

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
Designer

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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.

Riding the Bus, Writing on the Bus: A Self in Transition

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ABSTRACT

Riding the Bus, Writing on the Bus: A Self in Transition is an *a/r/tographic* inquiry into what it means to live poetically amidst times of transition, and how poetry is both an anchor and an inspirational kite during such times of change (as well as in times of rest and stasis). This paper is also a documentation of what it means to practice *a/r/tography*, an arts-based research method that is, by its very nature, enacted amidst the multifaceted, colorful, and often times messy swirl of our daily lives. Through inquiry into the processes of poem-making, and the lived experience of research through poetic inquiry, this paper aims to share some of the many ways in which poetry is effective as a personally transformative, and pedagogical, tool.

Also an autobiographical account of living in relationship with language, with change as a constant, and with the desire to embrace and make sense of change through the use of language, this essay describes this process of living poetically through prose reflections, the inclusion of poems inspirational to the author's journey, and offerings of her own new poems. The journey and writing are framed within the larger act and metaphor of riding the bus within Vancouver, British Columbia: a journey, a documentation of a journey, and a reflection on a journey that posits we are all "on the bus" in this journey we call life.

KEYWORDS

Visual A/r/tography, Arts-based Research, Educational Research Photo Essay, Film, Primary Education, Teacher Training

*The bus came by and I got on,
that's when it all began...*

(Garcia, Weir & Kreutzmann 1968)

I first met poet Daniela Elza in December 2010, at a dinner sponsored by a kindly graduate student who intended to introduce me to other poets and scholars here in Vancouver, British Columbia. I was, at the time, considering application to pursue my own graduate studies, and the lively topic of Poetic Inquiry filled much of our dinner conversation. I had never heard of poetry posited as a research methodology, though I'd long known what a handy tool it was for inner inquiry. That night, driving back to a friend's apartment, I was completely captivated by my hostess' quiet grace, and Daniela's feisty and effervescent spirit. In time, I completed my application for study, was happily accepted, and made plans to begin in the fall.

Of course, nothing ever goes quite according to plan, and as such, it was a topsy-turvy landing for me arriving in Vancouver; a learning curve, to say the least. Just as I was landing in my new home, enjoying what was to be my own bed for the first time in over three weeks, and settled enough to start feeling lonely, a funny thing happened one day on my way to campus. I was riding the bus, slouched down in the seat I'd flung myself into, catching my breath after the sprint I'd just made not to miss the lumbering silver coach. Thoughts elsewhere, I absent-mindedly sat up straighter, and could not believe what caught my eyes: there, on the inside wall of the bus where advertisements usually blare, a *poem* had been posted. My joy at seeing a poem (anytime, anywhere) was enough, but when I noticed the poet's name, I recognized instantly my new acquaintance from the year before. That recognition, that unexpected familiarity, welcomed me into a circle of connection, community and commonality, a stranger in a new place who actually *knew* someone! When I looked up that day from my well of solitude, with not an unsubstantial bit of confusion in my heart - come here for a new life, before me the possibility of a new persona I hadn't as yet even begun to unearth (laying the official mantle of "motherhood" a little bit to the side for the first time in over 23 years) - Daniela's poem came winging down to reference, root and *locate* me in my new milieu, to rescue and uplift me in a way only poetry can. And although I didn't realize it at first, Daniela's poem, and myriad

others I came to look for, expectantly, whenever I entered a city bus in the months that followed, wound their way into my a/r/tographic process and inquiry, becoming a central set of threads weaving in and amongst my explorations and discoveries around the city, in my writing, and in my new sense of self.

A/r/tography is defined as “an arts research methodology emphasizing living inquiry and reflective practice through examination of the in-between spaces of art-making/researching/teaching” (Beare 2009). In those in-between spaces, a/r/tographers “linger in the liminal spaces of unknowing/knowing as each individual inquires into...her own practices. The result may be an occasion for transformative meaning making” (Leggo et al. 2011). The authors describe how “(b)eing engaged in a/r/tography is about being committed to an ongoing inquiry through art-making and writing, not separate or descriptive of one another but rather working together to create new understandings. Artistic interpretation and representation alongside written discourse encourage a form of living inquiry...” (Leggo et al. 2011). In just such a manner, my a/r/tographic research began as an inquiry into (some of the) elements of *becoming* ~ one woman’s journey (back) to herself through processes of movement, change, and transition within an ontology of poetics and place. Through a process of living inquiry, “where meanings reside in the simultaneous use of language, images, materials, situations, space and time” (Irwin & Springgay 2008), I sought to engage with questions about my life as a woman, writer and educator “in transition and translation and transformation” (Dr C Leggo, 2011, pers. comm., 31 October). Locating myself in place (here, in Vancouver), within a practice of poetic inquiry, and with a fierce commitment to *educaré*, or drawing forth that which lies within (Baba, n.d.), I began. My inquiry coalesced into a more focused concentration on my own writing, fed by deep, thirst- quenching gulps from other poets’ works, unexpected explorations of my new city and home, and attention to the process of *becoming*, through writing, surrounded by change: nothing short of a recycling of the self.

