The Suitcase, the Map, and the Compass:
An Expedition into Embodied Poetic Narrative and
Its Application toward Fostering Optimal Learning Spaces

by
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Faculty of Education

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Abstract

Embodied Poetic Narrative is a triangulation of body, story, and object in creative and shared play as a way to surface new understandings of self and other. This curriculum model carries multiple entry points whereby the teacher/participant can enter from creative writing and/or movement in combination with shared stories developed from objects of value. With these imaginative explorations, I invite the body’s centre of gravity to shift and thereby provoke the axis of knowing to be disrupted. This process results in lived experiences re-interpreted, re-storied, and then re-imagined with others. When fracturing the signifiers of our everyday(ness) participants come to shared understandings and create intersections of commonalities thereby cultivating spaces of reciprocity where a community is formed. By moving away from text centred processes through immediacy and viscerality, we access our first, most creative impulses. I posit a body in movement reveals lost thoughts and treasured images and with an increased heart rate and rapid breath we provoke availability to the imagination and deeper understanding of self and other.

I ask questions such as, “If I am a museum of lived experiences what are my artifacts?”; “What is embodied literacy in the curriculum of the world?”; “How can co-authoring personal stories cultivate compassion within a community of practice and further a global community?”

My thesis explores my relationship with and through dance into embodiment, including reflections on spectatorship. It continues on to explore the culturally-inscripted body within our ever-growing world of fluid borders and hybrid identities. I critique text centred learning strategies as a primary factor in forcing the body into silence as well as examining the notion of self and other within an autobiographical and collective storying process. I trouble our privileged position of naming objects in relation to the everydayness of their use and finally, I explore the interpretive voice by examining readings of embodied acts.
Embodied Poetic Narratives presents a tool to create powerful, dynamic pedagogic environments whereby forgotten or suppressed memories, can activate personal agency and self politicized action towards transformative learning.

**Keywords:** poetic narrative; embodiment; literacy; cultural identity; interdisciplinarity;
To my boys:
Paul Henrik, Paxton, and Pierce
for doing this doctoral journey with me.

I simply would not have made it without you:
I will share the hat.
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List of Abbreviations

AAA     artistry, analysis, and activism
AERA    American Education Research Association
AWOL    Absent Without Leave
SIGs    Special Interest Groups
DJ      Disc Jockey
SFU     Simon Fraser University
SSHRC   Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council
UBC     University of British Columbia
Preface:

Embodied Poetic Narrative

This thesis marks a culmination of 30 years of practice as a dancer, choreographer, and teacher and a further condensation of many years of graduate research to articulate principles and methods of a teaching and performing tool I call, “Embodied Poetic Narrative.” This period of graduate work afforded me the opportunity to consolidate my lived experiences within my practice and interweave this with invaluable mentorship from my committee and a rich community of scholars both live and text based. This combination allowed me to determine the key components of this teaching and performing tool and to articulate it in a holistic and accessible document for both thoughtful provocation and application.

Embodied Poetic Narrative is a triangulation of the body, the story, and the object through creative and shared play as a way to surface new understandings of self and other. Embodied Poetic Narrative follows a circular model with multiple and varied entry points whereby the teacher/participant can enter this process from creative writing or shared stories based on objects of value or from creative movement. From any of these entry points a fluid process of transferring from one mode of exploration to the next can occur. What this means for the readers of this thesis is that they could start their reading journey through this work from anywhere in the document.

Through imaginative explorations with objects of personal value as trigger points for stories to surface, we allow the body’s centre of gravity to shift and thereby provoke the axis points of knowing to be disrupted. We tip the world on its head and what tumbles out are lived experiences re interpreted and re-storied and then shared and re imagined
with others. We suddenly understand the story a little differently, the story that took place 30 years ago in the high school hallway, when it is told while balancing a padlock in the nape of the neck. Something is triggered; a new memory is provoked by the teller and those who witness. When fracturing the signifiers of our everyday(ness) we come to shared understandings thereby creating intersections/nodes of commonalities with the purpose of cultivating spaces of community. By moving away from text-centred processes through an immediacy and viscerality, we build dynamic spaces fostering the possibility to access the immediacy of our first, most creative impulses. I posit that a body in movement unlocks and unfolds secrets, lost thoughts and treasured images and an increased heart rate and rapid breath provoke an availability to the imagination and further, to creative exploration of self and to broadened and deeper understandings of other.

My research celebrates the interdisciplinarity of scholarship and its continued bridgework to other communities and creative practices in the quest to enrich the perspectives of naming self in relation to other with recognition that individual agency is actually nested within a matrix of shared human truths. This multifaceted expedition evidences a hybridity of scholarship referencing a broad spectrum of disciplines: Culture Studies, Language and Literacy, Performance Studies and Art Education. It is within this multiplicity that a synergistic synthesis occurred for me resulting in a deep understanding of the necessary interdisciplinarity of my work. The interweaving and ricocheting, which has occurred within, around, and throughout these communities of practice, has proven to be astoundingly informative and uplifting understanding how I am paving the pathway for a lifetime of rich research as I forge ahead with this thesis as a foundation for continued interdisciplinary collaborations.

I want to create powerful, dynamic learning environments whereby embodied storytelling through objects as triggers for forgotten or suppressed memories, can activate personal agency and self-politicized action towards transformative learning. My research work has taken two forms. One form is as a workshop leader teaching in a broad scope of contexts from children in educative and recreational environments to youth in secondary
and postsecondary contexts and to adults and seniors in variety of workshops from professional development to continued education. The second form is as soloist dancer/actress embodying stories with artefacts performing in a multitude of contexts from formal stage to a shipping container to academic conferences. My work does not necessarily generate from inside out as that would imply a fixed location of inspiration, rather it is generated from a contiguous impulse that in its circularity acknowledges the key roles of receptivity and reciprocity. These kinaesthetic investigations are not fleeting documentaries of lives lived and lost, nor do I act as a conduit through which another story is told. Rather I portray rhizomatic journeys, tangled and woven impulses, both others and mine. This process emphasizes the possibility of suspending historical knowledge and inviting a revelatory relationship to the production of new knowledge—knowledge that can fuel the building of stronger compassionate communities within and beyond the classroom. This six part survey of Embodied Poetic Narrative is with the intention that its principles may be applied within and through the independent strengths of teachers, community workers, tutors and support workers in service of newly conceived and inspired learning spaces.

Key factors in this processes, which will be elaborated on throughout this thesis are:

- Immediacy of impulse creating a *viscerality* (Chapter 1)
- Problematizing the muffled cultural voice (Chapter 2)
- Destabilizing axis points in the body (Chapter 3)
- Fracturing narratives (Chapter 3)
- Reciprocity within a space on co-authorship (Chapter 4)
- Problematizing contingencies and chronologies (Chapter 4)
- Metaphoric manipulations of objects (Chapter 5)
- *Reading* the world through *space moments* (Chapter 6)

As a doctoral student I understand it is typical to move through the world asking questions to oneself and often out loud while crossing busy streets or crowded campus atriums. The following are some of the questions asked during these unabashed moments of inquiry.
Questions

- If I am a museum of my own lived experiences, what are my artefacts?
- What is body literacy in the curriculum of the world?
- How can an active body and dynamic space be the default in educational contexts?
- How can co-authoring personal stories cultivate compassion and empathy within a community of practice? And can this be the foundation for deep learning?
- What is the difference between citizenship and pedagogy, can they be separated?
- How can a shared learning space cultivate both an individual and yet shared voice?

How can I write a thesis that embodies the performative approach to my research?

Where are we?

I think we are in a book.

No...it’s not a book (looking around).

How can you tell?

There’s no spine!

I heard rumour we are in a thesis.

What the hell is a thesis?

Well I guess we are about to find out. But I still don’t know why we were not the first page of this.

Well I think Kathryn wanted the reader to know what they were getting in to....

Well that’s my job!

I think we should introduce ourselves.

Well it’s kind of complicated....
What is so complicated? It’s not rocket science! I am the theory? And you (looking at Compass) are the teaching. (Both Compass and Map look the other way.)

Ahem...I think you are forgetting something.

What?!!!

I am the most important one of all three of us!

Oh cripes, here we go!!

Well I am! We already discussed this!

How!

Well, I am like the tour guide....

You are the suitcase!!!

Yes I know but I am leading them through this expedition, as she calls it.

Maybe we should let Kathryn introduce us....

The Voices

This thesis is presented through three major voices. These voices are the suitcase, the map, and the compass.
The Suitcase

Suitcase is a reflective voice speaking to 5 years of performances with my research character, Lug, addressing performativity as practice towards inquiry. This aspect will be working through methodologies that have been very useful for me such as Performativity Inquiry, A/r/tography and Poetic Inquiry exploring in depth notions of disrupting conventional boundaries and traditions with text, spectatorship, authorship and agency.

The Map

Map is constantly referencing the topography of my community of practice within a theoretical framework. Moving through and around primary sources to current hybrids of thought. The map references several areas of practice, which theoretically intersect with my work such as Philosophy, Cultural Studies and Performance Studies.

The Compass

Compass is the voice that exposes how Embodied Poetic Narrative has been applied in a broad scope of educational contexts. This voice speaks to a collection of teaching experiences referencing on a general level and then, specifically, through a variety of teaching stories.

Dear Reader

Many have asked with a mischievous look in their eyes whether she would be dancing her dissertation.
I know. Isn’t it funny how people cannot seem to say “dance” with a calm centered voice. They have to draaaaaw it out like some bad Southern joke...,”Are you going to be daaaancin’ your thesis?!!!!!!!”

Or as if it is something subversive like, “You can sure pull the wool over those academics eyes!”

And the truth is she actually likes writing!

Imagine!

A writing dancer!

A dancing writer!

I believe that when I am writing I am dancing through text, and with this thesis, both in form and content, I seek to find and revel in the space that brings embodiment to text and textuality to the body. I am very grateful for the opportunity to feel a wholeness with my thesis rather than what many had suspected as an academic obligation. I have written this document as a dancer, teacher, and student in a quest to deepen my understanding of the body, the story and the object in relation to self and other. Through reflection on my teaching, immediate accounts of my performances and thoughtful ruminations on a broad scope of theoretical frameworks, I have been able to integrate all aspects of myself in the creation of this document. Carl Leggo (2008c) writes of this prismatic approach with his poem excerpt, a “Tangle of Lines”:

we need a poetic line,
not a prosaic line,
a line that plays with possibilities of space,
draws attention to itself,
contravenes convention,
will not parade for left to right margins,
back and forth, as if there is nowhere else to explore,
knows instead lived experience

(p. xiii)
Every night I would settle at my desk when the day was finally quiet and the night sky in my mind was illuminated with the galaxies of scholars that would throw light onto my research and as an eager astronomer I would navigate my way from one constellation to the next basking in the light of their writing and then in the spaces in between. Again I turn to Carl Leggo (2008c) in his brilliant recognition of this necessary interweaving between stories, ideas, reflection and theories:

In all my living and teaching and writing, I am engaged in a constitutive activity that involves seeking the lines of possibility among the points of light in the night’s sky. I am not trying to see only the shapes that others have named. Instead I am seeing the shapes that have not been named. (p. 11)

I have felt like a slow steady satellite moving through these constellations and finding equal value in the brilliance of the stars as well as the dark spaces in between. “Now I seek other constellations, and in the process of knowing creative combinations, I find that there are revelatory possibilities for living each day” (Leggo, 2008c, p. 11).

**An Overview**

As I am emphasizing the power of fragmentation and the potency of liminality throughout this thesis, it is natural for me to continue emphasizing these concepts within the form of this document and it is therefore that I have provided a 6-part approach that could be best considered a bricolage. The six chapters represent six distinct locations from where I stand in order to articulate the multiple perspectives of Embodied Poetic Narratives. Although these chapters refer back and forth in principles, concepts and applications, they can also be read as discrete documents independent of each other carrying a complete perspective on one key aspect of Embodied Poetic Narrative. The concise descriptors of each of those perspectives are:

- Chapter 1, The Ancestry and Adolescence of My Practice, covers the history of my relationship with and through dance to embodiment including reflections on spectatorship in relation to performer and how this transforms with Embodied
Poetic Narratives towards blurred boundaries between those who witness and those who participate in art making and subsequent meaning making processes.

- Chapter 2, Citizenship and Pedagogy, addresses the culturally inscribed body and how this needs to be acknowledged within an ever-increasing world of fluid borders and hybrid identities.

- Chapter 3, Knowing through Creative Doing, critiques text centred learning strategies as a primary factor with inscripting the body into silence. By advocating dramatic imaginative play as a vital force in constructing a holistic learning environment, I propose that Embodied Poetic Narrative can foster personal agency and cultivate spaces of compassion and respect within difference and diversity.

- Chapter 4, The Borderlands of Collective Storying, examines notions of self and other within an autobiographical storying process. I am asking where does the story begin and end with self and other and how do co-created stories maintain authenticity and efficacy in a community building process?

- Chapter 5, The Event of the Object troubles our privileged position of naming objects in relation to self and the everydayness of their use. By proposing that objects are artefacts emblematic of ever shifting meanings and personal values in response to a multitude of variables, I underline the power of these artefacts as they become potent triggers for buried memories that when shared create critical intersections key to the constructing of reciprocity and compassion.

- Chapter 6, Voicing the Performative Body, explores the cultivation of the interpretive voice by first examining readings of embodied acts through an empirical and then humanist lens and finally through Performative Inquiry. The chapter proposes that by building non-representational and non-prescriptive spaces for individuated voice, a deep learning can occur.

Why are you such a mess?

Hey! It’s been a long road here! You’re not looking so hot yourself! (Pointing at Suitcase) I am never folded the right way, so here I am with folds going everywhere! How about you?! You seem a little on the musty side....

Well I can’t even begin to tell you what I have been carrying—suffice it to say I know why they call me Baggage!

Well I guess we have been seconded to tell Kathryn’s story—so we had better get to it or we are going to lose the reader.
Well I think I should start after all this is for the Academy and I am the underpinning of this place—I am the theory—remember!

Why you?! She started to figure out what the hell she was doing with those Lugs and that started with me! Me! I am all about the performances and after all she is a performer!

All right you two! She is in the faculty of Education so I think I should start.

Why?!

Duh! I am the application in a pedagogic context that's why!
I point to the classroom or at least to what she calls the learning spaces.

Well I am the theoretical framework and she is after all a PhD student she’s got to start and end with me, in fact you two could probably take a break and meet up in a handbook or journal somewhere!

Hey! Not a chance!

Sshhh!...Here comes Thesaurus.

Where?

Down the margin, don’t look, just whistle or something.

He will not be welcome in this document!

Well you try to tell him that.

I think it is a she not a he.

Whatever! Back to us! I think we should take turns.

Yah, play fair!

How about we each get a part?

Well I don’t trust you; I think you are going to dominate (staring at Map).

I want a part in each chapter.
Yah me too!

Hmmm—OK deal—but I get to start.

Oh cripes, didn’t I tell ya? I am not going to be bossed around by you (staring at Map, again).

All right, all right, move aside; here I go!
1. The Ancestry and Adolescence of My Research

This chapter is where Kathryn talks about herself endlessly but she makes some important points about why she is not on the stage with a tiara anymore.

I want to start with my very first Lug.

They don’t know what a Lug is....

Lug!! Short for luggage! Duh!

And sooooo?

They will find out about it on page 18—take a leap of faith.

I don’t leap—I point.

Well, then can you point them in the direction of my first Lug.

The Heart of the City (Lug Log)

My heart is beating fast and I see my hand trembling and reaching towards the leather bag. I feel the light beam into my eyes blinding me for a moment and I notice one of my shoes is balanced on the end of a tie of the railroad tracks. My fingers curl around the rusted latch of the suitcase. A sudden impulse sends me spinning over the railway ties, the suitcase is held high over my head and then comes tumbling to the ground. I stumble backward in shock...shame. I slowly lower to the ground and like a snake approach the worn leather, my focus fixed on the once shiny
brass latches. I peek around the suitcase and surreptitiously finger the latches until they reticently release and the leather mouth gapes open wide mocking my desperation. I move to put my head into the lion’s mouth showing my courage but am interrupted by an unexpected movement. A small life sized heart shaped balloon slowly floats out; my gaze follows in wonder as it is gently carried up into the night sky and toward the sky scrapers surrounding this performance site. My fingers are spread and reaching upward; I am on my toes and begin to move toward it curious, eager, uplifted. I am running now over the track hands up lifted away from the audience, heart and over coated character swallowed by the urban landscape and what is left is the gaping empty mouth of the suitcase and one beam of light now falling into emptiness.

Returning to the site I was met by a resident of this neighbourhood. She was on her way home and stopped to watch. She was a mother, an immigrant, a witness, and a survivor—she said, “Do you know—you just told my story?”

That was not the first Lug.

What?

The first one was in one of her graduate classes....

Yes, I know but that comes on the first page of Chapter 4.

Well I think it should go here.

I like it in Chapter 4.

Put it in both, it’s short.

It’s not about being short! This is a thesis, you can’t repeat!

Says who?

Oh, alright.

It was my final project for my first graduate seminar. I had donned my overcoat and hat for the inaugural performance of what later became the Lug series. I was clutching my leather suitcase with one hand and with the other I was gathering the letters I had asked my classmates to write; a greeting or farewell, from or to a loved one.

I sat in the stall of the washroom down the hall reading through each of them hoping one would be the obvious choice for my improvisation. Unfortunately they were all good. And then I found the letter—a small note of forgiveness from a late Father to his gay son. I tucked it into my suitcase and returned to the class. It became the source of my improvisation as I moved through kinaesthetic/dramatic metaphors of estrangement— Isolation—longing—compassion—regret—and finally atonement. At one point in the improvisation I read the letter silently as a flood of
emotions entered my body. When I had finished the performance a room full of emotional students all claimed they were absolutely sure I had read their letter.

My First Performance

In the fall of 1981 I was propelled off Simon Fraser University’s Main stage with excitement and relief, confident that I would be a performer for life! I had never felt such crystallized intensity and knew that this experience would have long lasting resonations. Despite the deeply poetic implication of this particular piece of choreography, it was left in the wake of my own narcissistic effervescence. All those people paying for parking, babysitters, and tickets to watch me! I am sure the costume was complimentary and my accuracy with counts was exceptional! What more could they want?! The fact that we were dancing an immigrant’s story of arrival and departure, of place and displacement, of identity and heritage, ancestry and roots, seemed to pass me by. The fact that we were raising issues of how the living can die and yet continue to live as a ghost of oneself, that all of what one knows and values can disappear or be dismissed in service of assimilation, seemed to wash over me. My engagement with the work certainly was not about meaning but rather self-acclamation. I am a dancer, I performed well and the audience liked me. Most importantly, I looked good! Elitist narcissism obsessed with physical virtuosity is often the location of a dancer and I am troubled to admit, I was not exempt from this.

For many years with varying degrees of authenticity and depth, this was my world of dance. I never left this island of self-affirmation, this narcissistic celebration through recognition, no, complete adoration of form. Until…an important interruption. For 2 years of my life, I became the creative and kinaesthetic channel for my friend with AIDS. He did in fact die but not without my stopping all activity in my life to be by his side and act as his friend, collaborator, nurse and embodied inspiration for the last moments (18 months) of his life. Together we created intensively while he was dying; I was living fervently, double time, and in doing this my world of dance radically shifted. I listened to the voice of the dance and my body, the dancer, became purely the access point. My friend died far too young and with far too much work yet to be done. His words, amidst
fever driven monologues, mostly incoherent, still linger with me: “I am not finished yet....” At the age of 29, it was the first death I had witnessed and I knew again that my life had radically altered. I had been present for a dying process and recognized the terrible beauty in this journey, potent with creativity and combined with an almost acidic lucidity. The vitality in this crisis where imagination lacked the balance of a body; a man wrapped in a blanket in the studio, grey and weak, using another body as a vehicle for his voice, was profoundly transformational and now becomes the pivotal point in remembering and reflecting upon my journey as a dancer and choreographer. I am now beginning to understand the ancestry of my practice. I understand how that experience informed my current work as I embrace the voices of others and move them into kinaesthetic spaces to be heard and felt by those who witness. I hoped then as I do now that this amplification can become a kind of resuscitation of the self in relation to and in collaboration with the other. My history extends as far back as my undergraduate degree in The School for Contemporary Arts, SFU where interdisciplinarity was embraced and supported fully as we hobbled into shared projects with students from other disciplines barely yet knowing the legs of our own language. I have valued and revelled in collaboration for the 30 years of my practice and was delighted to see the breadth of the SFU main stage covered entirely by dear collaborators of many years as they answered questions around our work together at the end of my Comprehensive Exam performance. This was an image emblematic of my love for shared creative processes. Collaboration continues to invite humility and curiosity to my practice and whether it is in teaching or performing it is my ongoing commitment to always embrace this as the way in which I work.

