
in the wind clothes dance on a line performative inquiry—a (re)search methodology

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Mario is hamming it up in the rowboat. I recruited him as my crew for an early morning spot of cod-jigging in the bay, a decision I am beginning to regret. Oblivious to my poetic struggle to create an impoverished coastal outpost in lecture room 210, he halfheartedly pulls at the oars, and sneaks copious gulps of screech from an imaginary flask, slyly winking at the audience. The class, amused, follows our dramalogue. Outside, the January evening spills winter rain against the windows.

"Look Mario," I sweep a generous hand across the horizon of blackboards, "the village looks like the broken grin of an old man's smile. Boarded up windows. Fallen fences. How many people live here now?"

Mario shrugs. Coughs. Tugs haphazardly at an oar.

"Remember that signpost outside of town, just where the road bends?" I prompt him, my voice on the edge of desperate. I am sweating under the layers of fisherman's sweater, life jacket, and overalls, trying to kickstart our role drama on the fishing industry in Newfoundland. The outpost refuses to take shape. *Why isn't this working?*

"Never seen it," says Mario, with another swallow of screech.

You're wrecking the logic of the drama. Of course you've seen it! You've lived here all your life! The town is only ten houses long!

"You know the sign," I jab him in the ribs and point emphatically at a sign that I had taped earlier in the day on the blackboard: *Come by Chance—Pop. 157.*¹ I am silently cursing him under my breath, *Come on Mario, work with me on this.* But he refuses to play along with my paper props. Refuses to follow my lead.

"Nope. Never laid eyes on it. But ..." he says, suddenly rocking the boat with unexpected enthusiasm. "I know how we can figure out the population."

"How?" I am suspicious. *Is he going to swamp the boat?* The class eagerly leans forward on their seats—sea vultures waiting for us to capsize.

"Count the clotheslines!" He stands triumphantly in the rowboat, pointing to the blackboards. "One, two, three ..."

And to my amazement, clotheslines magically appear—diapers, workmen's overalls, cotton dresses, woolen socks, sheets dancing in the wind. The entire population of the outpost leaps into being. Within that single moment, Mario captures the very heartsoulbody of the outpost and gifts us life. Realized in the choreography geography of cloth limbs dancing on lines in the wind, the outpost unknown becomes known.

Within a moment, *the not-yet-real is realized*, and the role drama opens to exploration.²

in the moment, realization-recognition of journey/landscape

*And so, i stumble into the unknown landscape of a wind-swept outport where clothes dance on lines,
and possibilities stretch beyond the cold blue horizon of the Atlantic Ocean.³*

I am emboldened by moments: moments that catch at the sleeve of my sweater as I bustle through the library, pulling books from the shelves, smelling them as I have been instructed, looking for words, images, ideas that arrest time.

Moments, insistent taps of Morse code that interrupt as I hunt among the volumes of research methodologies—semiotics, ethnography, hermeneutics, phenomenology, narrative inquiry—looking for resonance.

Moments that startle as I enter haphazardly, awkwardly, dangerously into drama in the classroom, looking for (what does a drama researcher-educator seek?)—

*wait, the moment whispers,
you know me.
this space-moment resonates.
go to your being, becoming.*

The research methodology that we choose as educational researchers shapes our understandings of our landscape(s), our questions, our ways of being. The methodology betrays our communion with the world; it opens us (and the world) to inspection and introspection, expectation and interspection. A research methodology is the lens through which we read our field of inquiry. There are many research methodologies which invite the exploration, questioning, mapping of landscapes of known-unknown world(s). The question that I, as a drama education researcher, must ask is

*which research methodology will voice sound illuminate move within through my work as researcher
and educator towards moments of interstanding that are my hope and ambition?*

and so i realize performative inquiry
and, in that moment,
recognize a landscape of possibility.

Performative inquiry is a (re)search methodology that explores recognizes honors the absences, landscapes and moments of learning realized through performance. To entertain performative inquiry as a research vehicle, is to recognize the risk, the unexpected, the stop⁴ embodied in action and interaction through performance that opens us to possibility.

