

The Graduate School of Education
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UNESCO Observatory Multi-Disciplinary Journal in the Arts

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SPECIAL ISSUE

**A/r/tography
and the Literary and
Performing Arts**

Volume 3 | Issue 2 | 2013

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Guest Editors *Rita L. Irwin*
Anita Sinner

Editor
Associate Editor
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ABOUT THE E-JOURNAL

The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Special Issue: A/r/tography and the Arts

Guest Editors

Rita L. Irwin | Anita Sinner

THEME

To be engaged in the practice of a/r/tography means to inquire in the world through an ongoing process of art making in any art form and writing not separate or illustrative of each other but interconnected and woven through each other to create relational and/or enhanced meanings. A/r/tographical work are often rendered through the methodological concepts of contiguity, living inquiry, openings, metaphor/metonymy, reverberations and excess, which are enacted and presented/performed when a relational aesthetic inquiry condition is envisioned as embodied understandings and exchanges between art and text, and between and among the broadly conceived identities of artist/researcher/teacher. A/r/tography is inherently about self as artist/researcher/teacher yet it is also social when groups or communities of a/r/tographers come together to engage in shared inquiries, act as critical friends, articulate an evolution of research questions, and present their collective evocative/provocative works to others (see <http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography/>).

This special issue of Multi-Disciplinary Research in the Arts invites original creative and scholarly inquiry that engages in critical debates and issues regarding a/r/tographical methodologies; are exemplars of critical approaches to a/r/tographical research; and/or extend the boundaries of inquiry-based research. Contributions are welcome from disciplines across the arts, humanities and social sciences and in a wide range of formats including articles, essays, and artistic interludes, which explore diverse forms of the arts from drama, dance, poetry, narrative, music, visual arts, digital media and more.

Hovering(s) in/from/through the margins (Hover I)

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I share with you Hover I which weaves together image and text to tell about the ongoing process of becoming an artist/researcher/teacher and the paradoxes that surround the life of/my life as an educated woman of working class background. This hover is drawn from a larger inquiry, on creativity in women educators and learning through co-creative artmaking processes. Hovers, like a/r/tographers, flutter and flutter in the margins – in spaces of liminality which can be full of tension, ambivalence and resistance but can also be potentially informative, creative and transformative – and bid us to do the same. In offering the first of three hovers, originally appearing as pauses/interludes between flights/chapters in the original project, I hope to contribute to ongoing discussions on the value of inquiring in the world through writing and the process of artmaking.

KEYWORDS

marginal/liminal spaces; artist/researcher/teacher identity; paradox; women; creativity

OPENING

One spring day, when I was still a graduate student and teaching full-time, images of flight – specifically images of witches and birds – swept in, landed onto the pages of my writing, and interrupted my artful research process. This was not the first time that they had unexpectedly visited me. They had been dipping and darting through the margins of my life, both personal and professional, for several years now. They were evocative, provocative, persistent and in essence had encouraged me to pause, linger longer, be, and see in/from/through the margins.

Seeing marginally . . . means seeing indirectly, circuitously, and dynamically. Instead of stasis, marginal vision sees movement, shape-shifting, blurriness, [blind spots, silences, gaps, spaces, pauses], transformation. Instead of certainties and stable truths, it tends to ambivalence [contradiction and liminality]; it is not ashamed to be tentative. And instead of either homogeneity or crippling dualisms, it values [paradox] and seeks multiplicity [complexity and relationality].
(Griffin, 1995, p. 8)

Figure 1
Untitled, 2000. Colour
photograph, 6 x 4
inches, of mixed media
drawing (5 x 4 feet).



There are prisons.

*Some are
structural,*

*others are
metaphorical.*

Figure 2
Untitled, 2000. Colour
photograph, 4 x 6
inches, of mixed media
drawing (4 x 5 feet).



*Some I fear,
others I embrace.*

Figure 3
Untitled, 2000. Colour
photograph, 4 x 6
inches, of mixed media
drawing (4 x 5 feet).



