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## *Wild Profusions: An Ode to Academic Hair*

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### **Abstract:**

With the intention of expanding educational conversations through playful encounters, we braid curricular intensities inspired by wild profusions, written in our academic hair and offered as expressions of life writing. Through our *hairatives*, we share discomforts and provocations that are the stories of our scholarly identities, rooted in the body-word nexus as affective attunements. Through our entanglements, we map our networks of relations and invite curricular conductivity concerning how and why hair is formative in the context of the academy. Living on the precarious margins of stories, we share our narratives within the folds of educational theory to passionately and poetically render our richly textured events as the moments of knowledge creation. In this way, our hair serves as an artistic configuration, where we are manifest in “situated inquiry about the truth that it locally actualises”, to borrow from Badiou (2005), opening what may be described as an “eventual rupture” of our scholarly truths (p. 12). Our ruminations are the imaginaries of academics, or simply living intensities. We intend to crack open from the inside that which is “a reality concealed behind appearances” in an attempt to reconfigure “a different regime of perception and signification” (Rancière, 2009, pp. 48, 49).

**Keywords:** curriculum studies; hair; social theory; educational theory; life writing; arts-informed inquiry



Photo by Seonjeong Yi (n.d.). Used with permission.<sup>1</sup>

Give me a head with hair, long beautiful hair  
Shining, gleaming, streaming, flaxen, waxen  
Give me down to there, hair, shoulder length or longer, hair  
Here baby, there, momma, everywhere, daddy, daddy  
Hair, flow it, show it  
Long as God can grow, my hair

—James Rado and Gerome Ragni, lyricists, *Hair: The American Tribal Love—Rock Musical*

**A**h, the Cowsills, and the (in)famous rendition of *Hair*—the anthem of hippie culture sings in our hearts, whether we adorn manes, mops or locks—we live with freedom, and even a bit of rebellion in the academy, that not even a half century since *Hair*, nor the onslaught of neoliberalism, could eradicate. Indeed, we are, by virtue of our wild profusions, the unassuming scholarly flower children of today, beautiful hair flowing in the wind, singing and dancing our musing to all who will listen, and even if none do, our spirited souls are sunny with our stories written in our hair, our call to academic braids, inscribed in this ode to the vital life we hold, natural and true, for the academy is our summer of love: may we embrace it.

This playful conversation emerged from an off-the-cuff comment by our colleague Boyd White, who ironically does not have much hair at all, at a CSSE conference in Calgary, when he observed, of Mitch and Anita, side by side, that we have what was best described as “wild hair”. Needless to say that evoked further banter, and blushing on Boyd’s part, for he once was a good Protestant, but alas, he has a devilish sense of humour. And having just come from our beloved Carl, who has much more beautiful hair than all of us, the teasing struck a chord, or more aptly, a ponytail. It was a happenstance moment, a spark that ignited what had the potential to become a richly textured venture to consider our networks of relations, our curricular emergences, and how and why hair is formative of this particular tribe, living along precarious margins with our stories. That chance exchange initiated what might be described as an “artistic configuration initiated by an event,” borrowing from Badiou (2005), where our writings, our artworks in response, are manifest in “situated inquiry about the truth that it locally actualises” (p. 12). So in this triptych (Sinner, 2013), Mitch, Carl and Anita open what may become an “eventual rupture” of our artful truths, not with the intent of “formulating correct judgements, but rather to producing the murmur of the indiscernible”, to appropriate Badiou further (pp. 12, 34). We begin with our ruminations, the imaginary of academics, in a thinking-feeling-like-hair semblance where this encounter “attends to the ripples”, to adopt Massumi (2013), of our “intensifying, enlivening, potentialising”, creating a kind of “relational architecture” in the act and action of living academically, “oriented toward the disseminating end of things, toward potential expansion” while remaining “anti-institutional” in our wild profusions (pp. 51-52). We intend to crack open from the inside that which is “a reality concealed behind appearances” in an attempt to reconfigure “a different regime of perception and signification” (Rancière, 2009, pp. 48, 49).

Collectively, our individual events mark “a set of distances” that expose the nature of the “systems of relations” that we desire to interrupt (Rancière, 2009, p. 94). It is in our continued pensiveness, our intermediacy, as Rancière (2009) suggests, that our “sensible textures” attend to our displacements, which “brings into play several kinds of intolerability” (pp. 94, 107). We invite you to read our stories as a performance of creative non-fiction (Sinner, 2013), and we invite you to interact with them as points of entry for openings of relationality.