My conceptualization of performative inquiry as a (re)search methodology has evolved through my praxis in performing arts education and through my understanding of *academic performance* as articulated by myself and Stothers (1996). By embracing performative inquiry, I am proposing that performance as research (verb) is a journey of "knowing, doing, being, creating" and that it is through performative inquiry that we may come to an "interstanding" of our journey/landscape that is the imagining of our universe:

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

— Taylor & Saarinen (1994, p. Interstanding 2)

This paper seeks to illustrate the possibilities of exploration and interstanding that may be realized through performative inquiry as research methodology. What follows is not a linear explanation but a series of fragments, moments, interruptions, a danced choreography-geography of creative action and interaction. Remember that the landscape of interstanding is not-yet realized—it is a landscape as yet un-marked by your presence.

performative inquiry—a (re)search methodology

*In the dramatic moment, when the unimagined is imaginea,
we open a space-moment of learning to explore.
We realize through performance unexpected landscapes.
In action and interaction,
we dance an unknown landscape into being,
and in the space-moment of dance,
recognize its presence embodied in our choreography-geography.*

Performative inquiry explores and maps unfolding landscapes that twist in sudden gusts of recognition like clothes on a line. In the Newfoundland role drama, the clothes dancing wind did not pre-exist in our "not-yet-real" world (although the population sign taped on the blackboard did). Nobody said, "Oh, by the way, Mario. This outport has clotheslines." Yet Mario called into presence our Newfoundland outport by counting its clotheslines and, by his counting, we realize a space-moment⁵ of possibility.

Performative inquiry is a research vehicle that acknowledges performance in action and interaction as a place of learning and exploration. Its tools of inquiry, for researcher and participants, are their bodies, imaginations, experiences (shared and individual), feelings, memories, biases, fears, judgments, and prejudgments, hopes, and desires—simply, *being, becoming*. The catalyst for research may be a question, an event, a theme, a feeling, a piece of poetry, a phenomenon explored through questions: *What if? What matters? What happens? So what?* These questions are not separate but embodied within the action-interaction of performance.

Performative inquiry employs dramatic structures such as improvisation, role drama, creative movement, and sound work—i.e., performance embodying both "process and product"—which present researcher and participants with the freedom and responsibility to explore intersecting world(s) of light and darkness, sound and silence, movement and stillness, experience and imagination within a dialogue that recognizes the magic and possibilities of performance.

In performative inquiry, researcher-participant(s) realize-recognize⁶ journey/landscapes through performance and then map-in-action the landmarks of learning recognized through discussion, reflection, remembering, writing, re-imagining. There is no detached observer in performative inquiry: Researcher and participants together realize through creative action and interaction an ever-spiraling circle of interstanding.

knowledge not as product but as action-verb

*Intellect's light sees but is powerless to do.
The body's light sees and is able to do.
— Appelbaum (1995, p. 121)*

Integral to an understanding of performative inquiry is a working definition of cognition drawn from enactivism. Traditional cognitive theory is founded on Descartes' mind-body duality—a separation between body and mind suggests, however, a division between "doing" and the "knowing," a dichotomy that belies the experience of learning. In the riding of a bicycle, for example, how do the body and mind co-ordinate necessary knowledge and action to achieve the balance, forward momentum, and road sense to negotiate the landscape? In the choreography of a dance, which leads the choreographer to mark his or her steps? Body or Mind? Imagination or Experience?

Descartes' body-mind dichotomy has been challenged by academics in the 20th century, particularly in the fields of feminist research, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. The works of enactivists (e.g., Maturana & Varela, 1987), whose theories of cognition draw heavily on the "new" biology, also reject the Cartesian dualism—replacing it with "embodied mind" (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1991), and it is within this interpretation of cognition that performative inquiry positions itself.

(aside)

Fels: Embodied mind. Humph! Why is the body marginalized as an adjective? Is there a term that better celebrates the "knowing" of the body and mind co-evolving in interaction?

