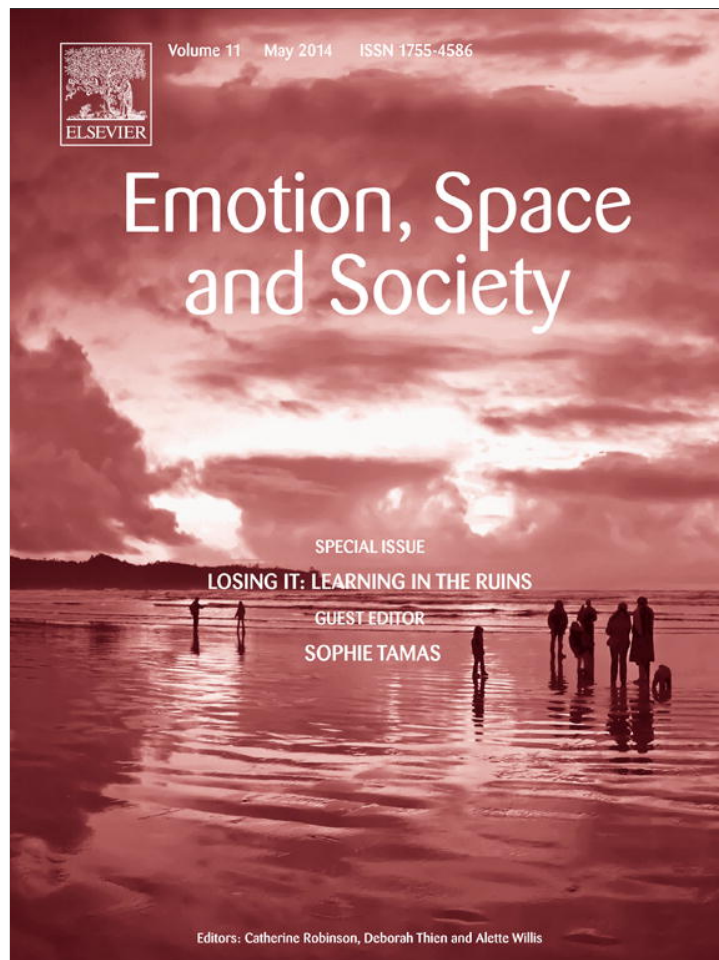


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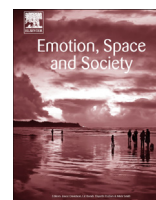
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## Catching my breath: In full flight over the prairies



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## ABSTRACT

The author places her tenure submission package into a laundry basket and sets it aloft with helium balloons. Awaiting news, she contemplates curricular encounters and choices of action that have shaped her journey through the academy. She comes to recognize that as educators, we must learn to stop and call ourselves into deep listening and mindful action. What matters is that we attend with hospitality and welcome what and who comes into our presence, as if responding to an unexpected stranger knocking at the door, “who is there?” and open ourselves to the possibilities awaiting us across the threshold.

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*“Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
 with your one wild and precious life?”*

Oliver, 1992: 94

January 16, 2012

I am afraid. I do not know how this moment will unfold.

\*\*\*\*\*

September 23, 2011

Yesterday, as I was standing in my favorite coffee shop buying a latté to fortify myself for the long drive up the mountain to deliver my tenure package,<sup>1</sup> I spotted a quote written on the chalkboard hanging on the wall above the espresso machine, “One must risk being a little bit foolish, so as not to be considered wholly a fool,”<sup>2</sup> and I stopped. I took a breath and laughed.

Was this a sign? I looked at the plain cardboard box into which I had crammed all the supporting documents, copies of articles written, CV, application letter, etc. etc. etc. and I take heart. *This is not the performance of who I desire to be.* I cross the street to the hardware store, and purchase a laundry basket. Then, I scoot next-door to the children’s store, and purchase helium balloons. When I explain to the sales clerk what I am plotting, she laughs, and gives me a discount. And so it is, I deliver my tenure package in a laundry basket with balloons, red, blue, and yellow, announcing my arrival, balloons and breasts bouncing with each step.

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An act of resistance. A hopeful reclaiming of who I once thought I was, a celebration of who I hope I might be, beyond the expectations of who I perceive (wrongly perhaps) the academy anticipates. The receptionist receiving my tenure package is not amused. “Put it over there.” She points to a pile of prim boxes piled neatly on a table. “I guess you’ll have to put it on the floor.” She dismisses me, turning her back to the scene. But I am confident in this performative moment. Now, whenever I think about my tenure application and its glacial progress through the system, I smile and consider my laundry basket in full flight over the prairies, traveling distances I have yet to imagine. I have not yet begun to panic.

\*\*\*\*\*

Maxine Greene (1978) calls us to “wide-awakeness,” warning educators not to sleepwalk through our lives, to be alert to the possibilities that we encounter in our daily lives. Being wide awake to who we are within each moment reminds us that there are choices of action. An ethics of compassion, reciprocity. Attention to injury. Similarly, Karen Meyer (2006) advises us to attend to our everyday living. She tells us that place, time, language, and self/other, matter. Living inquiry invites us to pay attention to how we engage in the world. Write fieldnotes, she tells us. Not the copious notes the anthropologist writes out in the field. But write of those moments that call you to attention, “moments that tug on your sleeve” (Fels, 2012a). Rewrite and rewrite your fieldnote yet again, polish this

moment like a stone collected on an ocean beach that has a story to tell, if you are willing to listen.