## Out of the Fire into the Mirror: Mitchell's Hairative on Masculinity

I'm very systematic about how I write a paper. Writing this paper was different. I attempted a new approach: systematic but messy. Much like the way I style my hair. First, I thought it best to look through old family photographs. Turning the pages on the old photo albums led me to an uncomfortable nostalgia, but without any sentimentality. I closed the book and I walked to the closest mirror to consider what curricular implications could come through hair. I decided that if I am going to be narcissistic, I should be theoretical. I won't be discussing Freud. I won't psychoanalyze my hair in relation to my sexual development, but I begin with Goffman's (1959) theories from *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* in relation to gender and my masculinity. While I haven't compiled all the comments made about my hair over my 32 years, I will cover the salient, poignant and pivotal moments combined with the (micro)social interactions that have taken place.

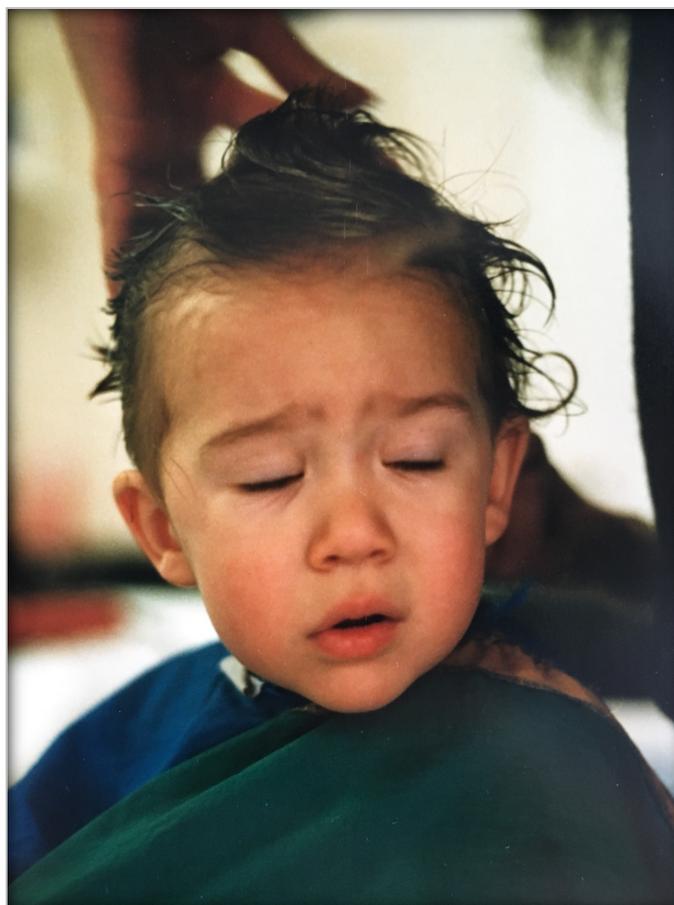
Goffman (1959) explains how the *self* is constructed by dramatic interactions between and amongst humans seeking information about one another (p. 17). To elucidate his point, he uses language most commonly found in the performing arts. Terms such as actor, audience, performance, front (stage), backstage, setting, props, director, and so on, metaphorically describe how our everyday interactions inform our perception of ourselves and others (and vice versa). Interestingly, some of Goffman's (1959) terminology has been popularized into our everyday use of language. Phrases like "he's putting on a front" and "oh, she's just saving face" demonstrate Goffman's (1959; 1967) theoretical influence on our vernacular (Beames & Pike, 2008).

According to Goffman (1967) actors have "face" (p. 4) when they present themselves according to how they wish to be perceived by their audience. Inversely, actors can "lose face" when, in the eyes of the audience, they have not presented a consistent self-image, or "front" (Goffman, 1959, p. 13). Goffman (1959) argues that although audiences expect consistency between an actor's appearance and mannerisms throughout a performance, actors often alter their performance for different audiences. Interestingly, an actor might present a different front for their family than for their friends or colleagues. This discrepancy leads Goffman (1959) to believe that as humans, we have "concealed practices" (p. 64). As Goffman (1959) argues that our environment, or our "setting" (p. 13), influences our behavior, this might be used to draw noteworthy inferences with hair as a pedagogical presentation.

Goffman (1959) states that when social actors enter a new environment, all people involved play an "information game" (p. 8). While my hair is not new to me, and looking in the mirror is familiar, I have not explored my hair nor looked into the mirror with Anita and Carl. As this is an opportunity for me to exchange information with Anita and Carl on our hair and theoretical positionalities, perhaps the future "information game" (p. 8) has influenced my analysis, the images I selected for this paper, and what I am willing to share with regard to my masculine development.

