

Provoking Curricula of Care: Weaving Stories of Rupture Towards Repair

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Abstract:

We are five scholars of education, *provoking curriculum* on the topic of “care”—as practice, theory, and struggle, through our stories of living, teaching, and learning. Our inquiries surface threads of rupture, where we find that “care” indicates our efforts to address suffering. Our care-work consists of restorative, creative, and contemplative practices. We tell our stories through a literary *métissage* (weaving) of creative non-fiction, poetic writing, artwork, and images. We thus creatively expand the meaning of care by evoking our understandings, lived experiences, and practices of caring. In this way, we hope to create more attuned relationships, and open the way for more stories of “care” to emerge.

Keywords: stories of care, curriculum co-inquiry, arts-based inquiry, life writing, *métissage*, healing

Conception

We are five scholars of education, co-exploring the meaning of *care*—as notion, practice, theory, and struggle, in the context of life’s unfolding events and suffering. Our curriculum areas include: the arts in education and research, women and gender studies, human development, fear studies, Buddhism, contemplative inquiry, and mothering/parenting. Inquiring into *care*, we began with the question: what does *care* look and feel like in these precarious yet gifted times that we live in? What constitutes our practices and our labours, of caring for ourselves and others inside and out of the academy? We navigate with (more or less) care through personal, institutional, cultural, environmental, and cosmic networks. This includes place-based and spirit-based relationships. Our inquiries surface threads of rupture and sites of wounding in our lives. We find that *care* indicates our efforts to recognize and address this suffering, for ourselves and others.

Our topic seeks to *provoke curriculum* through the stories of our lives, in creative non-fiction, poetic, and performative writing. Our care-work consists of restorative, creative, and contemplative practices, as we each respond to life’s ruptures, seeking to live well with ourselves and others. Engaging the arts for expression, Bracha Ettinger (1998) describes in her matrixial theory how “art is the transport-station of trauma” (p. 91). She reminds us that to be a *woman* artist working in the matrixial sphere is a fragile endeavor where “the future traumatically meets the past...and the outside meets inside” (Ettinger, 2004, p. 77). We believe that personal stories can give fuller meaning to the notion of *curriculum*. We invite neglected stories into our circle, to be heard and cared about in the present, in service of living well in the future. These stories are often left outside of communication in daily life. Stories, accompanied by artful and thoughtful processes of writing and sharing, can become sites of transformation and potential healing of trauma for teller and listener.

To first provoke this creative practice of *care* as a small group of educators, we witnessed our individual stories with each other, via email and in person. Our stories are rooted in and written through arts-based inquiry methods, including life writing, poetic inquiry, visual art, and photography. We then performed our stories in a weaving of live readings with an audience, at the 2015 *Provoking Curriculum Studies Conference* in Vancouver, BC. We took care to transform, as best we could, the science classroom in which we hosted our performance. We laid out a large cloth labyrinth, previously created by Barbara, on the floor. A labyrinth is a sacred geometric pathway, with one path into the centre and out again. Viewing and walking labyrinths invite meditative, womb-like qualities of moving into the centre and thus into the self. The cloth labyrinth acted as a visual focal point that held sacred space in the classroom, as we shared vulnerable stories. It was physically walked by Nané during her reading and performed upon by Michael. We had pencil, crayons, and paper available for the audience to respond with, to share their own stories and create art. As time drew to a close, audience participation consisted of verbal sharing of thoughts and wishes for care-work of their own. Many recognized the kinds of stories we told and the ways of being we were representing, as largely un-covered in educational and academic spaces.

As such, the following text weaves topics from our current curricula in need of care. Our work is presented as an artful *métissage* (textual/visual weaving). Through the practice of literary *métissage*, stories can speak across to each other and sometimes uncover and provoke new stories (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009). The stories that follow seek to expand the meaning of care, by evoking our understandings, lived experiences, and practices of caring. In this way, we hope to create more attuned relationships with ourselves and others. We thus invite the reader to be-with these stories, while taking care to note and