Stothers: Yes, the Japanese term "shinshin" or "bodymind." Let me explain: "in the state of 'bodymind oneness,' ... the mind moves while unconsciously becoming one with the body ... here, there is no longer a felt distinction between the mind/subject and body/object." (Fels & Stothers, 1996)

Enactivism proposes an ecological (i.e., interactive, interrelational, interdependent) reading of cognition. For enactivists, "embodiment has this double sense: it encompasses both the body as a lived experiential structure and the body as the context or milieu of cognitive mechanism" (Varela et al., 1991, p. xxvi). Knowledge is not seen as a mental operation separate from the body in action and interaction with others but as "an ongoing bringing forth of a world through the process of living itself" (Maturana & Varela, 1987, p. 11, emphasis added). Knowledge is a verb, creative, interactive, co-evolving in action and interaction.

Enactivism invites us to investigate the interrelationships among the learner, object, and environment. Enactivism also challenges us to reconsider the interplay of researcher and participants, the site and journey of research, and the possibilities arising when researcher and participant "bring forth a world together" through performance. If knowledge is realized through creative action and interaction (Fels, 1995), then the possibility of performance as a site of learning, and consequently an action of research, begs investigation. And it is this inquiry which leads us to the "edge of chaos" and the multiple possibilities that are embodied within performance.

**academic performance: possibilities on the edge of chaos
(an unexpected space-moment of learning that bodymind dances into being)**

*The edge of chaos where possibilities seduce
and life dances into being—
bodymind dancing on the edge of chaos
Aha!*

Critical to understanding performative inquiry as a research methodology is the notion that it is *through performance* that learning may be realized. The conceptualization of performance as a possible action-site of learning provides the basis for performative inquiry as a research methodology.

When Stothers introduced the term *academic performance* into our conversation (Fels and Stothers, 1996), our playful etymological investigation invited an unexpected reading. The word *performance* presents multiple possibilities that dances us into an unexpected landscape. Should we weight *form* or *action* in *per-form-ance*? (Remembering that (d)ance is action.) And the prefix *per-* suddenly takes on a split-personality when juxtaposed with the word *form* meaning "utterly, throughout and through" form but also "to do away, away entirely or to destruction" of form.⁷ *Is performance action both within through and without form?*

In our reading of *performance* then, we imagined a creative action-interaction, a birthing and rebirthing simultaneously within form and through the destruction of form, and suddenly found ourselves in an unexpected space between structure and chaos—a space that complexity theorists call the "edge of chaos" where patterns of interrelations are continually created and recreated through an "endless dance of co-emergence" (Waldrop, 1992, p. 12). It is in this space, we suggest, "on the edge of chaos," that performance dances into being "possible new worlds" (Varela, 1987) or "aha! moments"⁸ that are space-moments of learning. The "aha!" moment is the moment of transcognition—a space-moment of learning that comes into being in the interstices between the "real" world and the "not-yet real" world of performance.⁹

aha! realizing unexpected landscapes—exploration in the interstices

*Holes in the net are openings for the imagination
— Taylor & Saarenin (1994, p. Gaping 7)*

*Singing the space
there are meetings
and I am transformed ...
— Barba (1995, p. 165)*

Performative inquiry then is an ecological interstanding that invites the co-evolving world(s) of performance and cognition in a transformative dance. Through performative inquiry as research methodology, we as researchers seek dramatic moments: unexpected moments of realization-recognition which co-evolve through bodymind inquiry in interaction with the environment (real and imagined) and others (both "as is" and "in role"). We embody these moments to map the landscape of knowing, being, doing, creating.¹⁰ And in the mapping, possibility enters our language of action.

Performative inquiry as a research methodology allows both the researcher and participants the opportunity and possibility to sound absences¹¹ in the interstices between the "real" world and the "not-yet-real" world(s) of performance. Phelan (1993) states that "(p)erformance boldly and precariously declares that Being is performed (and made temporarily visible) in that suspended in-between" (p. 167). It is within the intersection of our real and not-yet-real worlds—that is, "the edge of chaos"—that possible space-moments of learning occur. And it is within these meeting places that research takes action.

*it is in the meeting places between when we become
Here and Now, something happens.*

transcognitive.

*absence voices silence in conversation
a space-moment of learning*

A space-moment of learning is called into being when Mario counts invisible clotheslines that become visible in the counting. This moment of the "not-yet-real becoming real," precariously suspended-in-between, gives the researcher-participant(s) a "new possible world to explore" through performance, reflection, writing, discussion. Who lives in our outport? How many diapers does the Johnson's baby go through in a week? Sadie has new jeans—wonder where she got the money for them? What do these clotheslines tell us about the people living inside the houses? Do clotheslines exist in your world?