\*\*\*\*\*

As a curriculum theorist and researcher in arts education, I am curious about relational encounters and learning that emerge through performative engagement—performance as a living encounter that calls us into presence, alerting us to the responsibilities of relational reciprocity of intimacy, vulnerability, and care.<sup>3</sup> With each encounter that we engage in, in our lives, in our teaching, in our work as artists, choices of action are required; we are not always wise in our choosing, or wide-awake. Our challenge is to stop and call ourselves into mindful action, to listen deeply<sup>4</sup> to what is within our hearts. What matters is that we attend with hospitality and welcome what and who comes into our presence, as if responding to an unexpected stranger knocking at the door, “who is there?” and be willing to open ourselves to the possibilities awaiting us across the threshold. What we do not yet know, is that the stranger who comes into our presence, is the child we left behind.

I imagine this writing, performative,<sup>5</sup> and narrative,<sup>6</sup> a layered account,<sup>7</sup> to give voice, weight, and illumination to moments, each a polished stone,<sup>8</sup> touching on lived experiences of engagement in school, from childhood to adulthood, moments of vulnerability that stop me still. Such moments are what Appelbaum (1995) calls stops: *moments of risk*, *moments of opportunity*, in which I recognize the danger of losing myself, my voice, my attention to what matters. These moments track<sup>9</sup> the path I lay down in walking,<sup>10</sup> from the child seeking to retrieve her red mittens, under the scrutiny of others, my confrontation with the word count of my first academic paper, a moment of resistance, to my failure last year to recognize presence during my lecture on Arendt's natality and Greene's “wide-awakeness.” Sleepwalking. *Mea culpa*.

In the writing of this piece, I had not anticipated my telling of these particular moments, haphazardly located as they are through the timeline of my academic career. These moments are stories with dates, typed on a page, yet embodied, living under my skin, calling me to attention. These moments startle me, scattered through time and place, in which I am child, graduate student, teaching assistant, assistant professor. I had not realized as this text unfolded, that they had mattered, burrowed deep within my body. Yet, as they surface now, I realize that in terms of my educational journey, these are the moments that caused me to falter, to mistrust, to seek refuge under the camouflage of what is known, recognizable, familiar. *Moments that silenced*, *moments to deny*. Until the moment when I come face to face with natality, an unexpected stranger in my classroom, and recognize the moment as mine to embrace.

In *persuasions of the wild: writing the moment, a phenomenology*, Jana Milloy (2007) calls upon us to dwell within the moment; she invites us to listen to the gaps, the silences, the unspoken, the unsaid, the unsayable<sup>11</sup> written within those moments that trouble us. Such moments of dis-ease may not be easily translated; each moment is fleeting, elusive. And yet I have come to realize that within each moment dwells a lifetime of possibility, renewal, hospitality, resistance, invitation, restoration, reflection, and welcome. Each moment that stops us calls us to attention, into presence, and while we may be delinquent, ignorant of those moments that elude us, each moment arises with consequence. Each moment, as Milloy reminds us, unfolds, one into the next, and although oft-times beyond our grasp, such moments are embodied within us, dwelling as an unsuspected stranger within our household of lived experience.

*Each moment a child of duration.*<sup>12</sup>

Such moments may haunt us, or taunt us, skulking in shadows. Such moments may be beacons of light that pull us out of sleep in

the hours before dawn. What matters is that we attend to what or who calls us into presence, so that we might be wide-awake to what gifts may be offered. The telling then of these moments, time-skipping across the page, like a stone a child throws, disturbing the flat calm of a pond, calls me awake. This writing is a coming home to a way of being in the academy where I recognize myself anew.<sup>13</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

November 2011

I tell my friends that waiting for news of tenure and promotion is like living with a low-grade fever. After a while, it becomes normal, this anxiousness of spirit that flows unmarked through veins and arteries. You don't realize its presence until someone asks how you are and you find yourself launching into a ten minute monologue about how your tenure package is floating over the Canadian Rockies or is caught in a thunderstorm over the prairies, or maybe it's in Montreal, or, hey, if you look outside the window, right now, you'll see my laundry basket floating by, balloons holding it aloft. And they look at you askance, as if you've taken flight from your senses, and you realize that you are in trouble. “I can't feel a thing,” I tell them. “I've lost all sense of being. Here, check my pulse.” I've placed a lot of hope in the helium, to maintain altitude. My thesis package has taken flight, but in my heart, I know it is sitting in a room, surrounded by other thesis packages, balloons drooping. How will I be received?

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1962

I am six years old. My friend and I have stayed after school to color in our workbooks. The big black clock on the wall shows it is three o'clock. The grade ones have left for the day, and now only the grade twos are waiting for the three-thirty bell, their heads bent low over scribblers, practicing their cursive writing.

“Could I borrow your blue crayon?” my friend whispers.

“Here it is,” I respond happily.

“Please be quiet!”

The teacher looks at me, and, in unison, the grade twos follow suit. Under their scrutiny, I am embarrassed, ashamed. I leave the room, and in the cloakroom, remove my snowsuit from a bronze hook. I pull on my snowpants, my jacket, my hat, my boots, then realize that my red mittens are still on the hot air radiator in the classroom, drying. I tiptoe in, my heart beating like the wings of a captured bird, I can barely breathe. I am determined to pass through the room like a ghost, invisible, like air aimlessly turning the construction paper mobiles that hang from the ceiling, but my winter pants betray my presence. No matter how lightly I tread,<sup>14</sup> the sound reverberates throughout the room.

*Swish swish swish*

The teacher stops in mid-sentence, and all eyes in the classroom turn in my direction. I forget to breathe.

\*\*\*\*\*

Shame slips under my skin, and journeys with me as I lay down a path in writing<sup>15</sup> swish swish swish out of the classroom and into my future. This child tugs at my sleeve. What, are you here, still, haunting me?