Excerpt from Interpreting the Winds

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

at a constant 12 degrees Celsius.

how we drink them
over tables smooth with worry
at the end of the day when you have

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

share them with each other.

(Elza 2009)

A/r/tography takes as many forms, simple or elaborate, as it does possible definitions, each a weave of colored strands unlike any other. Media combine, overlap, tangle; explorations fall apart, new threads arise out of nowhere: the a/r/tographer's job is to seek, to attend, to catch the flying array of change incarnate as it wheels by, expressing through our art, evoking through our instruction, recording through our research. In poetic inquiry, engaging in poetry becomes "an expression of living aesthetically as a researcher in the field" (Leggo et al. 2011). According to Iranian poet Nilofar Shidmehr,

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

Through my (initially unexpected) reflexive journey on buses around the city, steeped in my mobile-reading of the poems posted there, and in the writing and gathering of my own poetic observations and compulsions, I was "free to tell and retell and not 'get it right,' but rather 'get it' contoured and nuanced" (Gouzouasis & Lee 2002, p. 126), thereby "negotiating the messiness of field research through living inquiry, and...the messiness of day-to-day practice...to consider ways that we as researchers can...engag(e) in poetry from a perspective of living inquiry" (Leggo et al. 2011).

A/R/Tography

*partition proceed back up return
streetside Stateside outside return
crosswalk intersection sidewalk return
repeat review repetition return
remember research revisit return*

*Pen feather story tell
return
gathered round dusky fires at night
by morning, ashes, only charcoal remains
add water paint on the page
reflecting self
auto bio graphy
in between worlds
metis
in other words,
assemblages self reflexive
wonderment a perpetual
state of mind
northern place of mind,*

*place of mine
in artful consort with breath
chorus with frog
coyote women howling
all night cavorting
in forest, on shore
flocks of starlings flung skyward
untethered flight upending the night,
cast in an arc, a perfect swerving
reckless swoop
past the silver moon
licking the horizon
toward the fine narrow
line dividing
tomorrow from today*

(Borhani 2011b)

Poetry In Transit is the signature title of a project launched in 1996 by the Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia (ABPBC), aimed at getting the work of BC poets out into the public sphere: “In partnership with TransLink and BC Transit, the ABPBC produces sixteen poetry cards annually featuring the work of BC-authored and Canadian-published poets. The cards are displayed on buses and SkyTrains throughout the transit systems in BC” (The Association of Book Publishers of British Columbia 2011). And so it came to be, that riding the bus came to be a most meaningful ritual in my day, as I anticipated the twice-daily poems, riding back and forth to campus for class, infusing me with a sense of communion and prayer as I solemnly read the words I found posted there. I was always bereft when, for some unknown reason, a bus was empty of its customary poem placed above the front section of seats on the driver’s side. New to the city and the country of Canada, looking for any reminder of home or familiarity, and desirous of a *heart* connection to this place, the bus became a sort of home-away-from home, a place where the familiarity of poetry, found in a public place (so often devoid of the personal), reminded me of a community stretching backward and forward in time, from which I am never separated – the community of poets and lovers of poetry. Palestinian-American poet Naomi Shihab Nye describes how after the fall of the twin towers,

I found myself, as millions did, turning to poetry...Why should it be any surprise that people find solace in the most intimate literary genre? Poetry slows us down, cherishes small details. A large disaster erases those details. We need poetry for nourishment and for noticing, for the way language and imagery reach comfortably into experience, holding and connecting it. (2002)

In *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language Among the Western Apache*, Keith Basso points out that

