanding of the sacred. In perceiving the vitality, intelligence and personality of a particular place, one may begin to come into intimate relationship with that place.

“[I]n a nature ritual, one is never alone” says LaChapelle (1988, p. 163). One is always in the company of an Other: the sky, the sun, the moon, the wind, the rain,

clouds, fire, trees, plants, and animals. To think otherwise is to be condemned to a mechanistic view of the universe, and a deadening, dualistic way of thinking. To practice ritual is to give physical expression to the belief of community and mutuality with the earth. Ritual is inherently interactive and social, a practice that assumes a sense of self which is expanded and communal, and invites the energies of the *anima loci* to congregate and unite.

The discourse of ritualistic practice is sensual, somatic, tacit and nonverbal. It melds thought, feeling, imagination, dream, and intuition with the concrete movements and actions of material bodies within a particular environment. It serves to awaken awareness, and to focus intention through sharpened attention to one's own body and the body of the earth. The performance of ritual is the "unity of doing and observing" (p. 81). Thus, in ritual, "the body that does is of no less importance than the mind that knows" (Driver, 1998, p. 81). Indeed, one could say that the body that does, *is* the body that knows.

We humans can easily recognize the cyclical flow of cosmic energy in the patterns and movements of the earth: we see it in the movement from night to day, in the ebb and flow of tides, in the waxing and waning of the moon, and in the death and rebirth of plants and animals in the ever-changing seasons. Despite this knowledge, I was still overcome by feelings of guilt, grief and anger after my mother's death; I was unable to let my mother go, incapable of accepting her death, the inevitability of change, and my season of loss. It was only through actually *doing* the healing ritual that I was able to understand these concepts in a fully embodied way. By meditating, feeling the flow of energy through the ancient, knowing, half-dead, half-live cedar

tree, I once again became acquainted with and accepting of the cyclical nature of life and death, and felt myself once again reenergized and in friendship with the earth.

Such powerful transformation is possible when the *anima loci* is invited to gather together with human energy through the performance of the ritual, multiplying their powers “by fusion,” as it were (Driver, 1998, p. 156). The ritual, in the midst of performance, takes on a momentum, direction, and will of its own. Taking place in liminal space-time, at the margins of the everyday, at what the ancient Celts called “thin places,” the processes of ritual have a somewhat anarchic, chaotic quality. To an extent, the outcome of the ritual is beyond the participant’s control. The unexpected is likely to happen. A tree might beckon to you with the whispering of its needles. A snow-white cat could magically appear. The participant is invited to respond playfully: “Hello, cat!” . . .

Ritualization is grounded [in the life of those involved] and yet permeated with the spontaneity of surprise; it is an unexpected renewal of a recognizable order in potential chaos . . . It minds instinctual energy into a pattern of mutuality, which bestows convincing simplicity on dangerously complex matters . . . Thus, the decay or perversion of ritual does not create an indifferent emptiness, but a void with explosive possibilities. (Erikson, cited by LaChapelle, 1988, p. 151)

Ritual is a catalyst for processes of innovation and creativity, and is thus generative of new knowledge. This knowledge permits change in the participant’s consciousness, thereby changing the order of the world itself. Although rituals are

used to transmit old cultural knowledge, by their very nature, they cannot be performed the same way twice. The pedagogy of ritual is alchemical, one where visions and dreams arise in the participant's consciousness, giving birth to new ways of being and living.

It is no wonder that so many rituals are kept secret. We often keep secret that which is most precious to us, that which we desire most in the world, but which might be damaged by too much public scrutiny (Whyte, 2001). Choosing to guard the energies of my own healing ritual, I told no one of my daily meditation in the arms of the cedar tree. In the final instance, what did I learn from the practice of this particular ritual? Looking back, it can best be summed up by a line from "The Great Treatise" of the *I Ching* (cited by LaChapelle, 1988): The greatest virtue between heaven and earth is to live (p. 116).

Ritualized acts provide a rhythm and shape to the unseen powers that sustain life itself. Each ritualized act adds a further layer of meaning to the diverse narratives of our lives. If one pays sufficient attention to the everyday, one may come to invest every mundane act with sacred meaning, becoming acquainted with the sacral. "The sacral is the ritualizing of all things – small and large – that are invested with life's essential meaning" (Lerner, in Brussat & Brussat (Eds.), 1996, p. 398). Through the regular practice of ritual, one begins to know the mystery of the sacral, opening to its daily lessons, whatever one is doing.

**RITUALS OF VIOLENCE,  
ABSENCE AND SILENCE:  
REMEMBERED PEDAGOGIES  
OF SCHOOL AND FAMILY**

The body remembers, the bones remember, the joints remember, even the little finger remembers. Memory is lodged in pictures and feelings in the cells themselves. Like a sponge filled with water, anywhere the flesh is pressed, wrung, even touched lightly, a memory may flow out in a stream. (Estes, 1992, p. 200)

If you ask me where I come from, I have to  
converse with broken things  
with utensils bitter to excess  
and great beasts frequently rotted  
and with my anguished heart.  
(Neruda, 1946/1973, p. 203)

## **Violence: My abuser's house**

*The ancient cottage that I grew up in had thick stone walls. At their base, these walls were eight feet thick, made of boulders and stones that had been dragged into place maybe three hundred years ago – no one knows exactly when – by teams of workhorses. Many of the stones had been split from giant rocks. Quarrymen drove wooden stakes into the rock they wanted to use, which they then drenched in water. The wet stakes swelled up until the piece of stone that was needed broke off. The undulating marks formed by rows of such stakes could be seen along the edges of the bigger stones, such as the giant slab that formed the mantel over the fireplace.*

*Above the massive cottage walls a low, slate roof clung so tightly that the ceilings of the second floor sloped overhead, just like in an attic. This wee house could withstand any wild gale that blew in from the Irish Sea. The roof girders might creak and moan, the slates might blow off, hail or rain might pelt against the sash windows and the sturdy wooden door, but the cottage would never budge.*

*The cottage may have kept the harsh elements out, but it also kept the secrets in. I remember a childhood of furtive murmured conversations, closed doors, long silences, and quiet tears, interrupted by sudden, vicious, yet often predictable, bursts of violence every now and then. With such thick walls, who would be able to hear my mother begging for mercy as her partner beat her in the kitchen?<sup>1</sup> Only my sister and*

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this chapter, I have employed several strategies in order to protect the identity of the man who sexually abused me as a child. I do not refer to him by name. Rather, I refer to him only as “my abuser” or “the perpetrator,” etc. In addition, I do not refer to him in terms of his specific relationship to me, describing him only as my mother’s partner, and as a member of my extended

*I, two terrified little girls shivering in their nightgowns. And who would we have told?*

*For us children, and for my mother, it seemed futile to cry. Indeed, it only angered her partner further. If we had any crying to do we did it alone. Her partner, the consummate tyrant reigning with absolute power within "his" own home, was also a professional, and a pillar of the local community. Following our mother's example, my sister and I hid our pain and shame and made sure we maintained a public façade of middle class decency. This was a difficult task, as we lived in what I would now recognise as poverty. Looking back, sometimes I wonder how that could have been so, until I remember my mother's partner's fondness for single malt whisky.*

*Fearing for her life, my mother eventually fled this tyrant, this time for good, taking my little sister with her. My mother and sister carried only one small bag each, and the clothes on their backs. They had lost everything it seemed, including their sense of peace and trust in a benevolent world. I had already left a year earlier, almost as soon as I had turned seventeen. My mother told me much later that she was afraid that when my little sister left home, she would then be completely alone and*

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family. I have also taken care not to mention any local place names or other specific features of his life that could aid the reader in identifying him. I realise that my abuser's interpretation of events differs markedly from my own. However, even though my mother has now passed away, she did agree with my interpretation of these events. For a further discussion of writing with an ethic of care, please see the section of my dissertation entitled *Fictional texts and an ethic of care*, which is in the methodology chapter of this text (pp. 37-39).

*that her partner would then kill her. There would be no one to witness what had happened, only the old stone walls.*

*“Why couldn’t she leave for us?” my sister sometimes asks. “She didn’t care about us enough. We were beaten too. She left because she thought she would die, that he would kill her, not because he would kill us.” It takes a huge amount of courage to live in such an abusive situation, and a greater measure of courage to leave it. Perhaps it was the possibility of imminent death, an animalian instinct for self-preservation that made the final difference for my mother, not the instincts of motherhood. In fairness, my mother had actually tried to leave before, but she did not get very far.*

*My mother, sister and I were shell-shocked refugees, living on in silence for years long after we had left this man’s house, his kingdom of terror. None of us ever really talked about what we had lived through. There were other much more pressing problems. I was now a completely penniless student, struggling to pay for food and rent. And my mother and sister were homeless.*

*Unexpectedly, when I was nineteen, I remembered something that I had always known. Events from my childhood that had seemed distant, foggy and unclear now made sense, a kaleidoscope of memories coming into sudden focus. With an adult’s understanding of childhood memories that had been long suppressed, I remembered that I had been sexually abused. My memories were tiny fragments – just his touch, or his smell, or his look. Some came to me like crystalline, frozen snapshots of scenes, as if I were looking down at myself and at him from outside of my body.*

*My mother never really wanted to talk about these years of abuse that I was remembering. Whenever I asked her about the past, she would only cry. It was difficult enough for her to bear her own pain, never mind the added burden of mine. I began to talk to my sister about our lives in that stone cottage. She told me that she and Mum both knew what had happened to me, and had sometimes even discussed it amongst themselves. She even remembers Mum asking her, "Are they in bed again?" This would not be at all unusual. In fact, her partner eventually made no pretence at all of hiding his sexual abuse of me. He gave up the bed he shared with my mother, and slept in my bedroom each night – a fact that none of my family ever discussed, at least with me.*

*Strangely, my sister remembered more about the circumstances of my own sexual abuse than I did. She would ask me questions, such as:*

*"Don't you remember the revolver he kept in the chest of drawers next to his/your bed?" she asked.*

*"No," I would inevitably reply. I could only remember the constant threat of extreme violence, and a pervasive feeling of deathlike terror. Then I would wonder, and still do, what else have I forgotten? Will these other memories ever come back? And, when? Can I stop them from coming? I had survived for so long by not knowing, not believing, not feeling, not talking. It is hard for me to now truly know, believe, feel, and talk about this part of my life. And I ask myself if I really even want to. But, of course, the memories will not go away. Even when my daily life seems productive, successful and happy, and I am outwardly calm, I am still haunted by night terrors. I wake up screaming, convinced that the faceless giant, that dark*

*menace looming at the bottom of my bed is real. Although I have "forgotten" a great deal of conscious childhood memories, somatic memories of abuse keep on surfacing at night in my dreams, or when I smell something that reminds me of him -- the dry fragrance of wood shavings in a workshop, or the odour of carbolic soap scrubbing hands smeared with motor oil.*

There is a widespread tacit acceptance of the sexual, physical and emotional abuse of children (all children, but especially girls), as well as the battery, assault and rape of women in our culture. Statistics show that the number of children – the majority of them girls -- who are sexually abused is phenomenally high, while the number of perpetrators – mostly men -- who are criminally prosecuted and punished for such crimes is phenomenally low.

*My head swims while I read the statistics on the sexual abuse of children, and violence against women. They are simply overwhelming, obscene. They pile up like corpses, one on top of another. I find it no comfort to be reminded that I am not alone as a survivor of sexual abuse.*

*22% of all adults have been sexually abused as children (Sanderson, 1995, p. 19).*

*27% of female children are sexually abused (Sanderson, 1995, p. 19)*

*16% of male children are sexually abused (Sanderson, 1995, p. 19).*

*1 in 3 women were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Adams, 1994, p. 17).*

*1 in 4 girls are sexually abused (Lewis, 1999, p. 6).*

*1 in 5 to 1 in 7 men were victims of childhood sexual abuse (Adams, 1994, p. 17; Mendel, 1995, p. 8).*

*1 in 7 boys are sexually abused (Lewis, 1999, p. 6).*

*In 98% of cases the perpetrator of the sexual abuse comes from within the family. In 38% of these cases the father was implicated, stepfathers were implicated in 10% of cases, and brothers in 12% of cases (Sanderson, 1995, p. 19).*

*The reporting rate for sexual assaults on children is extremely low. Only between 2 to 6% of cases are reported (Lewis, 1999, p. 8).*

*86% of all childhood sexual abuse survivors suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Carter, 1999, p. 8).*

*59% to 64% of sexual abuse survivors have had episodes of amnesia concerning the abuse (Salter, 1995, p. 222).*

*More than one third of women are amnesiac about childhood sexual abuse in cases that required hospitalization (Mendel, 1995, p. 6).*

*Over 59% of individuals in treatment for sexual abuse had experienced periods in their lives where they did not recall the abuse (Mendel, 1995, p. 6).*

*91-97% of child sexual abusers are male, while only 9% of child sexual abusers are females (Sanderson, 1995, p. 20).*

*97% of psychiatrists are male (Lewis, 1999, p. 23).*

*54% of girls under 16 experience some form of unwanted or intrusive sexual experience (Carter, 1999, p. 6).*

*51% of women have been victims of rape or attempted rape (Carter, 1999, p. 57).*

*As of 1993, 48% of all women who had ever been married or lived in common law relationships reported that their previous partners had assaulted them (Carter, 1999, p. 6).*

*After the disclosure of a daughter's sexual abuse by her father, one half of non-offending mothers responded protectively; one quarter of non-offending mothers responded with disbelief, or did nothing; and, one quarter of non-offending mothers rejected their daughters (Strand, 2000, p. 6).*

*After experiencing childhood sexual abuse, 20 years later 80% of female survivors are still searching for a way to make sense of their experiences; 50% of female survivors can make no sense of their experiences at all (Salter, 1995, p. 207).*

*Finally, I can stand it no longer and stop taking notes on these awful statistics. I remember Sandra Butler (cited by Lewis, 1999) asking:*

*[H]ow do we bear what we know? How do you bear all the ways you are hated, all the ways you are treated with contempt, all of the ways your life is less than it should have been? How do you feel that? (p. 77)*

*I feel as if I have no adequate answers to her questions.*

The sexual abuse of children is such an extreme form of violence that it has been described as "Soul Murder" (Shengold, cited by Jacobs, 1994, p.55).