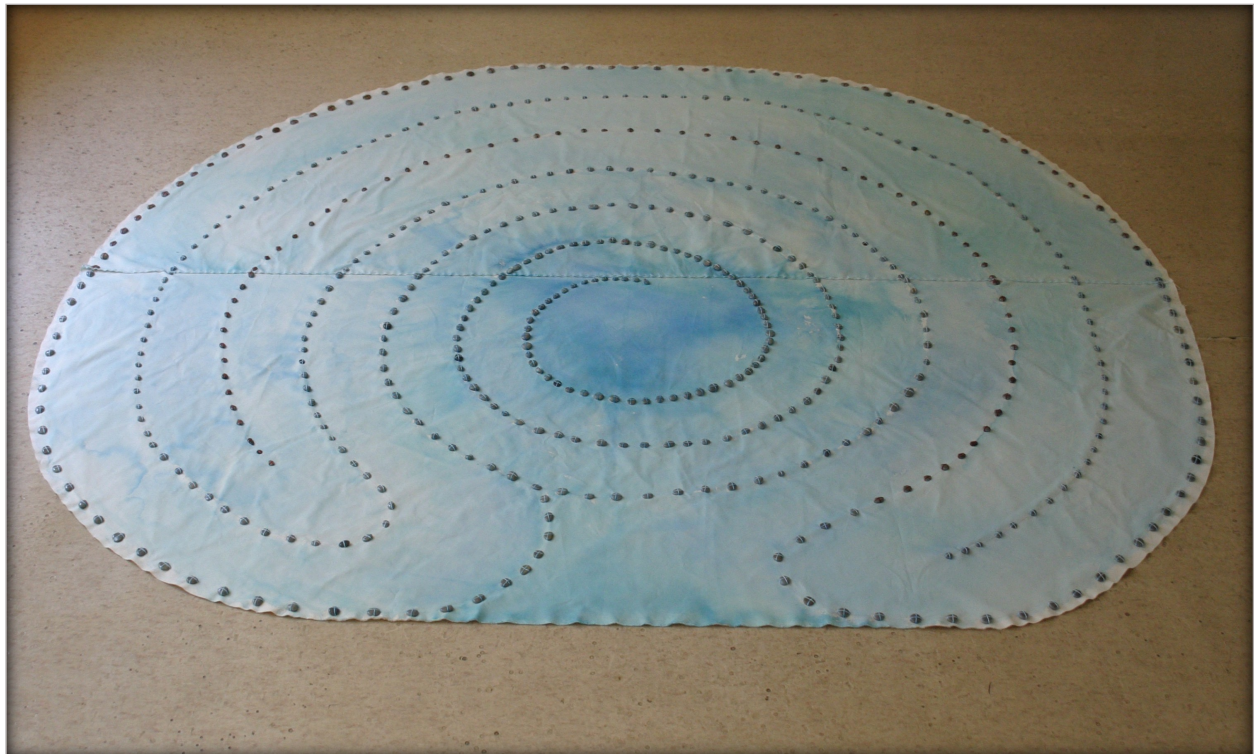
be-with their own stories that arise along the way. We acknowledge the risk of uncovering dormant stories and advise readers to attend to their own self care should their own stories of rupture surface. We thus invite you to read and walk with us on this labyrinth towards repair.

Susan's contribution explores changes in the landscape, inside and outside, and what it means to relate with whatever arises: working with resistance, strong emotion, acceptance, and letting things be. Barbara's piece poetically inquires into the *failure* of care when an art student, doing feminist work through vulnerable art-making, encounters the traditional art school critique. Pamela's stories dwell with the emotional aspects of being employed as a contingent academic and explores how emotional care enabled more holistic wellbeing. Nané enters a practice of surrendering to life's difficulties through labyrinth walking, while healing from illness and family trauma. Michael's art and writings are performative wit(h)ness responses to our stories, drawing us closer to the potential of an aoretic pedagogy of radical love in a culture of fear (Fisher & Subba, 2016).

Our intention with this representation of our conference presentation is to weave and further grow this inquiry with care. We thus offer our interwoven text in three parts: Rupture, Being-With, and Repair. And so we begin....

Part 1: Rupture

Michael: Offering to Nané & Barbara



Barbara Bickel (2007). *Water Labyrinth*.
Canvas, cotton, beach stones, red thread, and acrylic paint wash, 10 x 12 feet.

Nané & Barbara: We'd like to have everyone introduce themselves briefly....

Michael: I sank into a light trance. The two sister nuns of despair and repair had set the pedagogical space with a large canvas labyrinth of stones...encircled...the expectant audience... mumbles...anxiously....

Barbara: [smiles anxiously] You never know what Michael will do in a spontaneous moment....

Michael: Nané had cared for the womb space, in the chemistry lab of this performance, as a mother at the peri-natal table. Barbara, the master of the matrixial mediator, she designs the curricular invocation...together...two sister nuns of repair....

Nané: [smiles nervously, assuredly, as midwife at her ten-hundredth birth]

Michael: From vertical fixed circle after introductions and instructions of the performance event—something sacred....I begin without warning: a leap to the floor labyrinth and roll to the centre core in front of everyone...shifting the attention into a realm of bodies without talk....I lay in fetal position...feeling the pain on my sides and butt from rolling across the stones I'd not anticipated.

Barbara: You never know what Michael will do....

Michael: I never know what I will do. I'm not supposed to. I enact as best I can what the audience might be feeling in their school chairs...stuck...while listening to the hurt and anger in all the woman's presentations—it's there...and bodies may breathe through it...but there's something all too stiff, clean, and nice....I slide in wool socks to the back of the room and roll and moan on the chemistry benches...collectively, despairing from assaults of the everyday world, from the academy, from being...from caring...from adopting....