OK, so that is all fine to tell me where she came from.
But since it is my job to look at the theory
I want to hear about the graduate work.
The Start of a Mindful Journey

In 2005, I began a journey with a team of scholars located in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia, which radically affected my work as an artist, researcher and teacher. As I embarked on my first year in the Master’s program I was invited to bring my 30 years of dance practice to the classrooms and to the table with a community of critically inquisitive scholars. This new world of research turned my history of practice on its head and invited me to review what I thought I knew with an entirely new lens. What resulted were several years of articulating a praxis, which was on my sleeve and under my skin but now had the invitation to be voiced, theorized and embraced within strong communities of practice. This voice has had several tones, timbres and musicalities as it found its own linguistic form, which I now call Embodied Poetic Narrative.

My graduate research has brought me to understand more clearly what is entailed as an artist, researcher and teacher in the embodiment of personal stories and how these stories become invitations to possible evocations of others. Through A/r/tography, a methodology developed by a team of scholars from UBC’s Faculty of Education, I was invited to integrate knowing, doing and making through aesthetics. This came as a wonderful relief after such a history of separating knowing from doing and making and also with the understanding and meaning making of work as combined artist and teacher. In my reflection of this work there was an encouragement to allow new inquiries to surface rather than ‘fix’ understandings through the conveyance of facts. It is within this spirit and definition of research that I approached The Department of Research Ethics Board at SFU and stated my intentions to allow my research to be collected through reflective practice and then channelled through a performative form with a Map, a Compass and, of course, a Suitcase. It was a lengthy process of clarification, which resulted in an official document recognizing that this was research that landed outside of their jurisdiction. To move through our work ethically, heartfully and mindfully is a constant call to our everyday reflections and observations and I honour each and every moment that has contributed to this work. A/r/tography considers work/research as
intertextual conversations whereby understandings are considered more constitutive than descriptive. This platform allows artists to situate their work in what Irwin and de Cossen (2004) refers to as a place of multiple borders where “metissage blurs and situates acts of similarity and differences as well as metaphor and metonym” (p. 31). Irwin and de Cossen explain that there are spaces between and spaces between the in-between. There are multiple borders diffused again and again (p. 31).

I was also introduced to a second and very influential methodology, Performative Inquiry, conceived by Lynn Fels (1998), and through this research work I came to understand the value in creating space moments within performative explorations for realizing and recognizing learning, my own and that of my students and audience members, and it is in these moments of inquiry where my practice thrives as an artful and pedagogic practice. With both A/r/tography and Performative Inquiry, I located two valuable methodologies for my initial research as well as a third concept coined by Marjorie Siegel (1995), transmediation. This term is defined as the transfer from one perceived sign system to another through two distinct forms of language specifically image, text, music, spoken word and embodiment. With these foundational pieces in place I began my graduate research exploring notions of emotional and physical displacement, my own and others, through imaginative explorations integrating my dance and visual background. These explorations led to a fascination with the relationship of objects, storytelling and embodiment and with this, a drive to foster innovative educative spaces.

It is my turn to talk about Lugs. I promised this on page 12 remember? You may also remember that Lug is short for luggage. This is where, finally, dance arrived at Kathryn’s doorstep embracing all of Kathryn, her entire sensibility, mindfulness, politic, sensuality and aesthetic.

**Inception of Lugs**

In September 2006, I began an A/r/tography course which, fortunately, was centred on the theme of luggage. The class started with a stream-of-consciousness creative writing
exercise where we wrote for 10 minutes about one experience with luggage. Perhaps luck, or a very lucid moment, resulted in my writing a short piece of prose that became the foundation of my research for the next 1½ years. I include a Lug portrait along with the writing (see Figure 1). The text evoked an array of images and poetic narratives that resonated with issues and experiences of displacement, and notions of home and its relationship to identity. This was then integrated into a series of multi layered explorations both imagistic and kinaesthetic resulting in a series of performance solos called Lugs. With a floor length overcoat, a large hat, and a bulky leather suitcase, my Beckettesque character tells stories through a poetic narrative with dance as the vehicle. A narrative that fragments meaning and blasts chronology, logic and sequencing into space.

Figure 1. Lug 1
Suitcase

The first image I see is trembling hands
    Hands that are manifesting
    the potency of the moment

The second image I have is of a glance,
    a sweeping and momentary look behind
Drinking in a last image and wanting to
    preserve it

Departing and arriving
Moving forward and leaving so much
    behind
A trajectory into present weighted with
    a memory

There is sadness, loss, longing for
    what can and never will be

There is a density in the environment,
    the air is acrid, the surface is mottled and
the noise is industrial and yet for a fleeting moment there is a silent
    suspension...

The suitcase is lifted
The feet are moving

The present engulfs and suffocates the life that we know
All that is familiar is lost
All the threads that weave the value and meaning of self and place
    dissolve in a short breath

The suitcase is heavy although it is holding very little
The hinges and latches are rusted and unreliable and so there is a leather
    belt that is wrapped around the base and through the handle

The suitcase is placed with the others and the feet move forward to the
    next arrival,
which will become home for a while.

The pieces fall where they may and are read differently by each of those who witness.
Each Lug traverses an arc in narrative and structure traveling from one point of Departure
to another of Arrival with a crisis point in-between. This crisis could be loss of language
and transformation of immediacy, the everydayness of our cultural embeddedness or a
mere childhood memory. The crisis could also involve an emotional shifting of cultural and personal artefacts to practical objects of survival; for example, prayer clothes and embroideries are replaced with socks and tools. From this critical experience, many questions are provoked. What would I take with me if I could only take one bag? How would I survive in a new land? Do I need my family around me? Who is my community right now? I have brought these questions to my inquiry within performative and pedagogic explorations of self and place with a variety of groups in a large scope of educational contexts.

As I furthered this research beyond myself, I began to collect stories from others; spontaneous graffiti from the audience, found letters, and e-mailed memories. I based a new set of solos on the stories of others. With saxophonists, improvisational singers and digital artists, I continue to collaborate through structured improvisations forming a creative scaffold whereby these images can live within a performativity of text, sound, silence, emotion, and movement integrated as one. The interpretations are multiplied and magnified as they became part of a series of collective creations. Figures 2 and 3 are reflections of one of my site-specific performances within a series, called Embodied Theories at Play, which is elaborated on in Chapter 6.
Figure 2.  Embodied Theories at Play: 1
I have a matching set of 5 light-coloured leather suitcases of varying sizes and it was that day that I decided to use all of them, scattered at equal distance apart in the space. They created a location stronger than the atrium itself. The smallest suitcase concealed 10 large onions. The improvisation was inspired by questions around surrendering to emotion in the context of the academy or more specifically asking. Can emotion be present in scholarship?

I had pulled up my favourite piece from Gunter Grass’s (1962) Tin Drum. It was the description of the Onion Cellar (text included below).

…what did the onion juice do? It did what the world and the sorrows of the world could not do: it brought forth a round, of human tears. It made them cry. At last they were able to cry again. To cry properly, without restraint, to cry like mad. The tears flowed and washed everything away. (p. 503)

As the story was written with memories from World War II, I already had images that clearly were living in my body. I began in the centre of the
suitcases creating a feeling of interiority. My first movement was a wild goose step and it was reiterated throughout the performance. My movement vacillated between pushing against empty suitcases and feeling their resistance to a panicked goose step between them. My hands were fists pulled in close to my torso; I felt I was in a struggle, complicit in a particular violence and yet neutered in my experience of it. Detached or at least struggling to remain detached, the struggle reached a crescendo whereby a suitcase was opened revealing a bundle of onions. I chose one and held it to me, a memory of surrender but not embodied, not present.

I walked with the onion towards the audience and read breathlessly the script from the Tin Drum crashing the fourth wall and feeling the emotion and breath behind voicing the text as it clearly made its impact on the listeners.

The discussion spoke to the essential quality of my actions with the onion. There were expectations, associations, and creative impulses from the audience in regards to how I had handled the onion. But through the discussion we came to understand the vitality that lived in the clear image of simply holding the onion close to my heart while reading Grass’s excerpt.

The Adolescence of My Research

For 20 years previous to this research, I had worked with marginalized groups, disenfranchised members of the community, in areas of disempowerment. Whether addressing stories and issues of physical disability, racial/sexual/gender injustice, or intersocial dysfunction, I have always been able to trace the content of my work to identity and the sense of place and the relationality of this to family, to friends in close community, and to a broader scope of a global community. After all my first performance involved tumbling onto the stage with a suitcase and ended with me sitting ponderously on top of it as the voice in the sound system said “call collect anytime….” Although I was curious about this theme it was explored with flattering costumes and collaborations with well trained dancers who were all exclusively interested in demonstrating their physical prowess. The research strand afforded by my graduate work provoked a radical paradigm shift for me and with this created an increased awareness of aligned methodologies and theories. I observed dance living with a vital force in the most unexpected groups such as wheelchair users, elders, and teen substance abusers. Members of our society who have otherwise felt silenced, disenfranchised, and forgotten
embraced my explorations of movement and its direct relationship with memory, text, and value with open minds and hearts. This affected me deeply as a performer/teacher/researcher creating what scholar David Appelbaum (1995) would consider a stop moment in my life. According to Appelbaum, this stop moment is where historical knowledge is suspended and a revelatory opportunity is produced.

One comes to an end, the other opens. Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity. The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other. It is neither poised nor unpoised, yet moves both ways. It is this space that is the primary subject of my interest. It is the stop. (p. 15)

I felt I had troubled what was known and entered a new space where conventions, habits, and patterns had ceased. With both awe and a sense of mild discomfort I knew that dance was not exclusive to aesthetic virtuosity, but rather belonged in a much broader realm. This new form needed to contain interconnected and revelatory conversations between those who created with me and those who witnessed.

Through resistance we arrive at a place of self definition.

As teens find comfort in linking arm in arm (perhaps only metaphorically) with each other or pushing up against and repelling from the other in an eagerness to state what they are not, I feel I have been moving in, around and through an adolescence with my own process of self definition as a dancer, performer, director and choreographer. This next part of the chapter outlines partly my peeling away from what is commonly considered the field of dance in my interest to work with a form that moves beyond an elite user base.

Coming to research from 30 years of dance practice is sometimes like watching Émile through the eyes of Rousseau (Boyd, 1956)—wanting to follow the natural evolution of the new learner without imposing constructs of knowledge too soon or too fast. At other times I feel like the *Wild Boy from Aveyron* (Itard, 1962) who was found in a forest on the outskirts of Paris in 1799. A scientist, Jean-Marc-Gaspard Itard, took him into his care and was convinced that he could prove the child was more than a product of his
historical conditioning rendering him barbaric and obscene. “His whole life was a completely animal existence” (Itard, 1962, p. 6). This acculturation was not entirely successful as the history lived in the wild boy’s body leaving traces and tracks far too deep to be ploughed over. Leaving the professional dance world is sometimes like this experiment of enculturation, forcing clothes on a body (the dancer) that cannot comply, the buckles and buttons restrict and the shoes need to be kicked off. I am the dancer needing to be free of the shackles that bind me to traditional academic systems and conventions of acknowledged scholarly legitimacy and yet I am also the dancer who needs to crack the code of spectator/performer elitism and move beyond aesthetic appreciation. By cracking the code, I mean to cultivate a space of accessibility within the integrity of the practice, to foster an availability within the artist’s working methods that could be disseminated and practiced within a variety of contexts and to carve a space of dialogue whereby articulation of meaning-making is the creative act and this act must be shared with others rather than owned by one. The woman who claimed that I had told her story one night in Yaletown spoke from the heart to the heart of the work (not to mention the small heart shaped balloon that might have passed gently by). As Snowber (2002) exclaims, “We carry worlds within our hearts” (p. 29). We had bypassed the traditional notions of connoisseurship of reading a performance. It is for this exchange and what it opens for me that I am now standing on the platform waving good-bye to a train that is slowly receding into the landscape, that train is called dance, and I am turning towards a new journey with an open ended ticket. This train arriving now in the platform is called embodiment. And this train is filled with all kinds of interesting people who have never had a dance class in their life.

So what do you actually think embodiment is if you are so bent on moving away from everything you fought for in the dance world?
Embody…Who? Embody(meant)

The terminology that inscribes the body brings us to descriptions of the corporeal body, the phenomenological body, the inscribed body, the politicised body, the signified body, the sexualized body—all of which have contributed both to our conceptualization of the body and its relationship to knowledge and to our understanding of how we inhabit our bodies and perceive others’ bodies. (Leavy, 2009, p. 199)

What is this thing called embodiment? Increased heart rate, dry mouth, perspiration (everywhere!) gasping breaths…why bother, they ask in this new country. “Why not just write about it! You need more space? You need more time?” They say it again, “Why not just write about it or, better yet, make a power point!”

It is through the working methods of Embodied Poetic Narrative that I have been able to preserve some of the Wild Boy in my practice as artist, researcher, and teacher. I have been able to preserve and maintain the notion that unknowing is a foundation of my inquiry and that there is a recursive pattern in my quest as a researcher to find myself with more questions in the wake of deeper understandings and discoveries. “And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time” (Eliot, 1943, p. 59). This dedication to continuous and deep inquiry through active and collaborative doing is what links my work with a scope of very vibrant arts based research practices which I will be referring to throughout this dissertation. A/r/tography and Performative Inquiry are two that have influenced me deeply but I have also drawn from; Ethnographic Theatre Practices, Poetic and Narrative Inquiry as well as Cultural Studies naming only a few of what I would consider to be communities of practice which continue to help me define what it is that I do in this new country. Cancienne and Snowber (2008) write of the body as a sensual force awakening self to the world as simultaneously a location and experience of embodied presence. “In whatever stage of life one is at, there is always the body as a fertile place for discovery and growth” (p. 145). Shapiro (2008) writes of the body as a conduit and barometer of tacit cultural inscriptions, calling our attention to the complicity of our engagements through a culturally prejudiced embodiment, “The body here is understood as the concrete material inscribed by cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs and as the vehicle for transcending our
limited social identities” (p. 261). A simple gesture or action holds the history and unfolding narrative of culturally inscribed beings. Abram (1996) links the sentient body with the world of objects:

thus my divergent senses meet up with each other in the surrounding world, converging and comingling in the things I perceive. We may think of the sensing body as a kind of open circuit that completes only in things, and in the world. (p. 125)

Thus, when we consider embodiment, we recognize that we embody in action through our interactions with others, our narratives, our histories, in relationship with place and time, relationships and experiences remembered, and newly realized in an ongoing unfolding of new possibilities.

In my location of embodiment I still have so much undoing to attend to. I have been working diligently and relentlessly to dismantle the exclusionary myths of dance: one must be trained to do, one must be knowledgeable to appreciate, and one must be both to understand.

Shapiro and Shapiro (2002) claim dance is a birth rite not a privilege and acts as an important informative tool for all of us “…where the body becomes the site of social commentary using memories of personal experience and social construction through both an affective and a cognitive cultural process” (p. 215).

I will depart from the word dance as I understand it sends us tripping over and colliding into a myriad of counterproductive associations and I will linger a little longer in definitions of embodiment. My best attempt is; lived experiences moving through memory and the imagination and finding home in the flesh, the blood, the sinew and, yes, the perspiration glands of our body. Renown for her work with community and connecting the body to somatic practices towards healing, Halpren and Kaplan (1995) write about self as a place of discovery or as she writes more specifically “the body as locus of discovery” (p. 20). In Method Meets Art, Cancienne and Snowber (2008) write about the nexus of our body in a more explicitly sensual manner:
As dancers, it is our limbs, torsos, gestures, pelvis, hips, legs and hands that excavate the nexus of knowledge, insight and understanding. Our dancing bodies become a place where we can cultivate a sense of embodiment in an age in which analysis and fragmentation often thwart us in recognizing and exploring the meaning of the ordinary. (p. 200)

For some we have thankfully passed the Cartesian notions of mind/body split as we move into an era of new found trust in the knowledge on integrated being, as Henderson (1997) explains in Being Bodies:

We have observed over many years that this procedure—doing a bit, resting, doing a bit more, resting, and so on—facilitates the movement of information from cortical functioning to midbrain and hindbrain functioning. That is to say, this way of learning leads to the incorporation of embodiment of the information. It is no longer only a matter of something you know about conceptually; it has become a part of what you do and how you are. (p. 220)

To further this, I propose that what you do and how you are works cyclically to what you know and it is through this claim that my work invites a surfacing or an unravelling of stories that may never have seen the light of day, like small translucent creatures that have lived their lives under the stones.

I have been wrestling with my historical association with dance as I try to articulate a politicized standing that dance can and will become a means to cultivate agency within displacement. My history claims that the displacement of the dancer is the capital which is earned by the relentless training; this is the elitism that is cultivated through specialization. This is what strips personal agency in service of the extreme discipline that is required. This notion of specialization has entailed years of ‘undoing’ a paradigm which was entrenched in me and my entire sensibility as an artist.
Well OK, I understand that you have loved and then you have hated dance. Let’s write more about what you call embodiment and how this stuff works in teaching or at least in the studio by yourself with all of these revelations. I think you should give us an example of this stuff....

The Hockey Stick

I work with a counsellor/theatre director who is also interested in exploring unconventional ways of developing script. He has brought a hockey stick as an emblem of self within a particular period in his life. He begins his remembered story holding the stick with ease; an extension of his body—he sweeps around with imaginary slap shots on goal and with power and control he speaks of his father. He tells me what he knows but I am not interested in the telling of what is known but rather exploring the space where discovery lives. I ask him to work with the stick using any part of his body but his hands. The signifier becomes fractured, he begins to work with the properties of the stick; texture, weight, pliability and dimensions. The stick brings another movement to his body and tone to his voice. I begin to hear another side of the same story—what was once power and control gets mixed up in the navigation of this object through time and space. The activity is transformed to a gentle inquiry and results in tender curiosity. With this comes a concert of emotions playing back and forth and inviting the participant into a place of unknowing, this is the place of discovery....

The fracturing of the signifier causes a rupture in the triangulation of story/action/ object and allows new understandings to seep in. This fragmentation allows spaces where new meaning is generated. This is how the poetic comes into the object in relation to narrative affording a location distinct from physical theatre or theatrical dance where the props are often clear cuing mechanisms to specific narratives. For example, an actor picks up the tiny empty bottle beside his deceased lover and we can all understand that she has been poisoned. But what if the movement of a prop in relation to the axis point in
the body shook up that narrative until we, as readers, all had a different story of the bottle and the lover?

As a dancer I am constantly reading the world through movement and reading movement as sentences of meaning, grammared, and punctuated with all the nuances of shifting weight, leverages, and centers. This is provoked through something as concrete as an everyday object like a book, a hockey stick, a lock.

Embodied Poetic Narrative has made its way into the learning spaces of high school students, university graduate students, and senior citizens who speak not a word of English with similar results. A space of reciprocity was cultivated whereby personal stories were generated by movement, shared and then again animated with and through movement. These stories begin as pieces of self and then move through a kaleidoscopic process of compassion and mutual respect peppered with curiosity becoming a shared story. This is done with absolute attention to the fostering of a space of shared vulnerability. “Caring in this process implies phenomenological ethics, an ability to use one’s own experience to gauge the quality of another person’s experience so as to maintain integrity and to avoid violation” (Mirochnik & Sherman, 2002, p. 159).

I have experienced this shared creative process time and time again and understand how the perspective of self can be illuminated within a heightened astuteness through a broader perspective encouraging empathy and atonement to the other. This must be the basis of creating an optimum learning space where the faith that personal voice can be sounded, will be heard and will be embraced within an agreement of reciprocity. Surely the rest of our pedagogic work can follow with ease once this foundation has been constructed.

It is important to note that this research is done within the scope of an understanding of the “lived curriculum” as opposed to the curriculum-as-plan. The lived curriculum characterizes what takes place in the margins of learning, where both child and adult interconnect with the world and physical self. It is here where the nuances of gesture, smell, touch, sound and sight, shape us and inform our lives. It is into these margins that this chapter travels, the margins of sensuous knowledge, where all of life and
not just what takes place within the walls of the classroom, can be seen as a place for learning and wonder. The walls are extended into the halls of all aspects of life. (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002, p. 21)

Embodied Poetic Narrative:
Well that is all well and fine to talk about it as something you arrived at, but what does it look like in the classroom or, as she likes to call it, in shared educative spaces?

You Can Leave Your Shoes on

Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will refer to a critical pedagogic event, which I believe illuminates Embodied Poetic Narrative in application. This example will weave through aligning theories and practices that have informed, and continue to inform my work.

I am standing in front of a graduate class (it could have been a Grade 4 class or a group of seniors as I had taught elements of this material to all three groups that week) and I see their shoulders drop, their eyes widen their breath deepen when I say with a friendly smile, (and my best Joe Cocker impersonation) “You Can Leave You Shoes on.” You can wear jeans, you can forget anything you think you may know about dance. We are just going to move with our, perhaps forgotten friend, the imagination. Winterson (1995) asks, “Can we afford to live imaginatively. Contemplatively? Why have we submitted to a society that tries to make imagination a privilege when to each of us it comes as a birthright?” (p. 139).