Soul Murder is neither a diagnosis nor a condition. It is a dramatic term for a circumstance that eventuates in crime – the deliberate attempt to eradicate or compromise the separate identity of another

person. The victims of soul murder remain in large part possessed by another, their souls in bondage to someone else.

(Shengold, cited by Jacobs, 1994, p. 55)

In short, child sexual abuse is a crime in which the victim loses her self. Although the victim may not be killed, the perpetrator brings about her psychological death (Adams, 1994). The usual comprehensive definitions of child sexual abuse cannot begin to describe the true nature of the violence and the devastating long-term consequences of the pain and suffering that the perpetrator inflicts upon the child. This suffering does not end after the disclosure of the abuse. Indeed, depending on the victim's circumstances it may even intensify (Ainscough & Toon, 1993; Carter, 1999; Herman, 1992; Hooper, 1992; Martens & Daily, 1988; Salter, 1995; Strand, 2000).

Hooper (1992) describes childhood sexual abuse as the exploitation of a power relationship over children for the sexual gratification of an adult or significantly older child (p. 72). Hooper (citing Glaser & Frosch, 1992) continues:

[T]his pertains whether or not this activity involves explicit coercion by any means, whether or not it involves genital or physical contact, whether or not initiated by the child, and whether or not there is discernible harmful outcome in the short term. (p. 72)

Clearly, as minors, children are in no position to give their informed consent to any sexual activities with adults. And, as Herman (1981) points out, given the tacitly coercive or violent contexts in which sexual abuse occurs, neither are children in a

position to *refuse* consent. What is clear is that sexually abused children are “intentionally chosen and deliberately hurt” (Heineman, 1998, p. 7).

Most children who are sexually abused do not in fact describe what they have experienced as “sex” (Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989, p. 56). Rather it is experienced as violence, and a betrayal of the sacred trust between adult (often the child’s parent) and the child. From a feminist perspective, this violence is only comprehensible with an understanding of how the differences in power between men, women and children are played out not only within the “public” institutions of our culture, but also within the “private” realm of the family. It is the pervasive dominance of men over women, and adults over children, in our patriarchal economic, legal, medical, educational, and religious institutions that makes possible and sustains such continued widespread violence against women and children (Carter, 1999; Danica, 1996; Doane & Hodges, 2001; Herman, 1981; Herman 1992; Hooper, 1992; Jacobs, 1994; Langlois, 1997, Lewis, 1999; Mendel, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Strand, 2000). Thus, any study of the nature and effects of the sexual abuse of children and violence against women is “legitimate only in a context that challenges the subordination of women and children” (Herman, 1992, p. 9). Judith Herman’s (1992) groundbreaking work on trauma is developed from just such a feminist perspective. Her research has been so influential to feminist scholars, and medical and legal professionals working in the field of child sexual abuse that I will outline the most important of her ideas here.

Herman’s (1992) work examines the long-term effects of childhood sexual abuse on a survivor, effects that will usually be felt well into adulthood and

throughout a survivor's whole life. Such trauma is not insignificant: the levels of trauma and subsequent post-traumatic stress disorder suffered by those who have been sexually abused in childhood are similar in kind and degree to the trauma experienced by those who have survived acts of genocide, war combat, internment in concentration camps, political imprisonment, and torture (Herman, 1992). However, given the masculinist culture of all our important institutions – medical, legal, educational, etc. – it is not surprising that the trauma suffered by women and children in sexual and domestic life is greatly minimized. After all, the minimization and trivialization of the pervasiveness and devastating effects of sexual abuse, as well as the continued promulgation of limited legal definitions of what constitutes sexual abuse, function to undergird and to further the violence of the masculinist culture itself.

Herman (1992) calls psychological trauma “an affliction of the powerless” (p. 33). She writes:

Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection and meaning. It was once believed that such events were uncommon. In 1980, when post-traumatic stress disorder was first included in the diagnostic manual, the American Psychiatric Association described traumatic events as “outside the range of usual experience.” Sadly, this definition has proved to be inaccurate. Rape, battery, and other forms of sexual and domestic violence are so common a part of women's lives that they

can hardly be described as outside the range of ordinary experience.

(p. 33)

Trauma occurs in situations where the victim feels utterly helpless and powerless to control events, and where she feels a “threat of annihilation” (p. 33). Traumatic experiences, such as childhood sexual abuse and the battery of women within the institution of marriage, destroy the victim’s sense of human dignity, selfhood and bodily integrity. Repeated and continuous exposure to such violence and trauma over time (as is often the case of child abuse and domestic violence, as opposed to the trauma suffered in a car accident or natural disaster) increases the degree of post-traumatic stress disorder that the victim will suffer later in life (Herman, 1992).

Thereafter, the victim, faced with her own helplessness in the face of cruelty and violence experienced over an extended period of time, is left with a sense of alienation, shame, and guilt, and also an inability to name their experience and make sense of these past violent acts (Carter, 1999; Danica, 1996; Doane & Hodges, 2001; Herman, 1981; Herman 1992; Hooper, 1992; Jacobs, 1994; Lewis, 1999; Mendel, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Strand, 2000). Lacking an adequate language for her experience, feeling cut off from others, and burdened with the crippling emotions of shame, guilt, and inferiority, the survivor must live on as best she can with the distressing symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.

However, the effects of trauma are not limited to the destruction of a victim’s sense of self. Tragically, the experience of trauma tears apart the victim’s “systems

of attachment and meaning that link individual and community” (Herman, 1992, p. 51).

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love and community.

They shatter the construction of the self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. (p. 51)

This tearing apart of the victim’s systems of attachment, the breaching of the bonds of family, friendship, love and community, is not just a consequence of having lived through a traumatic event. Indeed, in order for a perpetrator to commit acts of violence and terror over time, he must first sever his victim’s attachments and bonds to other human beings. In other words, breaking the victim’s human attachments and bonds is a *prerequisite* to the battery of women and the sexual abuse of children, as my mother, sister, and I well knew. Herman (1992) calls this breaking of human bonds in order to create a situation in which prolonged and repeated trauma occurs “captivity” (Herman, 1992, p. 74).

According to Herman (1992), captivity describes a situation in which the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in his victim’s life.

A single traumatic event can occur almost anywhere. Prolonged, repeated trauma, by contrast, occurs only in circumstances of captivity.

When the prisoner is free to escape, she will not be abused a second time; repeated trauma occurs only when the victim is a prisoner, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator. (p. 74)

Political prisoners and prisoners of war in internment camps, victims of torture, hostages, and those who have survived concentration camps have experienced this kind of captivity. It may also be experienced by members of religious cults, the sex trade, and the porn industry. And, Herman claims, by great numbers of women and children who live with violence and sexual abuse within their families.

Of course, the powerful, dominant socio-cultural mythologies of the loving, nuclear family work against widespread public recognition and acknowledgement of the oppressive nature of many women and children's experiences of violence and abuse within the home. Further, the absence of any of the visible trappings of captivity – high walls, armed guards, etc. – mean that the invisible chains of captive women and children often go unnoticed.

In most homes, even the most oppressive, there are no bars on the windows, no barbed wire fences. Women and children are not ordinarily chained, though even this occurs more often than one might think. The barriers to escape are generally invisible. They are nonetheless extremely powerful. Children are rendered captive by their condition of dependency. Women are rendered captive by economic, social, psychological, and legal subordination, as well as by physical force. (Herman, 1992, p. 74)

What keeps women and children in a state of helplessness and psychological captivity, however, is what keeps other types of captive people, such as political prisoners and hostages, psychologically captive. In all cases of captivity the perpetrator acts coercively, tyrannically and capriciously; he isolates, humiliates and

terrorizes the victim; he destroys the victim's autonomy by controlling as many aspects of the victim's daily life and bodily functions as possible (including eating, sleeping, washing, dressing); he threatens the victim with death or serious physical harm in order to create a sense of disempowerment; and, limits and controls the victim's contact with other human beings in order to create a sense of disconnection. Even those who actively and forcefully resist such methods of control ultimately break under extreme duress (Herman, 1992).

These methods of breaking and controlling human beings, of rendering people captive, are remarkably consistent no matter what the context of the victim's captivity may be (see Walker, cited by Herman, 1992, p. 76). In fact, "professional captors" such as interrogators and pimps use the same methods in an organized manner. What I find most chilling, however, is Herman's (1992) assertion that in cases of the battery of women and the sexual abuse of children, the perpetrator employs exactly the same coercive techniques as the "professionals."

Even in domestic situations, where the batterer is not part of any larger organization and has had no formal instruction in these techniques, he seems time and again to reinvent them. (Herman, 1992, p. 76)

Such consistent behaviour on the part of captors towards their prey may be understood within the framework of ritual. As in ritual, the captor follows similar patterns and routines from one context to another, but each captor embellishes and improvises on the themes: isolation, terror, control, humiliation, disempowerment, disconnection, and so forth. The captor's ritualized behaviour acts as a "technology of transformation" (Driver, 1998, p. 47), a phenomenally powerful, embodied,

politically and ethically charged practice that establishes social order, and changes relationships with the wider community of living beings. As such, it is, of course, a form of pedagogical practice.

Ritual, as a form of pedagogical practice, is never ethically or politically neutral. When ritual is directed toward harmful, destructive or unethical ends, and is performed for the purpose of decreasing individual and communal harmony, peace and freedom, the results of such practice are equally as powerful and transformative as the healing and prayerful rituals that I have described in the previous chapter. Rituals are not merely passive reflections of political and ethical practice, they *are* political and ethical practice, simultaneously celebrating that which they constitute in the very act of performance.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, what is and is not considered ethical is always hotly contested, especially with regards to pedagogical practice. Less equivocal, however, is that ritual is used to create and maintain not only the physical and psychic being of the participants, but also their economic and social status (LaChapelle, 1988). Through the performance of ritual, it is possible to create and maintain structures of violent power. This is achieved by channelling aggression to establish and fuel ruling classes, and by harnessing the awesome processes of brutality and colonization to conquer, dominate, domesticate and devour the Other, whether that Other be a culture, an ethnic group, a social minority, or a single human being.

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<sup>2</sup> I employ Driver's (1998) broad definition of the word "political" here: having to do with the contesting of power and policy within the body politic (p. xv).

The ritual world is a personal one, not the impersonal realm postulated by science. It is a world in which personal agents direct their interactive performances toward the reordering of social relationships. . . . Since the transformative potential of rituals is very high and not always directed toward ethically justifiable ends, it is fearsome. The totalitarian uses of ritual in our own time (and before) have shown that it holds the power to transform people not only into creatures of freedom but also into destructive armies and mass murderers. (Driver, 1998, p. 191)

It is important to remember that rituals of violence and domination are enacted by people who, even if acting "alone," always belong to social groups. Such social groupings of people are borne out of shared or imposed, subjective interpretations of class, race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, physical embodiment (such as age, health/illness, dis/ability), and so forth. These groupings, into which individual people are classified and divided, are regulated through the unimaginably complex workings of each culture's institutions -- legal, medical, educational, governmental, religious, scientific, familial, etc. -- each of which have their own customary rituals of order, control, and evolution.

