

The Interpretive Spirit of Borderline Figures

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The future is necessarily monstrous: the figure of the future, that is, that which can only be surprising, that for which we are not prepared...is heralded by a species of monsters. A future that would not be monstrous would not be a future; it would be a predictable, calculable and programmable tomorrow. All experience open to the future is prepared or prepares itself to welcome the future *arrivant*.

(Derrida, 1995,
38–67)

Derrida's notion of the *arrivant* refers literally to 'that which or the one who arrives'. It is a feature particular to borderlines, thresholds, and the monsters that emerge at the limin of such 'marginal' spaces (1993). From the Old French *ariver*, 'to reach shore' and the Latin '*ad ripa*', to shore, the *arrivant* emerges *a priori* identification and naming. It is in this sense that Derrida (1995) suggests the *arrivant* as (a)kin to monstrosity, a word that etymologically evokes the presence of omens and signs of portend, *demonstrations* which both mark and disturb fixed conceptual categories. Marking by way of its exception, the *arrivant* exposes a metaphysical frame and the *will to truth* as the Nietzschean *will to power*.

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Such assumptions of logocentrism, or undivided truth, are disturbed and decentered by the *arrivants'* fragmentary effect. That is, the *arrivant* as a singularity functions as an excess or 'next case,' often in a manner requiring the reevaluation of 'the law' as universally applicable. Yet, this works both ways, as the abreaction of the Law often has the effect of stemming and reducing such *untimely fragments*. As Baudrillard (2001) suggests, this repressive function of the Law only produces further excrescences, which return to trouble the metanarrative illusions of modernity as the psychoanalytic 'return of the repressed'. Simply, despite the drive to foreclose on such unanticipated intrusions, the *arrivant* emerges "beyond our wanting and doing" (Gadamer, 1999, p. xxvii).

As Derrida (1995) avers, such borderline figures 'dis-ease' categorization as either good or evil, cure or poison, fact or fiction, stranger or kin. They emerge through this wound, the hole (*porta*) of signification, as opportunities to maintain an openness to the wor(l)d¹. In this vein, Derrida suggests the intimate relationship between the *arrivant* and hospitality itself (1995). This formulation is deeply pedagogical, suggesting more than "a matter of simply developing a tolerance for ambiguity...[requiring] of us a love of ambiguity which is at once a love of the generativity of new life as a gift bestowed from the Earth" (Jardine, 1994, p. 31). As Jardine suggests in *Speaking with a Boneless Tongue* (1994), it is also a matter of paying attention to borderline figures, those monsters lying at the margins of articulation and representation. Inhabiting the most familiar contours of belief, such *arrivants* might productively challenge the ways in which we frame and reinforce reality. Disrupting the comforting and coordinating territories of belief, a monster would emerge in my own teaching practice, giving rise to a productive pedagogical opportunity I will attempt to unfold in the subtitled section 'A Pedagogical Arrivant'.

Monsters do not have to look monstrous. As Derrida (1995) develops, the monster is closely related to what is normal, with normalization and normality. While experience oriented to the future prepares itself for the monstrous *arrivant*, "that which is absolutely foreign or strange," one must, as Derrida suggests, "try to domesticate it...make it part of the

¹ I am attempting to deploy a double meaning with the portmanteau term wor(l)d, intimating both an openness to language and experience.

household and have it assume the habits, to make us assume new habits” (1995, p. 387). This scenario parallels the hermeneutic conceptualization of the whole-part relationship in which “the part...has significance for the whole – just as its own significance is determined by the whole” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 223). Yet, the monstrous *arrivant* radicalizes this romantic hermeneutic notion by subverting the assumed unity of meaning connoted by the whole-part relationship. In this sense, we can locate the supplementary significance of the *arrivant* in its viral possibility. Akin to its viral counterpart, the *arrivant* derails the drive to be coded and decoded. Further, the *arrivant* is undecidable, a liminal figure unremediated by the Western binary logic of either/or. The singularity of the *arrivant* thus disturbs the fantasy of an *a priori* unity of meaning. While the hermeneutic phantasmatic ‘whole’ frames the part, the part always contains more than the whole ‘in itself’. The part is a remainder, the marginal excess through which the fantasy of the whole is maintained. As in the hermeneutic insight, the part *is* of particular significance to the whole. It is that which is ultimately domesticated, and yet, in this process requires something different of us, our habits and orientation to the wor(l)d. In an inversion of the trite complexity theory mantra: *the part is the differance² of the sum of the whole*. It is in this sense that the marginal singularity of the *arrivant* opens us to the future, demanding our hospitality and pedagogical responsibility toward that opportunity which emerges at the hole (*porta*). In this responsibility is a *caveat*, for as Hillman invokes, “opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further” (as cited in Jardine, 1998, p. 154). Indeed, the *arrivant* might anticipate and *throw* us “beyond our wanting and doing” (Gadamer, 1999, p. xxvii).