\*\*\*\*\*

October 1994

I am on academic alert. They are watching me, I feel their judging eyes as I pass by the department office, secretaries momentarily paused in their work, hands stilled above keyboard. I have been

accepted into a doctoral program on the condition that I achieve two grades of A in my courses. I am taking a third course as a backup. On the first day of class, I find myself, to my dismay, hand raised in the air, asking for the spelling of a word. “Praxis?” repeats the professor, raised eyebrow. Today, however, I am sitting at the table, proud, confident. I have completed our first assignment early, a book review of a book written by the professor. Everyone is aghast that I would choose his book to review. “It was the only title on the list of books he gave us that I understood,” I whisper to my friend. My book review sits on the tabletop in front of me, crisp white sheets of paper, ready to be handed in at the end of class. The professor’s words, announced just as the buzzer sounds, stop me. “About that book review due next week. If it’s one word over 2500 words, I won’t read it.” I hurry out of class, book review concealed in my backpack. Somehow between now and next week, I have to delete 1500 words....

The night before our next class, I engage in six desperate hours in a Sisyphean task, deleting words, then reinserting words I’d just deleted back into the text, clicking repeatedly on the word count function. The lettering on my delete key wears thin. At dawn, I stumble off to bed, unsettled but determined, the requested word count achieved. Three hours later, upon awakening, I reread my review before printing it, and realize to my dismay, I have removed my voice, the heart of the work. What to do? Words, sentences, paragraphs are retrieved. I hand in the original word length. It feels good, although to be honest, I am concerned whether this transgression will result in docked marks. Maybe I should have followed the rules? What about my A? The woman sitting next to me in class laughs. “My review is 45,000 words,” she says. Unlike me, she pays no attention to word counts. She is writing her life onto the page, and owns every word.

\*\*\*\*\*

December 1994

Today I receive a standing ovation. In response to the professor’s question, I quote Madeleine Grumet: full sentence, word for word, publication, date and page number. Something about teachers being handmaidens of the state.<sup>16</sup> Something about a classroom being a cement bunker, where a teacher can teach to her own curriculum. I am applauded, not for the wisdom of the words chosen in the moment, but because I am speaking in the academic language I have resisted all semester. My language is now theirs.

\*\*\*\*\*

January 1995

The rainy season persists through the months of November, December, we are halfway through January, and still the rain falls. I open the door to my doctoral class, and stand at the threshold, water drips from the bright blue rain cape I am wearing, pools on the tiled floor. I am late, the professor is speaking at the podium, neither he nor my fellow students raise their eyes at my entrance. I watch as they bend their heads over an article; a few are marking their text with yellow or blue highlight. I listen to the hiss of rain against the windows. The gray weight of the room falls on my shoulders, I am compelled to take action. To interrupt. Raising my arms up, my hands outstretched in front of me, like Superman, I fly into the room. “I have arrived!” A small act of resistance. No one smiles. Nothing is said. A highlighter snakes a blue trail across a line of text.

\*\*\*\*\*

May 1997

In one of my readings, I stumble across a sentence that stops me. “Not walls of cement, but...the melodies of your temperature.”<sup>17</sup> What walls have I encountered as I navigate my way through the

academy? Who has received the melodies of my offering? This quote becomes a metaphor that illuminates my journey, a small crack that lets in the light, Leonard Cohen’s song, *Anthem*, singing the throughline of my coming to understand curriculum, how we engage with others; this quote carries me through dark days.

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*The letter has arrived. Marked confidential. I test its weight in my hand, unsubstantial for a document of such importance. I lean against the table in the middle of the room, listening to voices filtering in through the door from the corridor. Mailboxes line the walls, each of us has our names staking one of the boxes; the labels are removable, detachable. The room is stuffy, heat expelled by the copying machine. Waiting, alone, in the mailroom, as my colleagues file into the classroom for a faculty meeting next door, I recognize fear and am startled.*

\*\*\*\*\*

January 2011

I am in full flight, four years into being an assistant professor, I have command over my subject matter, the LCD projector, the master key to the storage room. Teaching classes on arts-based research, curriculum theory and instruction, performative inquiry, I quote without hesitation, Maxine Greene, David Appelbaum, Carl Leggo, Karen Meyer, Celeste Snowber, Jana Milloy. Even here in writing this sentence I am conscious of the names I am quoting, so that their citation statistics may be further enhanced.

\*\*\*\*\*

“Hannah Arendt speaks to us of natality<sup>18</sup>—who will we become in the presence of others? She asks educators if we love children enough so as to invite them to participate in the world’s renewal not as we expect or imagine, but as they will come to embody through their actions.”

I am smug with these words

Everyone is writing furiously, taking notes,  
noting the brilliance of my lecture

Someone is watching.

Unspoken words—

I stop, mid-breath

An infant stares at me, open-eyed.

How is this possible?

For twenty minutes I speak about natality—

yet fail to see a newborn present in the room?

This is a stop.

\*\*\*\*\*

My blindness invites me into wonder. I am beckoned to recognition of sacred significance, which is, simultaneously, as Celeste Snowber writes, something very ordinary.<sup>19</sup> *How do I now respond?* A stop calls into question our habits of engagement. As David Appelbaum tells us, we are called to reconsider what we think we perceive.<sup>20</sup> A stop is an invitation to reimagine, to engage anew. There are choices of engagement, choices of action, in each encounter. And yet our ability to step outside the multiple scripts that we embody is difficult. Who shall I be in this moment? Assistant Professor? Writer? Mother? Woman? The unnamed baby stares at me, waiting for my response.