Although sexual abuse and incest is thought of as a socially taboo activity that is supposedly discouraged and criminalized, in ritual activity, marginal behaviour that would not be permissible outside of the ritual space is tolerated and accepted, encouraged even (Driver, 1998). (For example, Herman (1992) asserts that childhood sexual abuse is not so much prohibited as regulated by our legal systems.)

Remember, ritual is a liminal activity, and hence operates not *outside* social norms, but on the chaotic *borders* of social order. My abuser's violent and sexually abusive behaviour followed specific patterns of ritualization -- temporally, spatially, and corporeally -- that gave form to his brutal domination.

It is important to note here that there is a subtle difference between saying there is widespread *acceptance* of an established ritualized order, in which girls and woman are brutalized, and the widespread *belief* in such an order. Rappaport's (cited by Driver, 1998) work on the performance of ritual highlights this crucial difference. Here, he explores the finely nuanced difference between "acceptance" and "belief" in those who participate in Church liturgy:

Liturgical orders are public, and participation in them constitutes a public acceptance of a public order, regardless of the private state of belief. Acceptance is, thus, a fundamental social act, and it forms a basis for public orders, which unknowable and volatile belief or conviction cannot. (p. 148)

Rappaport continues . . .

It is an entailment of liturgical performances to establish conventional understandings, rules and norms in accordance with which everyday behaviour is supposed to proceed, not to control that behaviour directly. (p. 148)

Similarly, all of our society's important institutions -- educational, academic, medical, familial, etc. -- are comprised of complex, interwoven ritualized performances, which establish differential, unequal gender relationships.

Participation in such institutional rituals supports a culture in which violence against women and girls is accepted, and becomes a naturalized part of everyday life. To speak out against this “natural” state of affairs – these all too familiar mythologized notions of gender relations -- is to risk punishment for disrupting the habitual ritualized performances that sustain our public institutions.

How can one speak up and yet still belong? How should I speak about my own experiences of childhood abuse -- sexual, physical, and emotional?

How does one translate a language that is neither written nor spoken, especially considering that translation can itself be a tool for domination, or can simply be a dull and coarse substitute for what is translated? (Edgerton, 2001, p. 4)

To do so is to attempt to translate a language of violence, an embodied language of hatred, rage and fear, into a text of written English. What gets left out in the translation of trauma narratives might be called poetry (Edgerton, 2001). Perhaps that is why I first tried to write about my remembered experience of sexual abuse through poetry, to cut through the emptiness of expository language, to bridge the gaps between the embodied remembrance of the first language and an inevitably inadequate translation.

*In a graduate class on research and narrative inquiry, the professor (Leggo, 1997) read aloud the biblical story of the Prodigal Son, and asked his students to write something in reply to the story for class the following week. My professor’s rendition of the familiar Bible story, one that I had heard so many times before,*

*stirred me to write about my relationship with my abuser for the first time. I wrote a poem, which I entitled Forgive and forget.*

*You were the first  
to pull me onto his lap  
to take me into his arms  
to bury his face in my hair.*

*You were the first  
to slowly undress me  
to lie down beside me  
to run his hands over my skin.*

*I caress these jagged fragments,  
the threadbare childhood memories  
I've held close all these years,  
fearful of losing my past, my self, you,  
wishing I could remember more  
after a life spent on the run.*

*I hold the pitiful tatters of my story, his story  
and wonder what happened next?*

*I left your home at seventeen --  
never went back.*

*You are sixty now, and sick.*

*You have a bad heart.*

*I doubt we'll meet again.*

*First I'd have to know*

*What will I get if I forget?*

*What must I give if I forgive?*

I chose not to bring my poem to class, preferring to be pegged as the student who did not complete her homework than run the risk of having to read the text aloud to my classmates. But in writing this poem I did begin to struggle with my embodied truths in the difficult medium of language. In choosing not to flee from that which is difficult, that which is in fact agonizing, I am attempting to speak into my own silences, and the silences of our culture. To live in petrified silence, keeping shameful secrets -- his, mine, ours -- too close to the heart, is to always be haunted by night terrors, to always be vulnerable to the predator, condemned to always live life without the power of consciousness and agency. Like Bluebeard, the grisly suitor of the fairy tale, who seeks out naïve, powerless young women, whom he then seduces, murders and dismembers, the man who abuses a young girl denies her sense of beauty, love, and self. All the while, so the tale goes, the girl's mother sleeps on, unaware of what is happening (Estes, 1992). In deciding to wake up and dig through the rotten, corporeal debris of my childhood -- the self-knowledge that I have rejected, the painful clues I have denied, and the disgusting secrets I have hidden -- I am turning psychic detritus into compost, "the 'prima materia' from which all real

growth comes” (Harvey, in Brussat & Brussat (Eds.), 1996, p. 435).

As Kundera (cited by Edgerton, 2001) reminds us: Forgetting is a form of death (p. 8). Choosing to not forget, choosing to actively remember, is to choose life. Kundera (cited by Edgerton, 2001) employs the term “organized forgetting” to describe the methodical process of choosing to forget, which is practiced not only by individuals, but also by families and the other diverse public institutions of which societies and nation states are comprised (p. 8). Thus, remembering, and then speaking of personal trauma, can be viewed as a radically political act, an attempt to break icy silences, and to make meaning in support of wider social justice. Even though in speaking publicly I may invite stigma and risk my credibility as a scholar (see Herman, 1992), the need to make sense of my experiences – experiences shared by so many others -- drives me on. The need to make meaning is a fundamental desire shared by human beings in every culture.

The processes of meaning making can only take place in community, however. Within the familial community of my childhood, there was no language for the abuse I suffered. Like most abused young children, I assumed guilt for the situation, and blamed myself for what was happening. I felt different – not quite a part of my family. I did not have the language to describe my circumstances, until my abuser told a story that explained my predicament. Quite typically, his explanation carried an emotionally abusive power, denying my very humanity.

*When I was about five or six, my abuser told me that I wasn't really born in a hospital in London; I was a fairy changeling, who had been left on the doorstep. He*

*said that fairies often left small, skinny fairy babies with human families so that the human foster parents could take care of them. Only when a weak little fairy changeling grew up, would her fairy parents come back to reclaim their child. The fairy child would be whisked away magically, never to be seen again.*

*I had always thought that there was something wrong with me, as if I didn't belong, that I was out of place in my family, and that was why they didn't really love me. My abuser's announcement confirmed my worst suspicions: I was not even human.*

*I really did not want to believe this awful fairy changeling story. But my abuser reminded me that, unlike my little sister, I was indeed quite a skinny girl, with knobby knees, and pointy elbows and heels, just like the fairy changeling children. This was irrefutable evidence. My abuser enjoyed my terror and distress, contorting his face into a malicious grin, a horrible baring of his teeth. Convinced that he was right, I vowed there and then to keep my true status as fairy changeling secret from everyone – even my sister. Meanwhile, I waited in dread for the fairy parents who had originally abandoned me to come back and carry me off. I knew that one day I might simply disappear from the human world, and there would be nothing anyone could do to save me.*

Now I wish to re-story my life, to search for new meanings that will replace my abuser's narrative interpretations.

After a cruel childhood, one must reinvent oneself.

Then reimagine the world.

(Oliver, 1995, p. 52)

## **Absence: Returning to my mother's city**

*Now I'm in my mid-thirties, whenever I walk past a mirror I can easily catch sight of my mother as I knew her in her thirties. She looks right back at me. Then I am delighted and horrified when I realize that it's really me, with my mother's eyes and face, the same set of the mouth, and the skin around the lower jawbone just slightly beginning to soften and age. In a sense, my mother is always with me wherever I go.*

*Yet, as it is with most survivors of childhood sexual abuse, my mother was an absent presence throughout my childhood, the parent who at crucial moments of my life was not there for me. She despised the role of motherhood, and assumed it only with great reluctance. Her undisguised ambivalence as a mother, her emotional distance and none too veiled hostility towards me, her elder daughter, leave me now as an adult wondering who she was.*

*Several years after my mother's death, I returned to London, her place of birth and mine. I always think of London as my mother's city. She loved London like a dear, grey old friend. Each day I found myself walking through Covent Garden, Bloomsbury, Holborn, China Town, and into Soho, the neighbourhoods that formed the landscapes of my early childhood. Bertaux's Patisserie on Greek Street in Soho, the old Bloomsbury Squares, the British Museum, matinee performances in tiny Victorian theatres, Christopher Wren churches like Saint Paul's Cathedral and Saint Martin-in-the-Fields where I was christened, the old Covent Garden Market, the Angel Market, the Gainsboroughs and Constables in the National Gallery, Primrose*

*Hill, the Embankment . . . By walking the familiar London streets, I was re-igniting an intimate, personal relationship with place, where each feature of my surroundings was known and had a name, where every corner came alive through connections of memory and generations of storied family experience. In retracing childhood steps, I felt able to come close to my mother. Or, perhaps I was able to imagine myself coming closer to her. I was making a pilgrimage of love: simultaneously a ritual of leave taking, and a ritual of return. I was once again in my mother's city. I was home.*

*When my mother was in London she was always able to make beauty and sensual pleasure a part of her everyday life. She knew all the secret little public gardens and squares that were tucked away out of sight. She adored window-shopping. She loved the pleasures of good simple food in season; the rich world of music, ballet, art, and theatre in the West End; the splendid spaces of cathedrals, and the vernacular architecture of ordinary English shops and houses. Despite her obvious ambivalence towards motherhood, it was my mother who taught me to understand and appreciate beauty, and to recognise its presence in every aspect of daily life.*

*I am grateful for this inheritance. As I walked through my childhood haunts, carefully recreating the rituals that my mother performed and shared with me when I was a young girl, I was slowly winding a blanket of love around myself. Through visiting my mother's special places, I was calling my mother back to me through ritual.*

Rituals employ symbols so as to invoke, to address, to affect, even to manipulate, one or another unseen power. It is these actions – invoking, addressing, affecting, manipulating – that are primary. They are so much more fundamental than the symbols that we may even regard the symbols as having been generated through ritualization.

(Driver, 1999, p. 97)

*Nonetheless, despite my long ritualized search, my mother, as always, was just beyond reach, too elusive to feel her near. While visiting a Bloomsbury church I was overcome by grief at the futility of my longing, and the depth of my emotional wounds. I realized that what I had been seeking was the dream of a mother's unconditional love for her child.*

*In so many ways, I have always felt my mother's absence. She was absent when she did not stop her partner from hitting me, even when I was only a few months old. Absent through a long depression, sleeping through our school days and getting up just as we got home, pretending that she had been busy all day, though her bed was still warm. Absent frequently in her emotional distance and almost total dismissal of me as her daughter. Absent when her partner then began to sexually abuse me; she somehow wordlessly accepted that this was how our lives would be and that she would not intervene on my behalf. Absent again, when she repeatedly left me alone with him.*

*When I was about twelve, my mother announced she was leaving her partner. She packed up a few belongings and left, taking my little sister, leaving me behind*

*with him. Why did she leave me behind? Why did she choose my sister and not me? Eventually she came back. But she didn't return for me. She lived with her partner again until a year after I left home, when she left once more, taking my sister with her again. I suspect in leaving me behind she wanted to leave behind the ugly secret of the sexual abuse.*

*My mother acted as if her partner were having an affair with another woman, but the situation was far worse than that as her own daughter, a child, was that other woman. She seemed unable to comprehend how completely I was trapped, an unwilling participant in this nightmare. Perhaps this was just more horrific a life than she ever could have imagined for herself, or for her children? My mother was of course unable to vent her anger and hatred directly towards the perpetrator of the abuse, the man of whom she was so terrified. She suffered him in silence, but seethed at me; it is easier to blame a child than a violent man. I still cannot grasp how as a young girl, I survived all of the terror, cruelty, betrayal and silence.*

I turn to feminist theory in order to comprehend, and have compassion for, the suffering of my mother, and the ways in which she accommodated her partner's abusive relationship toward me. As a woman in a battering relationship, my mother was also what Herman (1992) would call a "captive." Under her partner's control, she slowly lost more and more autonomy, and became increasingly isolated. Her economic, social, and emotional powers weakened the longer she stayed in the relationship.

Herman (1992) describes the final stage of a battering victim's captivity:

[T]he final step in the psychological control of the victim is not completed until she has been forced to violate her own moral principles and to betray her basic human attachments.

Psychologically, this is the most destructive of all coercive techniques, for the victim who has succumbed loathes herself. It is at this point, when the victim under duress participates in the sacrifice of others, that she is truly "broken." . . . Even the most outrageous physical or sexual abuse of the children is borne in silence. At this point, the demoralization of the battered woman is complete. (p. 83)

My mother probably first thought of me, her firstborn unwanted child, as the price of maintaining her relationship with her partner, rather than as a welcome addition to her family. However, by the time she was completely broken by her partner, she saw me as a sacrifice. She was willing to sacrifice my body, my health, my sanity, in order to survive. Although she did not participate in the sexual abuse, she knew it was happening and looked the other way.