Borderline Figures

The Greek terms for interpretation, *hermeneuein* and *hermeneia*, can be etymologically linked to the god Hermes. Particular to a treatment of Derrida’s *arrivant*, the borderline figure of Hermes plays a significant mythopoetic role through which we might not only better understand

² This is a play on the Derridean notion of *differance*, the play of difference and deferral in language.

the 'original difficulty' of interpretation, but something of the pedagogical character of the *arrivant* 'itself'. By analyzing how Hermes embodies the character of the *arrivant*, we are confronted with a historical disposition toward interpretation that has largely vanished from life in schools. Yet, as an embodiment of paradox, Hermes retains psychological importance as a figure of difference and provocation. As such, by approaching interpretive practice through the mythopoetic figure of Hermes, I attempt to enable a mode of inquiry that 'repairs' a pedagogical way of thinking commonly absent in Western educational practice. Through mythopoetic analysis, we might similarly create new values, lines of inquiry, and terms of evaluation unburdened by the hegemony of contemporary thought.

Hermes is a god worshipped at borders, and is himself a borderline figure. It is at such borderlines that "life erupts," and that the *arrivant* emerges as a pedagogical openness to the future (Jardine, 1994, p. 9). A(kin) to the *arrivant*, Hermes is a messenger of signs, though in stark contrast to the contemporary rage for 'clarity' and 'clear communication,' his message is rarely transparent. As Hillman (as cited in Jardine 1994) comments, "When Hermes is at work. . .one feels that one's story has been stolen and turned into something else. Hermes has caught the tale, turned its feet around, made black into white, given it wings. And the tale is gone from the upperworld historical nexus in which it had begun and been subverted into an underground meaning" (p. 46). As Smith (1994) lucidly adds, "from the perspective of post-modern hermeneutics, the project is...a concern for how we shall proceed pedagogically after we have given up the presumption of ever being able to define in unequivocal terms all of the key referents in our professional lexicon" (p. 101). The subversive action attributed to Hermes fruitfully complicates the moribund pedagogical activity of 'delivering someone else's mail', that is, performing the curriculum with a literal mindedness privileging the curriculum-as-plan. Against this, it is critical to note, as Clifford and Friesen aptly contend, "itineraries, maps, and plans do not in themselves create the journey" (2003, p. 15–16). As a borderline figure, Hermes pries open such a proclivity toward the wor(l)d as given, stealing peace of mind and reading us back to ourselves in unanticipated and unfamiliar ways. After all, Hermes is both thief *and* trickster, transgressing 'clearly' defined borderlines with ease and without qualm. An illusionist and

magician, his elucidation of God's³ message is marked by potential omissions, substitutions and embellishments. Despite its apparent clarity, the message is marked by an enigma recapitulated in Barthes' pronouncement of the death of the author. No matter how unequivocally framed, the reader of a text will be left with a sense of lack, a void which demands the role of reader as interpreter. It is in such an opportunity that the curriculum-as-lived invests and invites our em(bodied) experience. Hermes, that marginal bo(d)y, playfully reiterates this lesson – a lesson 'lessened' by reducing the 'original difficulty' of textual interpretation to a litany of classroom activities designed to ward against the revenants haunting such rich and contested spaces (Clifford and Friesen, 2003). In this manner, Hermes enacts a psychoanalytic dimension germane to pedagogy. As Aoki (2000) comments, "The thing never speaks for itself" (p. 374). Signifier and signified pivot on a void, their correspondence guaranteed only through a productive conceptual violence placing the fecund remainder, excess or singularity under erasure. As an *arrivant*, the boy messenger Hermes is predisposed to maintaining the 'original difficulty' of language and meaning. Particularly in his most 'plain' elucidations of God's desire, Hermes' message comes couched in riddles and paradox, underscored by a penchant for trickery and subversion. Hermes' effect is thus one whereby we feel lost, or perhaps more accurately, feel *at a loss* for familiar master signifiers. Indeed, Hermes had no home proper, and in this sense, practiced a *vagabond* pedagogy of discovery in lostness (Block, 1998). As much as Hermes is an agent of unconcealment in making the divine apparent to mortals, he is also prone to clandestine machinations, invisibility and movement by night. As Aoki (2000) forwards, the will to 'master' always avoids confronting what is left out, disavowed, denied or repressed. It is this singularity that returns with the *arrivant*, with the messenger that rides on wings in the night – both articulations of "the pedagogies of precious returning" (Jardine, 1998, p. 136).