*I am the inmate,
I am the gatekeeper*

[T]he witch, a marginal person in her society, haunting the edges, familiar with their madness and their magic, a powerful, powerless person. Mid-wife, shaper, healer, spell-caster, [artist, researcher, teacher], she dances in the borderland [– an in-between space –] of our dreams [and helps us to open up liminal spaces for learning, creating, inquiring, and living], just over the line where the law ends. (Griffin, 1995, p. 11)

Was Hover I a chirping, a chant, an interruption, a diversion, a meandering, a pause, a haunting, a reverberation (Irwin & Springgay, 2008), a forewarning? Perhaps. But it persevered and helped me to give shape and to voice some of the issues that were preoccupying my life and work at the time. Hovering then, like a/r/tography, creates spaces for “[l]earning/creating/inquiring in, from, through, and with” (Irwin et al., 2008, p. 206) the margins/in-between and provokes interrogation (Pinar, 2004). Questions, therefore, around knowledge, power, (il)literacy, education, authority, control, equity, accessibility, and notions of freedom, like falling flight feathers, kept descending onto the pages of my writing and moving through my artmaking process.

Thus, I began to wonder how I was being shaped by and how I was helping to shape the teaching-learning contexts in which I found myself and, equally important, in which my students found themselves.

As well, I started to ponder further how I was complacent and perhaps complicit in re-creating inequitable, “mis-educative” (Dewey, 1938, p. 25), limiting/imprisoning and dualistic teaching-learning spaces and relationships for myself and the students in my classes to be, create, learn, inquire, and live in. In retrospect, it is not surprising that these concerns became air-borne – began to surface that is – as an educated woman of “working class background is among those most likely to be troubled by such questions. [She] know[s] how radically one can be changed by one’s education” (Pagano, 1990, p. 44).

ONGOING PROCESS OF OPENING AND CLOSING

This in-between and betwixt hover – filled with images of flight, birds, witches and text – appeared at an opportune time and helped me to revision my lived experiences of being an educated woman of working class background and artist/researcher/teacher as paradoxical instead of dualistic (good or evil, powerful or powerless, knowledgeable or ignorant, for example). As well, this paradox is filled with contradictions, like the witch, to be an educated woman and artist/researcher/teacher is to have authority, knowledge and power and to be a woman of working class background is to lack these same things (Munro, 1998; Mantas, 2004; Mantas, 2007). Therefore, “[t]o contain irreconcilable [contradictions] is . . . to be a[n] [educated] woman [of working class background and artist/researcher/teacher] in a state of liminality” (Heilbrun, 1999, p. 37).

It is from this liminal/in-between space then, that I am provoked to engage in what Lynn Margulis, a biologist, calls “autopoiesis” (cited in Lowell Randall, 1995, p. 26); in other words, a re-imagining of these in-between/liminal spaces not only as sites that are filled with contradiction, tension, and resistance but are also potentially informative, creative, transformative. They are “essentially enchanted, . . . profoundly mysterious, . . . place[s] for genuine wonder” (Lowell Randall, 1995, p. 26). From the margins, I am called upon to deal with the “the monstrous, . . . the unseen, . . . the magnificent . . . the sublime” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx), what we cannot see, do not have words for yet, and what is in the process of being imagined and becoming in/from/through/with the in-between.

The in-between/margin, bids me “to live a contiguous life” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxviii) and invites me to engage in “mythopoeisis” (Downing, 1999, p. 26) – a process of becoming simultaneously aware of how my life, personal and professional, is “given its shape through poetry/[words], through images” (ibid., p. 26) – that grow out of my own experience –and how “in some profound way, these [images/words] cho[o]se [me]” (ibid., p. 27). It is in this space that I also begin to imagine and transform teaching as sorcery/source-ery, “magic [as] the . . . understanding that everything is connected” (Starhawk, 1982, p. 13), and the educated woman from working class background and artist/researcher/teacher as the sorceress/source-eress (see Di Rezze & Mantas, Summer 2001, pp. 129 – 142) who desires to know and wishes to create

“worlds – places of inner and outer freedom in which new forms of connection can take place” (Keller, 1986/88, p. 4).

As for the paradoxes surrounding the life of an educated woman of working class background and artist/researcher/teacher, this story is in an ongoing process of being artfully created and told. Finally, I close by saying that the images, text and questions presented in *Hover I* continue to resonate with me, except that I am now also being invited to witness, experience, imagine, learn, create, wonder about, and eventually come to know more intimately – from the margins/in-between – as a mother of a daughter in addition to my roles as artist/researcher/teacher.

Please note that aspects of these mixed-media images (which include drawing, painting, collage, image transfer) in this interlude have been appropriated, but the original sources/references are unknown.

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