\*\*\*\*\*

Each meeting with those we love, those with whom we are merely acquaintances, and those whom we are meeting for the first time requires a willingness to encounter each other anew; each time of encounter, the first time of possible recognition. But we must be willing to be surprised, to be, as poet scholar, Rishma Dunlop says, astonished.<sup>21</sup> Derrida reminds us that it is not the stranger that we expect to whom we offer true hospitality. For such a stranger we can prepare, we can gird our loins for action, we can look to what we already know. Derrida writes,

Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, non-identifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly, other.<sup>22</sup>

It is the arrival of the unexpected stranger who calls who we are into focus. And who asks of us, in this moment of coming into presence, that we reconsider who we think we are, who we may become, and how we may now respond. To be willing to be astonished. An unexpected encounter asks of us, what choice of action is available to us in this moment now of our meeting?

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*I have been waiting for this letter since last May when I first requested permission to apply for tenure and promotion. I have followed all the directions. I responded to questions asked about the viability and value of my research. I numbered my refereed journal articles in my curriculum vitae; carefully tabulated chapters in books; calculated the conferences presented; students supervised; contributions of service. I am told to put the numbers in a prominent place, so that the counting by the tenure and promotion committee is quicker. I hesitate. What number is the magic number? I am annoyed with myself when I find a grammatical error in my tenure letter sent to the committee in September; the error hangs there like a red mitten on a school radiator. The child who I thought I had left behind in grade school tugs my sleeve. Will I be forgiven? Going forward for tenure is a honored practice, the procedure carefully prescribed, the rewards bountiful. I have prepared for this moment for years. Why have I lost my breath?*

\*\*\*\*\*

A stop calls us to attention to what is hidden—a vulnerability, an intimacy. A stop offers new awareness of possibility, a recognition of who we are in relationship with others as if for the first time. A stop is a glimpse of neither here nor there, but an elusive in-between, a liminal space of suspended attention in which we may choose to move as we have known, or to seek new ways to engage. Or we may choose to be silenced. The moment awaits our decision, embodied within action. As Appelbaum writes,

Between closing and beginning  
lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity.

The betweenness is a hinge that belongs  
to neither one nor the other.

It is neither poised nor unpoised,  
yet moves both ways...

It is the stop.<sup>23</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*A stop is not a moment of paralysis, but recognition that we arrive with all who we are, and in our arrival at this intersection; there is the gap between past and future,<sup>24</sup> what we have been and who we*

*are to become. A stop asks that we attend to what calls us to attention; there is something or someone who tugs on our sleeve, metaphorically, literally, requesting audience. A stop is movement in action. Is it possible in this moment of arrest, I will, like doubting Thomas, the disciple who refused to acknowledge the wounds in Christ's hands, likewise deny my presence? Must I ask another to recognize what I offer? My hands shake.*

\*\*\*\*\*

April 1983

Is it possible? I have sat in this class for twelve weeks and remained silent. Twelve weeks times three hours is...the calculation leaves me mute. Not that I have nothing to say. As the professor lobbs his questions across the room, and students reach out to grab them, responses are leaping in my brain, choose me, choose me, I want to speak! But I am mute. What if my response is not good enough? What if I make a fool of myself? When did I become so afraid? I am sure that the guy sitting next to me reads minds. He speaks my words even as I refuse them permission to reveal my presence.

\*\*\*\*\*

Announcing our arrival requires trust  
in anticipation of the response of those who witness, who attend,  
who listen, who act.  
To disrupt may be dangerous.

Can I trust you to whom I now speak?

\*\*\*\*\*

November 2007

I blew it today. Totally. In a faculty meeting with the Dean, I contradicted him. *Oh god! Did I really say that?* Afterwards I approach a colleague.

"That's it," I say. "I'm never saying another word until I get tenure."

"You won't get tenure unless you speak," he says.

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*So I have spoken. Sometimes in anger, in appraisal, in frustration, in excitement, in hope. But whose script have I taken to guide me through these years in the academy? Who have I become in my role as assistant professor? What happens now, when I break the seal of the envelope, pull out the pages and read what they think of me? Why, as I tear open the envelope, do I feel so unsettled? It seems in this business we can never do enough, be enough, complete enough. I have this article to finish. Deadlines become burdens. My professorial angst is not singular, of course. We see ourselves in the eyes of our colleagues. Those without tenure, awaiting judgment, recognize our unspoken text.*

"Am I good enough?"

"Have I done enough?"

"Will I be welcome?"

\*\*\*\*\*

December 2011

Carl Leggo, poet, says, "I no longer ask if a poem is good enough. I ask, what is this poem good for?"<sup>25</sup> A dangerous question to ask of an academic whose value is measured by the number of published articles, the dollar value of research grants received, number of committees served. How will I be valued? What am I good for?

When did I reduce my goodness to a quantitative measure? Who have I become in this journey?

\*\*\*\*\*

Today, I said no.

No to the student asking for an extension because his grandfather died.

No to the student asking how she could get a higher mark.

No to the student asking if he could enroll in my course.

No to the editor who asked me to review a book

No to the student who asked me to write a letter of recommendation

No to the colleague who wanted to set up a meeting on my research day

No to my colleague who wants to write a grant.

No to the emails on my desktop.

I lie. Here is the truth.