Performative inquiry recognizes and maps these new possible worlds or "aha!" moments—researcher and participants active conspirators in the unfolding of a co-emerging co-evolving cognitive landscape/journey enacted through performance. A solitary moment in a role drama becomes a springboard and, in the recognition, opens new possibilities within which to wonder and wander.

This is not to suggest that all performance realizes moments of transcognition, absence sounding presence. There are many times when an improvisation or dramatic scene struggles within a cognitive reality that prevents the realization of that "unique reality" which Kitaro calls pre-conceptual (or transcognitive), intuitive reality (Fels & Stothers, 1996). Nor are these space-moments of learning necessarily universally shared or simultaneously experienced by all participants. Perhaps only one person may realize-recognize "a new possible world" that announces a space-moment of learning. These moments may or may not anticipate further creative action and interaction within the performance, but they are embodied in the recognizer and remembered.

How many of those participating in the Newfoundland role drama "saw" Mario's clotheslines? Did others, like me, see clothes dancing on a line in the wind and suddenly recognize the possibility of naming members of our fictional outport (or any home with a clothesline) by the empty cloth limbs dancing naked under a blue sky? Or did they see only the blackboard? How can I, in that moment, as researcher-participant, help Mario bring into our role drama this unexpected unfolding that opens up new possible conversations in action and interaction? Do others in realizing and recognizing other (as yet unnamed) space-moments of learning bring that recognition (i.e., *mapping in action*) into the continuing dialogue of the performance?

In our example of the Newfoundland role drama, the action of research through performance continues until the end of our role play, our creative action and interaction testimony to the possibility of learning and (re)searching. And when we have bodymind danced to a temporary conclusion, it is through the process of reflection, sharing, recreating in dialogue and writings the journey/landscape experienced collectively and individually, that we (researcher-participants) map our performative inquiry. And in our mapping, we name the resonances, echoes, possibilities within our rememberings and those space-moments of learning that performative inquiry as research methodology seeks to chart.

praxis: finding ourselves on the map

Let us pause for a moment and consider performative inquiry in praxis. What does this research methodology look like in creative action-interaction?

In 1995 I was invited to lead a role drama for a conference.¹² I titled the role drama, "Finding Ourselves on the Map." What amazes me in remembering the role drama was the richness of possibilities that unfolded. Performative inquiry leads us into an "not-yet-real" world, where many possible space-moments of learning unfold, opening up unexpected landscapes to explore.

The focus for the role drama was to "find ourselves on a map." How do we create community-place in an environment given only our memories, our anticipations, and our present actions-interactions? Could we create, in sixty minutes, a community that is ours? ... a place to map on the landscape?

We created a "space on the edge of the ocean in the shelter of the mountains" by spreading a blue sheet on the floor and stacking a pile of cardboard boxes and covering them with a single white tablecloth. To begin the role drama, I asked the group to pile a dozen cardboard boxes into a mountain range while I spread out the ocean. After the mountains were "created," dissatisfied with the closeness of the sea to the mountains, I moved the blue sheet away from the boxes to create a strip of land.

"Put that back," a woman demands, "The mountain comes down to the edge of the sea."

Oops!

I quickly replace the ocean.

How is it that she sees a landscape?

And am I only thinking in terms of sheets and boxes?

I had a loose script to follow but was determined to pursue the direction indicated by the actions of the participants. However, after a while I decided that we should move into the "next scene." (I confess, the role drama was not unfolding as I had expected—and was, in fact, taking a right-angle turn into unknown territory. I yearned to regain control of the "script.") Grabbing a box from the mountain range, I cried, "We need houses. Let's all build our own houses." And I began to dismantle the mountains.

"Hey! Stop!" several participants protest. "You can't do that! Who do you think you are abusing our land?! What's the idea of clear cutting our forests?!"

And I feel the shock of the unexpected.