I've always liked my hair messy and I've always liked my messy hair. My earliest recollections about my hair always involved a conversation about when it would be cut. As a young boy, in between haircuts, I was often teased by my father about looking like a girl or appearing gay. My

father once compared me to Richard Simmons, which, when I understood who Richard Simmons was, didn't bother me; however, the teasing that ensued did. Now, if someone were to compare me to Richard Simmons, it would make a lot more sense given that we are both advocates for health, wellbeing and inclusive education. As you may know, Richard Simmons advocated for non-competitive physical education in the *No Child Left Behind Act* in the United States (National Public Radio, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 2008), which certainly resonates with some of my collaborative and community-based approaches to outdoor and environmental learning.



While my mother did not subscribe to the same thinking as my father, she has always insisted that I looked better with short hair. In fact, even now, at 32 years old, my mother still comments freely on my hair (and my weight). My most significant haircut in recent years occurred Christmas 2015 while I was sleeping. My mother and my sister conspired to cut off my "man bun". Now, my fallen pony-tail has an immortal holiday status and has since been called the "Mitchell-toe" (K. McLarnon, personal communication, December 25, 2015). Thankfully it wasn't a bad cut and, unlike Samson (and Anita, see below), the loss of some of my hair did not result in a loss of strength. Besides, hair grows back. Perhaps, the cutting of my hair is reflective of a form of punishment due to larger society's disapproval of not having what Foucault (1979) calls a docile body. After all, a body is

only useful and appealing to society if it is “both a productive body and a subjected body” (Foucault, 1979, p. 26). Considering this above anecdote, I am accustomed to my hair receiving a reaction.

As mentioned, these hairatives were inspired by a comment made by McGill professor Boyd White. After that comment, Anita and I launched into a discussion about hair. We discussed why we keep our hair a certain way and what that means in a social arena like the academy. In considering the semiotics of hair, within minutes our conversational entanglements lead to some of our shared theoretical affinities and our experiences negotiating school, life and work, thus opening the curricular possibilities of hair.

Before I met Carl in person, we had exchanged a few emails over a book project that we were both a part of. When we first met in Ottawa at the 2015 Curriculum Studies conference, some of the first words Carl spoke to me were about my hair. He said, “I love your hair,” to which I responded, “Likewise!” Carl then said, “It’s important for men to compliment each other.”

Throughout graduate school, my hair and facial hair has been the topic of conversation, particularly so when lectures started to encircle Marxism. During these classes, I’ve been told repeatedly that I resemble Karl Marx and/or Fidel Castro. Interestingly, during two recent pedagogical encounters, my hair and appearance has lent me some educational credibility.

First, when I was teaching and working at Outward Bound,<sup>1</sup> in the UK, the combination of my long hair and beard meant that I knew a great deal about mountaineering and orienteering. Why else would I look that way? Apparently, my presentation of self was consistent with my setting for all audiences I interacted with (Goffman, 1959). When I was leading students in the Lake District of England, many hillwalkers would ask me for directions. They were always surprised when I took out my map and compass, as if my beard could somehow point to magnetic north.

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<sup>1</sup> Outward Bound is an international, experiential, outdoor and environmental education organization that works with both youth and adults.



The second encounter happened at McGill when working with the B.Ed. students on elementary science education and pedagogy. My bouncy and uncombed hair combined with my gardening initiatives turned me into an immediate authority on subjects like “where to get compost for science labs”. Comically, my friend Jen, who is the lab technician in the Faculty of Education at McGill, has labelled me “hippie-earthly-compost-dude” (J. Wallace, personal communication, March 12, 2016) since I am the source of said compost.

And although I’ve spent an immense amount of time outdoors, I never considered myself to be too hippie-like. My partner, Alix, says that I’m too fancy to be a hippie (A. Petter, personal communication, September 4, 2016). And according to my sister, I’m not even a hipster: “You’re not skinny or fat enough to be a hipster, so I don’t know why you have that hair cut” (C. McLarnon, personal communication, April 17, 2016). Her comment reveals what Goffman (1959) would term an inconsistent front between my physique and how I wear my hair. Here, my sister was referring to the so-called “lumbersexual look”. For those who are unfamiliar with some of these gendered nuances in contemporary urban masculinity, a lumbersexual includes the mixing of a lumberjack and a metrosexual. The Oxford Dictionary (2017) describes a lumbersexual as “a young urban man who cultivates an appearance and style of dress (typified by a beard and check shirt) suggestive of a rugged outdoor lifestyle.”

To give further clarification, according to Buchbinder (2013), the term metrosexual emerged in the 1990s and occupied the media spotlight for a while, and still surfaces occasionally:

The metrosexual is a male, usually relatively young to his mid-30s, with sufficient disposable income to spend on grooming and dressing. A frequenter of the gym in order to keep his body in shape, the metrosexual is unafraid to use product on his face, hair and body or to visit

a salon in order to undergo rubs, scrubs and other treatments including applications to depilate his body in order to remove unwanted body hair. (p. 7)

For many, the term metrosexual implies homosexuality. According to Buchbinder (2013) metrosexuals themselves make it very clear that they are in fact heterosexual. The metrosexual, then, embodies for many in today's culture, especially men, an uneasiness around issues of gender, and particularly, masculinity. I wonder if the metrosexual is the postmodern man? Or in other words, perhaps the metrosexual is a man who is concerned with surface rather than depth, and *moments* rather than historical narratives (Buchbinder, 2013; Jameson, 2000).