In Heidegger's *On the Way to Language* (1971), he notes the importance of Hermes as a messenger of 'fateful tiding' (*die Botschaft des Geschickles*). In this movement, Hermes employs his magic to awaken the

³ In this essay, I use the terms 'God,' and 'Zeus' interchangeably.

sleeping and stir the Imaginary⁴ fantasy structuring 'reality.' As a figure of the night, Hermes is associated with the Greek underworld as a guide across the limin of life and death. As Otto (1979) notes in his seminal chapter on Hermes in *The Homeric Gods*, it is during the night that our familiar coordinates of perception, movement, and consciousness are altered. As a figure moving invisibly by night and weaving magic through the veil of shadows, Hermes returns an aspect of the unconscious Real; Manifest as the terror of being lost in the dark, the uncertainty associated with nighttime noises, and the dissolution of the visual field. The very fabric of 'reality' is placed at stake, while the assumptions of time, place, and measure are suspended. The *arrivant* carries with it an excess, an omen of primordial connotation that, as Heidegger (1971) avers, is "world shaking," a seismic phenomenon that 'cracks' and 'faults' the foundations of thought. As Baudrillard comments in *The Seismic Order* (1991), "the sky no longer falls on our heads, but the ground is now slipping away from under our feet" (p. 1). The earthquake marks the breakdown of the seemingly inseparable, an apt metaphor for the "breaking open of spaces in an intellectual sense," reminding that the surface, "the foundation or...profundity" as Baudrillard conceives it, has always been replete with cracks, however tenaciously fused (p. 1). It is in this sense that the marginal figure of Hermes marks the disruption of surface *presence*, and reiterates the remembrance of "underground deities who are threatening to plunge us into the abyss" (p. 1). "Even experienced and expert teachers can be surprised or *unsettled* in the classroom, for uncertainty and the unexpected abide in even the most mundane practices of teaching" (Aoki, 2000, p. 355 my emphasis).

A Pedagogical Arrivant

As Aoki (2000) suggests, the *arrivant* is never entirely expected. Particular to the curriculum as lived, the borderline figure of Hermes emerges in impudent disregard for our best laid plans. Yet, so long as we are open to the future, monsters are *not only* inevitable, but required. Just as Hermes is depicted as a youth, so too must meaning maintain an openness to natality as the singular 'next case' (Arendt, 1969). In such

⁴ This term is a reference to the Lacanian Imaginary, the 'sight' of the ideal ego and ideal object of desire.

play, or *spielraum*⁵, the *arrivant* signifies both the possibility of unconcealment as well as the generativity of supplementation.

Monsters need not look monstrous. Yet, they have the potential to speak the world anew, and in this movement, to speak us anew as being-in-the-world. Toward the conclusion of a study of Canadian explorers, a question emerged amongst a group of Grade 5 students that would signal the monstrous *arrivant*. As Jardine notes, "What occurs is that a most ordinary and familiar feature of classroom life (a child asking a question) gets yanked out of its ordinary and familiar place and as such, it becomes *monstrum*: the familiar world seems to break apart, to break open, and a lesson is foretold, and opportunity is voiced" (Jardine, 1994, p. 128). Nearing the end of a lesson in which students were asked to respond to a series of stock questions on the lives of the explorers, a student at the back of the room raised her hand. As a visiting guest to the classroom, I watched somewhat helplessly as the student sat patiently, reserved to watching her teachers prepare for dismissal. Slowly growing impatient, a sense of urgency seemed to overtake the student, who blurted over the din of restless voices and bodies: "Is there only *one* history?"