I have said no only to me

And in so doing

forgotten

who I thought

I was

becoming

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*How are we performed by others? For what purpose? How does our environment perform us? How should I be performing for you? This letter, its receiving and opening, is a small revelation, a ritual, a witnessing of one's self as written by others. Will I be seen?*

\*\*\*\*\*

I have been thinking about hospitality, relational encounter, and Derrida's unexpected stranger. My encounter with the tenure process has been one in which I have come to embody the lack of who I once thought I was supposed to be, or who I expected others expected me to be, or who I thought I wanted to be in the presence of...and no matter how many journal articles, students essays, or emails I process, I am still running in the same place, a place that has become utterly foreign and unforeseeable. When I look in the mirror, I do not recognize myself. What have I given my heart to?<sup>26</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

March 2012

Today in our program committee meeting, we spend thirty-five minutes debating an issue that surfaced earlier in the semester in one of our cohorts, a problem that as yet remains unresolved. Initially theoretical, our dilemma has now become one of educational practice. Discussion is sensitive, considered, compassionate for all parties involved.

We have a problem.

A problem?

A woman wants to bring her baby to class.

A baby?

To breastfeed.

Then take away?

No. To be present.

Won't that be disruptive to the others in the class?

It's a question of rights.

Whose rights?

The decision is postponed.

\*\*\*\*\*

How am I to be in the presence of a newborn child?

How am I to be in your presence?

\*\*\*\*\*

January 2011

Okay, so this is what happened to me in class today, our first class of the semester. An unexpected stranger crossed the threshold. Our encounter is one of a full stop. Literally. I stop, mid-sentence, in full flight of my welcome lecture, speaking of Hannah Arendt and her concept of natality. *How do we receive those who come into our presence? What rebirthing is possible in our encounter?* I stand tall at the podium, inviting Maxine Greene into our conversation. *You cannot sleepwalk through your classrooms. Maxine Greene calls us to wide-awakeness. As educators, we must learn how to be wide-awake!*

An infant child arrives my presence, wide-awake, watching me, and in that moment of our encounter, I realize, with a lightening of my heart, that I am seen.

I stop in mid-breath

I confess

I've been talking about natality and the importance of being wide-awake

and I didn't even notice that there was a baby in the room.

Eyes dark deep profound

Deeply listening

Excuse me everyone

I have to stop

to say hello.

What's his name?

Adam.

(Adam. Is that possible?)

Hello Adam.

Welcome.

A newborn's invitation

calls us to presence

I am here!

When I catch my breath, I wonder why this experience feels so joyful and immediate.<sup>27</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*I open the envelope. Afterwards, having read the letter, I draw in a breath, air filling my diaphragm, tension slipping from my shoulders;*

*in this moment, I feel again the possibility, and yes, the impossibility of who I am and who I have yet to become. There is a gap that shifts my balance, like the absence of wind, just before a gust fills the sails. I fold the moment into the envelope. The letter confirms forward motion, on to the next step. Confirmation (or denial) comes in June.*

\*\*\*\*\*

I look up the word tenure in the dictionary and am stopped.

Tenure: the right to hold or possess something

Tenuous: unsubstantial slight; flimsy; as, a tenuous plot<sup>28</sup>

I am not reassured.

I falter, is there anyone else attending to this moment?

You, who are silent in the text. Are you writing your own stories in between these lines? Are we, in this encounter, reimagining who we are, who we have been, who we might become...?

\*\*\*\*\*

This moment, I know, is only a stopping place, this writing like an inn that gathers travelers together, yourself included, around a fire. Sharing our stories. Revealing moments of vulnerability, intimacy, longing and belonging. Telling these stories, tracking my voyage through time, reveals your presence.

Perhaps I am where I am meant to be

laying down a path in walking

Perhaps I have not yet arrived at the crossroads I am seeking, an intersection of time and place, self/other and language that will call me awake

This telling is but one step in a journey as yet to unfold.

Perhaps there is no journey, only this moment

that holds us present like a mother's embrace

with promise, with hope

with grief, with loss

each greeting like

a newborn newly arrived

an unexpected stranger

who invites us to be born anew

Yes, I said. Yes. I will. Yes.<sup>29</sup>

\*\*\*\*\*

April 2012

Yesterday my son held a baby for the first time in his life. I missed the moment, too busy chatting with the caretaker of our next-door neighbor. "Hold the baby, again?" I plead, as if such a moment could be replayed. There is a quickening in my heart, a pulse of desire that has been absent for a long time. I yearn for new experiences, new encounters, new opportunities to meet myself again through a stranger's eyes.

\*\*\*\*\*

January 16, 2012

*I am in suspension. Taking flight seems the only thing to do in this time of uncertainty. After reading his letter, I encounter the Dean, and in my enthusiasm, I hug him four times, and then, abruptly coming to my senses, I shake his hand, solemnly. "Lynn, it's only a*

*letter of recommendation," he says. Like a balloon, leaking air, my confidence sags. I retreat from his office. This waiting continues. I trudge to the parking lot, car keys in hand. Shadows cross my path, and I look upwards to locate the source of movement. In the blue oh so blue sky overhead, I spot a laundry basket held aloft by balloons, red, blue and yellow, riding the wind. And my heart soars. This too is possible.*

\*\*\*\*\*

In each moment of coming into presence, we may recognize release in our encounters with the unexpected stranger, he or she who speaks to our heart, who surprises us, who resonates with the pulse of our beat, who reveals to us what perhaps we already have always known but not yet recognized. The unexpected stranger knocks on our door, and upon opening, we learn that the stranger is us. How now do I respond? And you?

I have in truth, unknowingly, been writing this story into presence, not only in this writing, but through the living of my academic journey, each moment like a child tugging on my sleeve, calling me to remember. I am surprised by this child who lingers still. I thought I had left her behind, swish swish swishing across the wooden floor, as a school clock ticks tocks towards end of time. This child haunts me as I lean into a space of hopeful invitation, offering a hand of welcome to those who, stopping at my door, cross the threshold into a space of encounter. What has this child come to teach me? What have I forgotten?