The gorge created by decades of mystification and iconification in the construction of the dancer, has just been bridged. I have cast a rope to the other side and with this, an invitation to meet in the gap. I am dissolving two conventions that are almost always anxiety producing when working in an educational context; dance as a form only for those who have talent and performance is an event displaying that talent. My challenge as a dance practitioner and teacher is to dismantle that myth and to convince my students
that we cannot, should not, must not, continue hauling around these sacks of mainly water (the body) as a secondary item of concern. We need to move! But I don’t want to have a body anymore. I want to be it. I don’t want to carry it around I don’t want to look out through it as if through chinks in a wall (Friedman & Moon, 1997, p. 228).

Ann Michaels (1997) writes to the power of the body as an eloquent language steeped in its own potency:

Fingers have a memory
to read the familiar Braille of another’s skin
The body has a memory:
the children we make,
places we’ve hurt ourselves,
sieves of our skeletons in the fat soil.
No words mean as much as a life.
Only the body pronounces perfectly
the name of another.

(p. 46)

Celeste Snowber (2007) also calls us back to the body with her beautifully sensual writing:

The lived body is the felt body where one makes connections to emotion.
It is also how we experience the flesh: the wind on the neck, fingers typing at the computer, the pain in the lower back, the joy of one’s torso swimming, the smell of lovemaking, and the tears in the belly. (p. 1451)

My research into embodiment has involved moving through the work of performance theorists and practitioners, like Phelan and Lane (2008), Schechner (1977), Barba (1995) and, as previously referenced, Fels (1998). I would now like to focus on the work of Brecht (as cited in Fong, 2001) who boldly dismantled the fourth wall of theatre creating the blurred line, the ‘splash-zone’, the in-between space of performer and spectator.

With the piece *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Brecht (as cited in Fong, 2001) pulled the fourth wall down. By introducing a formal and emotional engagement with the actors he moved the emphasis from character development to authenticity, presence and action.
This was thought to be an establishing of the character as opposed to a constructing of the character. This principle echoes my work with Lugs which allows the subtleties in the character to unfold through contextually steeped moments. Brecht did this by dividing the character into three components: self, neutral actor, and the character and through this triangulated focus he created an impartial subjective distance which he believed was necessary to bring a heightened awareness of audience and a cultivated astuteness to the playing space.

...by embodying the three identities on the stage, the actor can challenge the character he is playing, empathize with him, pity, admire and even criticize with him. The dramatic tension resulting from this kind of acting is beyond that produced by mere yelling and shouting which disguises themselves as theatre. In this way, not only the plot but also acting itself can be interesting and become the focus of the audience’s attention.

(quoted in Fong, 2001, p. xxi)

When performing my Lugs as Embodied Poetic Narratives I believe there are similarities in that I triangulate the story, the object and the body allowing a fragmentation resulting in spaces that open up for audience interpretation. In this way I also avoid creating a specificity of personal character and thereby allow the audience to see the character as they wish, this also brings the heightened astuteness that Brecht (as cited in Fong, 2001) has constructed in his method as the audience is personally invested in the ways the character and the story are presented. Brecht also shifted the conventional value system of plot to character; Beckett furthers this system with his own distinctive and extreme style with *Waiting for Godot* where the plot line and locations are considered secondary to the motif of waiting. In Lugs I will often work with thematic impulses opposed to specific information as is evidenced in Kit’s story in Chapter 4.

Augusto Boal (1995, 1998) continued this blurring by merging the playing space with audience allowing the audience who are now imbued with the title spect(actor) to enter and transform the play using performance as a means to an emancipatory process. In regards to his legislative practices within oppressed groups, Boal, who coined Theatre of the Oppressed, sources his work from Freire’s basic principles of naming then voicing
against oppression. The locus of Boal’s work is that we are not *making* theatre we are *doing* it.

In the case of my work with Lugs through Embodied Poetic Narrative, I work/play with a mindfulness toward kinaesthetic astuteness weaving the tools of improvisation with an attentiveness to each moment. Stephen Nachmanovitch (1990) refers to this astuteness as “the power of free play sloshing against the power of limits” (p. 33). This value to play is practiced widely with a form of movement, called Interplay, led by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter (2004). They claim “spirituality is actually a subset of play” (p. 12) and go on to explain that “Interplay helps people embody their lives through their own words and stories, movement, stillness, and voice. These four human expressions are four doors into wisdom. Each way reveals a unique aspect of our wisdom and spirit” (p. 41).

In this form of play, memories may be provoked, feelings may be triggered and insights revealed within the framework of our lived experiences. All of these references are calling attention to an invitation to witness compassionately and to become available to this provocation where a reciprocity, within a suspended poetic narrative, is collectively created. A deep listening to what may surface within a dynamic interplay of body/movement and environment is invited. Availability is the key factor for both the dancer/researcher and the audience-availability to allow an excavation from the variegated strata of our memories, images and emotional states in relation to identity and place. This availability is contingent on the courage to enter into a state of vulnerability which is in turn contingent on the cultivation of a sense of dialogue with those who witness. Julie Salverson (1996) writes of the complexity of this role in theatre as one who pays attention to what is said and what is unsaid. And the importance of the witness allowing the story to take form honouring the speaker but allowing it to take its place and to occupy a public space:

…take a shape that is of sufficient complexity and nuance so as to not belittle the whole experience of the teller, and find a public place that somehow marks and anchors the experience in the moment. This is a
possibility for popular theatre. With its curious combination of private and public space. (p. 39)

Lynn Fels (2010) speaks to this work as “relational responsibility.” Within this philosophy of practice, Boal (1995) deconstructs the division between actors and audience, performers and spectators by disrupting the elitism placed on the specialized role of the performer. Historically, relationships with audience and spectators have been both inseparable and divided but I will refer to the latter where architectural containment of theatrical events created a distinct separation resulting in a kind of sacredness in the distinctions between these two groups. Further to this change was the theatricality afforded to productions which again constructed a reverence in the location of a staged event and with this, a disregard for, and even dismissal of, the rest of the world. We enter a theatre, the door is closed and the lights go out—we see nothing but the stage. This delineation created the ultimate condition for audience members to become anaesthetized, departing from the complexity of their lives.

Boal (1995) moves into this space and dissolves the reverence of these distinctions by claiming “Theatre is a vocation for all human beings: It is the true nature of humanity” (p. 14). This notion of turning the conventions of theatre and audience/performer on its head, allows for the duality between fact and fiction creating a hybrid space, an active, dynamic forum inviting self reflection and a consideration of alternatives with our lives in relation to our world. This is a radical departure from the architecture of theatre both in form—the divisive playing space, and in content—the static script performed to an audience.

Theatre has nothing to do with buildings or other physical constructions. Theatre—or theatricality—is this capacity, this human property which allows man to observe himself in action in activity. The self-knowledge thus acquired allows him to be the subject (the one who observes) of another subject (the one who acts). It allows him to imagine variations of his action, to study alternatives. Man can see himself in the act of seeing, in the act of acting, in the act of feeling, the act of thinking. Feel himself feeling, think himself thinking. (Boal, 1995, p. 13)
Boal (1998) speaks of theatre as breaking free from the shackles of theatricality; of conventional containers such as theatres, illusionary effects, comfortable distances of observation contesting that, “the language of theatre and its forms of oppression cannot be the private property of actors” (p. 19). The engine that drives this deconstruction is that of creating dialogue. All too often we are, Boal believes, speaking in multiple monologues. Boal (1998) asks, “Could it be that we merely speak and cease speaking intermittently rather than speaking and listening? We know the words we speak but we do not know what will be heard” (p. 4). Boal, who derives the core of his work from education philosopher Paulo Freire, resists what he terms the banking method of education whereby the teacher simply deposits information in to the (assumed) empty vaults of the students. Freire writes that “teaching is transitivity, democracy, dialogue. An Argentinean teacher from Cordova relates: I taught a peasant how to write the word [plough] and he taught me how to use it” (quoted in Boal, 1998, p. 9).

Boal (1995) strives to create reciprocity between spectator and actor by wrestling against the conventional banking traditions of theatre to depict, transmit and convey emotions, narratives and moralities. Boal invites the viewer to depart from an anonymous and sometimes complacent position to a full bodied, astute participation within an emergent story. Within this event he creates a potency in the learning space placing primacy on the students meaning-making. With the work of Boal, we come to understand how he so clearly echoes Freire’s principles of placing the tools in the hands of the student to claim ownership of the individual meaning-making process. The impulse for a spect(actor) to intervene is one of our natural and incessant features of our body—that of perception and action, “Even in sleep we feel cold or heat and turn over or change sides” (Boal, 1998, p. 84). However, historically, audience members sometimes bypass this impulse in the theatre. This process breaks down habits which have become tight containers of limited known capacities. These containers exist both physically, intellectually, morally emotionally, and it is this work of defamiliarization as well as making and, more importantly, re-making through dialogue where a porosity begins to develop within these walls raising the potential for self empowerment. Moving from this model of participatory action research we continue to another dialect of the same language with
Barba (1995) from Odinteatret, Denmark, who has developed one of the most sophisticated methods of acknowledging this active space between audience and performer as has Schechner (1977) who has been invaluable for practicing artists who are drawn to theorize their practice with thorough and articulate attending to multiple perspectives and applications of the creative process and notions of spectatorship. Schechner speaks about the craft of the performer metaphorically as a circular printing press where the performer has the skill base to return to the beginning point of a performance time and time again. In many cases when I perform my Lugs I feel that the choices I make are recursive. I will begin with a move that returns throughout the piece, that is, a goose step or a gibberish prayer or a silent scream. It is what I refer to as building the historicity of the performance whereby each moment constructs a lineage of choices, a legacy of impulses.

Recently I was asked to do Alice B. Toklas in a 1:45-minute play with just one other actress, as Gertrude Stein, of course. I came from the world of improvisation and crashed landed in to the work of memorization and theatrical blocking but was amazed to find the same life and the same vitality and authenticity lived in these two examples of repetition. This craft is also revealed in a slightly different way by Cieslak of Polish Teatrik Laboratorium, who speaks about material evolving out of an extensive process of via negativa, a relentless process of rejecting a relatively large percentage of the material explored in rehearsal. When a score is designated, it is like a glass encasing the flickering light of the candle. He speaks about the flame as what illuminates the score:

> The flame is alive. Just as the flame in the candle glass moves, flutters, rises, falls, almost goes out, suddenly glows brighter, responds to each breath of wind—so my inner life varies from night to night, from moment to moment. (Schechner, 1977, p. 19)

Schechner (1977) discusses dependability in form constituting the craft of the performer whereas other theatre practitioners would speak of the lifeblood of a performer alive and changing but also within a solid structure just as my character Alice found a new journey every night of performance.
With this rapid firing yet significant timeline I land at my current and strong influence in performance, dissolving tacit conventions of boundaries and borders and inviting a mindful yet playful engagement. Lynn Fels (2004) writes of Performative Inquiry as situating pedagogic and aesthetic concerns within a variety of contexts and placing imaginative and thoughtful play as the nexus of inquiry:

Performative Inquiry then, in which performance is understood as an improvisational space of interactions may be understood as a co-evolving interaction between participants and their environment within which moments of learning emerge. Just as life dances into being within the interrelationships and co-evolving patterns of the edge of chaos. (p. 80)

Fels (2004) combines enactment with imagination and embodiment to come to new places of knowing, creating moments of disruption in our lives, that in turn, become transformative educative points. She encourages us, as educators, to welcome unknown encounters where new possibilities await and acknowledges the complexity embedded within such encounters. “Might we as educators, be willing to risk coming to know the as yet unknown that exists beyond and, perhaps more dangerously, within our known locations?” (p. 4). She states further that “confessions might be illuminated by the embodied presence of that which has not yet arrived? How dangerous is this welcoming of new arrivals?” (p. 4). Fels (2004) explains:

The conceptual underpinning of performative inquiry, as I have chosen to articulate it, proposes that it is through the simultaneous interplay between our experiences as we enter in a role drama or drama exploration through visualization or improvisation and our lived experience, past, present and anticipated that we come to moments of recognition, moments of learning which in turn, illuminate our embodied experience. (p. 80)

OK so now we know a little about this idea of the audience and the performer and the space in-between. I think some call this the…liminal space! I just learned that word! Anyway, she goes into that more in the last chapter. It would be nice to stick to the story about this graduate class she was teaching....Focus!
Now I only have half the battle won when I can convince my students that no previous experience is necessary and that our process is our performance and our performance is our process. There is neither fourth wall nor proscenium stage, nor lights, curtains or even applause; we have stripped the wolf of performance. But where do I bring in the personal engagement. This is a process whereby the story becomes the verb and our storying ourselves becomes the investment in the process. We begin, as Leggo (2004a) writes, to enword ourselves into the process.

**In the Beginning**

As I shape language, alchemically language shapes me, my poems writing themselves in autobiographical urgency.

Beginnings and endings and all the countless moments between the beginnings and endings that are more beginnings and endings.

Compelling words cannot be commanded, will find their way when they wish, organic chorus.

Do different alphabets divide the world differently, full of desire for divining concealed secrets?

(Leggo, 2004a, “In the beginning”)

This is a process of accessing personal material, sourcing images, stories, and movements that unquestionably belong to each individual. In the case of this class, they were asked to bring in an artefact, an object infused with personal meaning engaging an emblem of self. We then silently laid them in the middle of the room on crisp black pieces of paper and the room became charged with meaning. What is interesting about this stage of the class is that the objects seemed to trigger stories in all of the participants and the specific history to the owner of the object is transcended to a new level of potency. The objects become catalysts to a *traffic jam* of images, memories, and new stories. The objects themselves bring a vitality to the process and infuse collective life blood into the storytelling process.

Silently we gathered around the artefacts and soaked in these delightful diverse conduits of lived experiences, potent, as if they were elixirs to be consumed. The students then wrote for five minutes on one of the artefacts, their own or somebody else’s. This new
community of artefacts beckoned and invited a new relationship to the object. Our gaze upon them altered. We no longer privileged our own object but understood it was placed among many potent triggers. Stuart Hall (2001a) writes about meaning as “floating” and that we privilege an image or an object with all of our historical, cultural, socio-political embeddedness. As we write our stories, we write ourselves and our history into the narrative, exposing self on a deeper level than we would expect from the everydayness of an object on a table. O. Donoghue writes about storying as an active self-defining verb. “They tell stories, they write stories and they live stories. These became stories that story them” (quoted in Springgay, Irwin, Leggo, & Gouzouasis, 2008, p. 112). An excerpt from Leggo’s (2004a) “Zoo,” beautifully illuminates this:

Because words seek places beyond the alphabet,
I write in anticipation I will find the words
I need, or the words will find me.

I am my words;
your words are me.
You are your words;
your words are you.
I am your words;
your words are me.
You are my words;
your words are you.

(p. 112)

This is a concept of storying and re-storying, allowing stories to emerge from us, and through us and then rebound off others only to find their way back to us with altered tones and nuances and even distinctions. Like the secret game where the words transform through each teller. This re-storying process moves into a notion of blurring the lines of actuality and perception allowing a fluidity in the narrative and it is this that constitutes the tenets of ethnographic theatre practices whereby the ‘script’ shifts and merges factual data within a fictional performative context accessing multi-dimensional perspectives. In this transformative process, the storying enters a realm of reciprocity whereby the storyteller becomes plural and the authorship becomes a collective. Although these stories surface from personally lived experiences, they are perceived and understood through a context of other and in this transfer we understand how the story
moves out of a singular container and into the broader plain of equally complex lived experiences. As we uncover stories that have been silenced or hidden, we then trigger others stories and thereby connections and interconnections which construct a scaffolding of compassion and empathy. This event then becomes the foundation for agency of voice and collective amplitude of that voice. This concept I explore further in Chapter 2.

We re-story ourselves in each telling and the world in turn stories us. Imagined stories?—stories of the imagination?—somehow I say no. I think that the imagination is a place where creative construction occurs and it is sometimes external to the swamps that hold our secrets. I sometimes visualize the imagination as a utopic location outside the body to which we tether our ideas to and consequently gain a certain buoyancy of self. Whereas the silenced stories that exist and have existed through our lived experiences lay far below, entangled in the swamps of ourselves, squinting with the mere mention of possible lightness of being (the same lightness as Milan Kundera’s *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (1984). Imagine if I were a therapist, I would be lowering myself down into the swamp to conjure the escape plan, but therapist I am not… If I were exclusively interested in imaginative play I would suggest a magical transporting of self to the effervescent place of new stories constructed identities and playful renderings of self. I am interested in a place somewhere in between. I am curious to know if it is possible to ‘un-silence’ the voice—to invite this voice to re-sound through barriers that have long since rendered it forgotten or muffled. Is it possible to tell the stories that have not been named and with craft and refinement, honouring the grace of time and aesthetics, I ask can we enable them to surface. I am asking, “Can these stories be reconfigured and authentically *handled*, yet remain bare?” Uncovered and polished rather than decorated and accessorized? I realize now, as I articulate what is distinctive to Embodied Poetic Narrative, that shifting axis points become critical in the manipulation of objects/artefacts as intrinsic to the story telling process and the fracturing of signifiers within the storying process. I am not reading the book; I am balancing it on the back of my neck; I am not undoing the lock but rather holding it close to my heart. I am interested in disrupting the patterns of object/narrative by abstracting the handling of the objects which in turn introduces new information within a story. I work with the
poetics of the object, stripping it of preconceived notions of meaning and emptying the container by peeling away the identifiers. This concept will be expanded upon in Chapter 5.

So if I give you a story, that means you will interrupt me and tell me yours?

No, no—it means that your story will make me think of my story.

And then you will interrupt me to tell me yours?

I never interrupt!
I will tell you my story which will make you think of your story in a new way.

Oh, and then we will get mixed up and wonder whose story is whose!

Exactly! Now can we go back to the graduate class?! Where were we?

The students were storying each other!

Oh right!

The reading of these personal stories by researchers are in turn re-interpreted through what is considered thick descriptions as acknowledgments of the subjective renderings of stories which in turn reflect the power shaped positions, emotion, physical, intellectual and practical status of the researcher. This location is far from neutral and must be embraced as part of the exposure of deeper levels of understanding research questions. Frank (2000) promotes this kind of reflexivity that departs from positivist notions of representation:

Fiction can, ironically, expose that which “factual representation” conceals by its very implication. In addition, fiction may reach broader audiences and do so on deeper levels as compared with other forms of academic writing.  

(p. 42)
Kogler (1999) in his article titled, “The power of dialogue: Critical hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault,” further speaks to the complexity and the criticality of subjectivity within research:

Subjectivity enables engagement with the world informed by study and experience. Such engagement constitutes not only service to other but an othering of oneself as well. Such self-distanciation and complication invites “insight into usually hidden linkages between symbolic relations and social networks of power.” (p. 25)

Pinar (2008) continues to provide a beautiful image within the same article that speaks so succinctly to the powerful outcomes of subjectivity: “Articulating subjective experience keeps a string on these conceptual kites that, in their distance from the everyday, enable more panoramic views of our location in the world” (p. 9).

The writing is shared from the stories that were ignited from the artefacts. As Norris (2000) writes about his ethnographic theatre practices, “the one thing we find is that stories beget stories as one idea triggers forgotten stories by other cast members” (p. 46).

The process of response writing is at times quite fast in order to instil a kind of urgency in the room or perhaps a better word is haste. Moving with momentum through a process can strip away the possibility of judgement and what is left instead is an engine fuelled by instinct. The writing is finished and participants are eager to share. They seem surprised at what erupts from them and deeply appreciate the work of the others. A sense of shared vulnerability has constructed the ground to further the work together; we have built a foundation of trust and respect in order to spring into another level of risk taking. Reciprocity within a heightened sense of attunement is critical to this work. Rita Irwin and de Cossen (2004), the original generators for the methodology A/r/tography, write of the space between the often disparate roles we play in our daily lives.