Hearing Fateful Tidings

This was *die Botschaft des Geschickes*, the "message of destiny" that Heidegger attributed to the messenger Hermes. Uttered late into the determined curricular plans of the classroom teachers, this "fateful tiding" nevertheless required listening as a hospitality toward the future, that is, the *arrivant* as hospitality 'itself'. As a liminal figure, Hermes was frequently known to arrive at the last moment, offering a new course of action in the face of certain disaster. His arrival in this sense was often timely, and as such, Hermes was intimately bound to luck, chance, and sudden insights. As the etymological root of monster (*monere*) suggests, the *arrivant* is an omen, a warning that demands hearkening. As Heidegger suggests, "hearing constitutes the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its...potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 206). This extends to the Heideggerian sense of listening as an authentic means of Being-with Others (*Aufeinander-horen*), and further, to

⁵ From the German, *spielraum* literally connotes 'space or room to play'.

understanding the message as particular to being-in-the-world with Others. As Gadamer suggests, “openness does not exist only for the person who speaks; rather, anyone who listens is fundamentally open...openness to the other, then, involves recognizing that I myself must accept some things that are against me” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 361). The student’s question: “Is there only *one* history” was thus not particular to the individual student, but could instead be understood as an instance of Being-with-others, implicating the teachers, the curriculum, and the activities recapitulating the disclosed history of Canadian exploration. How did this question serve as a warning prying open the fantasy frame in which the topic of Canadian explorers was articulated in the classroom?

Between an Answer and Dismissal

With but moments to spare, and with restless bodies already anticipating dismissal, the classroom teacher began to advance an answer. This impulse toward immediate domestication circumvents Derrida’s comment that ultimately, the *arrivant* becomes part of the household by being invited in. As Jardine (1994) further notes, “this monster wants ‘in’”, alluding to the fecundity of the question as an invitation to enter into conversation with the *topos*, the topography of the subject (p. 129). In the drive to enact the Lacanian discourse of the Master, the radical possibility of the *arrivant* is remedied through authoritative naming. In this gesture, the possibility to understand something of the living discipline is acknowledged as being expressly the province of the teacher as authority figure. However, this monological action works only in one direction, ‘colonizing’ the *arrivant* without understanding its implicating portent. Colonization forecloses on hospitality by casting the world in its image. This image is predicated on a murder as articulated by Daignault, “to know is to kill...to rely on death” (1992, p. 198). In authoritative naming, the *arrivant* is made moribund while its difference is placed under metaphysical erasure. In order for foundational knowledge to circulate as truth (*logos*), its exception must be either ignored or quickly assimilated into an *a priori* extant structure. For Daignault, this process signifies the binary preclusion to either murder (dogmatic naming) or suicide (nihilistic ignorance). In this oft observed pedagogical reaction to the *arrivant*, the

passage of difference, or Heideggerian *spielraum*, is foreclosed (Heidegger, 1962). Amidst this, Hermes illustrates how both interpretation and meaning are already subject to play. As an antecedent to post-structural insight, Hermes reminds us that language is prone to difference and wearing out. Hermes goes by many names, including the Mesopotamian Ningizzida, the Egyptian Thoth, and the Roman Mercury. As Derrida (1981) writes, the Egyptian figure of Thoth, a(kin) to Hermes “has neither a proper place nor proper name. His propriety or property is impropriety or improperness, the floating indetermination that allows for substitution and play” (p. 93). As an interpreter to texts already spoken, thought or written down, Hermes *must* engage in a play of meaning which is neither entirely of his own, nor that of the Other. It is in this play, or Heideggerian *spielraum*, that intertextuality becomes the site of fertile meaning making. In support of this intertextual play, Hermes is occasionally impudent to authority, most notably in the case of a trick played on the esteemed Greek deity Apollo (Smith, 1991). Hermes resists the vaunted position of authority, including the notion of an ‘official text’ and its sequential elaboration as being ‘in itself’, ‘for itself’, and ultimately ‘for all’. Instead, as Derrida (1979) remarks in the essay *Living On*, “a text is...no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces” (p. 84). In *differance* to the compulsion to murder the *arrivant* through its univocal and unequivocal naming, Derrida, haunted by the mythopoetic figure of Hermes, suggests that the text is marked by an “overrun,” spilling beyond its literal, paginated boundaries.