I believe that my mother's partner used me to torment my mother by elevating me to a special status within the family. As my mother was pushed away by her partner's cruelty, she withdrew from her role as wife and fell deeper into depression. I slept in the same bed as my abuser: I was responsible for large amounts of my younger sister's care: I was responsible for increasing amounts of housework: I was also responsible for the emotional care of my abuser. It was just as if he had taken me for his wife.

The patterns of our family life were typical, given the environment of sexual abuse and violence in which we lived. The dynamics of such relationships are thoroughly documented in the literature on sexual abuse (Ainscough & Toon, 1993; Ashley, 1992; Carter, 1999; Daly, 1998; Danica, 1996; Downing, 1992; Herman, 1981; Herman 1992; Hooper, 1992; Jacobs, 1994; Langlois, 1997; Lewis, 1999; Martens & Daily, 1988; Renvoize, 1993; Salter, 1995; Sanderson, 1995; Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989; Strand, 2000; Travers, 1999). As I read through all this literature, trying to make sense of my childhood and my relationship with my mother, I am struck by the cancerous nature of my abuser's sexual abuse and violence. It has scarred every member of our nuclear family, creeping into every aspect of our lives.

One of the most devastating aspects of the sexual abuse of girls by male family members is the destruction of the mother-daughter bond. The mother-daughter relationship is "the primary parental attachment that underlies psychosocial development and the construction of the female self" (Jacobs, 1994, p. 15). The mother may feel rage, hostility, mistrust, anger, resentment and jealousy at being "replaced" by her daughter. She may feel guilt, shame and grief because of her inability or unwillingness to intervene in the sexual abuse. Unable to face the reality of her life, and fearful of the partner, her "captor," the mother's negative emotions are often directed at the victimized daughter (Ashley, 1992; Martens & Daily; 1988). At precisely the time when the daughter needs the benevolence of her mother the most, she may find herself alone. The captive daughter, powerless to break the cycle of abuse on her own, must also contend with the loss of the intimate mother-daughter relationship.

Under these conditions the daughter responds to the mother by rejecting her completely. Instead, she identifies with her abuser, the one person who gives her attention and shows her any kind of “love” (Herman, 1992; Jacobs, 1994). Thus, the daughter’s sense of identity, femininity and sexuality develops in a climate of male violence and control that is characterized by a hatred of females (Jacobs, 1994). In her study of incest victims, Herman (cited by Jacobs, 1994) found that:

With the exception of those who had become conscious feminists, most of the incest victims seemed to regard all women, including themselves, with contempt. (p. 15)

Paradoxically, although it is the male family member who perpetrates the abuse, the young female victim grows to mistrust and hate women. She also develops a masochistic sense of femininity in which her needs and desires are subjugated to the needs and desires of males, and in which love is equated with suffering (Jacobs, 1994). Thus, the sexual abuse of girls by male family members functions as a violent, patriarchal pedagogy. From a Foucauldian perspective, the concept of discipline is used to describe the “form of social power which regulates everyday life by working on the body” (Lewis, 1999, p. 35). An individual’s body is constantly manipulated and trained, until it responds and performs in ways that reflect her social positioning. By the time the sexually abused girl has become a woman, she has already fully internalized and embodied the masculinist, misogynistic beliefs of the broader culture, and may remain “captive” for life.

## **Silence: The pedagogy of professional bystanders**

As any musician, athlete, massage therapist, or survivor of trauma will attest:

The body remembers, the bones remember, the joints remember, even the little finger remembers. Memory is lodged in pictures and feelings in the cells themselves. (Estes, 1992, p. 200)

Somatic memory is indeed a powerful form of recollection.

However, survivors of trauma, including survivors of childhood sexual abuse, do not remember traumatic events from the past in the same way that they remember other events. During traumatic events, memory is encoded in fragments rather than in narrative episodes (Heineman, 1998; Sanderson, 1995).

If, as many argue, . . . memory is state-dependent, then the affective experience of terror will result in the attendant sensory images being stored in the subcortical areas of the brain as a series of “flashbulb” images. Unlike memories that undergo modification and structuralization as they are processed by the cerebral cortex, these “autobiographical memories” are characterized by a “frozen” quality, as if the sights, sounds, and smells of the original experiences have been seared into the brain exactly as received. These terror-driven memories are viewed as less vulnerable to the distortions that can and do accompany the encoding of narrative memory. (Heineman, 1998, p. 98)

Most survivors of childhood sexual abuse have at some time experienced protective dissociative and amnesiac states, in which they are mentally “not present” during actual abuse in order to absent themselves from trauma, or in which they block out painful memories of abuse, sometimes for decades (Heineman, 1998; Herman, 1992; Lewis, 1999; Sanderson, 1995). Sleeth and Barnsley (1989) describe these states as a form of “self-estrangement” (p. 112), and frequently, they are described in the literature on childhood sexual abuse as “abnormal” and therefore as a form of pathology (see Herman, 1992, p. 96).

However, Lewis (1999) describes the survivor’s ability to enter dissociative states at will as a highly creative response to an extremely difficult situation. Dissociation begins with self-hypnosis and then entry into a trance state, a place of transcendence where the abused child can feel no pain (Herman, 1992; Lewis, 1999).

The survivor experience then is in important ways a mystical one, in that it involves states of consciousness, reported experiences, and visions reported by mystics. . . . In short, survivors are unwilling, uninitiated, unprepared, unschooled mystics. (Culbertson, cited by Lewis, 1999, p. 32)

Although survivors may have successfully blocked out painful memories, everyday sensory experiences can trigger the return of memories of trauma in the form of “flashbacks” many years later. Anything that takes the survivor back to the time of the abuse may trigger a flashback: the smell of a certain cologne; the sight of a blue pick-up truck; the sound of a slamming door. These returning memories are fragmented, powerful, overwhelming, and are relived exactly as they were encoded

during the time of the original trauma. In traumatic memories, imagery and bodily sensation flood back, whereas verbal narrative and a sense of the time and duration of the event are missing (Herman, 1992), as is a sense of overall cohesiveness (Heineman, 1998). It is quite likely that the survivor may disbelieve these memories, and even choose to fight them.

Yet, in fighting terrifying memories of trauma, the survivor perpetuates a dualistic way of relating to herself and to the world. She discounts her own bodily experience. The transcendent states of dissociation that enabled her to survive the abuse now work to maintain her sense of disembodiment, preventing her from accessing her full life experience, her emotions, and her feelings – all her fear, pain, and rage. Sensory perceptions, especially those that might trigger flashbacks, are pushed to the background of awareness and into a mode of semi-consciousness or unconsciousness. Rather than reconnecting with the body, and thinking through the body, the survivor may view the body as “something to get beyond or dominate” (Downing, 1992, p. 76). Recognizing the difficulty of developing a non/dual relationship to one’s self, a self that fully includes one’s body, Tanya Lewis (1999), a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, writes:

Reconnecting my body and feelings leaves me with a heightened awareness of the depth of social inscriptions of the body. In my efforts to regain traumatic memory, to integrate body, mind and feeling, and to negotiate my way through the world, I am constantly encountering the edges of what is possible in normative discourses. (p. 96)

Normative discourses of embodiment, gender and race often work against the survivor's healing process, reinforcing the split between mind and body.

During experiences of sexual abuse, rape, incest or sexual assault, sensations and emotions are inscribed into the body, making it the pedagogical site of a curriculum of gender oppression. For example, in colonizing my body, my abuser was acting within the institutional frameworks of "family" to inscribe differential gender relationships. The family is, of course, a public institution, regulated and controlled by the state and its members.

Whenever a survivor's embodied trauma is re-experienced, she reconnects with traumatic memories that have not yet undergone the processes of structuralization and modification in the way that non-traumatic memories do. Thus, these flashback memories may seem at first to make no sense. Usually non-traumatic memory is shaped and developed in community, through shared narrative rehearsals with others. A meaningful world is created by telling and re-telling memory narratives that are brought to life through acts of communal authorship.

However, in the family of a sexually abused child (especially when a family member is the abuser), narratives of abuse, isolation, terror, pain, loneliness, and fear are not told and re-told, and shaped through shared familial authorship. The fifth birthday party, the time a child learnt to ride her bike without training wheels, the family vacation by the sea – these are the memories that are repeatedly shared in oral narratives and recorded in visual narratives in family photo albums. More often than not, the survivor is faced with a wall of secrecy and cold silence about the abuse when interacting with her family.

The silence I lived everyday at home was never broken at school. School days were filled with all the usual events that played over the surface of my young life like small ripples of water on a deep, dark pool. Tests, examinations, homework, learning Robert Burns' poetry by heart, school plays, sports days, watching boys' fights in the schoolyard, reciting the Lord's Prayer, hopscotch on sunny days: None of this could touch my inner awareness of the life I lived at home. At school, no mention was ever made of the traumatic lives of girls like my sister and me, and women like my mother. The more closely I held my secrets about the violence and abuse that my mother, sister and I suffered, the more poisonous these secrets became. As an educator, I now realize that such curricular silences functioned to erase my embodied knowledge of violence against women and children.

Just as patriarchy is reinscribed through canonical literature, so it is further stabilized through national mythologies in history texts, social studies texts. . . . expressly designed (when designed at all) to silence traumatic narratives – to avoid talk about human experience that touches all, frightens most, and threatens to blow apart national mythologies which have so shaped identities and reified inequitable power relations. (Edgerton, 2001, p. 11)

*As part of my Bachelor of Education degree, I had to complete a project for a social studies course. The task: Choose curriculum materials from the education resource library, and write a paper on the appropriateness of the materials for elementary school students, and how they might be successfully used in an elementary*

*school lesson. I looked through all the curriculum resources in our library, searching for something I would like to research further. On one of the upper shelves, I found a brand new, unused curriculum package that had been recently developed by the local Board of Education for students at the primary and intermediate levels. The materials explored the topic of "woman abuse."*

*This was perfect for me, I thought. The elementary social studies curriculum focused on self, family and community, and this particular curriculum package dealt with all three areas. The teacher resource book provided disturbing statistics on the number of elementary children who had witnessed their mother or another adult female in their family being battered or physically assaulted, as well as statistics on the number of women who died or were seriously injured by "domestic" violence in Canada each year. If the local Board of Education's statistics were correct, approximately half of the school district's students would have witnessed such violence at home. The aim of these curriculum materials was to teach elementary students that family members did not have the right to physically harm or terrorize one another, and that such violence was not an acceptable part of family life. Obviously, this was a pertinent issue for my future students.*

*The curriculum package also contained an age-appropriate video dramatization of a fictional family in which the father physically assaults the mother. The drama modelled simple procedures for children in such situations, explaining what they should and should not do to keep themselves safe. The video demonstrated that children should not try to stand between their mother and father, in the hope of protecting a parent during a physical assault. It advised that, if at all possible, they*

*should get out of the house during an assault, taking any other siblings with them. Children were told to try to reach a neighbour's house so that they could call 911. If it was not possible to escape, they should stay away from the violence in another part of the home. Later, they could tell an adult whom they trusted, like a teacher, about the violence at home.*

*At the time, I was overwhelmed with gratitude for the courage and vision of the curriculum planner who had developed these materials and lesson plans for the younger students in our school district. The information could be lifesaving. At the same time, I was also filled with sadness that no one had shared such information with my sister and me. We had grown up believing that my mother's partner had a right to be violent in "his" home, that this was a natural part of family life, that no one would care if our mother were hurt, and that there was no one who could have helped us anyway. But it seemed as if times had changed. Despite my generally positive feelings about the materials, I was troubled by the way in which the video represented the student's disclosure of the battery to their teacher. I particularly wanted to discuss this aspect of the curriculum package further in my paper.*

*Urged by our social studies professor to discuss our planned projects before writing our papers, I made a few notes and visited her office. As soon as I mentioned the topic of my paper, her expression clouded. She grew hesitant, and said that she would "have to check if it was O.K." to write about this issue, and that she would get back to me. It is important to note that I had not planned to actually teach about the topic of violence against women. We had only been instructed to write about social studies resources that were available to Bachelor of Education students in the*

*university library. One week passed and then two, and as I sat in class I realised that I would not hear back from my professor about whether or not it was alright to write on this topic.*

*So, I went back to the library, selected blander curriculum materials that were almost twenty years old, and again visited my professor in her office with a new bunch of ideas. This time her face brightened when I suggested different topics. I decided not to make waves: I did not write about how to create pedagogical spaces in a social studies classroom where children who had witnessed violence against women could learn basic information on safety, and develop an awareness of healthy relationships and personal boundaries. At the end of the semester, despite receiving an "A+" for the course, I felt betrayed by the professor, and was upset that I could be so easily dissuaded from following my principles. I wondered if I would ever have the guts to teach in such a way as to acknowledge and bear witness to the violence that rips through so many young students' lives.*

The curricular silencing I experienced during my Bachelor of Education program, worked to undermine and repress my self-knowledge. Once again I was signalled to keep this embodied knowledge, which has so fundamentally shaped my life and my personal sense of being, to myself. Was I, an educator, too wrapped up in my personal trauma, rather than our culture's collective trauma? There are those who would believe that teaching about violence against women would automatically turn the classroom into a therapeutic space, an inappropriate venue for the expression of personal grief and anger. However, I am not espousing the idea that a classroom

should be a purely therapeutic space. Rather, I intend to think about ways of creating a space where students can begin to question and resist normative discourses that foster violence against women. In this context, the classroom would be a place in which to work towards social justice. This work is, of course, quite definitely political in its intent.