(a)n unfamiliar landscape, like an unfamiliar language, is always a little daunting... Emphatically “there” but conspicuously lacking in accustomed forms of order and arrangement, landscape and discourse confound the stranger’s efforts to invest them with significance, and this uncommon predicament, which produces nothing if not uncertainty, can be keenly disconcerting. (1996)

The poems on the bus were a familiar language in an unfamiliar landscape, helping to ground my new steps and path, my (re)location, in something and someplace ancient, a place I can always visit, wherever I may be. I came to see the bus rides themselves as moving metaphors incarnate for the literal transition I was in: riding on the bus, in transit, my self in transition, transiting, heading somewhere, rolling along through glistening rain-drenched streets, a coach ride through a city of sparkling water and sunlight. My jostling, sometimes careening bus rides caused me to muse more than once, Are we ever NOT in transition, in this journey we call life? “How does it feel/ to be without a home/like a complete unknown/like a rolling stone?” (Dylan 1965)

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

*There is something about order
about equations and symmetry
that appeals and consoles
if you are horribly alone,
like a heaven-sent ladder
when you’ve fallen down a hole,
even if you cannot reach it
just counting the rungs*

could save your sanity.

(Israel 2011)

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

“Make a rhizome. But you don’t know what you can make a rhizome with, you don’t know which subterranean stem is going to make a rhizome, or enter a becoming, people your desert. So experiment” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987). Poetry making is *like this* (Barks & Arberry 1990); a/r/tography is like this. Experiment. Making an umbrella of flowering paper and leaves and spoken word and “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari 1987), living wheels of human ambulation - as I did, in the end, when all these poems were written, the “experiment” almost complete - is *like this*, an experimentation in poetry, performance, visual aesthetics, sense of place, and protest. A surprise. Rumi says, “When Shams comes back from Tabriz / he’ll put just his head around the edge / of the door to surprise us / Like this” (Barks & Arberry 1990). When our work surprises us, the changes it takes, the unexpected directions in which it leads us, we’re living *like this*.

This must be poetic inquiry. At first, I didn’t think I was writing enough. I didn’t think anything I was writing was “good.” I didn’t think I knew where I was heading. Then this happened:

a poem on the page
lights out
for Hollywood
lets it all
hang out
doesn't pay attention
to line
works instead
in rhythm
like the drum it came from
gak-ke-de-gak, gak-ke-de-gak, gak-ke-de-gak, gak-gak
tongue beating
roof of my mouth
sides of cheeks
swollen with sound
puffs! of air
plosive breath
clicking! teeth
clkt! clkt! clkt!

swallowing glottal stops

writing out of
 the
 lines
 freeing
 breath
don't have to say it
 all at once

(Borhani 2011a)

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

Night Rhythms

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

(Borhani 2011h)

No two were alike, but poems were beginning to flow: as testimony and witness, as acts of attention, as voice to desire, reverie, and delight; poetry as constant companion and mental health barometer, writing to stay alive. Instead of a nice, neat “answer” or packaged end result (a few poems reflecting my experiences of transition in a clear, linear manner), I had a handful of scruffy looking rough drafts, and a lot more questions than answers. The research question and conceptual parameters had shifted; in addition to writing poems, now a plethora of visual artwork and an ethos of protest were dominating my days with the advent of the worldwide Occupy movement and its local Vancouver scene and encampment. My old roots in media, broadcasting and stage work were promptly utilized in that new (rhizomatic) community, and I juggled my time spent on site “occupying” at the Vancouver Art Gallery with my coursework, often reading in UBC’s satellite campus next door, or writing (bundled against November’s chill) on the steps above the Robson Street skating rink. My bus route had changed, too, as a result of these new activities: now I was riding down Arbutus Street, to Broadway, then Granville, across the bridge, all the way downtown. No more student-packed coaches to the campus; here were workers, grandparents, kids in love, lost souls, a variety and flavor missing in the university-bound busses. I was still writing poems (mostly when they spoke to me rather than trying to coax them), continuing to journal, and shooting off some old rolls of black and white 35mm film I’d been carrying around for years. The photographic eye was a counterpoint to my writing, even though many shots were of the powerfully worded signage that so characterized the Occupy movement. Words in black and white and grainy relief shot at deliberately weird angles, or capturing a lone autumn leaf, a crack in the sidewalk. Reflections of a faceted inquiry into the nature of expression, documented while on the move, marking place and time with language and image. I was in a whirlpool of aural and visual input, sensory overload, and not always sure what I - as researcher - was doing, and what was being “done” to me by the process, the questions, and all the information - poems, photographs, new experiences and new questions - pouring in. (Re)calibrating myself to the (re)verberations, excesses, openings, contiguities and metaphor/metonymy (Irwin & Springgay 2008) of a/r/tographical practice, I was reminded that