Recognition that I ("in role" and as teacher) failed to honor-recognize their land, their space. That my agenda (to create a happy community of homes, put into action the anticipated direction that I had imagined for the role drama) is in conflict with their need to protect their landscape—the environment.

*I feel guilty! Ashamed! So this is what it is to destroy the land.
Without thinking of other. Or of the land. For my own purposes.*

"I'm sorry," I say. "I didn't mean to destroy the mountains."

*In that space-moment, learning comes into being.
Realized and recognized.*

A moment opens up—a moment neither intended nor anticipated by the script that I prepared the week before—a moment that opens a space to explore. Through performative inquiry, a space moment of learning happens and may be explored by teacher-researcher and participants together and/or individually.

How did I feel when that moment occurred? How did you feel? What do we learn from the experience? How does this relate to the "real world" of land expropriation, Greenpeace, environmental concerns, native land claims, etc.

Could I as teacher-leader have anticipated the "raping of the land" argument in the role drama? Perhaps. However, my "intended curriculum" had not included it in the proposed script. It was through performance that the possibility of that unexpected space-moment for learning "happened."

Our role drama unfolds into unimagined places ...

Nearing the conclusion of the role drama, I find myself trying to give birth to my child (played by one of the participants) but she refuses to be born.

*Come on, I mutter under my breath, get born and I'll light one of the forty candles
I bought for this role drama ...*

(a \$35 expenditure that I planned to use in a dramatic and moving conclusion. However, much to my frustration, the ending I had envisioned is bodymind writing itself towards an unknown possibility)

"... and we'll all sing happy birthday."

"You can't light her candle," interrupts one of the participants. "She must light it herself."

and rejecting me

"my child" gives birth to herself through the help of a sea-woman.¹³

I am devastated. In-role, I fail to give birth to my own child!

(a space-moment of learning in which I realize that my own child's journey/landscape is not of my making nor control.)

But then

a participant invites me

*to light a candle
and
in that moment i learn the possibilities of
my own learning within through
the role drama*

The moment of lighting the candle speaks to the hope made possible through one's own explorations (teacher and/or student) and to the learning that comes into being through performance.

*yes, i am here,
in this space at the edge of the sea
in the shelter of the mountains
and i too can become known.*

the hand acts, and in doing so speaks. (Barba, 1995, p. 26)

In performative inquiry, we can only trust in the moment unfolding through the action and interactions of all—our hope as we realize the journey/landscape of the role drama is that we might “light a candle” of learning, being becoming born in the space of interaction between the “real” and the “not-yet-real” world(s) of performance.

performance as a site of inquiry and revolution

*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.*

— Applebaum (1995, pp. 15, 16)

Performance seeks to create-destroy equilibrium. On the individual level of the actor, a precarious balance must be established if “life action” is to be realized. “The aim is permanently unstable balance” (Barba, 1995, p. 19). Performance as improvisation then is an altercation of balance in which the “real” world is thrown off balance by the imagining of a possible “not-yet-real” world. This newly achieved (transitory) balance throws the status quo momentarily askew, and in the attempt to secure (temporarily) new balances, the unexpected may occur. To perform is to work within and through form and simultaneously through the destruction of form, a precarious dance that recognizes patterns-possibilities in the wind that dances clothes on a line suspended between. It is within this space-conflict that the dramatic moment is born—the “aha” moment that is our learning, our knowing, our being becoming.

Performance, however, as improvisation is elusive, impossible to freeze-frame and remount for inquisitive eyes. Performance theorist Phelan (1993) warns, “Performance’s inability to be captured or documented within the re-enactments promised by the copy is part of what makes it, per force, face the impossibility of seizing the Real” (p. 192). It slips through our fingers, eludes our grasping need for permanence. Yet the memory, the experience is embodied, traces remain: these are our witnesses of the space-moment that is performance.

The researcher needs to enter into performative research without an anticipated destination. Warns chaos dramatist Alan Hancock (1994) “We are not working towards a fixed goal, (nor) through a process which continually narrows down rather than opens up the scope of the project ...”

Not a narrowing down but an opening up.