To say that such social justice work has no place in an elementary classroom is to nourish the violence of abusers, and to rationalize the acts of perpetrators of abuse and incest, making the classroom itself a site of further violence (Edgerton, 2001). By refusing to name this violence and abuse, a patriarchal curriculum increases the collective trauma, and forces the embodied knowledge of generations of women and children underground. When students are forced to bury their experiences of trauma in order that they might “fit in,” they must sever their emotions from their intellect. As a result, such students become what Daly (1998) calls “crippled human beings” (p. 148). For generations, the curricular rituals of public educational institutions have worked to suppress any acknowledgement of survivors’ experience, knowledge, and history.

When I was in my Bachelor of Education program, it seemed as if all the instruction we received on child sexual abuse was designed to protect us, a class of future teachers, from potential lawsuits. Indeed, this aspect of the curriculum was taught by a professor, a lawyer, whose area of specialization was education and the law. We were taught how and when to report suspected sexual abuse in a manner that would not infringe upon any regulations or laws. We were also taught how to avoid any allegations of child sexual abuse that might arise from the ways that we dealt

with our students. But we were not taught how to identify sexual abuse, or how to work with students who had been sexually abused. Sadly, very few programs and resources have been developed to educate teachers and parents about the nature and effects of child sexual abuse. Rather, the focus is on self-help -- teaching children to come forward and disclose abuse. Paradoxically, in continuing to concentrate on teaching children to speak up on their own behalf, educators and designers of curriculum materials place the onus for disclosure of sexual abuse and self-protection onto the abused child (Heineman, 1998, p. 93).

This is problematic as children who have been sexually abused may have a heightened sense of fear and distrust of adults. They may not even realize that what is happening to them is sexual abuse (Travers, 1999). They may also have learned to survive through the processes of denial and dissociation, and by passing as "normal" in order that the abuse may remain undetected (Danica, 1996; Heineman, 1998). Children know that they live in a world where they have less power than adults, both in school and at home. Being highly attuned to the power relationships that exist between them and the adults who surround them, sexually abused children often actively resist disclosure. They hide and suppress any experiences and feelings that they feel will "too greatly disturb their images of themselves, their parents, and the parent-child relationship" (Heineman, 1998, p.91). Of course, listening to the children we teach and care for is a key factor in the prevention of child abuse, as is teaching them about sex education, including sexual abuse. But educators also need to develop an awareness of the state of captivity in which many sexually abused children live, and be cognizant of the huge pressure the parents, one of whom may be

the abuser, may put on the child to recant (Salter, 1995). Indeed, abused children are exquisitely aware of the danger they may be in if they choose to disclose abuse.

Children should *not* be in the business of reporting sexual or physical abuse. For children in this miserable situation – of having to explain to one or several adults that they have been physically, sexually or emotionally abused – the world has gone terribly, terribly wrong.

(Heineman, 1998, p. 93)

*When I was twelve years old and already in secondary school, the English teacher gave our class a homework assignment. We were to write an essay entitled "Alone." The teacher suggested that we could write about the plight of lonely elderly people, or the experience of being lost in a forest. When I got home, I took out a notebook and began to write the first draft of my essay. I wrote the title – ALONE – then stopped. I felt an urge to write about my experiences of life at home, but I simply could not put pen to paper. What if my abuser discovered it? There was no telling what would happen to me. I quickly ripped the page out of the notebook and burnt it in the fireplace, as if in destroying the page I could also destroy the very thought of disclosure. Instead, I wrote an essay on one of the topics suggested by the teacher. I still have that notebook, though, with all its blank pages. I keep it as a reminder of the time I came closest to disclosing the family secret.*

Like many girls at school, I was clearly a submissive learner. I sacrificed my needs and silenced my voice, in order to serve and please the teacher, and to "pass" in

order to maintain secrecy and hide my shame. James MacDonald (in MacDonald (Ed.), 1995) describes a student's experience of the coercive nature of everyday school activities:

The exercise of unequal power, the use of praise or blame in group settings, and the judgmental aura of the school activity clearly communicate that the personal meanings of the person are not legitimate for common sharing with others. Further, the expression of personal meaning under these circumstances involves high risk on the part of the student. (p. 119)

In this kind of pedagogical climate, the relatively powerless student will certainly be disinclined to discuss disturbing topics, such as violence and abuse, no matter how great their personal import.

Despite the mistaken but widespread notion that children will simply disclose abuse to trusted adults in authority, such as teachers, most children reach adulthood with the secrets of their abuse intact. Still, many survivors of child sexual abuse continue to believe that school may be the "only realistic intervention point" for sexually abused children (Sleeth & Barnsley, 1989, p.70). However, as I have highlighted above, the obstacles to disclosure are many. The kinds of discussions that need to take place in our teacher education programs and schools are not taking place. Our teacher education programs do not adequately instruct pre-service teachers about the pervasiveness and nature of sexual abuse, and the devastating effects of abuse on the children with whom we work. Rather, neophyte teachers are schooled in the ways of the law in order that they might protect their future professional status. There is

little discussion of their responsibility as teachers to their students beyond the minimal requirements of reporting suspected abuse to social services. There is also a fear of even examining available curriculum materials and exploring possible pedagogical approaches to this topic within the relative safety of a Bachelor of Education program. Unfortunately, this unquestioning acceptance of the curricular canon, in which social norms and values are connected, virtually ensures the replication and validation of violence against women and children.

In short, student teachers are trained to be bystanders, to side with perpetrators of trauma, rather than become advocates for victims of trauma. Judith Herman (1992) writes:

[W]hen . . . traumatic events are of human design, those who bear witness are caught in the conflict between victim and perpetrator. It is morally impossible to remain neutral in this conflict. The bystander is forced to take sides. It is very tempting to take the side of the perpetrator. All the perpetrator asks is that the bystander do nothing. He speaks to the universal desire to see, hear, and speak no evil. The victim, on the contrary, asks the bystander to share the burden of pain.

The victim demands action, engagement, and remembering. (pp. 7-8)

The desire of educators, in schools and in teacher education programs, to not know -- to see, hear, and speak no evil -- is the futile desire to remain a bystander, to remain morally neutral. It is a refusal to bear witness to children's suffering, and to assume any collective responsibility at all for restoring justice (Herman, 1992). This refusal to bear witness can be seen in teachers' fears of embracing conflict in the hope of

social change. It can be seen in their refusal to engage deeply with pedagogical practices that explore and work toward ending violence against women and children.

This refusal to bear witness to children who have been sexually abused is not new. Perhaps Freud is the most notorious example of a professional who refused to bear witness to the suffering of his own patients (Herman, 1981). Feminist analyses go some way to understanding the silences of professionals: Often it is left to those who have survived childhood sexual abuse to claim their right to theorize their experiences, and to provide such analyses for others (Daly, 1998). In so doing, survivors are breaking the ultimate taboo -- that of speaking of childhood sexual abuse.

[T]his is how child abuse continues to exist; by not telling our stories when it is finally safe to do so, we allow child abuse to continue in our families and in our communities. Silence literally kills. It kills us first, and goes on to destroy those around us. Our silence protects, not ourselves, but the abusers. (Danica, 1996, p. 137)

Silence and secrecy are the defining features of childhood sexual abuse, and are perhaps as damaging or more damaging than the abuse itself. Our classroom practices and curricular canon have functioned to maintain this silence and secrecy (Daly, 1998). Many educators have naively trusted that curricular language is always fair, neutral and transparent. They frequently fail to question the ways in which language makes marginal people invisible, and how it silences narratives that run counter to the normative discourses that underpin childhood sexual abuse and violence against women.

It is collectively healing for survivors to speak their stories, to bring structure and meaning to that which seems meaningless and bereft of hope, thereby risking growth and change. In attempting to create meaningful narratives, to give shape and sense to constantly surfacing memories, the survivor is challenged to “become a theologian, a philosopher, and a jurist” (Herman, 1992, p. 178). And, I would add, a pedagogue. In struggling to articulate a language that can give meaning to the trauma of childhood sexual abuse, survivors begin to reconnect with their embodied experiences, thereby breaking down the duality of body and mind, and re-embodying their intellect. In seeking to give voice to the fullness of their lived experience, they can – we can -- perhaps also move to a space beyond the further limiting duality of victim and survivor. Together, in community, educators can find ways to challenge the curricular and pedagogical silences and secrecy that so nurture the sexual abuse of children and violence against women.

**FOR THE LOVE OF THE GAME:  
THE PUBLIC PEDAGOGY OF  
POPULAR CULTURE**

I think it is slightly misleading to speak of our culture as lacking contemplative mind. When we feel that, we are rather lamenting the deplorable contemplative state within which the common mind is absorbed. . . . Television, modern culture's peculiar contemplative shrine, supplies a contemplative trance to millions of people, for hours on end day after day year in and year out. It is unfortunately a trance in which sensory dissatisfaction is constantly reinforced, anger and violence is imprinted, and confusion and the delusion of materialism is constructed and maintained. (Thurman, 2001, p. 2)

*Kitchen God*

*When I lived in Japan  
the Great Land God  
stayed with me.  
He sat on the fridge  
in the kitchen,  
brought me luck, and  
made me happy.  
He carried a mallet,  
a barrel of rice and  
a sack full of fate.  
If you prayed hard enough  
he'd hammer at your door,  
bless you with smiles,  
spill his white seed,  
and you'd be having  
babies,  
hot dinners,  
and good fortune  
for years to come.*

*Now I live in Canada  
Eric Lindros  
stays with me.  
He sits on the fridge  
in the kitchen,  
smiles down from  
a box of Shreddies.  
He wears a helmet,  
and armour, and carries  
a big hooked stick  
for quelling  
the demons and spirits  
that lurk in the shadows.  
O Eric!  
Happy Kitchen God!  
Warm my heart!  
Moisten my womb!  
Bring me babies!  
Keep evil at bay!*

## The aesthetics of hockey

When I first moved to Canada several years ago – a bewildered Landed Immigrant – my new Canadian husband joked that if I really wanted to understand Canadian culture all I had to do was taste the local delicacy, *Kraft Dinner*, and attend a hockey game. I hated *Kraft Dinner*. And I hated hockey. Perhaps because hockey permeates Canadian culture, most Canadians have something to say about it, even if they loathe the sport. Yet, from my discussions with friends I was unable to discover why so many Canadians loved such a violent game.

The night I attended my first National Hockey League (NHL) game a fight broke out between a Vancouver Canuck player named Scottie “The Bulldog” Walker and a Phoenix Coyote player, Michel Petit. The two began throwing punches just a few meters from our seats. The crowd shuddered and stirred itself to life. The people sitting in the four rows in front of me, the rows between me and the glass, all stood up to get a better view. I stood up too. The home crowd cheered on The Bulldog. I was aghast and thrilled as the Coyote’s fists landed on Bulldog’s face. He could not defend himself as his arms were being held back by another Coyote player. Blood flowed from The Bulldog’s split skin, reddening his sweater and freezing in brilliant splashes on the ice. After what seemed like a few minutes, the referees skated in and prized the players apart. They had to scrape the blood off the ice. Only then did the spectators sit down. The next day the *Vancouver Sun* (January 23, 1998) carried a picture of The Bulldog’s face covered with five gashes that were held together with twenty-two stitches.

I was confused about what I was feeling while I was watching: horror and excitement, shame and a sense of passion and aliveness. I was located in a site of contradiction, ambivalence and tension.

In *Art as experience*, the philosopher John Dewey (in McDermott (Ed.), 1939/1958) writing on the segregation of high art from everyday life, and the removal of culturally valued art objects to the sanctified spaces of museums and galleries, declares:

Even a crude experience, if authentically an experience, is more fit to give a clue to the intrinsic nature of aesthetic experience than is an object already set apart from any other mode of experience. (p. 533)

Could one actually say that my experience of this NHL hockey brawl was, at least in part, an aesthetic experience? Dewey states that if one is “to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw” (p. 527), and he is clearly fascinated with the aesthetic qualities intrinsic in everyday experience, the sights and sounds of daily life:

The fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth; the human fly climbing the steeple side; the men perched high in air on girders, throwing and catching red-hot bolts. The sources of art in human experience will be learned by him who sees how the tense grace of the ball-player infects the onlooking crowd. . . . (p. 527)

If Dewey were alive today, he would probably also consider the rawness and freshness of hockey to be a rich source of aesthetic experience. Like Barthes

(1957/1972), who divined cultural and political meaning in wrestling, striptease and margarine, Dewey appreciated the artistic vitality of jazz, comic strips and the movies (p. 528).