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

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

Beauty

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

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

(Borhani 2011c)

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

On many days, while riding the bus, I wondered if other riders noticed the elegant, well-crafted poems posted on its curved silver walls. Few seemed to ever look up, let alone take note of the versified text, rich metaphors, and narratives in poetic form. Rarely did anyone echo my own inadvertent and satisfied smile at the well-worded

twists and turns; for me, they greeted, and sometimes framed, the rest of my day. The teacher in me wondered about this seeming lack of interest in poetry, or even the self-edification this innovative program nobly aimed to address. What would it take to enliven a greater interest in poetry in our culture?

In my work coming into public and private school classrooms under the auspices of Poets in the Schools, the initial response is most often, “Ooh, yuck – poetry!” Yet after a week spent in their classroom, most students have a new outlook on both their own writing and the acknowledged classics (and hidden gems) we read together. Many take up journal-keeping, and naturalistic observation of their worlds and lives that I have come to see as the intimate, nuts and bolts activities of that which we call poetic inquiry. Several have forged literary paths in their personal and academic lives, and/or cultivated rich inner lives. Coming from a small island community, I run into them frequently, and am blessed to see the continuing fruit of their revised (and much improved) understanding of poetry’s myriad benefits.

Recently, at a beloved friend’s memorial, one of my former students read an eloquent eulogy to this man who had been his earliest classroom teacher, moving me to tears at the mature tenderness of his words. I asked him (rhetorically) where he had learned to write like that, and even as he acknowledged our deceased friend, our eyes met in mutual understanding as he shyly smiled and said, “From you, Maya.” As grateful as I was for his acknowledgment, I felt - as I always do - that *poetry* is the real teacher: all I do is provide a decent “translation” (read: presentation) that kids can relate to; then they are well on their way to discovering the power of wonder, and wordplay, for themselves.

Although never a classroom teacher myself, my experiences with teaching writing as a visiting artist have helped me to better understand the (constantly shifting) relationships between artist, teacher, and researcher implied in the idea and practice of *a/r/tography*. Inextricably interconnected, I am researching innovative ways to teach writing, teaching appreciation of artistic endeavors, and strengthening my own poetic practice, all at the same time. Experiences of excess, along with messiness, and magic, abound. Coalescing into something new, the three components of artist, teacher, and researcher collaborate to bring a greater appreciation of poetic arts to my students, and to parents and classroom teachers whose eyes were also often opened to the wonders of poetry through our sessions. More than one classroom teacher has exclaimed to me about a student who she could “never get to write a thing,” who suddenly expresses her or himself quite effectively through verse. I smile, and reply the proof is in the pudding: *poetry works*, and can be used to heal literacy hesitations as well as to nurture child and adult alike to be unafraid of the magic of words and exploration.

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

The Way It Is

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

(Stafford 1998)

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

Dream

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

*I see my fingers outstretched
can't reach
the shells glistening
beyond my grasp*

desire
black as night

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

(Borhani 2011e)

Citing visionary musician, artist and poet John Cage, Pat O’Riley notes that “(p)oethics regard knowing as not only about knowing or not knowing, but a *willingness to not know...thinking as letting go and receiving rather than capturing and assembling/ordering*” (2003). Similarly, American poet Robert Bly embraces “reckless grandeur over the virtue of meticulousness” (Hoagland 2011), resulting in “a poetry of *devotion*, an ecstatic spirit which disdains the fidgety cautions of the intellect.” This aesthetic is well-suited to poetic inquiry. Without mystery, without “spiritual intensity’...as an essential poetic value” (Hoagland 2011), without devotion, how can we practice trust in the poetic act? Where will the words lead us? Where will those things we pay attention to lead us? Where will the things we ignore lead us? Spiritual intensity as a poetic value means walking “on the road to find out” (Stevens 1970). We carve a space for the poetic, a place for the unknown to come in and start another line of flight. Like those mystical poets from the East - Mirabai, Rumi, Hafez, Kabir - we practice tuning

more sharply to instincts which had been there all along -- the liberating force of paradox, and the way in which crisscrossing lines of thought, images, and competing claims can be used poetically to deliberately pull apart the tight certainties of “knowing.”
(Hoagland 2011)