There are only questions, exploration, possibilities. An opening of new horizons. New horizon(s) are called into being by the questions we ask, the worlds we dare imagine. Horizon(s) are our boundaries bordercrossings, “... projective, unfolding ahead of us as our pre-understandings and understandings do, altering as our location alters, rather than being static like the metaphor of a framework” (Crusius, 1991, p. 33). Recognition realizes horizons that become the unfolding of our journey/landscape. Demands Barba (1995), “I don’t want to see dance. I don’t want to see theatre. I want to find myself face to face with that which ‘is-in-life’ and which reawakens echoes and silences” (p. 162). Performance—bodymind dancing on the edge of chaos—invites Boal’s (1995) “moments of crisis” and Applebaum’s (1995) “the stop” in which danger and opportunity of action co-exist, and in doing so, introduce the possibility of revolution.

The “aha!” space-moment of the “not-yet-real” world realized in interaction with the “real” world invites new interpretations, new possibilities-response/abilities of action.¹⁴ To realize the potential of performative inquiry, we need to embrace the light and darkness that performance creates within the interstices of action realized and recognized. Performance as improvisation is contradiction, revolution, interruption, disruption. Performance is the spelling of absence into presence, an unexpected gust of wind that sets clothes dancing on a line. Performance spells possibility, potential into being.¹⁵

The researcher is an experimenter—an adventurer, a facilitator, a catalyst who invites encourages dares exploration through “the laying down of possible new worlds.” The performative researcher must therefore claim a position of responsibility and complicity.¹⁶ He or she co-creates a context through which and within which exploration occurs. He or she is not standing outside the action: His or her participation plays an active role in the unfolding of landscape(s). The researcher should remember that performance happens within his or her presence and that the shaping, questions, and focus of the inquiry play against personal and communal horizons which may encourage or inhibit the dramatic forms that house the inquiry and the embodied response of researcher and/or participants. There is no detached observer in performative inquiry: Both researcher and participant must be (a)ware.¹⁷

a researcher's “laying down a path”

*performance not as process but as journey
not as product but as co-evolving landscape
bodymind dancing on the edge of chaos
into being*

The reporting of performative inquiry is an interpretive dance, each danced remembering-retelling unique to the researcher-writer. Traces are possible footsteps in the journey/landscape we create through performance, but, in drawing a map of our journey-landscape, we can only hint at the possibilities realized. “The map is not the territory.” There are absences and questions, questions and absences that are the “holes in the net” of our mapping.

The question, *What if?* is left hanging unfinished, ever co-emerging through time. Like a pebble dropped into a still pond, performance sends ripples through the known-unknown world(s). The knowing that is performance is embodied within each of us; we live that knowing in our bodies, our spirits, our words, our actions. To write our knowing through performance is possible. To write *about* our knowing within performance is a more difficult challenge.¹⁸ Barba (1995) warns about the danger of trusting the written word as witness to the theatre.

The relationship that links *theatre* and *books* is a fertile one. But it is often unbalanced in favor of the written word, which remains. Stable things have one weakness: their stability. Thus the memory of experience lived as theatre, once translated into sentences that last, risks becoming petrified into pages that cannot be penetrated. (p. 12)

As a researcher-participant of the momentary, the fragmentary, the interruptions, the hesitations, I call on the skills of my writing as narrator and poet to re(play) those rememberings-(re)presentings of my fellow participants that shape the unfolding of our journey/landscape. I must trust in the imagination, empathy, journeying of our readers to capture the “results” of a performative inquiry. The telling of moments will be rife with holes gaps questions that signal absence(s) and as-yet unrealized possibilities. And the “documentation”—fragmentary, elusive, a choreography-geometry of moments and lost rememberings—will be as eloquent in its silences as it is in its telling.

*Not walls
of cement, but ...
the melodies
of your temperature
— Barba (1995, p. 162)*

It is the elusiveness of performance—and our inability to capture completely through writing and video-texting a (re)presentation of the participants’ story(ies) after the fact—that draws practitioners of performative inquiry to the praxis of interpretative exploration(s) (which are themselves performative). Performative inquiry is a research of fragmentary moments: an attempt to explore the essence of meaning making. In other words, while I might report matter-of-factly what happened before, during, and after a performance, the final telling often co-evolves into an interpretative dance that invites both the teller and the reader to musings that are both poetic and pragmatic.