A/r/tography attends to the spaces between artist, researcher and teacher. This is not to suggest it privileges one form over another. But allows for these dynamic practices and identities to interface and collide with one another so that meanings, understandings and theories generated become multiple, tangled and complicated. (p. 159)
Irwin (2003) writes about the levels of attunement that artists achieve through an a/r/tographic process:

As artists see attentively and create layers upon layers of visual images one upon the other, they are attuned to the relationship between them and the work of art. In other words, they are attuned to the aesthetics of unfolding ins/sights. (p. 68)

This layering process was echoed in my next step with the grad students as we moved through a process called essentializing the text where we ‘simmered’ the text, ‘reducing’ the body of words and thereby thickening its meaning. This stripping of the excess takes away the specificity, the details which imply ownership and what remains is a license to ‘borrow’ or even ‘claim’ identification. We borrow the essence of one story to set our own individual memories of our lived experiences into motion and in turn begin to understand the complexity of it in relation to the others. This relationality becomes crucial to the sense of community which is built within this creative process and which allows for shared vulnerabilities and heartfelt and sometimes dangerous exchanges. Here is Leggo’s (2004a) excerpt from Zoo which describes this weaving of memory, story, and other, very beautifully:

The language of poetry pushes at edges, sometimes even extending beyond the edges, even to the places where language refuses comprehensibility, clarity, coherence, composition (I love lists, not for the way they organize but for their infinite, endless possibilities). Some texts refuse consumption, easy access, even a comfortable reading location. The reader must struggle to locate their positions for responding. Some texts involve an intricate and complex textualizing that refuses to be still. Some texts invite me to let the words flow around me, as well as in and through me. I must relinquish the desire to hold the text in place, for then I carry the memory of mystery, even the mystery of my story, to other places, places like e.e. cummings where “I have never travelled.”
The reading of some of these poems can provoke a rich array of emotions and images in the room steeped with a sense of multiple ownerships. “When you find yourself laughing and crying both at once. That is the time to write a poem. Maybe that’s the only honest living there is” (Kingsolver, 2005, p. 234). We all need to value the event of writing and re-writing our stories together. Milloy (2005) claims that “the experience of writing is really a re reading of self. It originates at the sensual site of mimetic re-cognition and reciprocity that mirrors the text and the reader/writer across the skin” (p. 546).

This sense of empowering the text is a little like Barthes’ (1975) death of the author placing primacy on the individual reading of a story, in this instance our individual reading of the story. However, unlike Barthes, I believe the author has absolute power to name his or her history. In this sense our individual reading tells us as much about ourselves as it does the author of the story. Leggo (2004b) writes about this sense of writing oneself into being.

I am simply refusing the authority of grand or universal narratives to write me in given positions. Instead I will write my stories as fragments of diffuse and diverse narratives that are unfolding constantly throughout the earth. (p. 20)

These diffuse narratives that Leggo (2004b) writes of were echoed in the class’s next stage of exploration of Embodied Poetic Narrative as they fractured their stories and re-ordered the words disrupting their original narrative therefore allowing new values to each other’s underlying emotions and images. Leggo writes about the importance of fragments:

The auto-biographer is akin to a person putting a jigsaw puzzle together with most of the pieces to the puzzle long lost and no longer recoverable. I know this, but I am still fascinated by the fragments and the possibilities of story making even with the holes and gaps. (p. 20)

Completing these fractured memories and imaginings (see Figures 4, 5 and 6), the students had an opportunity to share the written pieces, continuing to build the sense of community and shared vulnerability. The students were then separated into groups, one group created shapes from their written fragments and partnered with another performing
their shape phrases simultaneously. We began to see new narratives based on the tension and resolution of the spaces between the bodies.

**Figure 4.** A/r/tography Class 1

Shape my body formidable and beautiful

**Figure 5.** A/r/tography Class 2

Carved to imperfection leaving your skin behind
Another group collected all the writing and further essentialized the text and then placed it over selected images of the artefact. This multiple layering of text, movement and image created a rich potential of narratives. Berry (2002) writes that “the poem is important, as the want of it proves it is the stewardship of its own possibility” (para. 8). These fractures of images, movement, and text provided the possibilities of our own stories to fill the spaces and thereby invited a personal voice to meet the event. The movers performed in front of the screen of images and text, creating yet another space of tension and another possibility of narratives.

Monica Pendergast (2009), the forerunner of a research practice named “Poetic Inquiry,” writes about poetry as a form of research placing primacy on the value of the poem; “…for the fullest appreciation of poetry in a research setting, it is my contention that the best examples of inquiry poems are good poems in and of themselves” (p. xxii). I also believe we can honour performances as both a means of research as well as a practice of craft and refinement. The students performed the piece, attending to the focus, concentration, and full engagement that performance demands. Within the disparity of skill bases and history (or lack of it) with performing they bring the intentionality that renders this refinement. Norris (2000) talks about alternative research as needing to be
identified in another way rather than as it is currently. He contends that the alternative implies that it is secondary to where we historically place the primary validation, in the word and the number.

With Embodied Poetic Narrative I have opened an opportunity to research new interdisciplinary approaches to learning, attending to multi modal learning within a multitude of contexts. This attention to the cultivation of an optimal space of learning moves beyond the classroom curriculum and into a global curriculum addressing citizenship from ground level. As Fels (2008) so rightly states, this is “an invitation to my students to step beyond the walls of the classroom” (p. 16).
2. Citizenship as Pedagogy

Parts of the chapter are drawn from a jointly written article with Dr. Rita Irwin, Dr. Carl Leggo, Dr. Peter Gouzuasis, and Dr. Kit Grauer (Ricketts, Irwin, Leggo, Gouzuasis, & Grauer, 2008).

Wow, you are in a tizzy (directed at Map).

Well, you would be too if you felt so disconnected.

You are right here (pointing to the ground).

Well this is all well and fine for you; you always seem to know your direction! I never get folded the right way!!!

Yes. and you are repeating yourself; let’s hope you don’t do that in the thesis.

The what?

We have gone over this and you were in the first chapter and that told you what it was....dummy.

Yah, and I thought I was supposed to start that chapter.

Well I snuck in; it is more interesting that way.

Says who?...(big sigh)...I don’t know what’s up and what’s down.

Oh cripes, here we go!! Well I sometimes don’t know what’s in and what’s out, and it doesn’t seem to bother me!

Well, I need to have the big picture.
I need to know where I am in relation to everything else.
How about just take a deep breath and know where you are located at this moment.

Yes, I agree take it one moment at a time!

Oh brother, now the two of you sound like running water “just go with the flow”...at least that’s what Csikszentmihalyi would say.

Who?

Oh forget it!

So when people ask, “What are you doing? Is it pedagogy; is it citizenship?”

You can stop right there. I know you are going to say something stupid like....or is it basket weaving or navel gazing?

I was not!!

What is this separation business?! What are you trying to teach in school? The distance between x, y, and z in an isosceles triangle or the distance between negligence and compassion?

You lost me....

I think what Compass is saying, if I may interject, is that citizenship is pedagogy and pedagogy is citizenship; there is no either or.

Oh I think I get that...equal by the way,...for the isosceles triangle.

What?

The difference!!

Oh, I am more interested in compassion than x, y, and z.

I know! Sshhhhh, here comes another reflection....
I moved toward the suitcase and opened it—not quite knowing how the small heart in captivity would respond (see Figures 7 and 8). It floated out of the suitcase moving away and toward the ground. It is in these moments that improvisational skills are used at their optimum to integrate surprises and/or disappointment. This well researched prop, this potentially exquisite metaphor, just gracefully declined from the performance. I turned slowly away from the balloon allowing the disappointment to play its part my arm lengthened behind me as I walked away my hand continuing to reach for it. As I continued to play off this loss I became aware of a sound from the audience, a small gasp, and as I lifted my eyes from the ground, I became aware of the heart floating back to me. It had regained its airborne status and was floating at eye level. I slowly reached toward it but now the wind had given it enough momentum to carry it slowly upwards. I continued to reach for it, on toes, fingers spread wide, as it floated slowly and lightly towards the skyline.
The image had provided a resolution; it had given me permission and caused a decision in my body. I would move into this new home. I would allow this rigid landscape to fill me with its unexpected breath. Lightly, energetically my heart, which had been in captivity of regret and longing, was moving into a place of discovery, yes, with fear but also with curiosity. I began to walk towards the buildings of Yaletown, my walk escalated to a full-bodied run, my arms spread wide. My body was screaming, “Here I am!!”

Figure 8. Lug: Yaletown 4

A scholar, who has witnessed this particular performance at a conference overseas, approached me trembling, “I come from a family of holocaust survivors—you have just uncovered my family’s story, which has not been allowed to see the light of day. I will now return home and encourage our words to penetrate space—you have somehow given me the permission to do this.” Oh the honour of allowing stories to run through me which carry such potency!
It was not my story—this Lug.
It was not his story.
It was a shared story.

Citizens of the world are experiencing a global identity shift as hybrid cultures are rapidly constructed. With the contemporary sense of virtual place we seem to shift notions of geography, territory, customs, homeland, and identity. With this shift, we observe and experience a loss in definition of self in relation to place. Sense of self becomes swept
into the fluid slipstream of assimilation, contrived membership, forever transforming what is perceived as the cultural norm of a particular location. As the borders in our world become blurred through heightened information access and digital intercontinental fluidity (Conquergood, 2002) we often witness not necessarily racial discrimination but rather symptoms of cultural claustrophobia on a global scale. So many differences in the same house (nation)—how do we accommodate? And through this crowdedness, we observe not necessarily a cultural diversity but rather a cultural hybridity, resulting in an identity crisis on a monumental scale. When I ask an Asian child in the classroom her name and she responds, “Donna.” She tells me this is her Canadian name. I ask for her Asian name and after a few tries, with gentle guidance, I have it. I politely ask if I may call her by her birth name. The student reveals a grateful and embarrassed smile. This is undoing the cultural silencing and finding the whispers of a language which is slowly in retreat. We are so occupied with underlining the fact that we are all equal that we forget values of distinction, differences, and individuality. Globalization brings erasure of the distinct—the extinction of the heritage—the deletion of the local—the annihilation of the particular (Shapiro, 1998). In attempts to address ‘multi-culturalism’ in the way that we would like to understand, which can be counter to the governmentalized notion, we begin to understand the need to recognize both the commonalities of humankind as well as the differences. Multiculturalism constructs plurality, multiplicity, and complexity but also results in diffusion and a levelling of identities. Ruth Prawer Jhabualala refers to this silencing as “disinheritance,” writing that she is “like a cuckoo forever insinuating herself into others’ nests” (quoted in Bhabha, 1998, p. 319). This assimilation process, on a geographic/cultural level, is reflected by Henry Giroux (1996) as he writes about the melting pot:

Can you imagine living in a country that welcomes you into it with open arms, there’s only one rule. You have to forget who you were/are. A country that would rather have you forget your roots and pick up their agenda as if your past never existed. America was supposed to be a great big melting pot. People from all over the world could come to America and melt together. C’mon everybody jump right on in to the United States great big melting pot. We melted all right, melted our heritage right off. We were boiled until we dissolved into one giant heap of nothingness. We became, Americanized. (p. 57)
Displacement on an emotional level results in the same giant heap of nothingness. A fluidity of borders, both geographic and personal, result in new sets of identity parameters. This geographic porosity can also result in a dissipation process. I am pondering the possibility of becoming accustomed without losing one’s customs and asking if one can maintain cultural heritage with a presence to here and now, if it is necessary to de-construct in order to construct, if it is possible to embrace Etienne Wenger’s (1998) social learning theory whereby education may be considered as identity development. As Garoain (1999) asks: “In what way could the subject matter of art play a part in transforming the hegemony of education into an emancipatory practice?” (p. 159).

Conquergood (2002) urges a re-thinking of the “learning space” and to revise this notion of “place.” He claims this multiplicity of cultural identities has radically transformed our definitions of words such as “local” or “boundary”; “we now think of ‘place’ as a heavily trafficked intersection, a port of call and exchange instead of a circumscribed territory” (p. 145). Conquergood explains that we no longer have static points we would claim as our community—he uses words such as “leakage,” “thin,” “membranes,” “retracted,” “transitive” all in service of the claim that the freneticism of migrations within globalization has created the fluidity which can transfer both to a rejuvenation and/or a stripping away of a traditional meaning-making processes. Conquergood (2002) writes of this “transgressive travel between two different domains of knowledge” (p. 145) as a critical point in Performance Studies whereby the story—local, knowing, which is grounded in a collection of memories, stories and interactions, cuts across the map—which is objective knowledge, authorized and legitimized through texts. “This promiscuous traffic between ways of knowing carries the most radical promise of Performances Studies research” (p. 45) and it is this movement which cracks open the binaries between thinking theory and doing theory which, Conquergood submits, constitutes the heart of Performance Studies.

Working in schools, cultural community centres, inner city drop-in facilities, geriatric centres, and special wards in hospitals has provided me with this cracked open space As I
reflect upon the work I have done in the schools as an artist-in-residence addressing “anti-racial” issues, I realize that I was not necessarily dealing with bloody noses in the corner of the school and echoed calls of derogatory words full of hate and pain. Instead it was subtle in its violation, its veneer of tolerance and its lip service to equality. Cultural silencing is a bi-product of what we celebrate as “multi-culturalism.” These silencing incidents force the rituals, the traditions, the prayers, and the songs out of the body. My interest has been to unearth these buried treasures and to cast them back into space and time to be recognized, valued, and celebrated.

Cultural Identity is a matter of being as well as becoming. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending time, place, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialist past, they are subject to the continuous play of history, culture, and power. Identity always exists within, and must be thought through, rather than outside, difference. Far from being grounded in a mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. I want children, teens, adults, and elders to speak, write, dance, and sing about their community, their homes, and their family.

It has become increasingly clear to me through investigating notions of identities and of place that my work addresses existential borderlands as opposed to specific geographic phenomena. To elaborate, my Lugs are not located in a cartographic framework where customs and practices are prescribed by tangible delineations, rather, they transcend cartography to existential planes where values and meanings resonate from spiritual spaces deep within the heart. These cultures and borders function on a shared plane and embrace shared, powerful, emotionally charged, lived experiences. There is not necessarily a train station, a country, a passport, a specific person, place or thing, there is no chronology, no estimated time of arrival; I am blazing a metaphoric trail and my
invitation to expression triggers an interpersonal excavating process, “the digging into the bedrock of truth.”

So that was about all these people that talk about citizenship and pedagogy.

Yes, yes! As a combined idea!!!

But what about Kathryn?

That is coming, there is a little more from these other folks.

Ahhhem, shouldn’t you be getting to a story?

Soon, patience Compass, this stuff is important!

Shapiro’s (2008) introduction in a *World of Change* describes dance as a solid force of tacit knowing of the world, able to contain that which cannot be named (within other modalities) and helping us to understand and transcend boundaries and limitations. “Dance always mediates who we are and how we live within time and culture” (p. 262). Shapiro writes about a global aesthetic, which cultivates mutual understanding triggered by embodied knowing and a deep understanding of a collective existence thus fostering a shared compassion within the human condition. This shared understanding connects self to other “recognizing the concreteness of an ethical existence in a shared world” (p. 262) and thereby setting the foundation for globally idealized initiatives such as constructions of community, advocacy for the disenfranchised as well as racial and gender equality. This transcendence of difference is key in Shapiro’s global ideology which she insists must involve and engage body narratives, “narratives that are shaped by ethnicity, harnessed by social class, and textured by culture” (p. 266).

Mohanty, a feminist theorist whose focus lies in transnational feminism disrupting conservative views of gender, race and globalization, takes this notion of meaning-making narratives and further situates it within a pedagogic context. Mohanty’s (2003) *Feminism without Borders* states that “critical pedagogy” (p. 195) enables an important
link between “historical configuration of social form and the way they work subjectively” (p. 195). Mohanty recognizes that classrooms are not mere sites of instruction but rather the sites of social and political residue of larger forces at play “which represent accommodations and contestations over knowledge by differently empowered social constituencies” (p. 194).

Mohanty (2003) believes that these dominant hegemonic discourses are embedded within us and that by acknowledging the “existence” of these forces a new analytic space is afforded where progressive transformation can occur.

Mohanty (2003) emphasizes the importance of subjectivity in the creation of progressive discourses of power and within this lies the value of stories, personal stories, shared stories and the reconstituting of meaning that comes with storytelling. This process disrupts the canons of knowledge-making in the institutions and classrooms and invites a revisioning, a new construction of counterhegemonic pedagogies. The awareness of corporeality as a vessel containing the forces of cultural discourses must be recognized and understood within practices and strategies not just within theories in order to shift educational institutions and their perpetuation and reinforcement of hegemonic power systems both inside the classroom and beyond.

Below is a Lug Log from a doctoral seminar presentation illuminating what Mohanty (2003) referred to as a counterhegemonic pedagogy.

OK, here is a story—thank you for your patience, Compass!!!

Well I didn’t mind!!!
How to Read the World (Lug Log)

The piece started with the suitcase in my hand.
I felt the weight of the vessel’. Vessel as in boat that thrusts me into my new ‘homeland’.
Vessel as in the heart that holds the fear, compassion and strength that carry and fuel the
journey.

I played with the tension between notions of arrival and departures with the weight of all
that is implied and resonates within these points in space and time geocentric and ethnographic.
The tension escalates until a ‘rupture’ in the improvisation creates a suspended second, a
departure from the historicity that has been created from the first impulse of the improvisation.
The suitcase is opened within a compounded moment and a small antique book is revealed. The
book is an artefact to the museum of our body, our life. It could be a bible, a photo album, a
journal, a passport, a letter.

The metaphor is fluid and I moved through the possibilities listening to the properties of
the prop both physically and poetically. The book became the notion of literacy such as Freire’s
notion “reading the world” and I propose the addition how the world reads the body.

The book was held and handled as an unreadable, inaccessible proposal, a non
negotiable document. The tissue thin pages were fingered, crumbling within an agitated
handling—running wildly in a circle holding the open book out in space letting the pages flip
recklessly through this trajectory. A transparency of history, of assimilation, compromise, loss,
release, forgiveness, and generosity. The piece ends with the book pressed into my heart as an
emblem of resolution or perhaps a fleeting arrival. And then I look into the audience’s eyes, some
full of tears and ask… “What did you see?”

Language Thinks Us

The Lugs as performative inquiries always finish with actively engaging the audience in
dialogue. An invitation to what Schon (1983) claims as the third part of his “Living
Practice” breakdown, “Back-Talk,” a dialogue with those who engage in the metaphor.
As was the case with the doctoral seminar presentation, my work can end with free writes
and/or active dialogue with those who engage or witness. This completes the
investigation and remains an essential component to my inquiry. What sediment is
revealed? What raises to the surface? What saliency sheds new light? Which words
move forward otherwise hidden or silenced in the recesses of our body? “Language
thinks us as we think within the language” (Bowers, 2005, p. 86).

Specializing in drama and literacy with marginalized children, Medina (2005) writes
about a hybrid space whereby the students examine fictionalized characters in relation to
their own lived experiences within environments of repression. Medina works through
critical performative pedagogies to invite a process whereby sense of place and culturally
inscribed identities are called into question. Medina (2005) proposes that “Critical
literacy then from a social semiotics perspective provides the possibility for new and
critical meanings to emerge when human creativity through diverse modalities is used
toward an understanding of how texts, languages and realities works” (p. 193).

Medina (2005) believes in situating dramatic improvisational exploration in performative
sites where the participants can fully engage with an integrated mind and body as well as
embracing cultural histories and lived experiences. With this kind of engagement
Medina claims an avenue to social justice has been carved, “In this way performative
practices within critical literacy exploration may provide situated moments of imagined
praxis resulting in magnified interpretations of issues of social justice and equity” (p. 3).

Medina’s (2005) research acknowledges the conditions between multiple literacies as a
key factor in unveiling the potential for minority students to engage in performative sites
as a means to reflect and respond to the socio-political frameworks in which they are
catched.

> The analysis of this work opens up a new set of possibilities in my
research in particular, an examination of creative pedagogies as reflective
spaces as forms of what I call ‘imagined praxis’ or engagement in
imagining possible social actions. (p. 3)

In addition to Medina’s research, I acknowledge that there are a range of researchers,
who share this focus of researching multi modal literary practices within situated contexts
bringing opportunities for those marginalized into a location of new understanding and
empowerment. Medina (2005) submits that, “These pedagogies support how learners
understand the use of literacies and languages by utilizing cultural knowledge and
linguistic resources in creative ways to engage children from diverse backgrounds in
designing their social futures through imaginative practices” (p. 10).

**Weather/Whether**

The following story is an example of Medina’s (2005) notion of designing social futures
but instead of children this field work engaged with a wonderful collection of Chinese
women between the age of 75 and 94. I worked with a puppeteer and a translator as
Cantonese was their only spoken language. After 2 years, our translator became an artist with us and the Chinese women became our dear friends.

Language expanded to another realm and words became only a small part of this new dimension of reciprocity. Words fell silently under the bristles of brushes, their bamboo stems shook under the grip of well worked and well loved hands. Words got pushed in broad strokes under the deep black ink finding their way from rice paper to silk to acetate, through light and then onto the moving bodies of these beautiful women. These broad strokes of transferring movement to words—to calligraphy—to movement, became another dance whereby linguistics and kinaesthetics integrated into a multi layered process, unfolding new ways of understanding friendship, community, and communication (see Figures 9 and 10).