So how then, would Dewey define the term “artist”? Dewey (in McDermott (Ed.), 1939/1958) writes that:

The intelligent mechanic engaged in his job, interested in doing well and finding satisfaction in his handiwork, caring for his materials and tools with genuine affection, is artistically engaged. (p. 528)

Thus, for Dewey an artist is someone who is deeply engaged with the creative experience. It is the *quality* of engagement, the *mode* of the performance, the *manner* of approaching an activity that determines whether a person is an artist. The *type* of activity seems insignificant. Indeed, Dewey states that his philosophy seeks to recover “the continuity of esthetic [*sic*] experience with normal processes of living” (p. 532).

Many Canadians experience the emotional and bodily sensations of watching hockey as a form of aesthetic pleasure, even if they have never played the game themselves (for example, most women spectators). The aesthetic of hockey lies in the technical virtuosity of the players, their skills perfected through intense, repetitive practice. The players are so aware, so mindful, of their art form that when they step onto the ice, they are ready to unite with the archetypal forms of the game, to improvise as the game unfolds. This improvisation follows and creates the game’s dynamic pace and flow. It is easy to see this beauty in the never-ending, pick-up games of shinny, or street hockey, which children commonly play all over Canada.

Although it seems transparently simple on the surface, hockey is as intricate as jazz, or a classical fugue. Ten players improvise more or less continuously, acting, reacting, accenting each other, turning mistakes to advantage. They glide down the ice in combinations, soar and collide, then break up and re-form into new patterns, like water or wind-swept snow. The moments of beauty change and vanish quickly but our impressions of the game and those who play it stay with us all our lives. (Gowdey, 1989, p. ix)

The beauty of improvisation is also to be found in the narrative genre of hockey commentary. Indeed, sections of the famous Foster Hewitt's lavish flow of eloquent, and at times surreal, commentary have been transcribed and transformed into passages of freeform poetry (in Gowdey, 1989). In Canada, hockey is popularly thought to be a love of "pure play" (Gowdey, 1989), a form of dance that embodies the spirit and passions of Canadians.

Yet, this notion of purity is somewhat misleading, suggesting almost that the culture of hockey -- and the mediated representations of hockey that the majority of Canadians have free access to through television -- is somehow a spontaneously occurring natural phenomenon. This naturalization of hockey (and indeed the naturalization of the myth of Canadian nationhood with which it goes hand in hand) is an obfuscation of the culturally, historically, economically and politically located forces and values that have created and shaped the sport. This fascination with the purity of hockey is a form of what Barthes (1957/1972) would call "mythologizing" -- the depoliticising of problematic behaviours in a way that makes such behaviours

seem, at least superficially, innocent.

Drawing on Judith Butler's (1990) notion of gender performativity, I interpret the "pure play" of hockey as ritualized gender performance, a celebratory, communal expression of heterosexual, heteronormative culture. An NHL game "performs" the dominant ideology of North American society, a society in which masculinity is closely intertwined with a culture of institutionalized violence.

According to Butler (1990), gender is not an essential, biological category, but a series of ritualized enactments or performances that are repeated over and over. Each performance carries within it a set of values and meanings that function to create and maintain gender. These gender performances are so deeply embedded in all established cultural activities and social transactions that they may feel as if they are a natural, integral part of our identities. In fact, we are usually unaware that we are engaging in daily gender performance. Most people perform their gender within the binary dualisms of compulsory heterosexuality, in which, as Butler writes, "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender" (p. 22).

In her wicked analysis of popular men's sports, Naomi Goldenberg (1993) suggests that bat and ball, and stick and puck games involve players in an intense phallic drama that mirrors "the rigid gender arrangements and restricted sexual activities we practice" in our culture (p. 264). In hockey, for example, a player must control his phallic stick well in order to shoot the small seminal puck into a vaginal goal cavity. But, on the other hand, as Freud himself once said: Sometimes a banana is just a banana.

Nevertheless, the hypermasculine, often violent, gender performance of

professional hockey cannot be so easily equivocated. The ideal NHL hockey player is expected to consistently perform to certain standards every night. He must have high levels of physical and mental endurance and stamina, play stoically through pain and injury, be ruthlessly competitive and fearless, and display an unquenchable desire to win at any cost (Vaz, 1982).

Violent drama is part of the NHL spectacle. Players are trained to be aggressive and physical, to make contact (Vaz, 1982). There are unwritten codes of conduct for behaviour on the ice that encourage fighting. Players are expected to break the formal "written" rules of hockey for particular ends: to ensure that goals are scored or not scored, to intimidate aggressive players, and to protect star players from aggressive contact. Some players are selected specifically for their abilities to perform the task of fighting during the game. In fact, if they do their jobs well, they become known as "role players." By engaging in role playing and performance, hockey players are continuing ancient sporting and dramatic traditions, such as the Roman gladiator fights, and the *agon* of Greek drama -- the enactment of the contest between the incumbent god and his challenger. No wonder that star hockey players are called heroes, warriors and idols, and are worshipped by their fans.

## The erotics of hockey

What fuels the continuous gender performance of NHL hockey? The drama of the hockey game re-enacts and celebrates the organization and direction of sexual and social energies that prevail in the wider society. Ann Ferguson's (1989) theory of sex/affective production may be employed to shed light on the intense emotions that are generated by hockey in Canada. According to Ferguson (1989), in western culture, sexual and social energies have been "socially defined, focussed and organised" in such a way as to create and perpetuate a system of male dominance over females, as well as other forms of dominance (p. 62). Ferguson writes:

Affectionate attachments and friendships of the Platonic sort, maternal and paternal love, kin tie and social bonding with work mates or with a community of identity . . . are all forms of sex/affective energy. . . .

The point is that all known human social constructions of sex/affective energy create the social desire to unite with others as the key focus of this energy. (p. 78)

As sex/affective energy is directed toward the creation and maintenance of the strong human bonds required for people to survive individually and collectively, sex/affective production is a part of the patriarchal capitalist system of economic production.

When sex/affective energies are manifested through rituals of gender performance, such as hockey, we may experience them deeply, bodily, and emotionally. Clearly, the expression of sex/affective energies through gender

performance is closely linked to the erotic. Butler (1990) rightly maintains that in western culture, heterosexual gender performance occurs under “a situation of duress” (p. 139). Nevertheless, we may experience our own gender performance as being pleasurable, sensuous and connecting. We may desire certain gender performances and derive pleasure from them even while they perpetuate social and psychic violence (Martusewicz, 1997).

Hockey not only teaches heterosexual masculine gender performance, it provides a forum for male homosocial intimacy. Patriarchal cultures require a high level of homosocial bonding, and it is socially acceptable for men to bond with one another through their shared experiences of playing and watching hockey. Thus, hockey also provides a channel for homoerotic energy within heterosexual culture. Men, as well as women, are able to enjoy the male athletes’ physicality, although the spectators’ conscious knowledge of their homoerotic desires is often repressed. According to Horrocks (1995), some spectators, both male and female, identify with the players to such a degree that they may also fantasize about *being* a player. I think of the little boys sitting in the row in front of me at an NHL game, who on seeing their favourite player sent off for fighting, mimicked his actions, making fists with their hands and punching the air with delight.

In Canada, hockey has traditionally strengthened kinship bonds within certain ethnic, class and cultural groups, as well as celebrating and enforcing the eurocentric mythologies of Canadian national identity. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) write that hockey is a “popular cultural forum for playing out the central themes of Canadian life: French and English, East and West, Canada and the United States, Canada and

the Soviet Union” (p. 136). They stress that hockey has always had “a range of different meanings and intended uses for various groups in Canada” (p. 27). Indeed, hockey has helped build communities of identity on the dominant ideological foundations of nationalism, racism, imperialism and sexism (Horrocks, 1995).

## Loving and losing

Whenever one team wins, another loses. For every NHL superstar, there are dozens of NHL players who slog away almost unnoticed by the public year after year. For every boy who makes it to the NHL, thousands do not. Loss comes early to a hockey player. According to Dryden and MacGregor (1989) if you don't make it in the minor hockey league by age nine, you won't make it to the NHL at all (p. 84). Under the intense scrutiny of their parents' and coaches' gazes, some boys are labelled "losers" the first time they step onto the ice. Dryden and MacGregor describe the kinds of questions parents and coaches ask as they watch a boy play for the first time: Is he a puck hog? Is he useless? Does he keep trying even when the game is lost? Does he quit? (p. 69) Girls and women have traditionally had an extremely hard time in the sexist world of hockey (Avery & Stevens, 1997). Yet, it is important to bear in mind that hockey also excludes and alienates many men and boys.

The metonymic space of loss works to undermine the hypermasculinity of the seemingly monolithic culture of the patriarchal, heterosexist NHL. Paradoxically, it also strengthens the desire for victory, makes each win sweeter, increases the dread of the inevitable defeats, injuries, trades and retirements, intensifies the hatred for the opposing team, and heightens the emotional responses of players and spectators.

Bruce Kidd (in Kaufmann (Ed.), 1987) writes that no matter how badly boys fear loss, no matter how badly they actually do lose, they are comforted by the knowledge that no girls play on their team. Kidd explains:

I would have been devastated if a girl had played on any of the teams I was so proud to belong to. It would have proclaimed to the world that I was inadequate. At the deepest psychological levels, the blurring of sex roles undermines not only the male-privileging sexual division of labour, but the very process by which males raised within sexually segregated sports have gained personal confidence and social validation. (p. 258)

Kidd concludes that male team sports, such as hockey, thrive on the symbolic cultural “annihilation” of women (p. 256).

With the increase in popularity of women’s hockey I ask: Does women’s hockey disrupt the gender dualism of the patriarchal sex/affective system? Does it provide girls and women with a space to play with “masculine” and “feminine” gender performance, to create oppositional counternarratives to men’s hockey?

## Learning love

When I began my research on the question of why Canadians love hockey I discovered that Canadian intellectuals have devoted little scholarly study to the subject of hockey. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) believe that many scholars refuse to acknowledge the artistic and creative aspects of popular culture, viewing it as “little more than narcotizing and ideologically conformist commercial spectacle” (p. 22). This intellectual snobbery may have its roots in the taste hierarchies that have traditionally been used to separate high and low culture, and also in the academic disdain for hockey’s violent physicality.

Western theories of art have traditionally been conducted in a language of dualisms: high culture and low culture, art and trash, good and bad. Dichotomous language is used to “impose taste hierarchies on society as a whole which devalue the popular” (McNair, 1996, p. 52). Taste hierarchies sanction the culture, customs and values of the most culturally powerful groups in society while also excluding and devaluing minority groups. Herrnstein-Smith (cited by Lacombe, 1994) writes that the cultural objects of the elite are:

legitimated as intrinsically superior by the normative institutions controlled by those very classes; at the same time, the tastes of the dominant for those objects and practices are interpreted as evidence of their own natural superiority and cultural enlightenment and thus also their right to social and cultural power. (p. 158)

Such dualistic cultural hierarchies have been somewhat eroded by postmodernism.

Still, when one encounters the old, familiar dichotomies of taste, one must ask: Whose tastes and values are these? Who is excluded in this hierarchy of taste? And who is empowered?

As an educator, I am deeply interested in how and why Canadians learn to love hockey. Carmen Luke (1996) reminds educators that:

Gender identity and relations cannot be apprehended or theorized on their own abstracted terms. That is, sex, gender or femininity needs to be studied and theorized in its constitutive relationship to other sociocultural significations, economic and political histories, hierarchies and discourses. (p. 1)

Children learn about masculinity and femininity, social identity, sexuality, class, race and gender relations from popular cultural practices, such as hockey. Gruneau and Whitson (1993) define popular culture as that which encompasses “all the various modes of expression, pleasure-seeking, and entertainment through which people negotiate their relationships with one another, with an imagined past and future, and with the institutions and prescriptions of a dominant culture” (p. 28). Popular culture produces and maintains much of the knowledge and desire, which constitute our lived, and hence fully embodied, discursive practices. Indeed, Carmen Luke (1996) calls popular culture “the public pedagogy of everyday life” (p. 7).