Nané: [refrain: 8 times] The power of repetition shifts my mind....In this labyrinth-writing-walking...I am a daughter of the Earth

Susan: In My Backyard



Susan Walsh (2012). *Backyard*. Digital photograph.

forget-me-nots moss lily of the valley buttercups a wild
and free backyard fringed by trees respite in the city coolness shade I nurture
herbs flowers meditate on the deck on warm days bird sounds squirrels
rattle the leaves breeze gently full summer blue sky blue clear just breathe

wafts of fall harvest at the edge of awareness
deep days of gratitude true thanks giving my hands in warm dirt I pat loving
blankets of soil around perennials herb wafts spearmint chives sage oregano
rosemary thyme lavender peppermint parsley on my tongue in my nose
how did I never before notice that the lily of the valley offers red berries in the fall?

shortened light winter solstice days pass suddenly
a dull thud of boulders rolling down the hill
on the property adjoining ours beep beep
beep of machinery backing up

the sound of a backhoe ominous hum punctuated by the
sound of metal scraping on rock crack of tree trunks roots wrenched
from the earth metal bucket swipes branches fury deep
sorrow tears the pain of the earth twists my gut

I phone the city development office more than once email the city
councillor the mayor the environment office the water commission feel
the intensity of my anger fear loss in your area property owners
can do whatever they want on their land no permits consultation
inspection required

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my dad twenty years passed from the earth has been all around me for
months a brass screw a piece of leather polished rock made into
a necklace his handwriting topics for stories on the back of
beer coasters I hear his voice write a letter fight them fight them
stories of my great grandmother in the old country Susan Casey smoking her
clay pipe leaning out her window above the pub cheering on the brawling
rowdies on Saturday nights fight them

you are fighting the wind now my partner says through an illness suddenly
flaring anemia dehydration swollen legs and ankles just let go

Pamela: The Dance

I have a week off between semesters and feel called to the coast. I am driving to Salt
Spring Island for a three-day conscious movement and dance retreat.

Before catching the ferry, I meet a friend for brunch on Douglas St. in Victoria. She shares
some news that stings. An academic position that I had coveted, interviewed for, but not
been selected for, has now been filled after a long reposting. And, I know the successful
candidate. I am still in a contingent position that is not to be renewed beyond the end of the
year. I start to cry. My friend steers the conversation into less tumultuous waters, pays for
my scrambled eggs and toast.

A pall falls over my day. I feel like hiding. I consider not going to the dance retreat.

I decide though that I can feel dejected no matter where I am, and I go.

And so, there I am on the dance floor. Really, on the floor. Lying there. Feeling low.

I lay on my side, pull my shoulders forward, protect my heart. I feel gingerly into the
bruised feeling. It feels like a hot coal under moss. I hold myself still. I feel the beat of the
music flowing past and around me. I am a rock in a river of sound.

I have an angry ache in my chest that does not want to be touched.

I probe it softly with my inner awareness. Tenderly.

The hurt starts to vibrate. My entire self is out of tune.

Then it wavers.

Ache. Not ache. Ache. Not ache.

I hurt. I am okay. I hurt. I am okay.
I breathe gingerly. I stretch out a limb.

I breathe. I stretch out a limb.

Feelings of heat, heaviness, stinging, splinters, come and go around my heart.

I continue feeling into sensations.

I get up and move about. I sway. I explore the movement of one shoulder, one arm, and then the other. I weave amongst the dancing bodies.

There is hurt.

And, I am okay.

It does not take too long: maybe a few hours. I keep finding my way in and out of these feelings. It is not a linear process.

At some point, I dance chaotically letting expectations break down. Sadness flows through my limbs.

Within a day the hurt has dissolved. Its energy has dissipated and is gone from my awareness.

I feel a sense of openness, even gentle happiness, for the person who has gotten the position.

If that is what they want, then I hope it goes well for them.

I feel free.

Barbara: Confessions of a Feminist Care-Giver in the Art Academy

I just witnessed a rape
a caustic verbal rape
in the art academy
The perpetrator
a woman professor
The victim
a young woman student
Both artists

The young woman
passionate to bring awareness
to the pain wrought by female beauty
in the world today
offers an opening through her art
I just witnessed what happens to
matrixial art attempting to bring forth healing
in the phallic sphere of the art world
daring to take space in the white cube

I was a silent silenced bystander
anOther woman professor mostly mute
disabled in the presence of the verbal barrage
unable to interrupt the carte blanche position of phallic power
the rational machine gun
speed battering
of a woman onto a woman with a woman
in this phallic space
caught off guard

The non-rational matrixial presence pressed face first into the wall
unable to withstand the irony of the betrayal
sunk to the floor and witnessed
wit(h)nessed a woman surviving
in the phallic academy of art
through crafty high intellect and cloak of irony
pain and vulnerability masked completely
as confidence
head held high by her training
her status

Nané: Wound Walking

I allow space for something that's wounded in me.
I allow space for something that's wounded in me.
I allow space for something that's wounded in me.

I breathe. Repeating phrases inside my head, I begin to walk this labyrinth. I feel the weight, shift, and balance of my feet as each proceeds, one—after—the—other. Feeling my feet on the ground, one—after—the—other, onto the wooden floor below me, each phrase and foot proceeds. My balance is not exact. My body sways and tilts. I can't find my centre. No centre, just wavy space. The floor feels Jello-like under my feet. I have felt this way for almost a year. I became very ill after finishing my PhD. I struggled with reoccurring pain, fatigue, infections. I left most activity behind—un-able. In fear for my health and life—wanting answers. What is my diagnosis?

Now, on this labyrinth, I don't try to compensate for my imbalance. In this moment, I don't fear so much, the strangeness in my body, my body making strange. This is how I am. This is how I am. I feel my dis-ease. I walk and write to feel my-self. Illness is a mystery I want to fathom, a puzzle I can't solve. I am writing and walking my wounded body and mind, my wounded-body-story, looking for my voice.