I am curious about flight, and wonder its meaning, as flight writes its presence into this text. Flight as in soaring, riding air currents like the bald eagles who sail above English Bay, as we watch from the log on the beach, sifting sand like an hour glass through our fingers. Or flight as in escape?

I am surprised by my attention to breath or the lack thereof, perhaps because I pay so little attention to whether or not I am breathing in my daily work. A fool, I take breathing for granted, and now, in this writing, in this journey toward tenure, newborn, I discover myself struggling for air.

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June 2012

Today, flipping through the pages of my thesis in search of a quote from Eugenio Barba, I came across a fragment of poetry I had written. In the final draft of my doctoral thesis, I interwove my text with moments of poetry on the advice of Carl Leggo, who was on my thesis committee, whose open door often offered refuge. Write poetry into your thesis, he said. And so I did, permitting my writing to take flight, so that the writing might evoke elusive moments of interstanding,<sup>30</sup> so that now, across time and space, you might journey with me.

within pools of echoes and silence

a lover awakes

madness touches her skin and

she arises translucent in moonlight<sup>31</sup>

Permission. Invitation. Hospitality. Welcome.

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Did I write poetry into my tenure package, all those words, claiming my arrival? How could I have forgotten? And so I offer, here—as my tenure package floats over the Atlantic Ocean, or perhaps now the French Alps—poetry written in between the lines

offered to those who will judge my passage amongst them—lived recognition of the pain, loss, rebellion, desire, hope, renewal, joy within that which we name our academic journey. I sit in anticipation of writing an ending, which in turn offers new possible beginnings, my fingers dancing, an awakening of desire, coming home to what matters.

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Arendt (1958) recalls us to the task of educators, to love children enough so as to invite them to engage in the world's renewal, not as we imagine it, but as they will, in their coming into our presence. "You want to see eternity in your student's eyes," a colleague tells me.<sup>32</sup> How do we attend to the child within us? The moments that startle, that tug on our sleeve, unfolding in our presence, are action sites of inquiry, reflection, renewal. By turning again to these moments that call us to attention, we may as educators, scholars, individuals, come to know ourselves, and the work we do anew. The child with her red mittens drying on a radiator in a classroom once upon a time, in her coming to be reborn in my presence in this moment, seeking to be welcomed, to be loved, she and I are at once each other's witness and promise of new beginnings.

For all that I am, in flight, and will become, living in the gap between past and future, I seek solace and guidance in those I quote, their words lifting me to new realms of interstanding. I see as if for the first time what I have come to recognize in the presence and grace of others. That in our work, together and alone, we seek forgiveness of the child within us

*each moment a child of duration*

—our challenge is to enact our promise of renewal in the presence of children and those who witness us, as we witness them, under the passing shadows of balloons held aloft in a deep blue sky.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> In Canada, after a period of time, as assistant professors, we are required to apply for tenure and promotion, and produce documentation to prove the quality and impact of our scholarship by a review of the number of publications we have achieved, membership on committees and service to our university we have undertaken, the quality of our teaching as indicated by student course evaluations, the quality and value of our research as evaluated by internal and external scholars. Failure to achieve tenure is devastating, exile from the institution. A fall from grace. I am not alone in my querying of the tenure process; my voice joins in harmony with others who question their experience in the academy. (See for example, Palulis, 2009; Richardson, 1997; Sparkes, 2007; Tierney and Bensimon, 1996; Wiebe and Fels, 2010.) I undertake this writing in the hopes of coming to understand the journey that has led me here to this moment of writing. Perhaps this exercise we call tenure in North America requires one to be “a little bit foolish” in order to survive, to flourish. Perhaps the landscape I am traveling in this writing, through this tenure process, is a journey of encountering myself anew.

<sup>2</sup> Quote found on chalkboard in café, paraphrased. Author unknown.

<sup>3</sup> Performative inquiry is a way of being in research that attends to learning, insights, and moments of recognition through the inquiry of stops, or moments of realization, experienced through performative play, creative endeavors and lived experience that call us to attention. See Fels, 1998, 1999, 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b.

<sup>4</sup> Celeste Snowber writes of deep listening, an embodied attending to the sensuous, the body, the spirit. Snowber (2005) writes of the dialogic relationship between mentor and student, using poetry, to speak to her heart's deep understanding and lived experience. In her poem, *Listening and becoming*, she writes, “To walk alongside, and to listen deeply, in spaces/of in-between: the hints/where passion may hide/its face. To hear one's heart/in the midst of inquiry,/to feel a pulse,/and to run wild/as theories rise and fall/in the swell of practice:/...” (350). Snowber dwells in the heart of poetry, dance, and embodied writing to illuminate the depth of her experience.