Contesting a cursory or surface analysis while embracing my own history, this hairative is situated more personally in relation to the social aims of education, and on the interactions that take place on the periphery of traditional schooling, as they often unfold in different and playful ways, giving space for more authentic self-exploration. Campano (2007) refers to learning that takes place at the margins of the school as the "second classroom" (p. 39). According to Campano, the second classroom is an alternative pedagogical space that develops organically by following interests, desires, forms of cultural expression and stories of students. Likewise, these hair stories encircle cultural expression while considering masculinity.

In closing I'd like to return to my first hairative, where as a young boy I was socialized to be concerned that I looked gay, feminine, or like Richard Simmons. In thinking about the curricular openings and emergences from hair, and specifically my hair, I have been attempting to locate my ontological and epistemological position within the study of masculinity, especially hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is negotiated in and through the use of powerful symbols (texts), whereby through different forms of communication, men systematically subordinate other members of society (Lemelle, 2010). Further, hegemonic masculinity is also constructed and perpetuated by embodiments. As we all have bodies, hegemonic masculinity can manifest in different ways depending on how a man walks, talks, and stands (posture). How men display these texts are representations of different intensities of masculinity, or lack thereof (Buchbinder, 2013). Moving forward, I ask what implicit and explicit messages might society, and by extension education, be teaching young boys about women and homosexuality, and how might curricula address and deconstruct these unhealthy notions of masculinity?

### Carl's Hair-Raising Tales

I was shopping at Loblaws recently. The woman who bagged my groceries said, "I know why you have long hair." Before I could respond, she whispered, "Because you can." That is certainly part of the story. At 64 years old, I am not bald! But that is definitely not the whole story. As an adolescent I often had long hair. I grew up in the 1960s. In grade eight, the Beatles were a major influence. I wore Beatle boots, wore my hair in a kind of Liverpool bob, and ordered Carnaby Street stovepipe pants from the Eaton's catalogue. I loved everything about the British cultural invasion. Long hair was a part of the hippie generation, the flower generation, the smiley face generation, Woodstock, Vietnam protests, civil rights marches, and hopes for revolution. I grew up on Lynch's

## *Wild Profusions*

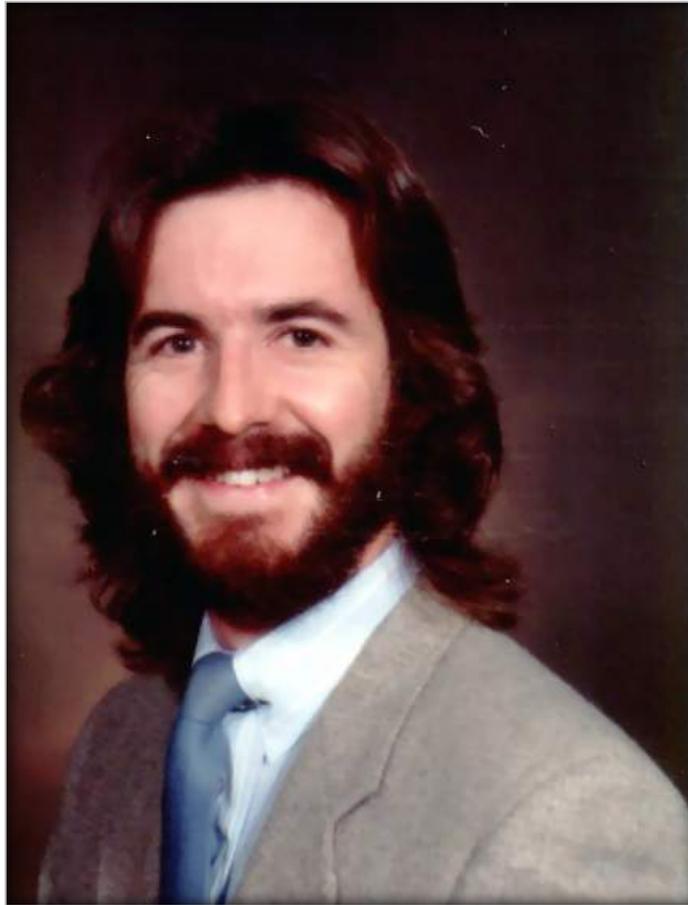
Lane in Corner Brook, Newfoundland where almost nothing ever changed. Lynch's Lane was a distinctly working-class neighbourhood in a working-class town. I was a sensitive, scholastic, serious, studious kid, and I wanted to change the world!