In an attempt to keep the student’s question ‘in play,’ I too acted impudently. My unfamiliar voice interrupted from the margins of the classroom. “I think this is a very important question that deserves more time and attention than we currently have” I pronounced, adding “perhaps we could return to it tomorrow”. While attempting to suspend the conversation until the following day, my suggestion opened a space into which the students began to venture their thoughts. “One thing I noticed was that there is nothing written by women” one girl remarked. “That’s because only men explored Canada” a boy rebuked. “That’s not true,” an aboriginal student protested, “Sacagawea was a woman, and was part of the Lewis and Clark expedition.” Another aboriginal student

momentarily stopped organizing his backpack, earnestly asking if his peer's comment was accurate. The student who initially insisted that only men had explored Canada paused, "I dunno" he responded, this time far less certain. The bell had rung, and many students began to filter from the classroom. A small group, including the girl who had asked the initial question lingered. "How will we remember about the question?" she asked. I suggested making it visible by writing it on the board. Carefully, the student recounted her question in chalk: "Is there more than one history?"

The *Arrivant* as Herm

The written question on the board enacted a type of herm, a sign reinvigorating the mythopoetic figure of Hermes. In ancient Greece, a *herma* served as a signpost or boundary marker, a ward against evil and invocation of Hermes, the patron of travelers. The herm was typically found at crossroads, at boundaries or thresholds. It was at such a crossroads that we as classroom teachers found ourselves in contemplation of the question as *arrivant* – the *arrivant* as *herma*. The question marked our location at a crossroads, intimating an unexpected reminder of *currere*, the course of Derridean 'overrun'. In this sense, the 'closed text' of the curricular unit on Canadian Explorers suddenly referred beyond its fantasy borders, an 'overrun' of "all the limits assigned to it so far...not drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex" (Derrida, 1979, p. 84). The teachers were hesitant. Their plans for the unit were coming to a close, a corollary for the image of a closing door reconciling the liminal breach from whence the question as *arrivant* emerged. "We don't have time to address this question" one of the teachers stated bluntly, citing the inflexibility of long range curricular plans and requirement to 'cover the curriculum.' A second teacher lamented, "I think this question is extremely important...I wish it had emerged earlier". The *arrivant* as an opportunistic gift was returned as a poison, foreclosed by the hyperactive obligations of schooling, which mournfully abandon those fecund singularities that *come too late*. The *arrivant* was an *uninvited* monster that emerged at the most inopportune and unexpected moment, poisoning teleological assuredness. Yet, Hermes is a much more complex character than this, and as Derrida develops, cannot be positioned as

singularly a poisonous or anarchic figure. In this sense, Derrida turns to the Greek term *pharmakos*. The *pharmakos* is a kind of scapegoat. As Derrida (1981) suggests, the *pharmakos* is an evil that resides inside the city, and as such, must be expunged in order to maintain civic purity. As Derrida notes, the *pharmakos* must therefore belong to both the inside as well as the outside of the city and hence, is undecidable. The term *pharmakos* is closely related to another term deployed by Derrida⁶, the *pharmakon*. The *pharmakon* is a Greek term which connotes a particularly ambiguous meaning. It is both cure *and* poison. Akin to the modern term 'drug', the *pharmakon* has both curative and debilitating features. If the logic of Hermes can be conceived as a *pharmakon*, then while the *arrivant* might be understood as disruptive, it must also be considered in terms of its potential to renew and reinvigorate. In lieu of the question: "Is there more than one history", the *arrivant* as a *pharmakon* might be understood as performing a disruptive logic. The question signifies both the poisoning derailment of preestablished plans *as well as* the opportunity to heal the disconnection of historical narrative from marginalized and absented voices. As Heidegger suggests, "the call points forward to...potentiality-for-Being, and it does this as a call which comes from uncanniness" (Heidegger, 1962, p. 325). In consideration of the uncanny dual logic of the *pharmakon*, I suggested to my colleagues that pedagogically, we are responsible for the *arrivant* as germane to not only a deeper and more complex understanding of the topic, but of ourselves as bound and motivated by such 'historical' topographies. As Smith (1994) avers, "the hermeneutic imagination works from a commitment to generativity and rejuvenation and to the question of how we can go on

⁶ Derrida's essay entitled *Plato's Pharmacy* fictionalizes a conversation between Socrates and Phaedrus, an Athenian heavily swayed by the arguments of the rhetoricians. In his essay, Derrida enacts a conversation in which Socrates, who throughout his life avoided writing, attempts to convince Phaedrus of the superiority of speech. In order to elucidate his point, Socrates draws upon the Egyptian character Theuth, and the mythopoetic emergence of writing. In Egyptian mythology, Theuth was a great inventor, attributed to the creation of geometry, astronomy and numerical calculation. Yet, Theuth was also the progenitor of games, a trickster that dabbled in alchemy and the occult, a floating signifier evading the attempt to be unequivocally known. Following this innate ambiguity, Theuth is also considered to be the primogenitor of writing.