The popular cultural practice of hockey functions as a powerful form of public pedagogy within varied Canadian social, geographical, economical, political, and historical contexts. Perhaps this is a clue to my newfound interest in hockey. Am I just a recent immigrant trying to fit into a new culture? Immigration may be thought

of as a radical act of imagination and transformation. Does my interest in hockey allow me to imagine myself transformed, and enable me to write myself into the larger fiction that is Canada? Sharon Todd (1997) describes pedagogy as “a process that gets tangled up in the nexus of social relations where identification, fantasy, and desire begin to emerge as pressing concerns” (p. 4). I am now a Canadian citizen, and must begin the work of demystifying my new home, considering the ways in which I am constituted by precisely those discourses and practices I seek to oppose. I find that instead of answers, I am left with many questions: Can we freely choose our passions, or do they choose us? Can our popular cultural indulgences be compartmentalized, and be made to maintain a discrete distance from the rest of our lives? I hope to find out this season.

**THE WAY OF THE FLOWER:  
MEDITATIONS ON A  
SOFTHEARTED PEDAGOGY**

The earth laughs in flowers.

(Emerson, in Van Matre &  
Weiler (Eds.), 1983, p. 8)

## **The way of the flower**

*One day, instead of giving his usual lesson, Buddha sat in silence. Hundreds of his followers waited for him to say something. After a long time, he held up a single flower and said, "Here is the true Way."*

### *August*

*I arrive at my teacher's house after dark. It is hot and humid inside so she has drawn open the balcony door to catch some of the gusts of wind that blow through the city. The rain falls more intensely on the roofs and sidewalks, giving warning that the typhoon is drawing nearer. It will hit in all its fierceness tomorrow afternoon. Tonight, before my ikebana lesson, I kneel on the tatami matting in front of my teacher's flower arrangement. The heavy face of a raggedy sunflower sits before a tall proud banana leaf. The bright plane of the leaf is broken by lemon-yellow discolouration and tiny holes where insects have nibbled on its green flesh. The bottom part of the pliant leaf has been torn away -- by wind or by human hand? - leaving it wounded and asymmetrical. An evergreen sprig of privet peeps out from behind the battered but still strong banana plant. From my kneeling position, I bow down low before the flowers. The pungent smell of the moist rice straw on the tatami matting rises to meet my face. I wonder how the second rice harvest will survive the coming storm.*

### *New Year's Day*

*I view my friend's flower arrangement: A heavy snow cloud of white baby's breath hovers over blood-red camellia blossoms, waiting for the right moment to fall. Earlier that day, I visited a shrine where two thousand warriors lay buried. Like everyone else there, I prayed to the kami-sama, or shrine god, wishing for good luck in the coming year. As we walked down the shrine's steps past the many stone lanterns, we could clearly see the volcano, Sakurajima, its three peaks looking as if they had been powdered with a thin covering of rice flour. Suddenly, the volcano exploded, the terrifying boom stopping everyone in their tracks, the force of the blast pushing a grey plume of dust and rock high into the sky.*

### *March*

*I walk barefooted along the temple veranda, surprised by the silky coldness of the boards. Over the centuries the dark wood has been polished smooth by thousands of human feet. I pass by a wet, green grove of bamboo, azalea, moss and rock. I am about to make my way inside when I notice that some twisted plum branches have been placed in a stone urn by the doorway. Their impossibly delicate blossoms signal that spring is already here. I pause a while longer in the winter garden.*

### *April*

*When I think of ikebana lessons, I am stirred by memories of the innocent seductiveness of flowers, the clipping sound made by the secateurs, the cool surface of hand-thrown, ceramic vases brimming with water, the fresh smell of discarded leaves*

*and soft blooms piled on sheets of old newspaper, and the quick movement of my ikebana teacher's hands. "Do you see how vulnerable a tulip becomes when you curl back its petals this way?" she asks.*

*August -- Leaving Japan*

*I know how far a bulrush stem bends before it breaks. I know how a blue iris bud uncurls, revealing its yellow heart. I know how a lotus leaf tips, trickling rainwater out of its cupped centre. I know how cherry blossoms fall from their lichen-covered branch. I know the brittleness of knotted kiwi wood. I know the turmeric stain of perfumed lily pollen.*

## Opening to the sensuous

My beginner's attitude towards *ikebana* was goal-oriented. I was concerned solely with the beauty of my final arrangement, and with making comparisons between my work and that of others. In fact, I often felt inadequate when I saw the exquisite arrangements of the other students. I did not realize the importance of being in the moment, whether I was arranging flowers or cleaning up. As a westerner with little experience of meditation, I was completely baffled by the seriousness with which the students would sweep the *tatami* mats after class, and puzzled by the slow deliberation with which they washed out their vases before putting them away. These activities were performed with as much sincerity as the flower arranging.

As the weeks passed, I began to notice small things during my lessons: The slight difference between the front and the back of a single iris leaf: The sparkle of grey stones as I placed them at the base of my arrangement: My fingers slipping over a vase's slimy interior as I rinsed it under running tap water: The bristles of the hand brush rasping against *tatami*.

After a few lessons my teacher, whom I called "*Sensei*," told me that it was important to look at plants in their natural environment so that I would be able to understand how they grew, how they moved when the wind blew through them, how the face of a flower turns toward the sun. As I went on my daily walks past gardens and fields or through the woods, I began to feel a special joy. The beauty of the natural world seemed so much more intense, colours were more vivid, and forms more dynamic. I never discussed these euphoric feelings with my *ikebana* teacher.

What mattered most to her was that I simply practice *ikebana* regularly.

There is a Zen saying:

Before Zen, mountains were mountains and trees were trees.

During Zen, mountains were the thrones of the spirits and trees  
were the voices of wisdom.

After Zen, mountains were mountains and trees were trees.

(Estes, 1992, p. 359)

It is the mundane, repetitive, cyclical qualities of everyday life that the *ikebana* student is encouraged to dwell upon. What my teacher was trying to develop in me, and in all her students, was an increased awareness of everyday lived experience.

The ritual of *ikebana* is a physical expression of humility, respect, and reverence for the earth, for life. It is an art that garners meaning through repeated performance, through cycles of creation rather than acts of completion. The performance of the art of *ikebana* opens, and is symbolic of the opening, of the practitioner's heart-mind (*kokoro*) to the mystery and wonder of the sensuous now. One comes to knowledge not by trying to grasp and control it, but by letting go and moving into the unknown. Instead of attempting to conquer and colonize knowledge, one continually opens up to the world, engaging the moment with increasing intimacy and intuitiveness. This opening to knowledge is an ongoing process: Even highly accomplished Zen teachers approach their practice with a sense of studentship.

## The practice of mindfulness

Awareness of the “sensuous now” is often called “mindfulness”. Mindfulness is not really a state of mind; it is a dynamic process of becoming. This process is so important because it alters the way in which the practitioner perceives the world, and herself as part of the world. The development of mindfulness is “not about the isolated self in the isolated moment” (Tomm, 1995, p. 15). Rather it is “a life-long process that is never completed but continually opens up new possibilities for greater connectedness to oneself, other people, and the natural world of animals and things” (p. 15).

*Sensei* never talked about mindfulness, and never appeared to “teach” it in any overt way. *Ikebana* practice was characterized by what seemed to me at first to be repetitious action. This repetition was, in fact, sacred ritual. *Sensei* would show me a new style and then I would practice it over and over again for months, sometimes years, on end. I studied *ikebana* in Japan with *Sensei* for three years, and at the end of the third year I was still intensively practicing even the most elementary of skills and styles. At first, I felt as if I were being asked to merely copy. But I was not really copying; I was re-creating.

This process of re-creation is completely absorbing. It draws the practitioner deeper and deeper into the mysterious realm of creative time and space, where the mind “opens” in order to maintain union with the flowers, and then enters a state of embodied oneness in which the dualistic boundaries between the practitioner and the object of practice (the flowers) blur and disintegrate. Brennerman, Yarian and Olson

(1982) call this process of re-creation “imitation of an archetype” (p. 93). They write:

Imitation is to be distinguished from rote copying. Imitation means here the act of opening to and participating in the archetype, as an act of conscious dedication to bringing it into material manifestation. In rote copying, the practitioner can be removed and work in a purely mechanical fashion. Imitation calls for uniting with the archetype in consciousness and seeing it as an object worthy of one’s total service.

(p. 94)

Or, in the words of the photographer, Minor White: I make objects sacred by the quality of my concentration (cited by Brennerman, Yarian & Olson, p. 82). This kind of unconscious consciousness is also known as transparent mind or perfect concentration (Joaninha, 1998).

When the “artist” enters the work in this spirit, the result is a new creation, a reinvestment of the sacred archetype. No two images of the same archetype are exactly alike -- as would be the case if it were a matter of copying -- but the dominant impression is of a powerful and living image of the collective tradition. (Brennerman, Yarian & Olson, 1982, p. 96)

In *ikebana* “the reinvestment of the sacred archetype” is achieved through the re-creation of the traditional styles of the Ikenobo School. Each of the traditional styles has its own characteristics, qualities, and conventions. Yet, each time the practitioner creates an arrangement she finds herself improvising on the style. No two branches or flowers or grasses are the same. Each is unique, although familiar, to

an experienced practitioner. The skill of the *ikebana* practitioner lies in the way she responds to the materials in the moment. Mark Epstein (1995), a Buddhist psychotherapist, writes:

Rather than promoting a view of self as an entity of place with boundaries, the mindfulness practices tend to reveal another dimension of the self-experience, one that has to do with how patterns come together in a temporary and ever-evolving organization. (p. 142)

Every few months my teacher would give me a book on *ikebana*. She ordered these books especially from the Ikenobo School of *ikebana* at the Rokkakudo Temple in Kyoto. Each one contained detailed guidelines for various styles and technical advice on all aspects of *ikebana*. I would devour each new book seeking to learn something new, something I did not already know, but I was always slightly disappointed. I asked *Sensei* politely, "Could you give me each book *before* I begin a new style, please? That way I will be able to read all I have to know about each style *first*." *Sensei* always nodded and smiled, but she continued to give me each new book only *after* I had gained considerable firsthand experience. I yearned for the certainty of the written word, for the comfort of the printed page, but what *Sensei* wanted to teach me was not to be found in a book. Mindfulness must be directly experienced by the student herself as a physical and experiential, not as a solely intellectual or cerebral, process of becoming. As Varela, Thompson, and Rosch (1995) point out, in Buddhist traditions knowledge "is not knowledge *about* anything. There is no abstract knower of an experience that is separate from the experience itself" (p. 26).

## The fullness of emptiness

When a practitioner creates an *ikebana* arrangement, the flowers arouse her senses; she can smell, touch, hear and see the natural world and its cycles of life and death, perceiving intuitively the chaos and order in living systems. The practitioner is mindful of the primal relationships between human beings and the earth, and the earth's cyclical flow of energy. By arranging flowers, *ikebana* practitioners make these invisible bonds visible and tangible. For example, the bud is highly prized in *ikebana*. Heavy with hope, it expresses a blissful potentiality: that which is not yet, but will soon be. In Japan, people gather around lotus buds awaiting the glorious moment when they will pop open in the summer heat. As summer turns to fall, and the lotus flower has already blossomed and died, its pliable green leaves begin to yellow and curl. When used in *ikebana* arrangements, the imperfect beauty of these blemished, dying leaves bear poignant witness to the passing of the seasons.

The Vietnamese Zen Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh (1995), calls our interconnectedness with all things "interbeing" (*tiiep hien*). He writes:

When we look into the heart of a flower, we see clouds, sunshine, minerals, time, the earth, and everything else in the cosmos in it.

Without clouds, there could be no rain, and there would be no flower.

Without time, the flower could not bloom. In fact, the flower is made entirely of non-flower elements; it has no independent, individual existence. It "inter-is" with everything else in the universe. (p. 11)

These simple teachings of Thich Nhat Hanh are profound indeed: Notions of the

individualistic, atomistic, independent self, which are still widely prevalent in North American society and which permeate its major institutions, are obviously no longer valid or tenable if one believes that there is no permanent self or entity independent of others. In Zen, the self is understood to be a complex web of interrelationships with no clearly demarcated "I": the self is a fiction. This understanding of the transience and impermanence of life, and the fictional nature of our self-identities, is called "emptiness."