<sup>5</sup> Performative writing, as identified by Della Pollack (1998), “is evocative...It operates metaphorically to render absence present ... “The writer and the world's bodies intertwine in evocative writing, in intimate copformance of language and experience” (p. 80). Pollack identifies six qualities of performative writing: evocative, metonymic, subjective, nervous, citational (dialogic) and consequential. I encountered performative writing in *Imagologies: Toward a media theory*, in which the authors, Taylor and Saarinen (1994) interrupt conventional font, layout, academic text, as they track the narrative of their research together. Their work inspired *Educational Insights*, an online journal ([www.educationalinsights.a](http://www.educationalinsights.a)) that I edited for ten years, during which time scholars explored alternative ways to represent and perform their research on-line, through hypertext, audio, video, as well as engaging in multi-vocal, autobiographical, poetic, narrative, performative narrative, interrupting the text through different fonts styles, font sizes, and text lay-out such as alternating left-justified, centered, right justified text, fragmented sentences, within which white spaces readers were invited to write their own stories, interpretations, meaning-making, and moments of recognition. Similarly, I play performatively with text layout in this article in those places where I wish the reader to pause, to interrupt linear reading, and to evoke a poetic response, within which the reader, as with the overall intent of the writing, may be moved to reflection and inquiry and recognition. I have chosen to use the same font style, New York Times, throughout this writing. The exception, are those sections dated January 16, which I have italicized, to alert the reader that this text is focal, continuous, enveloping all the actions and thoughts that I entertain while awaiting for the letter from the Dean of Education and actions following. Asterisks are used to indicate a change in temporal, spatial or attitudinal realm (Ronai, 1992, as cited in Ronai 1995), to separate the three texts: the January 16th writing; the dated sections of individual experiences or stops; and the theoretical storytelling that moves the reader through the writing until its anticipated ending, which is a new beginning, in the presence of balloons floating gently across the sky. I have placed explanatory endnotes, such as this one, which seek to ground the writing in its scholarship, at the end of the article so that the fluidity of the personal narrative and reflective writing is not interrupted. However, by no means, are the endnotes a supplementary text, they play a significant role in the scholarship of this writing. My hope is that this article creates a performative narrative poetic space evoking memories and stories of the reader's own lived experience to be evoked and reflected upon. Creating performative poetic narrative texts that are evocative, and reflective, resonate and share and inspire new recognitions and understanding is also the ambition of educational researchers who engage in poetic inquiry. Prendergast (2009) writes in her piece, *29 Ways of Looking at Poetry*, that, “Poetic inquiry is philosophically aligned with the work of poets through literary history who were and are committed to using poetry as a means to communicate experiences of memory, identity, place, relationality, hope, fear and/or desire.” And, also, “Poetic inquiry is philosophically aligned with the work of poets through literary history who were and are committed to using poetry as a means to communicate socio-political and cultural concerns, as an act of witness.” (n.p). (See Prendergast et al., 2009b. See also, Prendergast et al., 2009a). See also *The Art of Writing Inquiry*

(2001) edited by Lorri Neilson, Ardra Cole, and Gary Knowles, Neilson for examples of scholars engaging in new ways of writing research.

<sup>6</sup> Initially, when I wrote my doctorate thesis, I struggled, wondering how to conserve in my writing the integrity of my experience when creating plays with children, when engaging in role dramas with post-secondary students, from whom I had learned so much. I did not want to engage in an explanatory text: *how could I perform stops, moments of recognition, and emergent learning on a page?* Daignault (2005), whose ideas on writing I first encountered in 1995, offers invitation and permission to imagine scholarly writing differently. Daignault proposes seven rules of writing: *welcome words, welcome characters, welcome the body, emotions, welcome intertextuality, welcome grace, welcome the unknown. Create a space for others to enter in.* Through embracing Daignault's invitation, and with the permission of my thesis committee, the writing of my thesis (Fels, 1999) and other writings (see for example, Fels, 1995, 1998, 2012b) became a performative challenge, joyfully and respectfully interrupting conventional academic writing. Many scholars, notably, Richardson (1997), Ellis (1997), Leggo (2008a, 2008b), Meyer (2006), and Dunlop (2001), among others have explored autobiographical, narrative, performative, and poetic ways of writing within the academy, interrupting conventional academic text, mentoring a new generation of researchers, to write themselves into the text, to engage in literary, autobiographical and performative as well as sociological techniques to share their research and learning. Miller (2005) proposes “writing as a place where the personal and the academic, the private and the public, the individual and the institutional, are always inextricably interwoven” (p. 31). I recognize with gratitude the courage of researchers who chose to interrupt the conventional academic text, in their search to speak to the heart of the child within, to the pulse of the lived experience they sought to share. They have given us invitation and permission to attend to our own research, and writing, in innovative, performative, poetic ways that “split the silence” (Stanik, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Proposing a layered account that engages multiple reflections and the reflexive self through narrative, Ronai (1992, 1995) troubles the conventional linear narrative in her work on exotic dancers and sexual abuse. Ronai acknowledges Carolyn Ellis and Laurel Richardson for encouraging her to interrupt the conventional academic voice. She describes the layered account as “a narrative form designed to loosely represent to, as well as produce for, the reader, a continuous dialectic of experience, emerging from the multitude of reflexive voices that simultaneously produce and interpret a text. It is deliberately structured to resemble what Schutz (1970) has called the *duree*, the stream of consciousness as experienced in everyday life” (p. 396). She explains that, “the layered account offers an impressionistic sketch, handing readers layers of experience so they may fill in the spaces and construct an interpretation of the writer's narrative. The readers reconstruct the subject, thus projecting more of themselves into it, and taking more away from it” (396). Such writing, she proposes, “enables ethnographers to break out of conventional writing formats by integrating abstract theoretical thinking, introspection, emotional experience, fantasies, dreams, and statistics” (1995, p. 395). Poet scholar, Rishma Dunlop (2005, 2002), mentioned above, similarly creates texts that are intertextual, performative, poetic, layered accounts that touch the pulse.

<sup>8</sup> The image of polished stones is from Meyer's work on living inquiry. Fieldnotes are short paragraphs about a temporal life experience, written and rewritten, so that the experience, moment, or encounter comes into presence, offering the reader a gift to interpret, to make meaning, with which to resonate or question, to recognize through their own lived experience. See Meyer (2006).