Figure 9. Strathcona Project 1
We sat in a circle and created the shape of frozen branches then the arms stabbed the air as lightning struck then we filled our lungs and blew into the space with all of our might, creating cold blistering wind; our hands reached high and descended slowly to the ground until they gently touched the floor creating quiet rain puddles. Our heart rate began to quicken, our breath deepened and we felt the warmth of movement in our bodies. Something reawakened in these beautiful time soaked bodies. We slowly raised our hands allowing them to take us to standing and spreading them wide feeling the welcomed sunshine seep into our body; and finally the image of a warm breeze moved our arms from side to side our spine articulated in a series of curves and our weight shifted from foot to foot softening and awakening the joints in our hips, knees and ankles. The increasing heat in our kinaesthetic weather dance ran parallel to the increasing heat in our bodies. The music faded and we bowed to each other.

We transcribed the names of these movements into Chinese calligraphy with ink on rice paper. We transferred them to acetate and projected light through it thus moving into space allowing the words to fall on undulating spines, reaching fingers and broad, open
smiles. The women giggled, gulping memories of youth and then embraced the youth(fullness) that seeped into their present state.

We transferred the calligraphy on to bright coloured silk with the excitement of knowing every stroke under the brush was permanent. The panels of silk hung as reminders and prompters of our dance as we moved through them inviting the silk to dance with us as it responded to the playfully disrupted air.

The room was filled with deep breaths—open eyes and energized bodies as we returned to rest and to ponder the implications of breath, movement, joy, community, contentment and weather. We spoke about how Buddhist philosophy considers the four elements that reside in our body and how these elements are the barometers of our soul. It was no wonder we were dancing about weather! Pema Chödrön (1991), Buddhist teacher and leader, writes about this awareness in the body:

Nothing in its essence is one way or the other. The four elements take on different qualities; they’re like magicians. Sometimes they manifest in one form and sometimes in another...The first noble truth recognizes that we also change like the weather, we ebb and flow like the tides, we wax and wane like the moon. (p. 83)

We were moving in and through language exploring how language becomes a vehicle to carry us in the most unexpected ways through a dynamic meaning making process embracing our differences in age, health, cultures and lived experiences. Below is a story written about this residency and an exemplar of the notion that language lives far deeper that what is communicated in words.

**In-Between the Fireflies**

*I am working with fourteen Chinese women between the ages of 70 and 94 and a puppeteer—an unexpected collaboration. The puppeteer skids into the working space every week flushed, chopsticks are piercing the wild mound of greying hair—striped socks have found their way (with the help of scissors) to her wrist. Appliquéd and layered clothes add to the sense that we are in the presence of a wild urban gypsy.

She shows us puppets with used coffee filter as kerciefs. They are delicate and unusual, almost like fossils of another culture. We speak the words—English from us and Cantonese from them and these words carve intricate paths in space like tiny fireflies. Flickering and fluttering yet not
caught. The language lives between these creatures, it is invisible. We are creating lists of words and movements inspired from weather not yet knowing that wind, water, fire, and earth tell us about their well being. Not yet knowing that one considers herself with not enough fire and the other, too much wind…

When rest is needed a few scribe the words and movement through rich dark inks and bamboo brushes onto brilliant orange banners while the others gather around generous with their advice. Our dances are accompanied by these proud flags that flutter in the disrupted air around our moving bodies. We are wondrous warriors marching through language and into our bodies and allowing the heat to whisper old secrets.

This was my story seen through my lens until 1 week ago. The community centre coordinator arrives to make an announcement—fast words in Cantonese cracking our code, misunderstandings hover in the room. A cavern appears. We have a performance coming up, we will present our embodied weather. Our tiny puppets, barely named, will also perform to a group of seniors across town. Arrival times, taxi numbers and directions are pushed into our space. I suggest she write down the information recognising the overwhelmed looks inscribed on the faces in the room. “That wouldn’t help” whispered the puppeteer. “Most of them cannot read or write….”

Breath shortened
Eyes filled
Hands moved instinctively to the stomach.

My story shifted radically in that second

The fireflies turned out their lights
The ink dried
The flags went limp.

And then I caught the twinkle in Wu Yu Hok’s eyes across the room and my story re-constructed like an explosion played backwards.

I recognized the language that filled the spaces between the words and was grateful for what was spoken silently.

Hybrid Spaces of Learning

Imaginative practices such as the one described above, construct hybrid spaces containing both fiction and non fictional discourses allowing students to examine identity and place within their immediate social-political locations through creative and meaningful processes, “Here individuals perform in hybrid spaces where hybrid discourses and languages (Gee, 2001) become forms of expressing what students know as they read, re-read and create and re-create worlds and words” (Medina, 2005, p. 11).

Medina (2005) believes that these constructed performative spaces are contested sites whereby students working within these dynamic spaces can better understand the political and social ideologies that shape their daily lives; moreover, they begin to understand how they can employ a criticality within these forces shifting the student from complacency to a potential location of agency and transformation.
The following is a suite of several distinct Lug performances that exemplify this work situated within contested sites of hybrid identities. These stories are accompanied with photo documentation of the events (see Figures 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 16)

**Hyde Park: Speaker’s Corner (2006)**

I had left my hosts in Blackheathe with suitcase in hand. They shook their heads, “It’s raining! It’s Sunday! You should be relaxing with a cup of tea watching cooking shows!” I know… I remembered reading Tennessee Williams prologue to “The Glass Menagerie.” He spoke of the vitality of the creative process as a kind of jewel that lies in the energy produced by hanging onto a rock face by ones finger nails (“Featured Author,” 1999). Was Hyde Park my rock face? What was my jewel? I was soon to find out.

I passed through several underpasses with buskers noting that these could be possible locations for Lugs, but understood that my destination may consume all of my Lug capacity for the day. When I arrived in the rain at the North East corner of Hyde Park, I was surprised by the lack of signage and designated locations for speakers. An open gravel area served as the platform to exercise freedom of speech, as long as one was elevated off the ground. An interesting concept: a ladder for one and a milk cart for the other. There were three vague clusters of people with approximately 30 in each group. Like diving into icy waters, I knew the plunge needed to be quick so I opened the suitcase and donned the hat and coat typical for my Lug character. I chose the cluster closest to the fence knowing that I would need to interface with an established crowd rather than create my own. After all my suitcase could not take all of my weight and so my feet remained on the ground—ticket for freedom of speech denied (or not) and the fence? Well I guess I thought at the moment it was my only friend.

**Figure 11. Lug: Speaker’s Corner 1**
As I entered the group I realized that the tenacity that had brought me this far in the field of the performing arts was going to be key to my immediate survival. I could hear the crowd provoking the speaker, challenging her ideas, her language and even her grammar, the atmosphere was charged, I moved slowly, bristled with attentiveness, all senses astute. The speaker lashed out at me with scathing comments, scowling expressions and agitated gestures with one hand, the other holding on to the ladder from which she was perched, she was not young. I had now penetrated the crowd and was located in the speakers’ territory with some regret to my boldness but I turned and asked the speaker to tell me something about this displacement. Big mistake!

From such delicate, vintage features came the most surprising collection of words as she adamantly claimed exclusive rights to her speaker’s box. I did not speak with words for the remainder of my time spent in the circle and if it hadn’t been for the crowd, which was beginning to grow, now I would have receded completely. As my body deflated and I began to move away from the speaker, she determinately descended her three rung ladder and moved it a few meters to the right the chasm between us deepened however the crowd simultaneously took steps back to compensate creating an even larger playing space. They seemed to understand that I was needing to use my body in space. They cheered me to stay in although I was facing away from the speaker. They understood the moment my body decided to endure the challenge and cheered as I took a long slow lunging step back into the line of fire. It was at this moment that I noticed a younger woman close by whose body was hinged on every one of my moves intent on following all of my impulses and at this moment I knew that I had an ally. This awareness was coupled with the sound of a camera capturing almost every move I made. The speaker was trying to maintain, no, dominate focus in the crowd. She emulated hate and her words were angry attempts to dismantle the state of the world, and I apparently was making a mockery of her diatribe. What exactly was my work in the moment of this Lug? I was caught in the crossfire of anger, hatred and bitterness as accusations traversed the playing space propelling me into motion, I was at moments a conduit and at other moments a receptor and then finally I was able to feel as if I was a transformer.

Figure 12.  Lug: Speaker’s Corner 2
Ellie, my ally, spoke to my defence positing that my body was telling more than her words ever
would and perhaps she should “shut her trap for a moment and listen.”

A penny was found on the ground and someone placed it gently in my hand. I
understood the moment; the currency of language and the freedom of speech that belongs to
everyone—even for those who are silent. Listen carefully the dance is whispering. I reached up
to the speaker with the penny resting in my open hand. Her free hand impulsively slapped my
arm, causing the penny to fly beyond the crowd; my body reverberated in this sudden violent
refusal of my invitation, an invitation to consider—language, the politics of language, the form of
language, the tolerance, and perhaps celebration of diversity in the telling of our stories. It was in
this moment that my body softened and I felt the violence transform to generosity. I was
exhausted, physically and emotionally (I was also very wet). It was raining hard now and I backed
away slowly projecting a quiet grace. A hand gently bidding her to take care and to take love.
Hoping that the speaker would be able to find the cracks in her walls, the cracks that must be
there.

Figure 13. Lug: Speaker’s Corner 3

As I continued to back slowly, I stayed within my state of the dance and shifted my gaze to the
cluster of people 20 metres away. Some of the crowd followed.

The second cluster was smaller and much tighter, almost intimate. I had regained energy
in my transition from one cluster to the next. Unlike my slow, circuitous entrance with the first
cluster, I arrived suddenly and with this abruptness seemed to shatter the intensity created
between two men. A white middle aged Londoner stood suspended in space, an accusatory
gesture hovered. A Muslim man of the same age was standing casually on a plastic milk crate.
He was relaxed and clearly the fuel that was igniting the angry man below. The crowd turned to
me, a cacophony of comments floated in the air. There was a jocular quality despite the edge of
anger directed from the man who was challenging the speaker. Amidst a collage of comments
one radiated danger to me “Hey waddya have in the suitcase, a bomb?” I registered that this was
disquieting and penetrated the playfulness of my objective. I understood my time would be brief
but still had an urgency to craft a closure to my performance.
The angry man regained his momentum hurling accusations at the speaker claiming he had no God, no religion and that the space he occupied was not worthy of his attention then abruptly turned his body and his pointed finger to me, claiming that I was just plain out of my mind.

My hand reached slowly up to him, an extended invitation. My heart rate, hidden under the excessive folds of my wet overcoat, would have broadcasted my bluff—calm I was not! His hand changed to a fist, we were far too close for my comfort. A moment of silence passed like a wave through the crowd as the conflict in our intentions hovered in space. Will he hit me? I held my hand extended, my eyes fixed. The crowd began to jeer, “Shake her bloody hand for god’s sake!” Our eyes were fixed but I could clearly see the violent energy of his hand, empty like sand it poured away—the fist remained. The decision was clear, the action was momentous my fingers slowly curled to match the shape of his hand, his eyes changed his mouth relaxed, he moved his fist slowly forward and tapped mine “Peace man,” he whispered. I backed away relieved and glanced up at the speaker, my smile was for him; peace was spoken for his ears. He smiled back—again I felt the dance had moved a language through my limbs and in a site so charged with mistrust, pain, resentment, anger, and hatred, my body had in some way played as a conduit/receptor and transformer for grace, compassion, and reciprocity. I moved slowly to the centre of the gravel area, a place I would not have dared to occupy 1 hour earlier.

I stood in the open gravel area with the three clusters forming a triangle of distant tension. I was located in the centre. Warm and fragile I was feeling the reverberations of these two events wave through my body; it felt good to be in open space without fists and jeers. I peeled off the overcoat and hat and opened my suitcase, My movements were efficient and telling, even from the distance they were deft and agile. The actions of one not out of one’s mind, not strung out on drugs, instead there was an intelligence of movement that was recognized even in the school group of 10-year-olds from Germany who had witnessed one of the events. As I began to fold the overcoat I began to notice a cluster of people surrounding me I was indeed silently and unintentionally making my own cluster!

Ellie, my ally from the first cluster was the first to arrive. “Who are you?” And what was it that you were doing?” I began to explain a little about my graduate work, my research through Lugs and what I knew about what had just happened although that part was the murkiest, I was still reeling.
“It was…I can’t even….there are no….” Ellie spluttered through futile attempts to lace verbal language on what she had experienced—“It’s OK,” I said, “I understand.”

A couple appeared at her side and the woman very quietly said, “I just never thought that language could be this.” She pointed to the folded coat on top of my suitcase. It was a complicated concept and she was both confused and happy for voicing it.

I then noticed an 11-year-old boy standing behind the first row of people. His body lengthened and his eyes beamed brighter with my attention. “What did you think?” He was with the school group from Germany and I could see his peer group urging him to return to the bus. He suddenly put up his hands as if showing the size of the fish he had just caught—then quickly moved it to a gesture with 2 fingers showing a space no larger than a few centimetres. It wasn’t just a little different. He then moved his hand quickly and with great excitement back to the enormous fish. Indeed his mind had just caught an enormous fish of an idea. He smiled, I laughed and thanked him, but he was already running back to his friends.

Reflections

What is this notion of the body working as a receptor/conduit/transformer? How is it understood so deep with an innate kinaesthetic knowledge and yet so difficult to articulate vocally? Clearly the crowd at Hyde Park understood my body’s role through Lug and yet Ellie could not find words to describe her lived experience. I have written about the kind of astuteness I brought to the role in my Lug the crystalline presence that was so strong that it abolished historical patterns in my body. Fear may have been felt but it was not acknowledged or acted upon within a known history. My question is, do I bring my 30 years of dance to the arrival of this state of authenticity or is it just circumstantial? If acting is actually re-acting, an excavation of layers of inhibition and a good actor strips to the core with an exemplary ability to respond with an honest immediacy, does this translate to Dance? To a certain degree perhaps but what about the slow sustained balance work or the flexibility needed to extend my limbs in such a way to embody my extended thought toward the speaker?

What about the white, 30-year-old man in the second cluster who was poised to punch? For 30 years I have been engaged in a physical training called body weather work. This entails rigorous, athletic crossings repeatedly with full-bodied movements that involves an enormous summoning of strength, flexibility, and cardiovascular power. These crossings demand a kind of animalistic state not so different than one that is summoned before a major athletic feat. This state is a kind of hunger to get it right, then to do more and then simply to survive. The work ends with quiet meditative work developing keen focus and concentration. One of the exercises is an uncurling of fingers from fist to open palm in five minutes with eyes closed, attempting to achieve this task in even increments of movement, like sand through an hourglass. This exercise is done immediately following the gruelling cardiovascular work and usually the dancers can feel their own sweat drop onto their hand as they pull their focus from the large loud space of the training to a cellular awareness, a micro cosmic moment that evolves in miniscule and delicate increments. I have worked on this exercise both as participant and teacher for 20 years and have not perfected it but have understood this heightened awareness of energy seeping out of the body as a vessel. It is this knowledge that lives in my body and surfaces in moments such as recognizing the man’s fist is no longer carrying aggression but rather and invitation to peace. It is in these moments that I recognize the training that must be there in my body as I move through this inquiry of embodying other’s stories.
Chinatown (2006)

Although it was suggested that I perform my Lug in Shanghai Alley, I knew the location was wrong; the circle of posters outlying important historical features of the location permeated our ‘read’ of the space—leaving very little room for poetic interpretation. However the cement space in front of the Sun Yat Sen Garden was perfect! Although protected from the street it had a very exposed feel, wide open space, white cement with a large circle of tiles in the middle. Being a new immigrant, I suspect must feel like a combination of exposure, raw vulnerability combined with a sense of enclosure or almost entrapment. This space with its whitewashed cement, cracked and littered with urban remnants, resonated with the promise of richness and safety (the garden just beyond); this contradiction in associations presented the complexity that is often the case when investigating notions of home within the context of immigrants. This diasporic lens set the context perfectly for this location of my next Lug.

This Lug was being presented with a class of schoolteachers currently engaged in grad studies at The University of British Columbia and enrolled in a class called “Writing the City” which I was co-teaching. The objective of the class was to observe various
distinctive sites with clearly distinct demographics and to interpret these socio-cultural pockets through the discipline of writing, movement and visual arts. One of the assignments in the course was to purchase two objects from a dollar store as emblems of our interpretation of Vancouver in general. I bought a dollar store harmonica and played with my inhale and exhales during our teacher’s meeting. I was suddenly distracted from my exploration as I saw Stanley, one of our students from China, leaving for the day. I ran after him and asked, “Do you play any musical instruments?” “No” he said apologetically and was gone. I returned to my teachers’ meeting and 15 minutes later, Stanley returned, “Why did you ask?, “Well I am doing a Lug in a few days in Chinatown and I thought about you playing music as accompaniment. “Oh” he said “What about that?” he said pointing to the harmonica. “Well I suppose I could play like that.” I was delighted by his spirit to become involved “Sure that would be great!”. Graeme Chalmers, the director of the course, was listening to the conversation and then seeing the glint in my eyes responded, “Oh so now I bet you will want 36 harmonicas!” Wow what an offer! “Yes of course!” and back we went to the dollar store. In fact we visited many dollar stores in Vancouver until we were able to purchase at least 20. Did I have a plan? Not really, but I was going on Graeme’s instinct. There will somehow be a chorus of mouth organs.

A combined conversation with Stanley brought a small story of his entry to Vancouver from China and his first experience of what was referred to as the Golden Gate—not in fact that of rich opportunities but in fact the Golden Arches of Ronald McDonald. It seems his first memory of assimilation was that of entering a McDonald’s for a hamburger. He spoke about always feeling a little different and that never quite going away. I asked if he would be willing to start the Chinatown Lug with his story. He was excited and nervous about the idea and greeted me the next day with a copy of one of his ancestor’s head tax receipts asking if it would be helpful. I was honoured and delighted that he would bring such a valuable artefact of his family’s heritage. Typical of the Lugs I usually have either a prop or a strong concept concealed in the suitcase. It has ranged from bread to jewellery, to sod to balloons. In this case I used the head tax receipt as the
concealed catalyst bringing the Lug to a pivotal point or the point of constructive crisis. Below is a Lug Log of the actual performance.

**Figure 16. Lug: Chinatown**

The piece began with a brief lesson in how the harmonicas would be used; they were then distributed amongst selected audience members. Songs as we know it would not be played—instead both inhales and exhales would be sounded through the instrument, long tones with asymmetric intervals. A choral-like organism of breath tones. Individual voices embedded within a collective soundscape—a metaphor for Stanley’s experience of identity shifts with his immigration. Our voice is so connected to the fundamentals of our lives. Focusing on our vitals; breath—heart—cognisance, my choice of harmonica was as simple as this, keeping musical skill out of the paradigm and finding an instrument which was a clear extension of our vital self. I had rigged my harmonica with foam pads so I could keep it in my mouth without using hands. It would remain transfixed; an aural barometer of the effect exerted in my dance was another strong connection to the vitality of breath and heart. The piece began with a cluster close to Stanley. I stood beside him with my harmonica playing quietly as he told his story of the Golden Arches. He spoke of feeling of difference, wondering if he would ever belong and then I moved into the centre of the circle as Stanley encouraged the audience to spread out around the circle. An echoed pilgrimage; a homage to the hope and anticipation of moving forward into the unknown. I began to work with the suitcase as a source of tension playing with conflicts and tensions such as safety and unknown, obligation and negligence, longing and placidity. The contradicting ideas escalated working above and beyond the relentless atonal rhythmic drones of the chorus. An added surprise to the piece was that the harmonica finally planted in my mouth my teeth clamped shut worked counterpoint to the even dynamics of the chorus. It echoed my tempo of activity and heart rate precisely, a gift unforeseen but graciously accepted. Improvisation is entirely hinged on the performer’s ability to accept the gift, the unforeseen circumstances that may otherwise be perceived as a mistake or errors of judgement. Eventually I worked myself to a point of opening the suitcase and found the head tax receipt, it caused me to hold it out the audience making the
slow journey of the circle I was holding it out like a matador offering the ear of the bull—a combination of shame and pride coalesced to a question, but what was the question? It wasn’t until I had completed the revelation and my eyes met Stanley’s that I understood what the question was, “Shall I forgive?” I dropped the head tax receipt as our eyes became transfixed. I was surprised it wasn’t the critical catalytic point I thought it would be; it was in fact the harmonica. I moved towards him slowly, reverently, it felt ritualistic, the birth, no, celebration of something momentous. I let the harmonica fall from my mouth and caught it without breaking my gaze with Stanley. I handed it to him. Listen carefully, the dance is whispering—“Here is the forgiveness, take it, this is your voice—an invitation.” Stanley reached out and took the harmonica and we began to walk together towards the street the walk turned to a run and we disappeared into Chinatown. Stanley, no longer the little boy at McDonalds, wondering whether he would ever have a voice—a voice to be heard beyond his family.

Later, after the performance, Stanley claimed that I had given him the courage to tell his story—to claim his story—to be his story. I had found the centre, the spine of his secret and revealed it through movement. The rest was a collision of accidents between craft and heart. A few days later one of the students sent me this poem with a small note:

**Reflections on Kathryn’s Lug**

Luggage gripped in hand  
Mother’s blessing upon hair  
Last glimpse of home and land  
Journey begins to there.