For many, the idea that there is no persisting, inherent, individual nature can be distressing. Yet, an understanding of the impermanence of all things is all one can really count on. Life and death are part of one whole, where "death is the beginning of another chapter of life" (Sogyal, 1993, p. 11). In Tibetan Buddhism the word "*bardo*" is used to describe the states between life and death and rebirth when the possibility of enlightenment is greatest. *Bardos* are "occurring continuously throughout both life and death" (Sogyal, p. 11). Indeed, every moment of life is a *bardo*. This knowledge is vital and transformative. Sogyal Rinpoche writes:

Every time I hear the rush of a mountain stream, or the waves crashing on the shore, or my own heartbeat, I hear the sound of impermanence. These changes, these small deaths, are our living links with death. They are death's pulse, death's heartbeat, prompting us to let go of all the things we cling to. (p. 33)

Paradoxically, if we welcome these small, daily deaths we may feel more alive. We loosen the grip of the atomistic notion of self, and open to the sensuous richness and mystery of the everyday world. The practice of a meditative art, such as

*ikebana*, helps to cultivate an intuitive understanding of the fullness of emptiness, and a deep reverence for the interconnectedness of all things. This understanding gives rise to an experience of communion, communion being a sense of non/dualistic consciousness and participation in the world that nourishes one's desire to act with love and compassion.

## A softhearted pedagogy

The knowing self can only exist in relationship. As Gregory Bateson (cited in Epstein, 1999) says: It takes two to know one (p. 102). Knowledge is created through direct, intimate relationship, or non/dual communion, with another. Because of its relational nature, one cannot possess or gain knowledge. One can only do or perform knowledge. Thus, knowledge can be thought of as conduct (Trungpa, 1996), or social improvisation (Hershock, 1996).

The wisdom of skillful Zen art practitioners lies in their vibrant responsiveness to the social and the environmental. Through continued deep engagement with the processes of creating and learning, students of the Zen arts develop the sensitive improvisational skills required for such social and environmental reciprocity. The practice of a Zen art is in itself a non/dualistic improvisational pedagogy in which mind and body and heart are brought together through practice and tradition. As *Sensei* commented about the development of my practice: Before you looked with Western eyes, now you feel with a Japanese heart-mind (*kokoro*).

The accomplished Buddhist teacher and artist, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche (1996), defines art as “being able to see the uniqueness of everyday experience” (p. 27), and believes that art “is not an occupation; it is our whole being” (p. iix). The Zen artist’s medium is the stillness and movement of everyday life. The way in which we go about all of our everyday activities and rituals -- washing, dressing, eating breakfast, brushing our teeth, sleeping -- is expressive and communicative of

our embodied mindfulness. Thus, every aspect of a practitioner's life may be thought of as an improvisational art, a recursive flow of creativity, which in turn creates the artist.

The aim of improvisation is not the negotiation or regulation of "an agreement about how things are, but rather the creation of a novel harmony through jointly articulating a new world" (Hershock, 1996, p. 76). The harmony of improvisation is a generative interplay with no particular end goal in which the individual, isolated self ceases to exist, and in which knowledge and meaning arise in playful partnership and mutuality. The unceasing changes in our improvisational conduct give rise to an infinite multiplicity of meanings.

In a curriculum characterized by multiplicity "what counts are not the elements, but what there is between, the between, as a site of relations which are not separable from each other" (Delenze and Parnet, cited by Aoki, 1996, p. 11). What lies between are marginal, fecund, creative spaces of difficulty, ambiguity and ambivalence:

spaces between life and *non*-life, between the known, and the unknown, between universals and particulars (non-universals), even between the possibilities and impossibilities where inspirited newness is ongoingly constituted and re-constituted. (Aoki, p. 12)

Such pedagogical spaces offer a doubled potentiality -- simultaneous opportunity for growth of new self and loss of old self, an endless process of natality and mortality, becoming and unbecoming. Feelings of destabilization -- a sense that one has been cast adrift from all that is familiar, safe and known -- may arise in students and

teachers who find themselves in a pedagogical environment characterized by a multiplicity of meaning, the impermanence of self, the transience of all knowledge, and the flux of conduct. Yet, the experience of constant pedagogical comings and goings, the continued travel, in and out of an awareness of emptiness, the ebbing and flowing of knowing, unknowing and between-ness are an unavoidable part of all learning and change in consciousness.

Suzuki (1959) proffers the remark that “a certain sense of loneliness engendered by travelling leads one to reflect upon the meaning of life, for life is after all a travelling from one unknown to another unknown” (p. 255), and he relates the following travel story:

When Dogen (1200-1253) came back from China after some years of study of Zen there, he was asked what he had learned. He said, “Not much except soft-heartedness (nyunan-shin).” (p. 275)

Suzuki continues:

“Soft-heartedness” is “tender-mindedness” and in this case means “gentleness of spirit.” Generally we are too egotistic, too full of hard, resisting spirit. We are individualistic, unable to accept things as they are or as they come to us. . . . When there is no self, the heart is soft and offers no resistance to outside influences. (p. 275)

### *A travelling life*

*Several years ago I immigrated to Canada, moving first from Japan, then to two different cities in Ontario, then finally to Vancouver. Although I had to move*

*from one continent to another, then right across the breadth of North America, my three large boxes of carefully stored ikebana materials travelled with me each time. They contain Japanese vases of varying shapes, colours and textures for use with different ikebana styles, my hand-made ikebana secateurs, wires and tapes of different thicknesses, several manuals and reference books, my own personal journal documenting every arrangement that I created, each entry containing notes on the date, the flowers and type of vase used, as well as a detailed sketch of the final arrangement. And, of course, there are the photographs of many lessons, of my arrangements, my teacher and her work, and my classmates at the New Year's ceremony at the shrine. Nowadays I rarely use my ikebana materials, but I would never dream of leaving the boxes behind, or of giving away or selling my vases. Although I have become caught up in the busyness of graduate study, teaching, and research, and have not made time for the practice of ikebana, I treasure the contents of these three boxes. I know that some day I will practice ikebana again. But why do I cling to these unopened boxes of possessions that I no longer really use?*

*I live in a small apartment crowded with books and papers – the usual detritus of academic life. Yet, the presence of the sealed boxes in my storage closet is strangely comforting. As a teacher educator and doctoral student in the area of curriculum theory, I am all too aware of the prevalence in North America of dualistic, technical-rational, corporatist approaches to curriculum and pedagogy. My three “ikebana boxes” contain more than fond memories of times past. They are talismans of another powerful, transformative educational paradigm. They remind me of a softhearted pedagogy, a pedagogy of intimacy, a pedagogy of the sensuous*

*now. They remind me that it is possible to live a playful engaging pedagogy, created in a spirit of studentship, mindfulness and compassion, a pedagogy that nourishes tender hearts.*

**(IN) CONCLUSION:**  
**AWAKENING TO MYSTERY**

After all is said and done, I know I will have no answers. None. I don't expect to have them. What I will have, and all I have now, is questions. What I have done – what I have tried to do – is frame those questions – not with question marks but in the paragraphs of books. (Findley, 1990, p. 318)

[T]here is indeed an Other side to everything, a silent archaeology within every speech, a secret which inspires every saying, indeed an absence which is always present. (Smith, 1994, p. 179)

## **Inconclusion**

By now, in a more traditionally produced and structured dissertation, having presented and analysed my data, I would begin the process of drawing conclusions. Perhaps I would emphasize the applicability of my findings, or the means of implementing my well-tested program. I would make sure to convince my examining committee that my research would reduce bullying in school playgrounds, or would improve standardized scores in Grade 6 math classes, or help “at-risk” kindergarteners graduate high school and become socially productive citizens – no doubt, all laudable goals. It is this final chapter, one professor assured me, that would prove my academic relevance and employability, and eventually lay the way for a much-coveted, highly desirable university teaching job. But, of course, this is not that kind of dissertation.

Perhaps you remember: I did point out early in chapter one that I would not be coming to any conclusions. What had fascinated me was what had fascinated Kathleen Rockhill (1986) whose work I had read as a neophyte graduate student: I wanted to explore the fullness of a pedagogy and a scholarship that could embrace the chaotic, the disorderly, the embodied, the emotional, the passionate, and the conflictual. With this in mind, perhaps you realized that my dissertation would not have a tidy finale, a triumphant gathering of all loose ends into a single, neat bundle. Indeed, in chapter two I had already surmised that a non/dualistic relationship to knowledge is necessarily uncertain, unstable, and contingent. Arising always in relationship, always in context, never in isolation, a non/dualistic conception of

knowledge is one that is characterized by undecideability. It is messy, awkward, ambiguous, precarious, contradictory . . . and most unbefitting of the conclusions chapter of a traditional-style doctoral dissertation. Clearly, this conclusions chapter in particular provides a most disorderly ending to my dissertation. All I can truly say in conclusion is that I am in a state of inconclusion.

In his magnificent work *Pedagon*, David Smith (1994) claims that all narrative is “inexorably ambiguous,” and declares that this ambiguity is “essential for the sustenance of discourse” (p. 170). He discusses the way in which ambiguity and disorder reveal the limits of language, thereby pointing to the political nature of all language. Smith does not believe that ambiguity, disorder and linguistic limitations stymie those engaged in pedagogic practice. Rather, these “impediments” actually act as creative catalysts for pedagogical alchemy:

[T]o raise the question of the limits of language is also to open to its possibilities. But this requires a fidelity to that which calls out to us from within the heart of which we do not understand and for which we may not at present have words. Pedagogy then becomes a vocation to live and act within the difference between what we do know and what we do not know, that is to be drawn out to what calls us from both within and beyond ourselves. (Smith, 1994, p. 168)

As I do not seek to gain textual mastery and totalism here, I can relish this space of uncertainty between what I do and do not know. This is a space of yearning, of bittersweet longing.

I once wept in the library. Tears of frustration swept down my cheeks as I stood in the narrow corridor between unlit stacks. I had been searching for books, or more accurately *the book*, that contained the solutions to a problem that had been gnawing at me during a Master's course -- a half-formed, barely articulated problem. I wanted answers, and the peace and relief that come from a sense of certain knowledge. But I realised that this was impossible. No such book existed. There were many marvellous books, but *the book* did not exist, and there never could be any certain answers. Perhaps it was then, albeit reluctantly, that I began to relinquish my desire for answers and solutions, for the sense of complete knowledge that is characterized by finality.

Although the easy pleasures of certainty are still not lost on me, I have come to understand the importance of living with those half-formed, barely-understood questions. Working "at the edge of incompetence" is what Elliot Eisner (in Saks (Ed.), 1996, p. 412) calls the risky practice of courting the unknown in one's research practice. Instead of textual certainty and finality I have sought to nurture an intimate co-existence with absences, silences and the unarticulated, creating here a generative text that contains spaces of struggle and resistance, as well as spaces of contemplation and meditation.

## Awakening to mystery

If we can acknowledge the disorderly, ambiguous nature of pedagogy, and let ourselves be drawn outward into the pedagogical world with a heightened sense of unknowing, we begin to nurture the qualities of astonishment and wonder in our living practice. Although pedagogical practice, like life itself, is mysterious, an acquaintance with the mysteries of pedagogy *can* be cultivated consciously. The gentle arts of allowing, of silence, of receptivity, and of surrender awaken an awareness of mystery in the everyday (Hallen, 2001).

The simplest, most banal of events becomes transformed by one's altered perception. The delighted chorus of laughter rippling across a classroom full of children at circle time; the shared contentment at the end of a daylong fieldtrip and a bus journey home filled with song; the devastating cruelty one child casually shows another in the playground. Such small moments brim with profound meaning that can never be fully grasped.

The first mystery is simply that there is mystery. A mystery that can never be explained or understood. Only encountered from time to time. Nothing is obvious. Everything conceals something else.

(Kuschner, cited by Brussat & Brussat, 1996, p. 496).

I believe that there is a place in the academy for curriculum theorists and educators who dedicate their scholarly lives to the contemplation of such everyday mysteries. The contemporary western university has its roots in the ancient, monastic traditions and cathedral schools of the Christian church. Naturally, it is in no way

desirable -- or even possible -- for the contemporary, secular university to return to its original, early medieval, church-based structure. But in academic cultures, such as our own, that are becoming increasingly corporate in nature, there is certainly a great need for an organizational rebalancing to take place by fostering more contemplative approaches towards research and study.

It must be remembered that contemplation is not the same as inaction. The creation of theory, an act that requires a contemplative state of mind, is frequently an act of resistance (Zavarzadeh & Morton, 1994). Contemplative practice can be the vital first step to understanding the limits of knowledge, to forming the difficult questions that will guide further research and practice. It is thus an inherently creative state.

In contemplative practice we enter a state where we have freedom from, and at the same time access to, thought and feeling. In the creative act, one similarly enters a realm characterized by the coexistence of the seemingly opposed aspects of freedom and access -- in this case freedom from, yet access to, all the conceptual and technical resources one has assimilated over a lifetime. Creative activity is thus contemplative, and contemplative experience . . . is the core of creativity. (Sarath, cited in Buell, 1999, p. 14)

Contemplation can take diverse forms, including that of prayer, in the deepest sense of the term. A prayerful pedagogical/theoretical praxis is an expression of one's most heartfelt longings, an expression of one's yearning to physically manifest

one's desires in the world – simultaneously a prelude and accompaniment to conscious action, a non/dual praxis located both in the head and in the heart.

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