together in the midst of constraints and difficulties that constantly threaten to foreclose on the future" (p. 102). In this vein, I petitioned for "one more day," secretly hoping to build the momentum through which the singularity of the question, "Is there only one history?" might shake and supplement the foundations of an overwhelmingly Eurocentric historical discourse – "heavy interpretations...[masquerading] as forms of truth lying beyond the reach of interpretation itself (Smith, 1994, p. 122). It is at such a herm(eneutic) signpost as the *arrivant* that the heavily sedimented meanings to which Smith refers might give way to their 'overrun,' requiring us to stray together into new terrain, down into the powerful current of *currere*'s undertow.

The Gift of Opportunity

The following day, my colleagues and I anxiously prepared to enter into dialogue with the question: "Is there only one history?" My colleagues continued to voice their reticence, suggesting that the students had "probably had enough" of the topic, and as such, would quickly be given to boredom. I feared that neither the students or the topic were being given much of a chance. I recollected Smith's (1999) pedagogical *caveat* in *Children and the Gods of War*, "Young people want to know if, under the cool and calm of efficient teaching and excellent time-on-task ratios, life itself has a chance, or whether the surface is all there is" (p. 139). As we entered the classroom, we were immediately taken by surprise. Several students unhesitatingly approached us, their voices a cacophony of enthusiastic desire to be heard. One of the students outstretched her arms, pushing a book into our purview: Jane Yolen's (1996) *Encounter*. It was a book I had once been familiar with, though forgotten with the passing of time. As an apt illustration of the loss of innocence and subsequent cultural genocide of the Taino aboriginals at the hands of Western colonizers, this book emerged as a *gift* in its most symbolic sense. Drawing from the work of anthropologist Mauss, Baudrillard (1993) conceives the *gift* as unique, particular and ambivalent, symbolizing an *occasion*, a time and place specific to a group of people. *Encounter* was such a gift, a deeply personal account written from the perspective of a Taino boy and, for the students, bespoke "another side of history." Yet, *Encounter* did not merely exemplify the binary inversion of a Eurocentric historical consciousness. It was instead

a reminder of the concomitant superposition of multiple intertextual *histories* already in play. As Foucault (1984) articulates, “The true historical sense confirms our existence among countless lost events...[the] affirmation of knowledge as perspective” (p. 89–90). Deferring the accumulation of meaning as ‘one more damn thing,’ the *gift* instead pries open the foundations of meaning as the particular endeavor of *this* class and *this* question. *Encounter* thus marked a *gift* specific to what had become our *mutual* question, the “stubborn particularity” that had returned to trouble a *topos* on the brink of closure (Jardine, 1994, p. 137).

It is critical at this juncture to recall that Hermes is himself a god of gift giving. Particularly at and across borderlines, Hermes presides over both transaction and translation, an apt parallel to the mediating spirit of hermeneutics. This feature of interpretation was furthered by another student, who asked if his cousin, an active first nations artist, could speak to the class on the historical meanings of Blackfoot symbology. In yet another example, a student brought in a brief diary entry from a member of Henry Hudson’s first Northwest Passage crew. The entry was replete with unfamiliar references to measurement systems and the often absented voice of the crew members themselves. This entry was a stark contrast to the patriarchal narration of many contemporary textbooks. As a community, we gathered around both Yolen’s *Encounter* and the diary of Hudson’s crew member. In this generative space, additional questions such as “What stories are left *out* of the textbook?” and “How are First Nations people talked about in comparison to the explorers?” began to emerge. The notion of perspective, a term students had only encountered in art, emerged as a means to interrogate the univocity of historical narrative.

The *topos*, or place of our study, was slowly giving way to the Heideggerian *lichtung*, or clearing, intimating both the illumination (*erleuchtet*) and opening of the topographical space (Heidegger, 1962, p. 171). This space of possibility seemed to *open* “beyond our wanting and doing” as the lives of the students returned within the resonating space of the question voiced a day prior (Gadamer, 1999, xxvii). The question “Is there only one history?” began to place the fantasy of a univocal history at stake. In the clearing (*lichtung*) invited by the question as *arrivant*, the first nations’ students in the class began to find a voice for

their own personal and cultural *encounters* with colonization. Further, the girls in the class became heavily invested in exploring the significant roles of such female explorers as Roberta Lynn Bondar, in addition to interrogating the political atmosphere of the time as precluding against the possibility of women-led exploration.