The known is left behind  
Ahead lies only new  
Past imagery crowds the mind  
The remembered, the beloved, the true.

Greeted at the New Land  
By confusion, by uncertainty, by fear  
Searching for a helpful hand  
To make sense of this here.

Blending in day by day  
Slowly losing what is past  
Yet deep inside, it will stay  
The Luggage—and what’s inside—will last.

Thank you, Kathryn, for inspiring me to write this poem. I was very moved by your Lug and remembered my own family’s stories from the past.

Regards and thanks,

Jim

---

1 J. Harcott, June 7, 2006, personal communication, used with permission.
Reflections on the Lugs

I have chosen these three Lugs out of the 100 I have performed because they exemplified aspects in my research that were distinct and valuable.

I entered a site potent with the invitation for political speech with my Hyde Park Lug. Clearly the speakers were engaged in a performative activity, which was beyond doubt brimming with intention. By the nature of Lugs as rooted in performance I was aligned with the expectations of the site but in conflict with the expected form. Most believed I was strung out on something as I was not “able” to speak and even when they beckoned me to language I resisted. It wasn’t until I moved to the centre and unveiled the character that people seemed to begin to fully acknowledge the possibility that speech could be embodied and still have political and emotional agency. When the speakers came to their spots with ladders and milk crates, they have clear intentions; their objective was to change minds, to make impact. The default was an elevation which gives right to accusation and resistance and from this premise they moved into the heart of their language. Their words were hurled, cast into the crowd as arrows from broken hearts. In this way my Lug was displaced. If I had any objective other than to dissolve any attempts of having an objective, my Lug would not be true to its core. The integrity of the performance would be lost. The receptivity that must be there would be broken. I understood that there were moments with the crowd and the speakers where I intersected but in most instances, we worked with opposite forces in completely different directions. Later I realized it was the tension within these oppositional forces, which brought attention to the possibility of language being perceived in a new way.

Yaletown (which appeared at the beginning of this chapter) was my first Lug outside. Demographically my playing space was steeped with stories of immigration, of many traveling from homeland residences much larger with much more private space. The fact that private residences are stacked close together in glass buildings with front and back yards being shopping streets and public parks, creates another kind of “homeland.” I explored the integration of both form and content in this Lug by playing with the
oppositions of space and restrictions, freedom and repression, being overwhelmed and finding a manageability and finding the balance between integrity and compromise.

With Chinatown Lug, I was working with the site as a key element, but it had added these conditions which brought it to a very special place. I worked with a personal recollection of immigration, which was integrated into the piece. My storyteller, Stanley, immigrated with his family to Vancouver when he was just a boy and he brought his first impressions to the performance revealing his vulnerability and confusion. The audience accompanied the piece with harmonicas and was thus part of the performance to orchestrate this in the simplest way as part of the performance experience. Working in Chinatown with Stanley’s story brought an authenticity and specificity to the Lug, which was both a gift and a challenge as it also walked the line of appropriation. I needed to both honour the authenticity and gently nudge it to a place where I could remember my displacement as a child and integrate it throughout, even at the crisis point when voice and agency grew out of a discovery of the head tax receipt which was revealed when opening the suitcase.

As I navigated difficult cracks in the cement, as I leapt through the dusk air, I felt that I had eroded the attention to other details, which brought a more subtle emotional nuance to the work. It is my constant challenge to balance the practical with a much more complex framework of decision-making.

Below are two of my most recent field studies that represent the core of the chapter as they raise questions of borders and identities within a performative realm. These stories are accompanied with photo documentations of the two performance events (see Figures 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 and 33)
I received a call from a colleague and co-researcher:

“I am doing an installation at the Cannery in Steveston, telling the stories of folks who worked there, lived there or in fact anyone who has something to do with fish, I have interviewed a carver, a cannery worker, a fisherman but we have not heard the salmon’s story.”

I responded, “Well I don’t do iridescence or spandex.”

“No, No!” she replied “None of that!”

“You know I am into ugly dance, smelly, dirty, old and sad.”

“Ugly is good very good.”

“Alright then, send me some of the stories.”

How can my Lug character tell the story of a fish? I will wear my overcoat and hat and of course bring my suitcase. None of this is very fishy….I went to my favourite children’s literature author Shaun Tan (2008) who is a master at telling odd stories of displacement.

We crept closer, the smell was weird, like the ocean, I suppose, but with some other sweet odour that was hard to identify. Red dust had collected in the creases of the suit, as though he had been through a desert as well as an ocean. (p. 24)

I listened to stories of people who worked at the cannery from their extensive website and then thought about the sound for this project. I then pondered the sound of breath and suffocation, seaside and folklore, what could be better than an accordion? I phoned my colleague and another co-researcher. She said she was in. I then wrote a small poem.

What if?

What if we had asked?
What if we had asked where you came from?
What if we had asked where you were going?
What if you had answered?
What if you had a story to tell?
What if you had just one story?
What if?
What if we had listened?
What then?
We arrived at the Cannery to an astonishing confusion between the authenticity of the building and all of the machinery and commercialized *framing* the *informationalizing* for the countless schools groups that have had and will make their way through.

I had ordered the objects I would need; old fishnets and salmon cans which would both act as metaphors to notions of capture and containment.

We walked through the site and chose six locations where I planned to perform scenes from the fish’s side of the story. I had my suitcase, a large pile of fishing nets and about 50 salmon cans. No scales, no iridesence, no spandex. When I finished the day of filming and performing, I realized the Salmon’s story was an immigrant’s story. In fact it could be many immigrants story. It was a story of displacement and assimilation.

In reflection of the day, I wrote on each scene in the Cannery with the Salmon’s voice and then wrote a parallel story using an immigrant’s voice. Below are the entries of both voices. They run parallel and map out what I would consider an arrival and a simultaneous departure told by a fish and a man.

**Figure 17. Lug: Cannery 1**
The Cannery: The Ramp

Rolling up the ramp, up stream, the rails are my boundary I try to escape but get caught.
Surrender
The net becomes entangled with my suitcase—my sense of home is getting confused, I am disorientated. I pull both with me as I struggle toward the sea but am caught by the mesh of another net rolling up the ramp, up stream. I feel I am suffocating. I can see beyond and long for ease and clarity.

The Station: The Suitcase

I am standing on the platform The industrial clatter mixed with crying babies and echoed arrival/departures announcement is unbearable. I suddenly feel as though I know nothing. I move heavily toward the train and am momentarily distracted by a newspaper caught on my shoe.

I see my hand reach for the side rail of the train’s doorway. I take one look back hoping to see something familiar that I can store in my memory of home. A crow perched on an electrical wire poised....

Figure 18. Lug: Cannery 2
I am flip flopping in my natural habitat—joy, lucidity, ease....
The dock is slippery, the air is sharp. I can smell the seaweed and hear the gulls, I am home.
My hands move playfully over and around the suitcase like a magician concealing a coin,
narrowing in on the intention to open it.
A crack reveals a surprise. I reach and feel a small choir of tin cans crashing together. I close
the suitcase quickly but one escapes. I quickly place it back but with the sensation that
something is going to happen here/ a murder at the Cannery—one fish’s story.
Maybe it’s mine....

I feel the tug on my pant leg and look down to see my child has used the suitcase as
support to stand at first one hand on the suitcase as support/ one hand on my pant leg
tenuously balanced and proudly smiling.
I reach down and pick her up and smell the milk on her breath as I but my head into her
tangled hair we blow into each other’s face—our code for, “See you soon!”
My wife moves closer and I feel the temperature drop as she tucks my passport into my coat pocket.
Something is about to happen and I know it involves some kind of death.

Figure 19. Lug: Cannery 3
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cannery: The Machine</th>
<th>The Station: The Conductor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I see metal. It is cold and damp and I hear the continuous rhythm of a machine. I am half in and half out and I feel a slow progression. The sound is getting louder as I approach. I feel the mounting panic of the unavoidable. I need a moment.</td>
<td>I am paralyzed at the door of the train I carry the weight of my family, no my ancestry in my shoes. The conductor is yelling at me, the passengers behind me are yelling at me “Move!”; “Get in!” I am paralyzed. I respond by whispering: “I need a moment.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cannery: The Knife</th>
<th>The Station: The Door</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am numbed but am still aware of the relentless progressive movement and the rhythmic metallic noise but as if behind a cloud and in slow motion. Then suddenly this changes radically and I feel a quick, cold crash, swift and precise and then black.</td>
<td>The Arrival/Departure announcements and the yelling and crying are still there but masked by the hissing steam. Suddenly there is a bang as the doors shut and the train lurches forward as I close my eyes and do absolutely the only thing I know at that moment. I pray.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20. Lug: Cannery 4
Figure 21.  Lug: Cannery 5

There has been a change and I am not sure what. I am floating. The weight is gone, I am no longer suffocating. I feel I am moving forward but very, very slowly and there is silence. The details recede, the noise, the smell, the temperature of the room, all that I knew is moving with me although I do not know how. I feel sure and at peace. There is an overwhelming numb feeling of resignation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cannery: The transition</th>
<th>The Station: The transition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I know that I am on a platform and I am walking slowly towards the exit. I know that I agreed by nodding when a porter had offered to carry my luggage. I know I am surrounded by crows moving fast and loud. I move towards the brightly lit exit. I look up to the roof beams of the station where a row of crows sit quietly watching – I watch back for a long time. I am moving slowly towards the exit and still watching the crows. I feel quiet inside. My heart feel like a stone in a bottomless well falling slowly. There is a numbness that covers the feeling of loss and a knowing that there is no turning back.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 22. Lug: Cannery 6

Figure 23. Lug: Cannery 7
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Cannery: The Packaging</th>
<th>The Station: The Paperwork</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am reaching high above me. The cans are stacked one on top of the other. There are millions of them. I want to belong but know what I am about to lose. I reach higher and higher until my fingers tremble with the strain. I know I have arrived. But I am not sure what that means. This is my reality</td>
<td>I have been waiting in the line-up for many hours it is now morning according to the business world. I can see the droves moving towards their eight hour shifts – coffee cups in hand nodding to the familiar social intersections on their habituated routes – the bus driver – the barista – the colleague. My feet are aching and I am hungry. My fingers are cramped from holding my necessary paperwork but I need to have it ready even though it may be another few hours before I get to the front, before I ask if I can be one of the droves, before I can be considered “home.” I know I have arrived. But I am not sure what that means. This is my reality.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 24. Lug: Cannery 8
We are progressively living within borderless regions with increasing fluidity where the world wide net catches our global communities. This net sometimes traps us and imposes a kind of neutered networking (with the obscene exception of emoticons). The senses are stripped—as we create massive and yet intricate forums of communication, details of heritage are scaled back, the heads of our traditions, prayers, languages, rituals are severed as we move along the relentless belt of assimilation. Pressed into containers of homogeneity. The world is becoming a Cannery.

The Olympics (2010)

A shipping container landed (not so spontaneously) across the street from the burning cauldron during the 2010, Vancouver Winter Olympics, the nexus of this global street fest. As most of us could not afford the sports events, we stuck to the streets and participated in this massive global party. I was asked to be part of that street activity. An
evening of performance in a shipping container. It is the quintessential performance venue for my Lug character, a space of transition, a vessel of arrivals and departures. I was delighted to be asked to perform in this site on the night before the closing of the Olympics and the extinguishing of the torch. I performed two 12-minute Lugs on the evening of February 28, 2010, with the help of my dear friend and collaborator Julia Nolan who played Saxophone and a crew of 20 people who worked out all of the logistics around transporting my 37 suitcases (some equipped with dry ice for special effects). My Lug character needed to be a little extraordinary for this event, instead of a long coat and one suitcase, I envisioned a coat with a trail of 5 metres able to pull 37 suitcases: my entire collection. This coat was designed, the suitcases were delivered (with the dry ice) and several production meetings later…. 

Figure 26. Lug: Olympics 1

I could hear an odd sultry version of “Oh Canada” weave through the Olympic crowd. I had given the sax player her cue which in turn was the cue for the special effects crew to begin activating the dry ice effects in my stack of 38 suitcases precariously posed on the back of my trailing overcoat. I could see that the Pied Piper effect of the sax player starting at the cauldron and slowly advancing to the side was working—crowds were following—crowds were gathering; I could feel she had arrived at the container—our site of performance, my head was down as I pulled, hard
hoping I could move the trail of suitcases—A wedding trail of lost histories—a steam engine working against all odds—the impossible arrival. The image of a single traveler trying to pull this pile of steaming suitcases scattered metaphors of departure/arrival throughout the crowd—the crowd of hybrid identities, multiple countries living in one soul. Who to cheer for and why? “I am Dutch but live here so I cheer for Canada and Holland, my wife cheers for India.” The Olympics, with the burning cauldron in the background of the performance site—stirs the pot—provokes us to question identities and loyalties within the fluid borders of our current world. I break free of the coat and shed the haunting weight of the suitcases and am propelled forward with one, it is closed but peeking out from a corner is a small piece of red fabric and offering it to an audience member he pulls as I allow the suitcase to explode open—a bundle of flags tumble out—and I quickly rifle through them in search of what? My own flag? I am desperate when what rolls quietly out from the colourful mess onto the pavement but a small globe—I dive down to the ground hovering over the precarious object and in an instant I return to standing and face the crowd with the globe clutched between my teeth. My global language—a plea for understanding.

The crowd follows me into the shipping contain where I release the globe like a whisper gently placing it on the ground I cover it protectively with my hands then gently, tentatively back away from the audience who are crowded into one end of the container. Leaning over each other to catch the moment. The moment is a tiny globe laying on the floor of a shipping container and a character in an overcoat and hat backing away slowly and quietly whispering “take care…”

The second performance immediately after the first was entirely different Although it was in the same site with the same beginning—the handling of the objects and resulting metaphors were completely different.

Figure 27.  Lug: Olympics 2

Tug of war with a Canadian Flag
Flags in my mouth
The silent scream
And an odd communion
These are all fleeting memories of the night, the crowd and each impulse somehow merging from
Moving from the outside to the inside of the container afforded quieter more detailed work and as the globe was stolen between the first and the second performance I nestled a loaf of bread within the flags inside the suitcase which was later revealed inside the container.

Figure 28.  Lug: Olympics 3

Assuming the posture of a beggar full of shame I broke pieces of the bread and in a bent over position continuing to look at the ground, I held out pieces of bread only feeling that they were being taken. I backed away to the other end of the container. I looked up for the first time and I was surprised to see that there was a crowd on the other end each with a piece of bread in their hand—we shared a suspended moment and then an astonishing move. One man held up his piece of bread, a gesture so refined it carried the reverence of a communion, I shivered with the potency of this gesture. Everyone followed and he placed it in his mouth I smiled and followed and turned to leave.

I am sure I could feel the rest of the crowd follow, a union that started in tug of war, a reverence discovered in the most unexpected way. I was, and still am, astonished by how we called attention to possibility through conflict. Astonished by what emerges through Performative Inquiry where each moment unfolds anew. I am reminded, as I walk slowly back to the room where I will pause in privacy to allow the performance to wash over me. This is the kind of research I will always feel honoured to participate in. This public inquiry, this performative journey, is what brings breath to every created/constructed thought that I bring to articulating Embodied Poetic Narrative.

As it was impossible to follow the tradition of talk back at the end of this Lug, I instead created a Blog for response and had volunteers hand out postcards with clear instructions and an invitation to submit a response to the Blog, I also sent PSAs to all of CBC’s
programs urging anyone who had seen the event to post comments on this site. Below is a selected collection of the responses.²

**Figure 29. Lug: Olympics 4**

*Anonymous said...*
I was on my way to see the flame and stopped to see the performance.
It was very interesting, I saw a man who was struggling with immigration and then ended up being in a countryless world.
It made me think of exile
March 2, 2010 12:05 AM

*Anonymous said...*
I thought it was really interesting when you picked up the mini globe in your mouth!
March 3, 2010 10:26 AM

*Anonymous said...*
As an observer of the dance:
Crowds and crowds of people walking by—the music calls them to attention. In a sea of bodies, what makes one notice something different? The sound of music, the lights and smoke, a slow moving body. Two performances happened that night, each quite different from the next. The intensity was thick and almost heavy. The serious weight of the performance was displayed in the relationship between dancer and Canadian flag. What is Canada made up of? What stories of struggle does it hold? What is our multicultural identity born of? A stop moment for me was when you caressed the wet ground, then rubbed your face with your wet dirty hand. We are of this land, this land is of us. I was unable to see much of the performance in the container, but was left with thoughts of our Canadian history. Who are we as Canadians? What identities have been given up along the way?
March 10, 2010 7:06 AM

² The excerpts were taken from http://www.blogger.com/profile/02392342951525668452.
Anonymous said
At first I assumed you were telling a story of the weight and impediment of ownership—allllll those suitcases you were straining to pull along with you. But then, all that frenzy of global action... Maybe this was the story of one who sold everything and went traveling around the world! Could that explain the shipping container? But having the world in your teeth...? I couldn’t make much of that at the time. Thinking back on it, perhaps that is part of the excess consumerism again. Okay, the earth’s feeling the pinch!
March 2, 2010 5:42 PM

Anonymous said...
The second performance had fewer observers. As directed, I tried to get the audience to move through the container to the other side, so more people could fit in and actually see the performance inside. As the first 5 to 6 people followed the performers into the container, I asked them to move all the way along the wall to the other side so more could fit in. Funny enough, even though directed, they still did not want to cross the invisible line between performance space and audience space. It seemed they thought the entire back side of the container was stage space, and only walked halfway along the wall and stopped a few feet from the performance. Even when directed to go further upon entering, they could not bring themselves to walk past the performers. This leads to questions about audience space and performer’s space—how do they intertwine? What are the boundaries? Who sets those boundaries and how can they be broken? How does an audience know when to respect these boundaries or engage with the space or performance?
March 10, 2010 7:10 AM
Anonymous said...
I enjoyed that your work resonated with what was happening on the street. The TV world looking in on Vancouver and Canadian flavored flag waving were ever present. I really enjoyed how your ongoing performance character had the capacity to take these themes on. And take it on in a way that sat well with your visual/physical vocabulary. I also felt that taking on these themes—especially right in front of the Olympic flame provided an accessible entry point for viewers (many who may have never seen such a style of performance). I often hear how contemporary artists (particularly dance) wanting to engage with a general public—but then don’t really shape their performances to actually do this. Our themes do not always acknowledge the zeitgeist of the moment. You did this well. Reflecting an artistic barometer of the moment—within your work—reflecting this perspective back to an engaged public. I also enjoyed that you found a way to work with the site—inside and outside. Expressing both a public and intimate exchange.
March 20, 2010 8:33 AM

Anonymous said...
This performance left me with thoughts of rather than celebrating what we have become, but of sadness of what has been lost. It is easy to celebrate what we have become and not recognize that pain is also a part of our history. The stop moment for me was when you invited an observer to participate in the dance. What would he do? Would he take the flag? How far would he go in interacting with the performance?
March 10, 2010 7:07 AM
Anonymous said...
Although I have seen a few versions of Lug before, I found that the location of this particular performance enhanced and shaped further my enjoyment of it. The industrial container, the concrete courtyard, the massive, imposing architecture, made the performer--the immigrant, appear even more vulnerable and heroic as she tried to pull the weight of her memories and travels along with her. Also, within the physical and conceptual context of hundreds of people from all over the world, gathering, shouting, singing in the courtyard, her suitcase full of countries, spilling out into that courtyard added a poetic dimension that added to the magic of the Olympics. Thank you for this.
March 7, 2010 9:37 AM

Anonymous said...
In this dance performance, I enjoyed the fact that we got to follow the dancer and the saxophonist through the shipping container. The performance made me think of the Vancouver 2010 Olympic experience where it did not matter where in the world you were from—ie. what flag you represented—you were welcome and able to join in the wonderful energy at the venues and on the streets. That which divides us as nations, represented in the multitude of country flags that tumbled out of the suitcase, was countered by the image of the globe which serves to unite us as one global entity. The sense of harmony, respect, and togetherness that I witnessed at the 2010 Olympics, are things I hadn’t expected to experience. I think it is so unique to experience such a massive international event where you live.
March 3, 2010 11:27 AM
Anonymous said...
This dance spoke of the personal struggle—emotional, physical, and political—one experiences when leaving home and coming toward another place to name as home. What must be forgotten, what must be accepted are all found in a sea of frustrations and containments. The suitcases beckoning you back to glowing memories, the shipping containers’ metal wall confinement, the teeth clenched upon the small globe, the flag eaten in rage...all these images put the audience physically into the experience of leaving your culture behind and searching for a place to be in a new land. It is the struggle we Canadians have all experienced at some point in our family’s history. A moving performance, it brought tears. Thank-you.
March 3, 2010. 9:36 AM

These two stories, The Cannery and The Container, are examples of work that draw attention to cultural displacement and the silencing that occurs with this. The container asks what is your flag? And does it really matter in this space of transition. Is it made of fabric or of something intangible? What is nationalism in relation to citizenship? How can we break bread on common ground? The Cannery with my Lug character telling the story of the Salmon draws a parallel to the ways in which immigrants are ‘caught’ in the traps of assimilation and the loss of heritage that ensues. It also draws attention to the entrapments of the World Wide Web and how our distinct communication becomes ‘canned’ and ‘neutered’. In both cases, the Olympics with flags, a small globe and a loaf of bread, and with the Cannery; a fishing net, and salmon cans, I use the artefacts and the environment as critical factors in my performative choices. This dialogue becomes the moving metaphor, the poetic narrative read in multiple ways by those who witness. The power in this is that it permits and even invites an individually unique ‘reading’ which in turn is met with personal reflection and memories as part of the meaning making process.
This was shared in a virtual space with the Olympics evidenced by a few chosen Blog entries.