*Hand over hand hauling in the netted light,
the holes in the representational,
the holes in the visible.
— Phelan (1993, p. 177)*

Performative inquiry is a research methodology that realizes theory within practice (i.e., praxis). Just as the Taylor and Saarinen (1994) argue that their “book will, in a certain sense, be a non-book,” performative inquiry as research methodology requires a new reading of research, one in which researcher, participants and reader reach meaning through co-evolving co-emerging creative action-interaction.

It should not be limited by the linear logic of the past. ... The work must also be riddled with gaps, spaces and openings that invite the reader to write. WHITE SPACE BECOMES THE SITE OF TRANS-ACTION IN WHICH THE EVENT OF UNDERSTANDING OCCURS.

— Taylor & Saarinen (1994, p. Gaping 13)

Dramatist Peter Brook (1968) writes of “the empty space”—a bare stage which by its naming and our entering into that space becomes no longer an empty space but a space filled with memory, anticipation, and possibility. The “white space” of Taylor and Saarinen is the “empty space” of Peter Brook is the action-site of performative research: interstices between the not-yet-real and the real, located on the “edge of chaos” where we, researcher and participants, bodymind dance absence into being.

*performative inquiry
a mapping-recognition of a space-moment(s) of learning*

*exploration through which action-process occurs utterly through form and simultaneously through the
destruction of form*

*absence sounding presence
realized*

*suspended between
a precarious presence
a space-moment of learning
realized in creative action and interaction
on the edge of chaos.*

and recognized.

“AHA!”

*performative inquiry a methodology of possibility,
co-emerging, co-evolving in action and interaction
to interstanding.*

In real life, ‘if’ is a fiction.

In the theatre, ‘if’ is an experiment. (Brook, 1968, p. 157)

In research, ‘if’ is a possible footstep
into a space-moment of knowing

Mario is hamming it up in the rowboat. “I know how we can figure out the population,” he exalts. “Count the clotheslines!” And to my amazement, clotheslines magically appear—diapers, workmen’s overalls, cotton dresses, woolen socks, sheets dancing in the wind.

Notes

1. I am aware that Come by Chance, an existing town in Newfoundland, has a significantly larger population and is not the isolated outpost we imagined in our role drama. I was captured, however, by the town’s name, reflective of our attempts to create imaginary landscapes.
2. “Not-yet-real” describes the imaginary world created by researcher-participants through performance.
3. The use of lower case “i” speaks not to the subject “I” which may be read as dominant, separate, and alone, but to the interactive “i” in action and interaction with others and landscapes as realized through shared experience. My reading of lower case “i” has been informed through conversation with J. Khamasi: “I/i can be I or i, you and me both involved.” (Minha, 1989, as quoted by Khamasi, 1997). I use the lower case “i” deliberately in specific text to highlight learning realized through shared interaction.
4. See Applebaum (1995). Applebaum’s work suggests that “the stop” is the moment of arrest in which a person recognizes possibilities of action which embody both choice and risk.
5. A “space-moment” speaks simultaneously a space of time and place. See Abram’s (1996) discussion of the “invisible or absence within presence.” Acknowledging Heidegger’s suggestion that

time and space are not separate entities but embodied within a single entity (which he named “time-space”), Abram claims that when we acknowledge an awareness of time embodied within space, then “Space is no longer experienced as a homogeneous void, but reveals itself as this vast and richly textured field in which we are corporeally immersed” (p. 216). I choose to use the word “moment” rather than “time” to suggest a happening, as a moment located within space through which creative action and interaction is realized.

6. I hyphenate “realize-recognize” to indicate the near simultaneous space-moment of learning that happens when a “new possible world” is realized through performance and recognized (Aha!) by the participant(s). The recognition that occurs through performative inquiry speaks to the social (or personal) mapping of those Aha! moments by the researcher in reflection with participants.

7. See Barnart (1988).

8. “Aha!” moments are known to drama educators as those moments when within the experience of performance, the participant(s) “see the light,” and a situation, idea, or relationship is understood within the context of the participant(s)’ real and/or imaginary world(s). The “aha” moment is the moment of transcognition—a space-moment of learning that comes into being. The “aha!” moment realized-recognized is not an end

point in the research, but a marker in the co-evolving landscape that welcomes further exploration and contemplation.