Then, at 21 years old, I professed a Christian commitment, and, at 22, I began teaching in a school operated by the Pentecostal Assemblies of Newfoundland. At 24, I went to an evangelical, transdenominational Christian seminary in Toronto. At 25 I returned to Newfoundland and resumed teaching in a Pentecostal school. In my early twenties, I adopted a distinctly conservative look. I lost my adolescent style, and I assumed a Tip Top style, a kind of grown-up man's style with a man's haircut even. Like a lot of converts to any fundamentalist persuasion, I adopted the appearance, the fictional persona, that I thought would allow me to fit, to belong.



I have worn eyeglasses since I was in grade eight. By my mid-twenties, my eyes had deteriorated even more. Big frames were popular. In my mid-twenties, the lenses in my expansive glass frames were so thick and heavy that the glasses kept sliding down my nose. I started wearing an athletic elastic to hold my glasses firmly on my nose. I grew my hair in order to hide the elastic. While visiting my mother about a month later, she noted, "Your glasses are thick. You need contact lenses. I will give you the money to pay for them." I have asked my mother for money a few times in

my life, mostly when I was a graduate student with a young family. She has seldom ever offered me money, but on this day, she offered me money to buy contact lenses. I guess she thought I definitely needed a makeover! I guess she longed for the old days when her son wore Beatle boots and Carnaby Street stovepipe pants and laughed with a cool Brit-inspired hopefulness for the future. Whatever her reason, she gave me the money, and I ordered the contact lenses, back in the day when one pair of soft contact lenses cost hundreds of dollars and required an evening practice of meditative rubbing and cleaning. By now, my hair was growing a little bushy, a little wild. With my contact lenses, I saw a person in the mirror I had not seen for years—a little flamboyant, even bold, perhaps. I saw myself as I had not seen myself for a long time. I realized I had been imitating somebody else's notion of what a teacher, especially a teacher in a Pentecostal Christian school should look like. I had been hiding behind a mask, a persona, a stereotype.



Now, with longer hair and a beard, I began confessing the wildness I felt inside. As I grew my hair, I began to write poetry. After growing my hair for a year, and writing poetry for a year, and seeing without eyeglasses that slipped down my nose, I began to understand the world with a kind of stark and disturbing difference. I began to wake up from a long sleep or nightmare. I began to question everything and everybody around me. I had always been a big questioner, and many of my

colleagues did not appreciate it. One told me if I kept on asking big questions, I would go crazy! In the course of all my questioning, I became a better teacher. I had always been open to inviting lots of questions from students and exploring alternative possibilities for understanding.

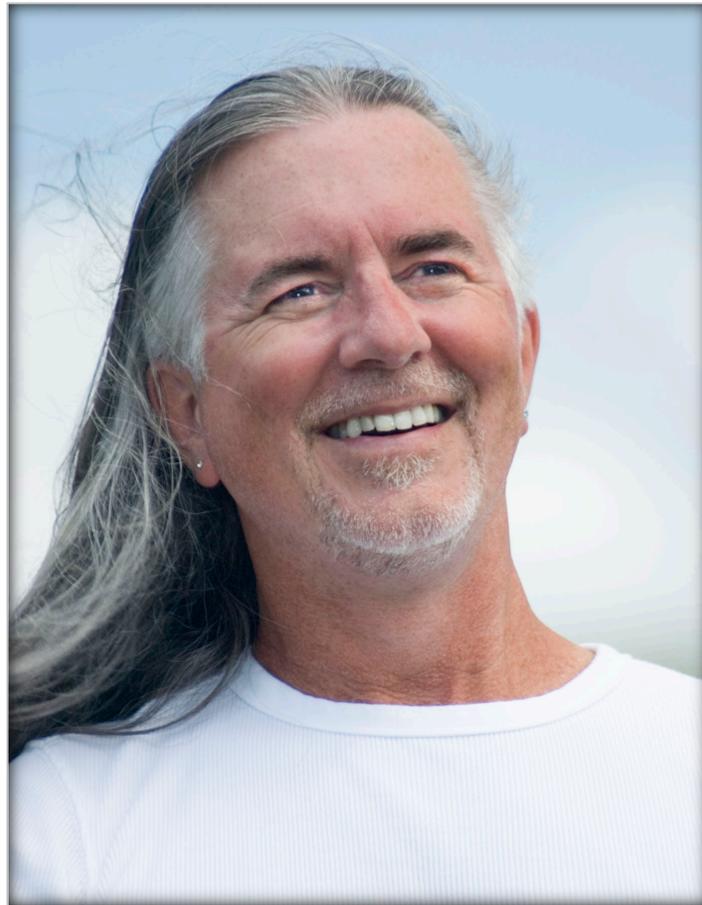
In the spring, I was teaching a poem in a grade 12 literature class. The poem was included in an anthology focused on young readers. An adolescent boy wrote the poem as his last message before committing suicide. The poem was intended to invite young readers to ask difficult but important questions about life and purpose, joy and hopelessness. After reading the poem, I asked students to write a personal response to the poem. A while later, one student asked, "Can you commit suicide and go to heaven?" I responded in what I hoped was a thoughtful way: "I believe a loving God will accept into heaven anybody who wants to be with God because God is loving. God is generous."