I breathe. I cover myself with a blanket. This blanket holds and protects, a containing gesture. Holding self, holding and comforting. This blanket mothers me. My words contain and re-mother me, as I move towards the centre of the labyrinth. This blanket of words is my path.

I accept myself and my needs over others' directions.
I accept myself and my needs over others' directions.
I accept myself and my needs over others' directions.

I write my body in its chaos, its quest—with gentleness. I repeat this mantra of gentleness. Over and over all these months—be gentle. Entirely needed, entirely new. I write to be-with, to midwife. I walk, I write, I walk, I write.

May all beings be well.
May all beings be safe.
May all beings feel loved.

How can I write this story? I don't know how to write this story. I want to write for repair, my story of finishing a PhD, and being the daughter of my mother. Her illness she could not name or heal, that kept me so unsafe with her. She so often put me on her enemy lines.

Sometimes, in this war of hers, it was a good day. Now, I write my own body in its healing quest.

I allow space for something that's wounded in me.
I allow space for something that's wounded in me.
I allow space for something that's wounded in me.

I breathe. I walk to protect and repair. I write my body in its chaos, its quest—with gentleness. Learning, bit by bit. The catch, is to release. This wound is guiding me now. A new sensory organ, raw, aching. Leading me on its pathway, this labyrinth of writing-walking. Distractions fall away. My mind stills. Words fill with purpose. Writing substitutes for rumination. The body releases what it can when it's time—the body in its wounds and words, the words and their bodies. How can I tell the story that wants to be told?

May I be well.
May I be safe.
May I feel loved.

Part II: Being-With

Pamela: The Tent

I accept contingent academic work because it is available and because I am told it will lead to a more secure position. After my divorce four years ago, I adopted a mantra that echoed for a long time:

I must secure my future....
I must secure my future....

Now I imagine my future like a tent unmoored from its pegs flapping wildly in the wind. After a few years of being in a contingent position, I did not gain a secure mooring as promised. Instead, the ground crumbled underfoot and my tent was swallowed whole.

This is not personal. It is larger forces and unfortunate timing, I am told. No one in any position of power has any actual power to do anything. All the Chairs are empty. Nothing can be done.

Disaster, from the Italian, means *ill-starred event*. My career is in the grips of a disaster of timing and circumstances.

What do you do when despite your best efforts the ground gives way beneath you?

For months, I exist in limbo and feelings of fear, shame and anger ebb and flow through my bodymind in a toxic slew.

Until one day I simply snapped. Whatever inside me that had been holding onto my imagined future simply let go. And, suddenly all I could do was laugh. There was an absurdity to how hard I had worked and how little it mattered. I had no control. When I looked around though, I was the only person laughing. I was both the only person who had lost her job in the downsizing (others took retirement packages) and the only person who was strangely cheerful.

With this, my horizon widened and perspective arrived: Might there be other possibilities?

The energy that had driven me to prove myself in the academy (to whom? for what?) rushed out and in rushed a feeling of love. That I am fundamentally okay no matter what happens became self-evident. Caring for myself, which had often felt like a chore before, now became a priority.

When confronted by the undeniably contingent nature of my reality, I found an unexpected place of non-contingency within me.

Barbara: Confessions of a Feminist Care-Giver in the Art Academy

A young woman
in training to survive in the phallic art academy
not heal or thrive
writes notes and more notes
her notepad clutched close to her breasts

“WHERE IS THE HOLE? WHERE IS THE HOLE?”
the woman professor repeatedly calls out
amidst her pointed attack focused on a wall of vaginas
Her failure to penetrate a great frustration, a supposed failure of the art
in the presence of a multitude of lovingly sculpted
laid out in rows
pristine hard white vaginas dropping
in vertical succession
like tears on the wall of the white cube
“THIS ART IS ABOUT VICTIMIZATION” the woman professor professes
sweeping her arm to encompass the entire gallery
“WHY FOCUS ON VICTIMIZATION?” the woman professor demands
echoed by the mostly silent male professor by her side
a sincere twisted attempt to protect the student is at play
her art now victimized
verbally fucked in this phallic space turned brothel by the rape

I just wit(h)nessed a rape
I could not Did not stop the sharp knife edge
that holds both vulnerability and victimization
from becoming a cut
a gaping wound for the rape victim, the rapist and witness
A young woman’s attempt to bring forth healing through art
fucked again
vulnerable matrixial art turned into a victim by its phallic perpetrators



Sarah Dorau (2015). *The Currency of a Woman's Worth*.
Cast porcelain, 4ft x 2ft x 4 in. 49 cast pieces all together.

Nané: Wound Walking

Louise DeSalvo (1999) describes how in order to write about traumatic events, you must include your deepest thoughts and feelings about them, past and present (p. 25). I must link detailed descriptions of what happened with my feelings—link events with feelings. Re-visit just one moment at a time. Write about joy and pleasure too. How I appreciate the sunset, the full moon in view, my grandmother's presence, the simple comfort of being with my daughters at home. In further writing, can I decide what stories to write? I can barely tell this story of a lost mother and her daughter, sent into the forest. What is my experience? To get to the details through what my mind does to protect me. I may never tell this story, some stories are left untold.