9. For the purposes of this paper, the "real world" is understood as a multiplicity of worlds folding one into the other, within which the known and unknown exist simultaneously. The "not-yet-real world" is the world(s) of imaginative play (e.g., role drama, improvisation, tableaux) introduced by the researcher-participants. It is the intersection-interaction of these worlds (real and not-yet-real) in which aha! moments—i.e., space-moments of learning may be individually or collectively realized-recognized.

It is important to remember that, within performance, the interaction among participants embodies the interaction of "real world(s)" and "not-yet-real world(s)" as experienced by each participant, and embodied within the action of the performance. A space-moment of learning may be unique to only one of the participants but, in the shared remembering, may become part of the group mapping. What is "known" in my world(s) may be "unknown" or "not-yet-known" in another's world(s). The so-called "Real world" is not a universal rendering but speaks to the multiple realities within our experience.

10. The concept of knowledge as "knowing is doing is being" is introduced by Davis, Sumara, and Kieren (1996). I include the word "creating" in their triad to embrace our imagining of the not-yet-real that is incorporated in our being, becoming. (See Fels, 1995.)

11. In current academic discourse, absence is generally understood (following Derrida) as the deferred, the naturalized, the literalized, the taken-for-granted. For the purposes of this paper, I understand absence as potential or possibility which may be enacted through performance and recognized—and, through recognition, become present and known to—that is, embodied in—an individual. Of course, what may be "absence" or "invisible" in the experience/knowing of one person may be known and explicit to others. (See also Abram's, 1996, discussion of the "invisible or absence within presence.") This reading of absence includes the spelling that is possible through performance in which the "not-yet-real" becomes "real"—as when Mario's clotheslines came into being, sounding their presence by Mario's counting.

12. "Imagining a Pacific Community: Representation and Education," Vancouver, BC, April 23-26, 1995. I won't go into a lengthy discussion of the experience and the landscape that unfolded—although in performative inquiry, such a recalling in order to map the journey/landscape realized is a possibility for the researcher-participants. I will simply highlight two moments in which the unexpected absence in my known world was played into being through the performance.

13. See Scott (1995).

14. See Felman & Laub (1994) regarding Felman's play on the word "responsibility." She breaks the word into two: *response* and *ability*. In the telling of a story where the teller "bears witness," we must consider the ability of both the teller and listener to respond to the testimony.

15. My thanks to Carl Leggo for introducing the idea of "spelling" through his poem, "Spell Poetry" (unpublished), University of British Columbia. In speaking to performative inquiry, I wish to realize a methodology that celebrates the potential of *performance* as a way of coming into knowing—the magic that is in being, becoming. I am reminded of one of my drama students who while writing on the blackboard groaned, "In this course I want to learn how to spell spontaneity," a desire which speaks to the spontaneity of performance, and the possibilities that may be spelled into being.

16. See Davis and Sumara, 1997. The complexity of performance is not limited to its multi-components of interruption, absence, and possibility, but also to the continuing co-evolving interaction of relationships between. The complicity of the researcher-participant(s) is to be acknowledged and welcomed.

17. I wish only at this moment to flag the complicity and responsibility that rides on the shoulders of the performative

researcher. The potential dangers of performance for participants and the unexpected repercussions that might erupt are known within the field, particularly within the realm of popular theatre. See Salverson (1995) and her thesis on an ethic of risk. Performative researchers, like researchers in any field, run the risk of interrupting the well-being of their participants. Precautions and a mindful awareness must be part of all performative inquiry, knowing—even then, risk remains. As Salverson (in conversation) has asked, "Under what conditions is trust possible? What can researchers offer, what's beyond their control?"

18. One of the challenges of performative inquiry is to language what is essentially unlanguageable, that which is embodied through experience within the elusive realm of performance. An aha! moment, for the experienced drama educator exists as an experience that one immediately recognizes, smells, tastes, touches, hears, feels, and yet, to record its presence is as difficult as marking Phelan's (1993) "holes in the visible."

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