A few days later, Fred, the principal, called me into his office: "There's been a complaint. From a parent. He says that you are teaching erroneous views in your classes. He says you taught his son that it is okay to commit suicide." Fred explained that he really had no choice but to take the parent's complaint to the school's advisory committee. This committee, comprised of parents and pastors and principals, called me to a meeting a few days later. They raised the concern about my teaching erroneous theological views. I defended my teaching, and they nodded their heads gravely. Then, in addition to spurious theological views, they noted that they had other concerns, too. One of them recalled how I once told my students that you could worship God while hiking in the forest or along the seashore on a Sunday morning. Another noted that I once said I liked Bonnie Tyler's music. At the time, I mostly listened to classical music, with a little contemporary Christian music and Air Supply and Bonnie Tyler. I liked Tyler's Tom Jones-like vocals—big, loud, passionate. Another was concerned that I jogged on Sundays. I pointed out that I was training for a marathon, and on Sundays I only ran during hours when there was no scheduled church meeting (a typical Sunday included seven to eight hours of worship and Sunday School). I asked, what is allowed on Sundays? Going to church and resting. One pastor said, "I take naps."

Once the door was opened to complaints, there were several, all more stupid than the last one. But the final complaint was the one that changed my life. "Carl, we are concerned about your long hair." That was the concern, the complaint, the accusation that changed my life. Fundamentalism reared its ugly bald head. I responded to all the accusations in clear and confident ways, and I left the meeting, and I soon after left the school and the town and returned to university and pursued a degree in creative writing at the University of New Brunswick. My long hair was a scandal, a stumbling block, an offense. So, I wore it with pride like you might wear a t-shirt with the image of Che Guevara or Bob Marley or Martin Luther King or Mahatma Gandhi. I am the foe of fundamentalism. I believe in fundamentals and fundaments and I believe in fun, but fundamentalists operate out of a fund of self-serving, even stubborn, adherence to unbending beliefs. Fundamentalists fear fun. The only fundamentals they promote are the fundamentals of narrow, stark, uncritical, uncreative beliefs. In *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning*, Ruthven (2004) explains that the contemporary surge of fundamentalism in the world "is a response to . . . the

anxieties generated by the thought that there are ways of living and believing other than those deemed to have been decreed by one's own group's version of the deity" (p. 34).

Fundamentalists are recognizable by at least six main criteria. First, fundamentalists interpret texts in selective ways that support what they believe. They do not ask questions. They revel in alternative facts and fake news and preposterous interpretations that bend syntax, semantics, and sense with veritable verve but vacuous veracity. They already know everything and so nothing interests them except *everything* they already know. Second, fundamentalists are fearful, especially fearful of the Other, whom they see only as feral or, at best, fertile ground for proselytization. Third, fundamentalists are uncompromising, ungenerous, unloving. They are narrowly self-contained, singularly confident, and pompously pious. Fourth, fundamentalists love absolute appearances, binary oppositions, simplistic solutions, the semblance of stable truth, familiar formulae, and rules that are never unruly. Fifth, fundamentalists hate questions, pluralism, relativity and diversity. Sixth, fundamentalists are so moralizing, they are demoralizing, so literal they are illiterate, so critical they are hypocritical. Wendell Berry (1990) writes that "fundamentalism . . . wishes to monopolize a whole society and, therefore, cannot tolerate the smallest difference of opinion" (p. 175).



Hairography

1

one Friday night  
at O'Hare's Pub in Steveston  
Sammy the server said  
we were just talking about you  
oh?  
we were talking about guys who can't change their look  
oh!  
perhaps I am seeking a familiar perpetuity

2

I have long hair for many reasons  
let me count the ways  
I have long hair because I can  
I don't need to shave my head  
I don't need to wear a toupee  
or an elaborate comb-over  
I used to joke I had long hair  
so when I did go bald  
I could sweep my hair over  
but Donald Trump's comb-over  
sucks all the humour out  
of comb-overs, no longer funny

3

while I was on a ladder  
stringing Christmas lights  
around the garage door,  
my neighbour, a single mother,  
caressed my hair, and said,  
your hair is very soft  
and I said thank you  
(what else could I say?)