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I feel heart-ache, a physical aching heart-break, grief. A physical pain in my chest, held in my back, in the muscle between my shoulders. A point, this knot. Press into it, deeply with your fingers—releasing the tensions and toxins. Illness marks a shift, re-ordering my life. There is nowhere else to go. I was going there all along.

I accept myself and my needs.
I accept myself and my needs.
I accept myself and my needs.

I breathe, wrapping my body in this blanket of wool and words. This blanket of words and wool, a cover to protect and comfort, mothers me. My balance is not exact, my limbs heavy with fatigue. I feel how my body sways and tilts. I can't find my centre. I am all wavy space. I don't try to compensate for my imbalance right now. I feel my feet on the ground. In this moment, I do not fear the strangeness in my body, my body making strange. I experience—this is how I am. How I am in body, on a quest for my soul beyond time. I allow myself to feel any relief, by surrender. Illness marks a shift, re-ordering my life. There is nowhere else to go. I was going there all along.

The power of repetition shifts my mind from its agony of thought. In this labyrinth-writing-walking, distractions fall away. My mind stills. Words fill with purpose. My body releases what it can when it's time—the body in its wounds and words. The words, the wounds, and their bodies.

Susan: In My Backyard

the breeze sways branches now snow laden quietly waiting prayer flags lift drop gently
breathe crisp air blue adrift in the uncertainty of strong emotions I go to
my cushion try to welcome all of Rumi's guests¹ I watch my
rage see how it attaches itself to the person who is clear cutting trees how it
expands to include someone I feel has wronged me and yes to my partner
his illness and the disintegration of my sabbatical plans I breathe in the
energy wisdom of my Scottish Irish ancestors let things settle

and yes I breathe breathe in my anger fear sorrow breathe out peacefulness
gentleness² think of others who are also gripped in strong emotion let peacefulness
radiate out like the pink gold waters of the Bedford Basin early in the morning

clang of the dump truck panel as it throws fill dirt over the treeless ridge
thud of earth at the edge of my meditation practice
I breathe in nausea the churning of
my gut anger sadness fear twisting through my body the body of the earth
breathe slowly slowly out then jump up go outside again
others can't won't fight anymore what's done is done they say the trees are gone

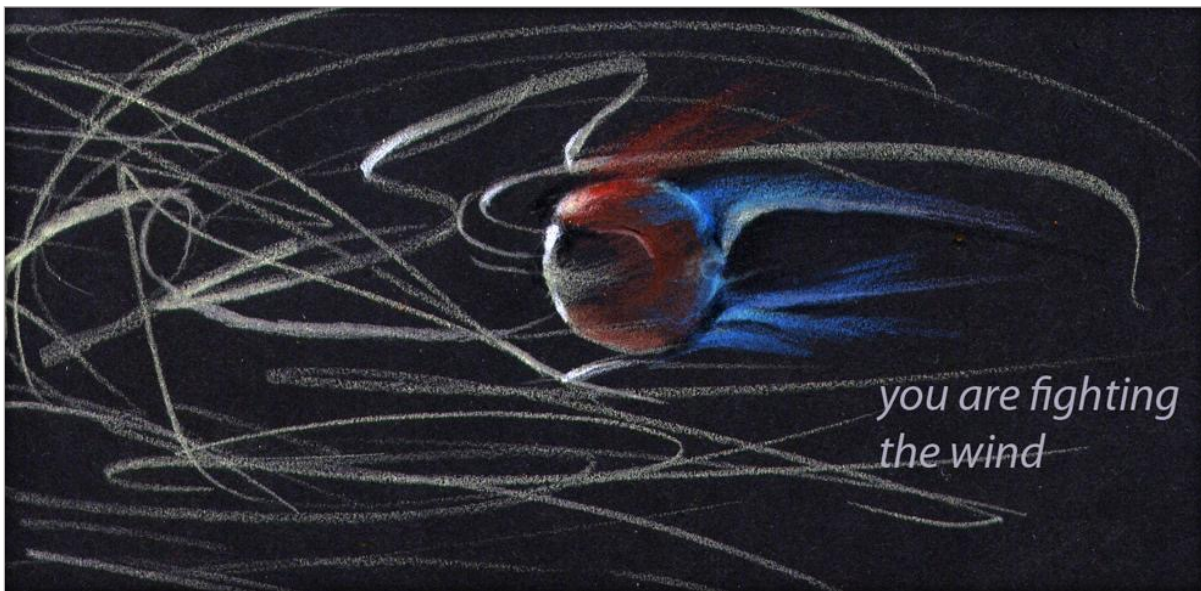
silence no trills bird songs one or two chickadees skip from branch to branch on
the forsythia no finches mourning doves sparrows blue jays cardinals
not even a crow deer alleyway gone tiny winding stream
disappears into nothing three squirrels uprooted from their homes
scramble manically around our yard

Thich Nhat Hanh (n.d.) teaches that we must welcome our anger, sorrow, and resentment—and care for them like a loving parent. Ani Pema Chödrön (2012) writes that