Similarly, environmental educator David Greenwood points out the ways in which poetry functions as a site of resistance to what is traditionally understood as “knowing”:

Like...time I seek out on the land, poetry engenders another cultural way of knowing. It is a dissident minority tradition within my own colonized and colonizing culture. Stopping for poetry is an antidote to the morning news...to the voice of reason that governs research method...Poetry...helps me to recover my wilder self. (2010)

Coyote Song

Waking early,
before my soul
- out wandering all night -
has jumped back into my body,

I think I hear coyote's lonely dawn

distant

yearning howl

then, my eyes focus

see the house right next door,

know I'm in the city now.

There are no coyotes here.

Was that me I heard?

Out wandering

some misty highway

peering sideways

at the dawn?

(Borhani 2011d)

“If life is mythically conceived of as a heroic journey, if the myth includes trials, errors, and failure as part of one’s necessary education” (Hoagland 2011), then are not a/r/tographical explorations the field notes from that journey, the lived myth returning from the sojourn, evidence of a newly “certified” teacher of the self? Sometimes, they are literally field notes: poems written down at the Vancouver Art Gallery, on the bus, at home curled up on the red settee below my window; emails from classmates, my supervisor, old friends; inspiring one-liners on Facebook and snippets of text from the internet. One of these one-liners (Brooks 2011) guided an important methodological consideration for this poetic inquiry, arriving at a timely juncture during some of the early “confusion” over what constituted “(re)search.” Thereafter, I kept it front and center on my desk, its message reminding me of a vital and easily overlooked tenet of any journey worth taking: *The purpose of life is not to find yourself, but to lose yourself* (E Trobridge, 2011, pers. comm., 17 October). So instead of worrying that I was getting “lost,” I learned to relish it, better understanding that being lost is what makes a finding all the more rewarding. These poems and musings are my findings, my way-making in this new environment. As Indigenous scholar Priscilla Settee points out, “(w)riting, in fact, is vital to cultural and racial survival because it is not just to communicate; writing is for discovering oneself” (Settee 2011, p. 438). At the heart of a/r/tographic work, deeper discovery of oneself guides the intersections between art-making, living inquiry, and the practices of *educaré*; the many ways in which the world draws us forth.

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

Dear Robert, did you listen

to this soaring primeval music

on silent mornings

when the white mantle

lay deep on the land,

*working your translation
of that (foolish) hero's journey
(unknown) into the self
and (nimble)
back again?*

(Borhani 2011g)

When first setting out on this journey into a/r/tographic research, the idea of a finished, final product was somehow so appealing. But along the way, the messiness took over; in translation, the woman and writer in transition did indeed transform, into a (re)searcher and exploratory artist grounded in a new milieu, looking to *find* out. Rather than a neat, packaged envelope of poems, “new understandings” (Irwin & Springgay 2008) arose through the practice of writing, through the practice of “Occupying” politically in that season of global unrest, and “occupying” myself, in (that new) place, on the bus, at home, in class, on walks to and from these locales.

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

*What you seek
is seeking you.*

(Rumi 1995)

I found out what it was (or at least began to piece together the jigsaw-like pieces of my clues) one very blustery day walking home from my neighborhood coffee shop, when I saw protruding upside down from the corner garbage bin a strikingly beautiful umbrella. Momentarily confused – why was this beauty in the trash? – I pulled it out, sure there had been some mistake – and saw the broken spines that had led to its truncated existence as a whirly-gig in the rain. At first, I was still dismayed, wishing for some way to repair, reuse, or recycle the beauty; then, my dismay slowly shifted to renewed curiosity and inspiration, as I examined the dusky-blue leaf pattern on the silver-periwinkle fabric, convinced that the umbrella could be made into a piece of “trash fashion,” at the very least - a designer skirt or hat of “*haute trash*” (Haute Trash 2012). In addition to the lovely fabric, the umbrella had a classy, thick wooden handle and spine – clearly this umbrella had seen some days, and might yet sport some more! Originally, I thought I’d get it to designers who relish such projects, *toute de suite*. But when I took the broken-accessory-about-to-become-art home, that’s when the fun *really* began!