4

occasionally somebody says  
I look like Willie Nelson  
I like Willie Nelson

5

perhaps the whole business  
of hair has been constructed  
by shampoo corporations

6

I wear my hair long because  
I must—my life is devoted to poetry  
and professing and protesting  
in hair-raising tales of living adventures

7

in contemporary culture  
the main circles of men I meet  
with long hair are construction workers  
hard rock musicians WWF wrestlers  
the occasional catwalk model

8

growing up I didn't like barbers  
especially the culture of barbershops  
full of bumptious banter feigned humour  
smells, distinctly masculine and hard-edged  
Brut, Old Spice, Mandom, Jaguar, Hai Karate, Macho Musk

9

a woman once shampooed my hair  
and massaged my scalp so perfectly  
I fell in love with her  
but that's a story for another day

10

my hair is long because I seek to live with  
ambiguity boldness creativity desire  
enthusiasm fun generativity hope  
idiosyncrasy joy kintuition love magic  
novelty openness poetry questions  
risk scepticism truth ululation  
verve wildness xanthate yahoo zest

**Ms-understood Medusa Moments:  
Harkening Anita's Notorious Hair to (Non) Order**

Although I have been advised, often, in my academic life to cut these locks, to keep it all under control, to tie it back, or to translate, to conform, I have not, do not, and will not. There is an absolute refusal of the politics of academic hair: no teasing, straightening, ironing, flaring, extending, colouring, nor hot drying. No, that stream of me-time is reserved for the semi-annual trimming of "split enz" (a great band) with maybe some layering, on special occasions, and not more than twenty minutes please. With the exception of one unfortunate incident of boredom and scissors in the idle hands of my five-year-old self, followed by the admonishment of my mother for ruining my long hair (a conversation which remains surprisingly crystal clear to this day, as does the detested mod bob that resulted), I have always adorned this look of untamed, unwieldy, unkempt hair. And why not? Perhaps it is an effort to be less conventional, least in a symbolic sense.



My hair is a story within a story that resides at the back of everything. (Was it D. H. Lawrence who once wrote something to that effect? I do not recall the source.) It is no accident that my faculty web profile is a photograph that speaks to a bit of wildness, taken after the season finale of *As You*

*Like It* in London's open-air Globe Theatre—*Oh Orlando*, "My father charged you in his will to give me good education."



And while I might be a fright at times, when the rains bring tell-tale Jewish curls bouncing along in a lineage rooted in stories of generations before me, I live my inheritance every moment in my hair, and remain resolute in my stance. I have not surrendered to cultural and social protocols, peer-pressure of the worst professional kind, no matter how little I am to be, or not to be, in this academy. So like an emancipated yet pensive spectator, I live within this communal performance of the academy where hair could well prove to be a kind of artful political scholarship of action (Rancière, 2009). Curiously, hair is not indexed once in any of the many texts that line my shelves, though habit and haptic, even haiku and hedonism, appear often in fine arts, education and philosophy books, and in books about those books. I am left wondering, where else might I turn but back to literature, or at least pop culture, for some semblance of belonging, some heartening, with my hair.

Perhaps I feel a particular transgenderedness with Samson, for fear that if cut, I will lose my strengths, my edge, my intellectual ferocity, my academic competency, or truth be told, a bit of all of the above. Still, I do not identify with the Rapunzels either, for we know what she got up to, in the Grimm version, not Disney. And Jane Eyre I will never be, with her hair nicely tucked in, all modest

and plain, no, that is not for this kindred spirit. If I must choose, I prefer being a ms-understood medusa—it is far more fun, all the ambiguity, the uncertainty, the unpredictability, the unknown, for we do live our embodied contradictions. Of course this is all meant with good humour, though I sense that is not necessarily appreciated all the time, especially when I am perceived in a particular gendered paradigm, and my locks a symbol of all sorts of traits and taints.

Let us consider the long history that curls hold in literature—where curls are symbolic of youth, which I like very much now that I am as old—actually, older than that rendering of *Hair*. I shall keep my view from the back youthful despite this face. Like the BBC character, Mrs. Slocombe, also notorious for her hair, I am bordering on a woman who no longer needs to care. Or curls as emblematic of short-temperedness, or maybe more a temperamental soul, in this case, that holds the imprint of hard-headed Swiss stubbornness (the worst kind of stubborn) that apparently is not well known in the symbolised waves and ringlets—must read more books, especially those with stories, where the real research resides. And then gentlemen prefer blondes, and blondes do have more fun, so I am told. Perhaps most of all, it is the association with conquering that I find the most appealing in this curled hair, with my desire to be confusing in my gendered disposition, knowing as a blonde woman, my chances are better with sensible shoes, not the angelic. This is where my profound offence tends to reside, the enculturated iconography of *that look*, which I do not fulfill in my ways of being in the academy. I am outspoken, tenacious, and as described by one graduate, I am a woman to contend with, and I take that as a compliment.