[we] build inner strength by embracing the totality of our experience, both the delightful parts and the difficult parts. [Doing so] is one definition of having loving-kindness for [ourselves]. Loving-kindness for [ourselves] does not mean making sure that we are feeling good all the time....Rather it means setting up [our lives] so that [we] have time for meditation and self-reflection, for kindhearted, compassionate, self-honesty....This is the way [we] become true friends to [ourselves] just as we are, with both [our] laziness and [our] bravery. (p. 53)

a chain saw starts up I stomp out to the back yard boots coat undoneyell at the workman I'm just doing my job, lady get back on your own property.
no I am not riding the waves gracefully

Michael: Offering to Susan



R. Michael Fisher (2016). *Untitled Art Image*. Susan Walsh (2016). *Text*.

Susan: *I don't agree....I don't agree....I feel the depth, the impulse to fight....I sense this deep in my DNA, the cells of my body.*

Michael: You are fighting the wind...between the mountains of ideal world and real world, in aporotic pedagogical³ space...of radical inquiry and care.

Susan: And hearing more loudly the influence of my ancestors. Fighting the wind...knots tighten, constrict. Opposing with a sword rather than shapeshifting, becoming one with the wind.

What does it mean to fly with the wind, open into it? Drift in its currents.

Michael: I draw a blanket. Place my coloured pencils *just right*. Flip it, roll it, ride it, print it. I colour.

Susan: Orange pronounces the boundary of fear fury...deep sorrow....I allow myself to enter it...all of it. Open my being.

Michael: I'm with you all the way. Looking for prayer flags, flying the ship...the fearlesship...I'm with you all the way, Susan. We are both noticing winds of change....I doubt it will ever settle completely. I colour some more....

Susan: Forget-me-nots, buttercups...blankets of soil...red berries....I touch them tenderly. Listen to the wind. Learn to ride the waves.

Part III: Repair



Sarah Dorau (2015). *Weight*.
Cast iron, rawhide, bed sheets, 30 x 16 x 6 inches.

Barbara: Confessions of a Feminist Care-Giver in the Art Academy

The matrixial weeps
sheds life size vulvic tears
continual wit(h)ness to the violence perpetrated
in the white cube space
in the name of art
that is not art but faux art that does not know it is faux

The day after the rape
matrixial art resurrects
menstrual blood stained bed sheets

ground for a sarcophagus appear
iron sculpted figure of the deceased victim
reclining on the soft sheets

The young woman artist knows
she will not be buried underground
but lays open and exposed
surrounded by friends and family who
tentatively at first
wit(h)ness, then honour, celebrate her presence
her strength
her beauty
I with gratitude wit(h)ness the phallic white cube
momentarily move
into co-relationship
co-poiesis with the matrixial
restoring art as a transport for trauma⁴

Nané: Wound Walking

In this labyrinth, new words appear to me. Into this womb-like labyrinth, I become a *daughter of the Earth*. These newly born words gently appear. They hold me in an-other script, a new birth story on this walking-writing-path. I (and all) are held by *Mother Earth*, held in gentleness.

I am a daughter of the Earth.
I am a daughter of the Earth.
I am a daughter of the Earth.

I breathe, and feel my feet on this floor, the Earth. As each foot comes to the floor, I feel the weight of my feet with presence and meaning on this Earth. I enjoy these new words of being born to Mother Earth. I breathe them in. *I am a daughter of the Earth—of Mother-life*, and life in writing. I am Earth Mother's daughter. I seek and surrender myself to Mother. I am a daughter of the Earth, walking and writing. Mother holds the words and the path, before and behind. She holds me entirely on this labyrinth. I am born a human being among so many others, one of her many children on Earth.

I am a daughter of the Earth.
I am a daughter of the Earth.
I am a daughter of the Earth.

Susan: In My Backyard

we sit in doctor's offices later I make soup
the clarity of a winter cold blue sky thought stops me
what have I been bulldozing inside me? ancestors all around different
lines of ancestors in my DNA auric fields within and beyond plant and
rock ancestors in the earth listen

outside the window an ugly stick spray painted fluorescent orange vestiges of the
surveyors who tramped the yards a few days ago orange pronounces the boundary of fear
fury deep sorrow and maybe a line of acceptance? we can do nothing

a few birds this morning patches of blue among the clouds
the crows are back a few jays some starlings noisily at the feeder
softly the wind chimes gentle gentle gentle my meditation
expanding the heart the elastic heart breathing out in increasing its
elasticity expansiveness its ability to embrace experience in all its
aspects stretching "the love that will not die gentle and warm clear and
sharp open and spacious" (Chödrön, 2003, p. 2)

Louise Hogan (1995) says:

We are looking for a tongue that speaks with reverence for life, searching for an ecology of the mind. Without it, we have no home, have no place of our own within creation.... We want a language of [a] different yield. A yield rich as the harvests of the earth, a yield that returns us to our own sacredness, to a self love and respect that will carry out to others. (p. 60)