“We have to understand the artistic process not only as an attempted solution of a paradox, but as the paradox itself. What one knows, one cannot say, and once said it is no more the same” (Hess 1975). For a final presentation in another graduate seminar in which I was reporting on the Occupy movement, I glued photos from the Vancouver encampment to the leafy blue umbrella fabric, along with some fresh red and gold autumn leaves that, amazingly, held up under the delicate pressure applied in the gluing process. When I twirled the broken umbrella, spines collapsing as I spun, the photos revolved in a peculiar bent and shapely way, like an improvisational dancer, and leaves fluttered in time to the rhythmic breeze of the spin. Natural materials, recycled objects, and narrative documentation combined in a photo-leaved moving montage of a place in time; this, in turn, led to the next (even better!) incarnation of the umbrella.

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

Decorating the newly christened “poetry umbrella” were the now-dried leaves from its previous incarnation, to which I carefully glued fresh gold and crimson ones, also tucking scraps of poems between its fabric and spines, or impaled onto ends of the broken spines. Thus freshly adorned, the umbrella was now destined to become the “roof” of an improvisational “bus” in which I would ride around, periodically stopping to disembark and present a poem.

To transform the broken umbrella spines into my lines of flight veering off from within the imaginary bus, I tied long pieces of colored yarn to each one. In the spirit of true improvisational theatre, actors (selected from the assembled audience of fellow-presenters) were asked to fulfill their roles only moments before we “moved.” A handful of yarn strings was held by each of four comrades, who formed a loose rectangular shape around me standing in their midst, holding the curved wooden handle of the umbrella that united us all (metaphorically, and literally), its colorful strings flowing from our center in unpredictable yet fluid ways. Several threads were gathered into each person's hands, like balloon strings; but without the buoyancy of an actual balloon to hold the strings aloft, they twisted, sagged, and tangled in a particularly satisfying enactment of rhizomatic play! At the front of the rectangular-shaped space that the lines of flight delineated, a sixth participant - my “driver” – commanded, like a steering wheel, a hand-painted cardboard sign that read “This Space Is Occupied.” The four comrades were meant to represent the wheels, or four corners, of the bus, and I the passenger in their midst, with the driver of our “bus” leading the way as we moved around the room. The driver and four “wheels” would

halt in unison (their lines tangling more magnificently each time) when an iPhone's doorbell chime rang for the "stops" on our route. There, I would step out from the intertwined configuration of lines of flight that draped the imaginary walls of this improvised transport, and toss-spread-rain a shower of colorful autumn leaves from a shopping bag at my side, signifying movement between indoors and outdoors, on the bus and off, cityscape and nature, as well as blurring those distinctions, since this mimicking of outdoor activities was being performed indoors on a gray November afternoon in liminal space and time. I read one poem at each stop, then stepped back into the "bus," as we kept rolling throughout the room, "all around the town" (Raffi, cited in Wickstrom 1998). With the amorphous swish of movement as we swerved and shuffled around the long and narrow, low-ceilinged room, the flurry of leaves tossed and blown about the space, the ethereal tone of the bus-chime, and the reverent delivery of my words, our improvisation captured the in-betweens, excesses, metonymy and liminality of a/r/tography as live performance.

Our audience seemed intrigued by the mode of presentation, at times even entranced, and perhaps therefore more receptive to the poems, curious about their delivery, the context, and what it might say about the words themselves as part of a moving, vibrating, intertwining whole. Not everyone "got it" that we represented a bus, I'm sure; yet they were swept away on an imaginary wind of some kind, understanding the poetry of movement, the words recited, the impressionistic tangle of colored yarn and moving bodies and flying leaves. My role as artist as researcher (and teacher) gained new depth and scope that day, as I strode more solidly from poet into performer, incorporating visual art, sound, dance, and theatre into my expressive work. And perhaps for having ritualized their initial foray out into the world, the poems did come alive off the page, their voices the echoes of a budding a/r/tographer, finding hers.

For the Missing Women

*"Because the night belongs to lovers,
because the night belongs to us..."*

-Patti Smith & Bruce Springsteen

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

the night is my lover

grand solitude in darkness

salty air dotted stars

alone

under cover

fully exposed

impenetrable *fully enclosed*

companied by loose, curling thoughts

the mysterious wind that carries them away

(Borhani 2011f)

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

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

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