But then it was suggested from an administrator that perhaps I should do less research and more service. And so I think of *Oliver Twist*: Please sir, can I have some more gruel-ling teaching, too? I suppose my hair does harken to a Medusa-like quality in such contentious moments, a ravage of snakes with an appropriate measure of feminist rage, though I do not recall anyone turning to stone, least not yet. But I have time. I have tenure. Instead, this kind of creeping, “discursive policing” swirls all around us now, regardless of where we make our academic homes, and it aims to limit academic autonomy and the right to speak, as Reay (2014) suggests, subsuming our time and energies with the “busy work” of the academy.

My eccentric belief remains that I should not cut my hair, perhaps because I was not socialised in that way into the world of women; instead I let it all hang out and still embrace my wild child, in spite of the academic scrutiny that now prevails and shapes the gendering of our academic personas (Reay, 2014). For what it is worth, my idleness is now spent cutting words in the praise of non-order, in writing with spice and just a bit of sardonic prose. After all, what else does a good academic do on her summer holidays? And now, the incoming white, not gray, which I attribute to my evident displacement in the academy takes me to another form, another age, another self. And so I remain, in wild profusions.

### **Professing Profusions as Promising Possibilities**

With Rancière’s (2006) propositions for a pedagogic methodology that is predicated on the interruption of academic hierarchies (of master and disciple), we are striving to perform our

contradictory lessons within, and in response to, the “policing” of institutional life that “separates those who take part from those who are excluded” (p. 3). Our deliberations are assembled in ways that are intended to take up Rancière’s pressing question “from what position do we speak and in the name of what or whom?” (p. 2). In part, our jesting is a response to the rise of the neoliberal agenda that has become the normalised and normalising practice in our daily lives, evidenced in our instances of life writing in the privileged spaces of the academy that map connections between independence of thought and the ability to voice other perspectives, and the equation of such expression as a transgressive act that is tolerated less and less, formally and informally, as reductionist, technocratic structures take hold in ways that are redefining the “conditions of intelligibility” (p. 10).

We all have wonderful but rarely told accounts of wild profusions. Our intention is to avoid simple answers or resolutions, to present instead many possibilities that will never be conclusive. In an anti-fundamentalist way, we are eager to invite conversation, even consternation, certainly creative and critical convocation. In our writing, we hope to express, both playfully and purposefully, that long hair is not only a symbol, but a narrative, a living story, a growing story that invites many interpretations.

Elaine Decker (2007) has been researching humour and comedy in education for a long time. She approvingly notes that comedy “attends to complexity and discourages the search for the simple . . . by actively interpreting each experience from different viewpoints” (section “Humor-conscious teaching”). According to Decker, comedy “practices a way of being that is constantly open to the possibility of another way of being. Its aims are . . . to laugh our way into another view—a wider view” (section “Humor-conscious teaching”).

In a like-minded way, bell hooks (2013) calls for “education for critical consciousness that reshapes thought and action” (p. 185). She is concerned that many critical educators now feel frustrated: “We are constantly deconstructing and laying the groundwork for alternatives without making the interventions in how folks live daily that are needed if our society is to be utterly changed” (p. 7). Here, hooks is especially concerned that “academic institutions are by nature and direction structurally conservative. Their primary function is to produce a professional managerial class that will serve the interests of the existing social and political status quo” (p. 166). She calls for “a union between theory and practice which privileges the experiential as the site where change and transformation is registered” (p. 169). In “Wild Profusions: An Ode to Academic Hair”, we are taking up the call from scholars such as Decker and hooks to interrogate our academic lives with critical and creative humour. We understand that the humour is going to offend as well as tickle. Humour is serious business! Education is serious business!

We are deliberately playing with artful modes of expression, beyond the academic hierarchy of what constitutes research and scholarship, in an effort to provocatively open spaces that redirect the power of academic language, and to circulate our sensibilities in ways that invoke, in this case, laughter as the best pedagogy, and humor as methodology, and satire as theory (Rancière, 2006). Although we wrote our stories in different parts of the country, with different frames of reference,

and with different purposes in mind, there are surprising echoes shared across our academic imaginary, and we invite you to make our stories your own. Here we might turn to Stephen Leacock, a fellow Canadian, a teacher and academic, writer and humorist, to consider our *Further Foolishness* (1916), as we wander to the *Garden of Folly* (1924) after *Too Much College* (1939), and learn *How To Write* (1943) *Happy Stories* (1943) instead.

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> With the exception of the epigraph photo by Seonjeong Yi, all the photos are of the authors of this work, and all are engaged with permission.