Through a kinaesthetically based exploratory process, one can discover that identity and place are intrinsically linked to our own historicity, intimacy, and immediacy of home and community. I am exploring how the culturally inscribed self and body addresses the complexities of the world. When working with groups with the intention of creating a performance and in the process of listening and gathering stories, I search for lived moments of vulnerability that are then carefully crafted into small scenes to be remembered and sequenced later. I have witnessed the participants’ shared moments of loss or crisis as well as pride and revelation and know that the honour in this position as witness must not be held lightly. The resulting performances of shared processes become a testimony to their voices, voices that in many cases have been muffled or even muted.

In this chapter, I have explored how the culturally inscribed self and body addresses the complexities of the world by outlining a variety of methods using the body as a site for progressive and active problematization and possible-re articulation.

The migration we consider within globalization and the resulting hybridities are also echoed in our developing scholarships. Clearly in articulating how the body begins to re-write itself into the world as a powerful tool for social action, we need to interface with a multitude of communities of practice, drawing on languages and perspectives that are essential in acknowledging the complexity and density of this endeavour. Conquergood (2002) begins this chapter with articulate insights into the fluidity of forces at play with globalization and now it is appropriate to end with his insight towards collaboration and interconnectivity as we can no longer afford to think of our disciplines as having fixed boundaries, “A boundary is more like a membrane than a wall. In current cultural theory ‘location’ is imagined as an itinerary instead of a fixed point” (p. 145). With this concept I submit that the articulation of Embodied Poetic Narratives will continue within this multiplicity of influences bringing a rich diversity and a secure foothold in the important dialogues that will continue in regards to the scripted body within our rapidly changing world.
3. Knowing Through Creative Doing

OK, this is fun!

What is?!

Oh you will find out, it is something about putting a book on its feet.

What?

Well she makes people snake and hiss in order to understand literary stuff like illustrations.

You mean alliterations?

Yes that’s right! I tried to do this and ended up hyperventilating and getting very disoriented.

Disoriented is good.

Not for a compass.

You should try to get lost sometimes, it will give you a better understanding of where you are.

What?!!

Hissing Our Way to Literacy: Counter Textual Approaches to Learning

I am walking down a road in Surrey that is punctuated with suburban prostitutes eyeing me with suspicion at first and then overt disappointment. It is a hot sunny day. The road and the area
seem under construction and I am navigating gravel, chopped up asphalt and the odd bucket, glove, and 2 by 4. I am not sure of the exact location of my destination and gazing ahead across a desolate field of burnt grass past a forlorn and broken playground, I see a non descript building with some colourful figures in front and I am hopeful that this may be the celebration I have come to be part of and to deliver my crazylishus lesson as referred to by Addy, the leader of this African youth club. The closer I move to the site I see many clusters of people all with jet black skin against burnt grass, the women like vibrant flags of celebration emblems of joy in their brilliant batik bunos and head-dresses. I am wearing beige shorts and a white T-shirt and am aware of my extreme displacement.

I stand on the burnt grass in my clothes from the Gap and feel utterly displaced, I had no idea where to sit, how to stand, whom I should talk to. I am thankful for these moments as it affords necessary humility and grace. I wander between the clusters of families where a 12-year-old is carrying her 2-year-old sibling in last year’s wedding flower girl dress to the playground.

I see wild colours on display and hear exotic accents in the air and yet they are all balancing paper plates of Cheezies and Costco burgers. It is time to begin my lesson and so they make their way into the darkness of the building past the half functioning foosball machines to the gym where a collection of 14-year-olds are playing with the sound system like sultry, seasoned DJ’s.

I ask the children to sit with me on the floor while the parents seek the comfort and safety of the chairs. I tell them that they are about to attend the most exciting writing exercise of their life. They beam with glee, mostly because they sense they need to support this lovely minority and partly because I can be quite convincing when I need to be. As I explain that on a hot summer day like today we need to celebrate the season with alliteration they are still smiling but I can detect the slightest sign of scepticism. I began reciting Miller’s poem The Esses of Summer with animation in my body and great enthusiasm in my voice knowing we were are about to embark on a wondrous journey together!

The Esses of Summer

Serine sounds surround sea shores
sea storms stir seashells to shore,
sunbathers soaking up sunshine
some are soothing sunburn sores.

Sealife silently swimming seas
seaweed surfaces sand,
surfers skillfully surfing sea’s
steadily they stand.  (Miller, n.d.)

I stop suddenly and ask what they notice? They say, “There are a lot of ‘S’s.”; “You are right!,” I reply. “What is the sound of an ‘S’? Well you sound like a room full of…..”; “Snakes!” They proudly answer (in their outdoor voices) “Well let’s see….Can you show me? Don’t tell me, but show me!” They don’t know but I have just given them an important literary device and one that is central to my work. They answer with serpentine arms, torso and the neck and head followed in sequenced articulation. Later I will ask them to write with this device but for now, a room full of serpentine creatures hissing enthusiastically is good enough. “Now,” I whisper with wide eyes drawing them a little closer (both parents and children) we are going to hiss like snakes every time you hear an S-word. You can’t stop until you hear a word that doesn’t start with a ‘S’. I am giving the signal that we have a secret that we are about to undertake, a highly subversive act! I have done this by whispering my instruction and created a condition where they needed to lean in to hear. They needed to get a little closer, bring the body in, bring the breath in and the heart and
mind will surely follow. Secondly I have outlined the task within such a restrictive form that results in a kind of urgency, this is the state where games live. We know games and so associative responses historically embedded are triggered. I begin reciting the poem again my hissing serpentine creatures listen carefully for the breaks in the text where a non S-word becomes the oasis the opportunity to fuel up with oxygen for the next long stretch of hissing.

There is hissing, and quick deep gulps of air. Hissing and gulping. The poem has come to an end and both the parents and children are beaming with pride. They don’t know yet but we have only just begun! I have now activated their spines and deepened their breath. The state of their bodies has been radically shifted. They are attentive and waiting….

They have also felt the cultural familiarity of a storyteller; in this case my delivery of the poem, igniting an atmosphere of call and response.

With all of my participants hissing, running out of breath and waiting for a non S word I created a cause and effect relationship with them, which triggers the same familiar comfort of engagement. I have created (with a poem) the tenets of what I consider an optimal learning space—an active body and a dynamic space. I now pull out parts of the poem that are action packed; seaweed surfacing sand, soothing sunburn sores, soaking up sunshine. I collectively draw suggestions from the children as they embody parts of the poem. The surface of the seaweed sends textural landscapes across our body moving with a floating fluid plane, applying sunscreen brings us back to inhabiting a body with expression and situation as we “ouch, ouch” through our swiping motions. We then become the radiant beams of the sunlight casting life rays across the dingy, dim gym floor. In a matter of minutes we have transformed, at least this poem and this gym!

We are now ready to stand up!

We take our imaginary magnifying glasses out of our pockets and look through them angling them toward our own body we are inviting dynamic scope depth and breadth in this silent gesture. We become the Sherlock Holmes in search of full-bodied movement. We find it and our now ready for the next level! We boldly cast our imaginary magnifying glasses over our shoulder and cover our ears as we hear the imaginary crash! We have accepted the invitation.

The gym is charged. The parents AKA hissing snake creatures are poised. My multi modal poetry performers are standing with baited breath. I cast a look at the sultry 14-year-olds at the sound equipment (yes, remember them?) who have also been caught in the crossfire of playful raw abandoned energy which has collided with adolescent scorn and scepticism.

“You guys can just throw on something sensationally slippery!”

They smile and nod!

Fingers at the sound system are working furiously—suddenly electrified on an entirely different plane. And so we begin; the parents are hissing and gulping. The children are undulating, sliding and stomping and the DJ’s are spinning and adjusting. We all end breathless and entirely delighted with ourselves. I am calling out to the world for energizing and dynamic ways to approach literacy and right here and right now with this celebration with this African Pocket in the middle of Surrey, B.C., they have answered back!

**Force Patterns in the Body = Force Patterns in the Learning Space**

The stories I work with are not necessarily and often not manifesting linguistic/vocal but rather kinaesthetic/performative. I believe that within the body we store information that is meant to be resuscitated not necessarily or exclusively through spoken or written language. Murium Reiner (1998) a researcher looking at tacit understanding through embodiment writes, “bodily acts are often tacit, implicit, and are hard or impossible to capture in propositional form. Yet some highly sophisticated knowledge is evidenced in
the dynamics of the body” (para. 1). She goes on to write about how this bodily understanding has a direct link to the improvement of learning—spaces. She suggest in her study that this knowledge leads to improving spaces of learning, In particular, it will describe how tacit knowledge, of which learners are normally not aware, and which is triggered unconsciously by sensations of force patterns, can be accessed and exploited to improve learning (Reiner, 1998).

Cancienne and Snowber (2008) move that further by saying dance is a vehicle for deep-seated learning beyond the traditional spaces:

Dance vibrates out of the soul as a pulse of life asking to take form. Both in lamenting and exalting, questioning and probing, asking and receiving, stomping and contracting, releasing and swaying, dance is a vehicle for expressing the depth of humanity. (p. 1449)

Through the lens of performance scholars such as Conquergood (2002) and Siegel (1995) as well as theatre/drama educators such as Heathcote (1984) and Gallagher (2001), I will examine a range of methods that critique the primacy towards text and speech centered modalities in the learning space both inside and outside the classroom, as a means to address the culturally inscribed body. The second part of this chapter will examine how these theories are transferred to dance scholars/practitioners such as Shapiro (2008), Albright (1997), Doolittle and Flynn (1999), Snowber (2002), Bagley and Cancienne (2002) as well as the movement practice called InterPlay which investigates notions of self and other with embodied practices working on the edges, through and around text. The two parts of this chapter are bridged through Rolande Barthes’ (1975) notion of the pleasure of text as well as a weaving of teaching and performing stories that exemplify the methods of working fully with text towards a holistic literacy.

Textocentrism, Verbocentricity and Silence

I will begin by examining a sweep of scholars within Performance and Drama/Education Studies who are embracing performance as a generative learning space; Conquergood (2002), Heathcote (1984), Siegel (1995), Gallagher (2001) to name a few, have made
valuable contributions to the field of Performance Studies which has also informed
tangential communities of practices such as philosophy, education and anthropology to
name a few. With this chapter I intend to examine these selected scholars within
Performance and Drama/Education Studies and to draw connections to their methods of
working from and through text in order to cultivate learning spaces steeped with the
possibility of transformation, articulation, revelation, and empowerment.

As referenced in Chapter 2, Conquergood (2002) also writes of Performance Studies as
the uprooting of traditional ways of organizing knowledge, which is collected within an
empirical paradigm and tethered to text. An embodied process which lives in
Performance Studies, although ephemeral, finds meaning through experience/
participation and this application is what Conquergood refers to in the context of
constructing meaning as “knowing how” or “knowing who” (p. 146). Conquergood
writes that dominant cultures dismiss “subjugated knowledges,” a term coined by
Foucault, addressing all knowing outside the borders of positivistic validity. This
knowledge is deemed illegible…existing outside books, outside the borders of inscription
and therefore illegitimate.

What gets squeezed out by the epistemic violence is the whole realm of
finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured,
improvised, co experienced, covert and all the more deeply meaningful
because of its refusal to be spelled out. (Conquergood, 2002, p. 140)

The textocentrism emblematic of Western Imperialism seems to have created a blindness
to tone, gesture and breath, to name a few critical messengers of meaning. Further to
this, text centered literacy has often been equivocated to intelligence which can only be
an enormous oversight to the idea that so much of the world either does not have access
to text or considers it riddled with oppressive directives and devastating consequences
which Certeau terms “intertextuation,”

More often than not, subordinate people experience text and the
bureaucracy of literacy as instruments of control and displacement e.g.
green cards, passports, arrests, warrants, deportation orders, what de
Certeau calls “intertextuation”: Every power, including the power of law,
is written first of all on the back of its subjects.
(quoted in Conquergood, 2002, p. 140)

Conquergood (2002) continues by citing Hurston (1990) in his critique of text centered learning:

...the white man researcher is a fool not because he values literacy, but because he valorized it to the exclusion of other media, other modes of knowing. I want to be very clear about this point: textocentrism—not texts—is the problem.  (p. 151)

Conquergood sets out to deconstruct the hegemony of textualism by reconfiguring the text instead of placing the romanticism of performance against the authority of the text, one creates a hybridity of knowing and understanding by integrating theory and practice. Conquergood breaks this combination down into three categories; imagination, inquiry and intervention. He also refers to these categories with the acronym AAA—artistry, analysis, and activism. This triangulation creates an integration of creativity with critical reflectivity and finally a commitment to application and interrelations. This braiding of meaning-making and understanding encourages the cultivation of the learning space as engaging, experiential and holistic—collapsing traditional notions of knowledge-making as located exclusively through a cognitive process.

In Boler’s Democratic Dialogue in Education, I refer to Li’s (2004) chapter, “Rethinking Silencing Silences,” where I find a parallel critique of silence opposed to speech as Conquergood’s (2002) concern with textocentrism. Li addresses the common notion of silence as a non-productive space. Li encourages us to consider silence not just as the absence of speech but possibly evidence of personal agency. She asks us to reconsider the possible inadequacies of speech—making and to shift the primacy of speech as the centre of learning within the public school systems to another location whereby we could recognize the pedagogical merits of silence as an important force for reflective learning.

To re-dress the inadequacy of speech making at both individual and collective levels, it might be important for concerned educators to silently contemplate what has been left unsaid. The purpose of such contemplation does not aim at translating “silence” into “speech.” Rather,
it raises our awareness of the limitations of speech and the need to explore various forms of communications. (Li, 2004, p. 75)

Li (2004) encourages us to look at what is beneath and beyond the silence just as Conquergood’s (2002) work looks through the text and, by this focus, we are invited to see the interconnectedness between speech and silence. All too often support races in to finish the sentence of an English-as-an-additional-language learner. When interviewing a peer consultant in the Learning Centre, SFU—the most important learning she recognized for herself in the position over the term was to embrace silence and wait for the students to find their own words through the silence—as a result of the silence. Silence affords space and time to reflect and ponder which in turn brings personal voice.

Marjorie Siegel (1995) speaks of this departure from privileging text and the slow shift from transmission of information in the learning space or, as Freire (1970) would term the banking system, claiming that students now need more than words for an optimum learning experience. Siegel’s primary method in attending to this concept is through trans-mediation, which “highlights and intensifies the generative nature of meaning-making” (p. 455). This process of transferring signs and symbols ultimately leads to metaphor which “offers a way of talking and thinking about transmediation that calls attention to the need for students to invent their own connections, ask their own questions, and in doing so, open new lines of thinking in school” (p. 455). Siegel dissects this process of meaning-making for the reader by explaining that there are two different planes of communication; content and expression and these planes existing in particular sign systems, must be shifted to another sign system. Just as the “S” of Summer was shifted to breath and undulating spines in service of a deeper understanding of the text. As the connection of these different sign systems have not yet been invented, it calls upon the learner to construct a poetic syntax. According to Siegel (1995) this action is the result of a highly generative space. “The absence of a ready-made link between the content and expression planes of two different sign systems created and anomaly that sets generative thinking in motion” (p. 456).
Siegel (1995) advocated the notions of a learning space as a site that goes beyond information submitted and received but rather a dynamic space where meanings are collectively constructed and connections are invited to emerge.

Whereas knowledge was once relegated as stable and absolute it is now seen as partial and contingent. Similarly, the familiar idea that learning is a passive process of acquiring isolated skill and bits of information has given way to the idea of learning as a social process in which students actively construct understandings. (Siegel, 1995, p. 457)

How can performative playfulness within the context of understanding text play out in the classroom when using movement and storytelling as a tool? This question has been answered for me through Embodied Poetic Narratives as the form influenced by Seigal’s concept of transmediation. I have discovered a way to move through text and speech with an embodied inquiry as a model for learning. “The emerging shift from transmission-to inquiry-oriented models of teaching and learning implies that students need more than words to learn” (p. 458)

All of these many stages of transmediation within a creative process serve as a highly individualistic approach to the subject matter. These interpretations will access or trigger personal associations which are integrated into the work, allowing for surprising material to surface.

These unexpected outcomes are what I believe is the magic in this process of animating text and ultimately what facilitates the essential meaning making of literacy. This principle is the key to taking specific linear narratives and moving them through the personal and into a broader possibility of interpretation.

As explored in Chapter 2, I write about the process of personal stories moving into a shared world of meaning making. The stories were fragmented and re-constructed thereby losing some of the specificity and moving into a poetic space where new meaning could be read in the spaces between the words. The narratives travelled in and through movement and theatre vignettes, creating new meanings by their sometimes surprising placements. The author of the text no longer owned the story as it created another layer
for someone else’s movement phrase. This kind of surrendering of authorship begins to
cultivate a new ecology or culture in the collaborative team which, I believe, becomes the
mechanics of making a community. Rather than erasure of self and of personal stories it
becomes an accumulation and layering of others within one’s own personal framework.
There is a sense of a collective generating of creative impulses and a collective sharing
and crafting of shared storying, which ultimately empowers the entire group. With this
process we worked with artefacts and physical metaphors. In this context, an artefact is
an object that can be infused with a multitude of meanings just like the stories which have
been poeticized: a picture frame, an antique book, a foreign coin or an onion to name a
few. These are objects that trigger stories in each of us and although these stories are
distinct and independent they are linked by this common trigger; the physical metaphor is
a prop that is even more abstracted to an artefact of value, and it is through the
performer’s intention that we recognize this transformation. These props are: stones,
paper, onions, antique books, handkerchiefs.

I posit that without this process, a text cannot truly resonate in a shared world of
imagination but rather remain self-contained within its own determined meaning. When
initiating this concept in the classroom I speak about the difference between
representation and interpretation and the importance of interpretation opposed to
prescribed meanings.

So this is Kathryn’s signature exercise coming up.

Yes and this is her signature exercise.

That’s what I just said!

No, No. I mean this is the exercise she is known for, everyone enjoys doing this. This
is where she makes her point that everyone has their own unique mark in the world
and it is indelible.

Like a signature—*in ink*!

Or one’s famous sourdough cinnamon cake!
What?!
Never mind! Like one’s signature but this one is in the body, more fun than in ink!

Signatures

This exercise will take the participants through a series of exercises, which will show how one can work from concrete to abstract and to feel immediate ownership in the material. The exercise involves at first miming the participant’s signature with the finger as the pen and open space as the paper. Incrementally we build this movement in size and dimension as we shift the pen to another body part and imagine the paper as being the inside of a globe instead of a flat surface. These manipulations result in full bodied and three-dimensional interpretations of what was once a signature. We can play with this in movement by placing two or three people together to see what may come up randomly. This becomes a metaphor of individual voice and how it interfaces with others finding intersections and commonalities in the building of diverse communities. We then have a discussion around the individuality of a signature and the important role it plays in our lives. We talk about ownership and binding agreements, legalities and responsibility. We then shift the conversation to what is it that nobody can take away from us. We then do a free write based on the sentence “Nobody can take away my…..” A few of these are read aloud. An example of a rap song we designed based on these exercises appears below.

Rap Song

You can take away my clothes
You can take away my nose
You can take away my time
But you can’t take away my pride

You can take away my toaster
You can take away my hat
You can take away my home
But leave the clothes on my back
You can take away my freedom
You can take away my peace
You can take away my shelter
But I’ll always have my dreams

I’ve got dignity, sanctity, destiny,
memory, honesty, loyalty.
So even if you tried,
you couldn’t touch my pride.

So here is another way that Kathryn encourages what she calls multiple readings of the world but this time it’s at the dry board with colourful markers.

Sounds squeaky and stinky.

Well I think it sounds imaginative and fun!

I think we just did a multiple reading.

No, I think we just did a multiple anticipation.

OK, meet you on the other side of this exercise for the *reading*.