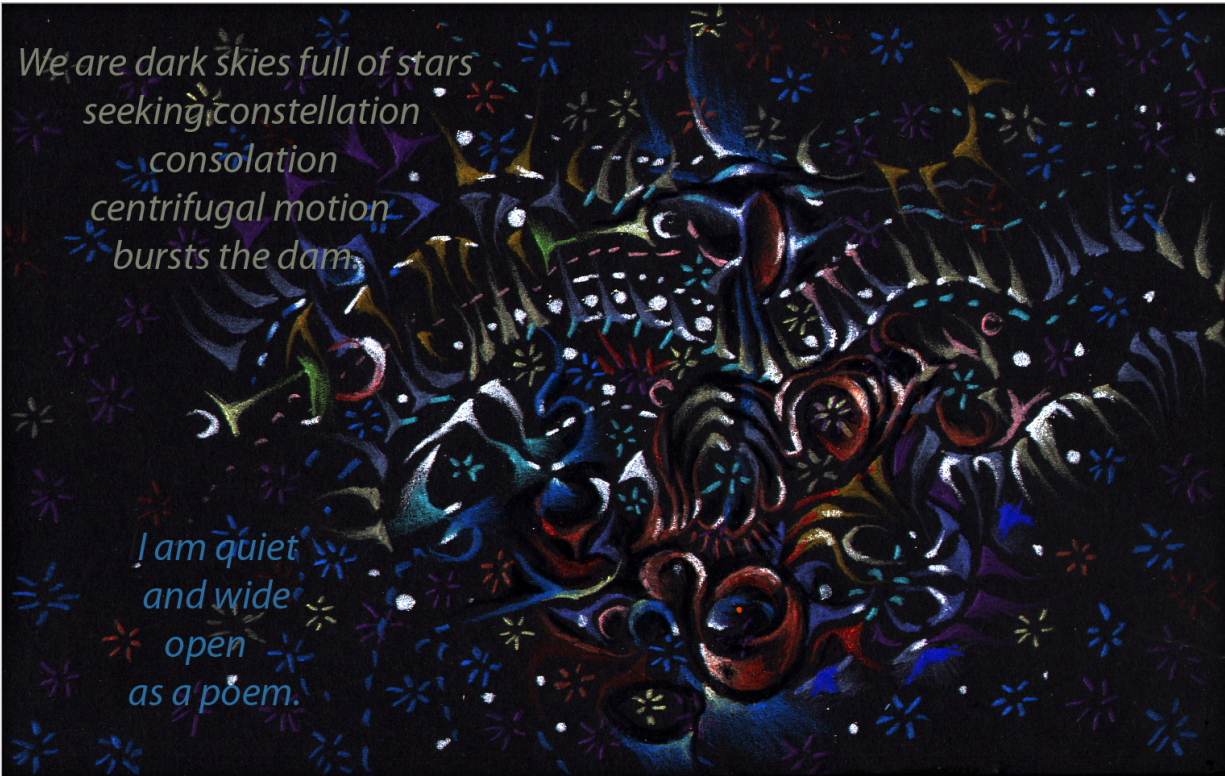
a different yield one that returns us to our own sacredness a reverence
for life one that extends out to others a different yield open awareness
beginning here in the backyard

Michael: Offering to Pamela

Michael: I radically care for therapeutic art-making in learning and teaching sites. I was asked by you all to bring my pencil crayons and blank paper to the session so that participants would have an opportunity between readers/performers' enactments to move in and out of any a-rational or irrational feelings and thoughts, spontaneously or otherwise, onto a *third space*, which could offer them a safe way to discharge their own re-stimulations of hurt (past and present) that came from listening to the hurt in the stories. It's all about attending to what is.

Pamela: Yes, you brought those and they were quiet invisibilities on the benches around the circle of participants. They were there. Tools. Like one lights a candle or breathes in an attempt to secure one's future in the moment, when it seems like there's a cascade of energies that mount in proportions that seem overwhelming. I love accessing and creating rhythms.... "I am hurt. I am okay. I am hurt. I am okay."

Michael: Yes, that's what spontaneous drawing and colouring is like. I have to attend to every mark and the relation it has with the mark before it. We're all marked that way. I too am a creator of rhythms. I am being destroyed. I am a creator anyways. I am being destroyed always. All is good.



R. Michael Fisher (2016). *Untitled Art Image*. Pamela Richardson (2014/2016). *Text*.

Pamela: The Chrysalis

It is spring. In a six-month period I have, amongst other things, taught the equivalent of six courses and submitted a large grant proposal. I imagined that if I secured the grant it would secure my future.

It is spring. I have three months off from teaching. I rent a forest cabin on Cortes Island. I announce quietly that I am going away on retreat.

I imagine that I will write.

Each month, I spend three weeks on this rain forest island and return for one week to the semi-arid landscape where my university is located. I make the trek six times.



Pamela Richardson (2014). *Sanctuary*. Digital photograph.

The journey is one of pieces. Topographic fragments of land and sea.

On the Cortes to Quadra Island ferry I gaze and dream. I am as quiet and wide open as a poem. I still have not left Cortes in my heart or mind.

Next, I drive over Quadra Island with the line of cars heading to the next ferry. If I turn out of this convoy I lose my spot in the ferry line, so best to make my way directly. Unless I don't. And, that is fine, too.

Then there is the brief Quadra to Campbell River ferry, which is full of commuters in the morning. I stay in my car for those 10 minutes.