Toward a Vagabond Pedagogy

Like Hermes, we had abandoned the certainty of the sanctioned path or curriculum-as-plan. Straying from the *logocentric* master signifiers of Eurocentric historical narrative, we embarked on a *vagabond* pedagogy of possibility in meandering (Block, 1998). It is here that we turned to Hermes as a guide to wanderers, travelers, and vagabonds. Hermes is a guide across boundaries, ushering and caring for those who have been led astray. In this sense, he is that *arrivant* that meets us on such paths, a *herm* (signpost) that orients and raises our awareness to new courses of travel. Hermes is a knower of roads and pathways betwixt and between (Friedrich, 1978). Just as hermeneutics seeks to reinvigorate lost meanings or pathways of understanding, Hermes points the way where hitherto there was seemingly n(one). Particularly when lost and meandering, we are haunted by the mythopoetic figure of Hermes, leading us into opportunity, into the *porta* (hole) – the wound-like abyss between signifier and signified, cite of slippage and lack. As Jardine (1994) notes, “an older reading of the Wound is that it is not ours to repair, nor is it a Wound of severance and isolation. This older reading requires envisaging the Wound as an ‘opening,’ a ‘portal,’ an ‘opportunity’” (p. 72).

As our inquiry into alternative perspectives of history gained momentum, we continually grappled with the desire to return to a stable, *logocentric* home. Though we continually fretted about the lack of resources dedicated to an inquiry of alternative perspectives, we made of the most of our found materials and contacts, paralleling Block’s (1998) advocacy for ‘discovery in lostness’. To this end, we turned to grandparents, local aboriginal contacts, innovative texts and performances of counter-perspectives on Eurocentric historical metanarratives. Even in the diary logs of exploration crew members, we identified a productive *aporia* derailing the assumption of progress, mastery and univocity. In this midst of our reinvigorated research, a

student wrote a response to our initial question, “there is not one history, but multiple *competing* histories at the same time” (emphasis mine). One of the practitioners leading the prolonged inquiry of Canadian Exploration elucidated “At first I feared throwing away our plan and prepared materials...but was reminded that teaching isn’t entirely about having a secure plan, it’s about being open to the possibility of looking at the world differently.”

The Trappings of Domestication

The *arrivant* as *hospitality* had opened an otherwise foreclosed treatment of history as a conversation determined in advance of both students and an engagement with the topography ‘itself’. Yet, the *practices* by which we were conducting our inquiry began to assume a curious similarity to those legitimized institutional forms which had initially rendered the topography of Canadian Exploration moribund. First, the research students were conducting had been transposed into a familiar reductionist framework predicated upon dates, names, locations and events. Second, the lesson structure of the inquiry had slowly degenerated into an abandonment of students to the internet, wherein they became ‘accountable’ for finding and subsequently fil(l)ing information into appropriate categorical frames based on the aforementioned headings. While the content suggested a radical take on the foundational structures into which the students had been inaugurated, the ideological orientation to such content remained starkly familiar. As Žižek (1994) comments in *Mapping Ideology*, beliefs and convictions are not reflected in what we think or believe, but rather, in what we *do*. The activities in which we participate thus create a sub-text for belief, such that when an ideological framework is introduced, it seems plausibly correspondent to ‘reality’.

It is critical to reiterate at this juncture the embodied nature of the Hermes. Hermes is a god of bodily action, a patron of travelers and vagabonds. As the progenitor of foot racing and pugilism, Hermes was renown for his athleticism and fleetness. He is similarly a wild, monstrous body of transgression and creative Eros, known for his