<sup>9</sup> My thanks to Dr. Vicki Kelly, for the term tracking as a way of engaging in meaning-making of an individual's pedagogical pathway. (In conversation, 2012.) Kelly writes, “It is through life writing that I began to understand the value of “looking from the mountain.” In writing I was engaged in an act of stopping and attending to the lived landscapes of my life from a distance in time and space. I began to read the patterns in different ways because distance created perspective and an achieved height of land allowed me to trace my meandering. It was as though I was looking from the mountain top and could clearly see both the landscape and my own pathway. I was following my own act of navigating through life. I was witnessing my wayfinding by tracking my lived experience” (2010, p. 84).

<sup>10</sup> See Machado (1930).

<sup>11</sup> Butler as quoted in Salverson (2008), p. 252.

<sup>12</sup> See Milloy (2007), p. 157.

<sup>13</sup> Through writing, we inquire, we reflect, we recognize ourselves, and others anew. The act of writing is in and of itself an inquiry, bringing us to new meaning-making and understanding. See *The Art of Writing Inquiry* edited by Neilsen et al. (2001).

<sup>14</sup> Madeline Grumet, in a talk at University of British Columbia, cautioned her audience to “tread lightly, oh so lightly.” Attendance by author. Date unknown.

<sup>15</sup> Varela (1987), in his writing, translates Antonio Machado's poem in which the poet informs the reader that there is no path, you “lay down a path in walking.” Poem by Antonio Machado, from *Proverbios y Cantares* (1930) as translated by Varela (1987), p. 63.

*wanderer, the road is your*

*footsteps, nothing else;*

...

*wanderer, path there is none,*

*only tracks on ocean foam.*

<sup>16</sup> See Grumet (1988).

<sup>17</sup> Barba (1995), p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> Philosopher Hannah Arendt introduces the concept of natality in her writings. See *The Human Condition* (1958). Natality is understood by this author as recognition of all the possibilities (and impossibilities) of creation, engagement, and action that are embodied within each unique individual in relationship with others and his/her environment. Natality is an invitation for each individual to come to thoughtful awareness and action—that is, to encounter others with a commitment to engage and create anew in mindful ways, so as to rewrite and/or reimagine embodied narratives of immoral, harmful, uncaring, or questionable practices and relationships, old and new, that have or may emerge through thoughtless action and/or engagement in relationship with others. Levison (2001) reminds us that those who arrive newly amongst us are already marked by others by the context of their arrival—their reception predetermined by the past, their future already anticipated by what has come before. Natality then—this grace of possible renewal—is endangered as “our capacity to act emerges always in relation to the ways in which we are positioned by others” (p. 21). What matters, then, is a recognized responsibility of reciprocity in each new encounter, respectful engagement, and a shared desire and willingness to imagine anew by those who arrive and those who welcome, thus creating a space of embodied attention, mindful respect, and compassionate negotiation, and commitment to act in meaningful ways that brings forth the world’s renewal. Arendt writes,

*And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.* (1961, p. 196).

<sup>19</sup> See Snowber (2009) in Richmond and Snowber (2009), p. 67.

<sup>20</sup> “There is a moment in which personal or cultural history stands before two diverging pathways. One leads to a repetition of the known, the tried and true, the old, the established. It is safe, secure and stable. The other finds a renewed importance in the unknown, the uncharted, the new, the dark and dangerous. Unfettered by accepted categories of thought, it might be immediately hidden away from view, out of fear or repugnance. The moment I speak of is not choice in the sense of deliberative reason but an action that choice stands on.” Appelbaum (1995), p. 16 as quoted in Ricketts (2011), p. 155.

<sup>21</sup> In conversation, no date. Rishma Dunlop, when asked by her students, what she wants from them in terms of an assignment, tells them that she wants to be astonished.

<sup>22</sup> See Derrida, as quoted in Borradori (2003), pp. 128–129.

<sup>23</sup> Appelbaum (1995), pp. 15, 16.

<sup>24</sup> Hannah Arendt speaks to the space between past and future, the gap within which dwells the present, as a space for education to engage with mindful action

and attention to the world’s renewal. See Arendt (1961). See also Gordon (2001). This generative space of possibility offers educators the opportunity to reimagine what is known, to seek new ways of engagement and to listen deeply to the children who come into their presence.

<sup>25</sup> See Leggo (2011), pp. 32–59.

<sup>26</sup> Question posed by poet scholar, Carl Leggo. See Cohen et al. (2013), p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> My thanks to Karen Meyer for her work on living inquiry, and for calling my attention to the immediate and the joy that comes from attending to each moment. See Meyer (2006).

<sup>28</sup> See Webster’s New World Dictionary, p. 1503. No publishing date. My home copy has lost the flyleaf.

<sup>29</sup> Molly Bloom’s response in *Ulysses*. See Joyce (1960), p. 938.

<sup>30</sup> Interstanding is a term coined by Taylor and Saarinen (1994) who propose that understanding is inadequate in today’s network of relationships; meaning-making is created through the intersections of connections, or what complexity theorists in education might call neighboring interactions, rather than a task of digging under to find meaning. They write,

Understanding has become impossible  
because nothing stands under.  
Interstanding has become  
unavoidable because  
everything stands  
between.

(Interstanding, 2)

<sup>31</sup> See Fels (1999), p. 70.

<sup>32</sup> My thanks to my colleague, Allan McKinnon, for this insight. His words stopped me as we stood outside a hotel after a faculty event, looking up into the night sky. And my thanks also, to my doctoral thesis committee, Drs. Patrick Verriour, Carl Leggo, Brent Davis, and Karen Meyer, who “set aside the red pen” and listened deeply.

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