Campbell River, long and thin, stretches along the shoreline. Rather than getting on the highway right away, I drive along the water to the highway entrance south of town.

Then I am on my way to Nanaimo. There is not much traffic. I speed. Once I got a speeding ticket.

I zoom past all the bays: Fanny Bay, Oyster Bay, Union Bay, Qualicum Bay, Nanoose Bay. I am on my way to Departure Bay.

There are still regular stoplights though. I have to pause between speeding spurts. One day I saw a bumper sticker that said: "Relax! You aren't on the Mainland."

Next I am on the Nanaimo ferry bound for Horseshoe Bay.

From there, I make my way down the rainy North Vancouver incline towards the green fields of the Fraser Valley. I am on my way to Hope.

From Hope begins the Coquihalla mountain ascent to Merritt. Weather is volatile in the mountains. I have brand new snow tires. They never see a speck though.

I am advancing now, not retreating. I will soon be back at work.

Back on Cortes Island, here is what happens on my retreat: I write very little. Mostly, I read. I sleep. One day I have a Skype meeting with a research group I co-lead, and someone asks *what are you doing there?* A few minutes later the connection cuts out.

I spend days on end by myself. I walk my dog for hours on forest trails or along the beaches where oysters are farmed.

I want the green damp hush of the rainforest to adopt me as its own. I want to send my confusion out into the waves and be emptied out by the wind.

Tomorrow, or the next day, I will write.

Daily, I walk down the trail to the meditation hut at Hollyhock.

I light the altar candle.

I sit on a black cushion with a soft grey blanket over my shoulders.

I watch my thoughts circle like fish in a bucket.

I breathe into my heart.

I practice going nowhere fast.



Pamela Richardson (2014). *Light*. Digital photograph.

A Closing Reception

Our curricular co-inquiry now closes, artfully telling stories that are often left in the shadows. We invite you, who have journeyed with us, to contemplate how educators can create provocative curricular spaces of care, for more stories to emerge. Despite the presence of media and web-based technologies for story sharing, we are in a culture of sound bites, and largely still isolated from the lived stories of others. Do we know our own stories, or how to tell them in meaningful ways for transformation and healing to occur? Being held in ever widening circles, we can learn to “hear each other to speech” (a feminist idiom). By sharing our care-work and stories as restorative creative and contemplative practices, we seek to live well with ourselves and others. We find that practices of creative writing, poetry, and art making, can hold and transform our individual stories. Creative transformation is amplified when we do this work together as educators and students, being in relationship with each other’s stories.

We are teaching in the midst of a culture of fear. Rachel Naomi Remen (as cited in hooks, 2003) eloquently names the quality of fearlessness that is required for us to teach from a place of radical love, so needed in our world today: “Now, as educators, we cannot heal the shadow of our culture educating people to succeed in society as it is. We must have the courage to educate people to heal this world into what it might become” (p. 181). Thus, what could education become if we acknowledge the weight of human suffering through sharing our storied threads of rupture? As we address these stories through relational practices of care, we create more hopeful and courageous forms of education. This opens pathways for healing curricula towards repair, as we care for ourselves, schools, and communities. Awareness and insight, alongside emotions of joy and love, can be given birth to—from the very heart of education.

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Endnotes

¹ Reference to Persian/Afghan/Iranian poet Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi's poem "The Guest House" (n.d.). See <http://allpoetry.com/poem/8534703-The-Guest-House-by-Mawlana-Jalaluddin-Rumi>

² Through *tonglen*, a Tibetan Buddhist practice, one can breathe in strong emotions and breathe out peacefulness and healing for oneself and others. This practice is described in detail by Pema Chödrön (2001).

³ *Aporetic pedagogy*: the way of teaching and learning that pursues the possible impossible of liberation, while flying into the winds that move against it [acknowledgement to Rebecca A. Adelman (2014) for explication of the aporetic in philosophy and pedagogy].

⁴ Six months after Sarah graduated I met with her and shared this writing. We both cried and revisited the experience. She had not let herself think about it since that closing exhibition. I spoke about my reservations in publishing this writing and she encouraged me to do so. She also gave permission to have her name accompany the art in this métissage. She read a final version of the entire métissage weaving, appreciated the other women's stories and reiterated her desire to see the piece published. She added that reading about the experience wit(h)nessed by me and in my voice helped her, similar to Pamela's story, to be with the ebb and flow of the pain she still experiences as the trauma dissipates. I am deeply grateful for her permission and the expansion of my understanding of wit(h)nessing, feeling/validating pain alongside another in a traumatic situation, as another form of

fighting for/with another. She has continued to make art grounded in healing for herself. I have made a commitment to consciously prepare to enter critiques (when I am not the supervising faculty who sets the context of critiques) with students who are creating art based in healing within the matrixial rather than surviving in the phallic. I also remain committed to teaching critique in my art courses that holds a feminist anti-oppressive lens based on respect, compassion, and care for the full emergence of the art and the artist. Critique engaged with this critical caring lens, with its desire to enhance both the art and the artist, holds the potential to interrupt the perpetuation of traumatizing phallic-dominated critiques by future artist teachers in academies of art and education.