affairs⁷ with goddesses, mortals, nymphs and animals. It is this embodied contour that is particular to hermeneutic inquiry, for “once we believe we “construct” interpretations, we also believe that we must *make* a boundary for them to prevent madness and drool. Once this happens, Hermes retreats, unneeded, and the sparks stop flying. We have taken interpretation up into our heads” (Jardine, 1994, p. 230). It was to this heady confidence that our activities had returned, yet this time, our awareness was somehow different. We were able to recognize the slow migration of our bustling and excited conversation northward, like so much educational activity occurring ‘from the neck up’. Yet, this recognition was not merely “knowing something again that we know already,” it was instead “the joy of knowing *more* than is already familiar” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 114). Haunted by the mythopoetic figure of Hermes, we implicitly knew our monological approach to the topic was both disingenuous and overtly cerebral. The approach constituted an appeal to the reasoned frameworks of colonization, militating against wild bodies and borderline transgressions. It was not however, a *complete* collapse into familiar modes of conducting research. The familiar frameworks designed to represent knowledge had been supplemented in our hospitality towards the *arrivant* – the *arrivant* as hospitality itself. This seemed closer to Derrida’s notion of domestication. The *arrivant* now seemed part of the household, but in a way that fundamentally altered the *topos* ‘itself’. In turn, something of our lived pedagogical practice had been re-turned, a reminder that “life erupts at the boundaries” (Jardine, 1994, p. 9). In the return of this singularity or supplement, we brought the question of representation back into dialogue with the lived topography of the discipline itself.

Monere – Demon/stration as Omen

The following day, we gathered with students in order to discuss the manner in which the revisited histories might be represented. As one student contended, “it was difficult to find stories and information from a perspective other than [that of the] explorers”. This was a sentiment articulated by the findings of the teachers themselves, who found the challenge of supporting the student inquiries demanding in terms of

⁷ Some of Hermes children, including Pan and Hermaphroditus, were themselves hybridic figures.

both lack of resources as well as the lack of their own understanding of history as a contested topography. Another student noted, "if another class looked at the question 'Is there more than one history?' they might have the same problems." We were beginning to articulate the requirement of the topography beyond the will of the teachers' desire for a standardized 'accountability' and the students own proclivity toward representation via 'posters' and 'dioramas'. As one student noted, "for people to understand different perspectives in history, we will have to *show* them." Once again, we had happened upon the importance of *demonstration* as a corollary of *monere*, a sign of portent. This demonstration would be an omen of alterity haunting the legitimized narratives of modernity and the univocal legitimation of (his)tory. In light of a number of films the students had watched chronicling the explorations of Cartier, Frobisher, Hudson, and Champlain, we decided that our representation would too be filmic. Reworking our long range plans, we dedicated the following two months to the informed development of scripts, backdrops, and props. We worked closely with drama professionals to block, rehearse and hone dialogue. Keeping our on-going work open to critique, the students forged deep bonds with their peers, developing a greater understanding of the heritage, belief, languages and cultural practices of those closest to them. Working with a videographer, students filmed, edited and produced their 'vignettes' as a sound *demonstration* of their inquiry. The product was ultimately more than an evidence of student learning. It was an example of the powerful *arrivant*, and the necessity of pedagogical hospitality toward the future. The culminating work also demonstrated a change in the orientation of the classroom teachers toward long range planning and the haunting present absence of the mythopoetic figure Hermes. In their faith that significant learning would emerge through risk, the teachers were not simply abandoned to wander aimlessly. Hermes, the god of borders and thresholds, marked the passage, the middle way of generative ambiguity and abundance. This is not to suggest that the work was not without its difficulties, but rather, that such difficulties provided the work its rigor and rich character.

Endnote

While an apt metaphorical symbol, the mythopoetic figure of Hermes might be read as greater than a pedagogical allegory. His present-absence haunts the living pedagogical relationship and the topographies of the disciplines as lived. As the god of the wound, of the opening and threshold, Hermes protects the passageway of possibility itself. In this function he is a key figure of interpretive 'play', of making meaning from the message of the other. Yet, as Derrida (1981) notes, Hermes is more than a messenger. In the absence of Zeus, it is Hermes who assumes his vaunted position. In this movement, Hermes becomes both the voice of Zeus and yet, *more than Zeus'* voice. By way of a supplementary logic, he is at once both the same *and* other. In the familiarity of the classroom, Hermes was encountered as an uncanny question, a monstrous *arrivant* profoundly altering future orientations. In this gesture, the 'authorized' narrative returned to its 'original difficulty' as an interpretation 'itself', shaking both our fundamental suppositions and their supporting practices. In the return of the *arrivant* as a fecund singularity, the whole was reinvigorated through the healing of its severed connections. And while the monstrous *arrivant* was ultimately domesticated, almost being lost in this process, its trace ushered us into the fertile territory of pedagogical opportunity towards a future – a future by necessity hybridic and monstrous.

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