**The Blindfolded Image**

I stand at a dry board with various coloured pens and in 30 seconds and with a series of efficient sweeps, create an image. It was my favourite picture to draw from childhood (I am sure many share this favourite). I have created a clean precise image and it is interpreted with an equal efficiency by my students, they are all in agreement. “That is a house, sun, path, flower, window, and door.” I then blindfold myself and with the same pens and the same amount of time, create a ‘mess’ of straight and scribbled lines leaving some spaces sparse, others dense, punctuating with short or broad sweeps of varying colours. This time the reading of the image takes much longer and the space between the image and the students is totally charged; the readers became energized with a creative tension. There are extreme differences in the reading and there is clearly an enjoyment in sharing this.
I saw a dragon, a boat and a wretched storm!

I saw a peanut butter sandwhich....I’m hungry!

As Conquergood (2002) wrote about the tyranny of textocentrism, Siegel (1995) writes of the same traps within verbocentricity with understanding that the teach-telling models result in cultivating passive learners with the exception of the arts whereby students learned to construct new models of meaning outside of the word and within other language/disciplines such as visual arts, music, dance or theatre. Langer (1957) contributes to this notion of working outside the word by claiming that text and the construction of meaning is discursive–meaning as it is set up in discrete units which are intrinsically sequential and thereby meaning is collected successively.

Conversely, an analytical process of understanding a picture is perceived through symbols simultaneously which become interconnected and thereby create a meaning through the interrelationship of these symbols. This process then becomes a more holistic approach to understanding.

What’s wrong with text?

She’s written an entire encyclopedia here as far as I can see—she must like words!

I think she is saying she likes words—and—

And what?! You never finish your sentences!

Sometimes sentences feel like they’re being sentenced....

What?!!!
In addressing both culture/body/self/story we move through scholars who recognize and advocate learning spaces that are not hinged on text. This is not to move away from or to dismiss text but rather to roll text around in our mouths, allow it to slide through our bodies, coming to understand the words within a full bodied knowing; a fully creative embodied knowing as Barthes (1975) states “…it granulates, it crackles, it caresses it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss” (p. 67).

Barthes (1975) invites us to dismantle the conventional structures of the reader/writer relationships and to engage in the text merging these positions. He invites the reader to become full bodied in his/her event of meaning making. “What is significance? It is meaning, insofar as it is sensually produced” (p. 61).

The interpretation is intended to employ all senses. He invites us to understand what he calls the “blind spots” of a writer and the reader, to understand the text as an interlocutor to new meaning—a sumptuous signifier. His encouragement to return to the body as a receptor of words and not only to the cognitive centre of our mind, of course, parallels all my values as a dancer and performative writer.

In 2007, I was fortunate to visit many famous galleries and museums in Europe where I not only absorbed stunning works of art but also observed myself as a spectator. If I visited the museum at the beginning of the day my absorption and interpretation of the work was very astute—analytical—comparative—working closely with relational, historical, and contextual information. As the day progressed my body became more involved—integrated into the immediate, visceral process of meaning making. “The pleasure of text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do” (Barthes, 1975, p. 17). I began to sit longer in front of works and pass over other pieces quickly and with ease not even needing to forgive myself. By 4:00 p.m., I had achieved the state that I am sure Barthes writes about in *Pleasure of Text*. “In the text of pleasure, the opposing forces are no longer repressed but
in a state of becoming: nothing is really antagonistic, everything is plural. I pass lightly through the reactionary darkness” (p. 31)

I allowed the paintings to wash over me. Barthes (1975) invites a parallel way of being with text. This availability for words to wash over and through us leaving the residue—these traces as body knowledge, is very similar to the way in which I improvise with words in my dance performances, I wait for the moment and invite an impulsive, visceral logic as an added layer/texture in the dance. This is what I term Poetic Narratives.

...what happens and what “goes away,” the seam of the two edges. The interstice of bliss, occurs in the volume of the languages, in the uttering, not in the sequence of utterances: not to devour, to gobble, but to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover…. (Barthes, 1975, p. 13)

This puts the reader in a position of vulnerability as if in a dark room tentatively feeling for the furniture. To continue the metaphor, narrative takes on a new idea as we resign ourselves to relinquishing the light switch and instead relishing in the darkness not knowing what may be revealed.

This is very subtle and nearly untenable status for discourse; narrativity is dismantled yet the story is still readable: never have the two edges of the seam been clearer and more tenuous, never has pleasure been better offered to the reader- if at least he appreciated controlled discontinuities, faked conformities, and indirect destructions. (Barthes, 1975, p. 9)

Barthes’ (1975) text performs exactly what it speaks to; it “walks the walk.” Not only does it celebrate liminality, but the text itself lives in this space of unknowingness. When I perform my solos I invoke a sense of unknowing—the conventions of spectator/performer have been dismantled as have relationships to traditional narratives. We are all in a dark room together feeling our way towards the furniture. This unknowing or rather ignorance to the narrative is, in fact, for me a form of bliss.

Although Barthes’ (1975) notion of bliss is described clearly in a nonsexual realm, he describes in humour, the varying linguistic and cultural interpretations of the orgasms ending with the possibility of the ultimate resignation of self into senses as being. In this
way Barthes (1975) suggests that text creates a space, a wound, an invitation for a kind of continued sense of discovery and/or inquiry. “I am interested in language because it wounds or seduces me” (p. 38).

…what it searches for (in a perspective of bliss) are the personal incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language. (Barthes, 1975, p. 66)

**Sans Textbook**

When working with students beyond text we will often take fragments of images as a way of paralleling our poetic inquiry. Fragmenting both the text and the image and thereby creating openings for new ‘readings’. By doing this we enable a refreshed approach, disrupting our traditional ways of making sense of an image. Although scholars within Cultural Studies would argue that an image is carrying just as many discursive properties as text, Stuart Hall (2001b) writes, “images do not carry meaning or signify on their own” (p. 325). Hall claims, meaning floats and that according to the socio-political conditions embedded deep within us, we privilege one meaning over another. There is no right or wrong answer in how we view the image but Hall emphasizes that the interpretations we may believe we own are merely the cultural inscriptions that lie deep within us.

Regardless of these biases that come into play when students transfer knowledge to new plains of understanding they, as Siegel (1995) emphasizes, inhabit powerful locations in the learning space as “knowledge makers and reflective enquirers” (p. 70).

Below are examples of fragmented texts and images from a high school residency. The images were a part of a performance created by the students based on memories of their ancestry (see Figures 34, 35, and 36).
Figure 34. Burnaby Central Project 1

The letters my friends gave me are flashbacks

Figure 35. Burnaby Central Project 2

It makes me feel safe
Gallagher (2001) writes of her process of transferring meaning from pre-existing text to personal stories allowing the text to become a springboard asking her students “what happens when?” opposed to “what happens next?” the latter, she says, often provokes more linear logical extensions of a story. Within this activity, Gallagher allows a departure from the text, inviting a playful imagining of a story to be constructed collectively, and calling attention to remembered histories and embracing current realities.

Gallagher (2001) submits that this process, sans textbook, becomes a powerful event for the students, “Because they are not following a text book, they have the whole of the history of life and literature to choose from, along with many powerful symbols of popular culture to draw on” (p. 44).

Gallagher’s work (2001) begins to blur the distinction between nonfiction and fiction as her students begin to recognize themselves in the stories they read and consequently begin to understand how their notions of self are manifest within a particular social
construct. To complete a process that Gallagher coins ‘learning in role’, she invites the student to write letters in role adopting the accurate style and tone of the particular character they have in mind. This creative writing activity again encourages both an engagement and reflectivity but unlike Conquerood who is advocating a departure from the text, Gallagher is continually working through the text in a circular recursive fashion, playing, imagining and dramatizing and then moving back to it. This process is echoed in a project I undertook in 2005 using Hana’s Suitcase (2003) as a catalyst to examine points of transition, displacement, and transformation with groups from elementary children to seniors.

Hana’s Suitcase as Catalyst for Examining Transitional Spaces

I must admit I was first drawn to Hana’s Suitcase because of my obsession with luggage. Over the past 27 years, I have explored suitcases as a vessel to hold both literal and metaphoric emblems of our identity in relation to time and place. Hana’s Suitcase is no different and in fact the epilogue in the book helped to underline that by claiming that her suitcase was in fact a replica of the original, allowing it to transcend the ‘object’ as ‘meaning’ and instead to be seen as a catalyst provoking profound events.

The content of the novel is an account of a young Jewish girl (Hana Brady) during the Holocaust, very challenging subject matter and not easily embraced by students, teacher, or parents. The author, Karen Levine (2002), is able to bridge to an otherwise unattractive subject matter by a brilliant literary device. The two narratives; a holocaust museum director’s search for the identity and story of Hana Brady and Hana’s experience of the Holocaust, run tandem to each other, interweaving perspectives, narratives and timeline. I posit that in this particular case her device works similar to a homeopathic principal. We are able to absorb small portions of the horror of Hana’s narrative by building the emotional antibodies to eventually face the truth about her life and the realities of a horrific event in history.

I chose one chapter in the novel, The Deportation Centre, and worked with three different groups; seniors, elementary school children and pre professional dancers with this material. With all the groups I had been relentless with this selected passage. We had all re-read the chapter countless times with the purpose of preparing for scenes and reflections or to simply provoke images for our own writing. In retrospect I understand that what interests me in this chapter carries the potency of a suspended moment in crisis, which I propose to be the catalyst for transformation. This is the point when Hana has been removed from all that is familiar and safe and is suspended in time before the movement to another unknown arrival. Hanna was transported from home to a deportation centre before her delivery to a concentration camp. This charged moment summoned a strength in Hana, which would help nourish the remainder of her life.

My first step of abstraction was working with one chapter isolating and fragmenting the text. We next essentialized the text which is a reductive process resulting in a transformation of text from narrative to poetry, stripping away excess and centralizing meaning.
We then manipulated these fragments, applying personal style and working quickly so as to ensure that the work came from an instinctive rather than cerebral platform. A poem was constructed, tableaus were created from the poem and then linked together to create a moving phrase which was then again influenced in quality, dynamic and intention by the addition of music. They were then able to enjoy small presentations of the movement studies, which created revelations in their own critical thought, and a mutual sense of value and appreciation. This interfacing served as a viable platform for the cross fertilization of ideas for further creative, critical work.

Within this process, I encouraged the participants to honour the source material but to also let it evolve in our process of transmediation. We were not making this performance an illustration or enactment of the novel nor were we showing scenes from what we perceived the Holocaust to be. Although each group was distinct in their embodiment of the text; there was a commonality in the imagery, which transferred to a continuity in texture of movement as well as use of time and space.

There were and still are many challenges to the work of moving from literal narrative to the poetic text through embodiment. The following are some of the points of challenge:

1. Transforming the text from linear narrative to poetic collage.
2. Transferring from cerebral approach to full bodied one.

With younger children I integrate props such as silly putty or plasticine, fragments of magazine images or toys that are fragmented or pliable to illuminate and animate the concept of abstraction, metaphor and poetic embodiment. With a more mature group I assign creative writing, discussion and sometimes hands-on manipulations to help facilitate abstraction. This form of embodied abstraction helps to transport text from specifics, that is, character, setting, context to personal and then to universal. Sumara (2001) echoes this beautifully:

Most significantly, these activities illuminate the processes by which human beings experience a sense of personal identity and, importantly,
how these experiences are necessarily organized by remembered, currently lived, and imagined identifications and relationships.  

All of these stages of my research with abstracting and essentializing text serve as a strategy to usurp the literary analysis and exchange it with personal interpretations—a highly individualized and poetic approach to the subject matter. These interpretations access or trigger personal associations which are integrated into the work, which I propose, constitutes the essence of meaning-making within literacy projects.

Butler sees the processuality of drama in education as giving teachers the opportunity to ‘subvert this theatricality (in a way that rational argument never can) because it is able to meet the enemy on its own terms—the affective, feeling level of experience’.  

(Ó’Toole, 1992, p. 58)

This is the key to taking specific linear narratives and moving them through the personal and into the universal and I believe without this process a text cannot truly resonate but rather remain self contained within its own determined meaning. A critical factor in achieving this transfer is to establish a safe space, where compassion, respect and a deep listening can occur, and this often takes 80% of a residency to cultivate. Teachers and or programmers must be fully ‘on board’; contributing material, augmenting lesson plans, carving pathways and catching those who may fall from such an unfamiliar process. An artist must also be aware of what context they are working within and move with ultimate respect in relation to that framework. Hana’s Suitcase was an astounding journey, which has provided an abundance of invaluable information in regards to the animation of prose in a multitude of directions exploring self and other.

**Making Strange**

Dorothy Heathcote (1984), similar to Siegel (1995), supports the act of interpretation as a kind of syntax between signals and responses and within this act, we (society) have developed symbols and rituals to contend with this process. Heathcote (1984) writes about drama as the construction of and the invitation to ‘another room’ (p. 129). This room allows for the possibility of dissolving the practicalities and pragmatics of time,
space and consequence and for the merging of performer and spectator. Heathcote (1984) describes this as a ‘no-penalty’ zone (p. 129) and this space allows us to actually see the world opposed to merely recognizing it.

Heathcote (1984) speaks to the anesthetization that happens with teachers and emphasizes the importance of what Victor Shklovsky (1977) refers to as “ostraneine” or “that of making strange” (p. 127), this sense of disrupting the hegemonic constructs of the learning space or the ‘top-down’ models of transmission and reception, from teacher to student, are creating new avenues for meaning-making rather than what Heathcote’s students term as the ‘dummy-run’. “The act of dramatization is the act of constructing meaning, which may also involve the interpretations of meaning. Play makes constructs of reality which are then available for examination by the spectator which exists in each participant” (p. 130).

Below is a story of a teaching situation fusing imaginative playfulness or, as Shklovsky would call it, ‘making strange’ with Lewis Carroll’s (2001) Jabberwocky:

This one is also fun grrrrrrr...

What are you doing?

I am being a hairy adjective/noun!!!

A Grammar Lesson in the Swamps

This story outlines one of the examples of how we activate text through the body and in this case vocal choir, then imaginatively and dynamically move back to the word. In this way I propose to come to understand text on a deeper level and then to return to the text rather than create an entertaining diversion from it. Henderson (1997) in Being Bodies explains this process of embodying knowledge.

Lewis Carroll’s (2001) Jabberwocky is a perfect example of this circular exploration, which conceals an excellent grammar lesson. I have included the first two stanzas below.
Jabberwocky

‘Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch.

(Carroll, 2001, p. 17)

Carroll embeds his nonsensical words within a conventional framework allowing the reader to understand and identify the signifiers of the text. The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame, came whiffling through the tulgey wood. Although the words are open to interpretation we understand that the Jabberwock is a noun, whiffling is a verb and tugley is an adjective.

When reciting the poem with a fully animated delivery growling, whispering, barking and cooing, the students can not only visualize but can also feel the texture of these words. Now there is only a short jump from this full understanding and interpretation of the text to embodiment. We can now move into the shapes and then movement of these words, after all, it is almost impossible to hiss a slithy tove without allowing our back and arms to serpentine through space. As our voices work in chorus to animate the text and our bodies respond with shapes and movement, we begin to feel restrained in our seated circle and the invitation to stand and take up more space happens almost organically and is met with relief. We are now sitting in the fire of the text; breath, vocal chords, body and imagination are fully engaged creating the dynamic space and active body, which are the key components of the next part of this circular process. This is what Henderson refers to as the “margins of learning” moving away from “curriculum-as-planned.”

It is important to note that this research is done within the scope of an understanding of the ‘lived experience” as opposed to the curriculum–as-plan. The lived curriculum characterizes what takes place in the margins of learning, where both child and adult interconnect with the world and physical self. (cited in Friedman & Moon, 1997, p. 30)

The children give suggestion by showing instead of telling. “This is a Slithy Tove!”; “This is a Jubjub bird!” (see Figure 37).
With a quickening of the heart and heat in the body and boisterous imaginations we return to work with the written word. A blank piece of paper beckons our students back with an invitation to create their own nonsensical words then framing them so we understand their identity grammatical construction as a verb, noun, or adjective. How did a grammar lesson find its way in the crack between the creatures and the swamps?!!

Drama as the ‘Universal-Joint’ in Curriculum

With a process such as Jabberwocky, we come to understand language on a deeper level. Shapiro and Shapiro (2002) write about the combination of both affective and cognitive processes working in tandem,

It is important to see that dance can be used as informative and optimal literacy, where the body becomes the site of social commentary using memories of personal experience and social construction through both an affective and a cognitive cultural process. (Shapiro, 2008, p. 215)

As we have allowed both written and spoken language to move through our bodies, breath and mind imaginatively, we have activated both personal voice and collective criticality, facilitating a deeper understanding and appreciation of language. Now surely the tenets of literacy have been securely placed!

Heathcote (1984) proposes that dramatization is a social act of constructing meaning and in this event the play itself becomes a reflection of reality and the player is also a
participant allowing a doing and observing—interpreting and reflecting at the same time. The ideal role for a teacher/facilitator within this context is to become an ‘enabler’ as Heathcote (1984) explains, “I’m arguing for a school in which teachers don’t intrude between materials and children but work as ‘enablers’ to put children in direct touch with the tasks set for them in a context of meaning” (p. 128). The participant/performer then sets into play a merging of fact and opinion within a story which Heathcote submits has two layers; the outer layer, which are the events of the story, their sequencing and relationships to each other and the inner layer of the story which carries the attitudes of the players and illuminates the emotional impact which in turn acts as a catalyst impacting others. To clarify, the outer layer holds the mechanics of a story and the inner layer carries the impact.

In her article “Material for Significance,” Heathcote (1984) acknowledges Piaget’s three elements of construction when telling stories, namely wholeness, transformation and self regulation.

…(quoted by Peter Caws in his essay in Partisan Review, Vol. 35, No. 1, Winter 1968)…[He continues with:] By wholeness is meant the sense of internal coherence which can be seen in drama work as in all arts. Structure is not static. The laws which govern it act so as to make it not only structured but structuring. In other words the structure is self regulating in that it makes no appeals beyond itself in order to validate its transformational procedures.

(Piaget as quoted in Heathcote, 1984, p. 133)

Heathcote (1984) emphasizes the value of drama in the curriculum, claiming it is the “universal-joint” (p. 137) for all else which is taught in the classroom. And in order to dissolve this notion of condescension defined as the “dummy run” (p.127), a shift in value must occur which balances fact-constituted knowledge with meaning-making processes driven by individual curiosities and mindfulness.

What are you doing?
I’m getting ready for the next session.
You don’t need to stretch for this, get up!

Let’s find out what the folks who have been working in dance say about words and meaning and hmmmm the world.

Stop warming up she’s not doing a Lug in this part!

Yes but some of the folks coming next are choreographers.

Yes but they are very special choreographers, they work with friendly movement and you will be just fine... get up before you hurt your self!

**Politicized Performative Practice**

With the last part of this chapter, I intend to carry the wealth, scope, depth, and theoretical richness from these performance studies scholars to a location for embodied practitioners and researchers within education. I will be highlighting a selection of dance scholars: Ann Cooper Albright (1997), Bagley and Cancienne (2002), Lisa Doolittle and Anne Flynn (1999), Sherry Shapiro (2008), and Celeste Snowber (2002) as well as a movement practice called InterPlay, who are working at bridging their work within the often dichotomized theory/practice paradigm. Shapiro, voiced in both Woman’s Studies and Dance/Education, is one of the leading scholars in the project of dance as a platform for emancipation and radical social change. Her interrogations of dance as a tool for political force, is through the lens of Critical Theory and Gender Studies.

Shapiro (1998) writes of dance as serving an important role in challenging one to imagine new formations of self in relation to the world, claiming that dance connects mind and body, allowing one to rechart oneself into time and space and to “work through horizons of emotions and thought” (p. 126).

Shapiro’s (2008) introduction in a *World of Change*, describes dance as a solid force of tacitly knowing the world which is able, to contain that which cannot be named (within other modalities) and helps us to understand and transcend boundaries and limitations. “Dance always mediates who we are and how we live within time and culture” (p. 262).
Shapiro writes about a global aesthetic, which cultivates mutual understanding triggered by embodied knowing and a deep understanding of a collective existence, thus fostering a shared compassion within the human condition. This shared understanding connects self to other, “recognizing the concreteness of an ethical existence in a shared world” (p. 262), and thereby setting the foundation for globally idealized initiatives, such as constructions of community, advocacy for the disenfranchised, and racial and gender equality. This transcendence of difference is key in Shapiro’s (2008) global ideology, which she insists must involve and engage body narratives, “… that are shaped by ethnicity, harnessed by social class, and textured by culture” (p. 266).

Shapiro’s work is often coupled with that of Svi Shapiro, who brings a background of Cultural Studies from The University of North Carolina, creating a rich conglomerate of perspectives. This collaboration results in a substantially rich contribution to the scholarship of dance. Shapiro and Shapiro (2002) echo Boal’s work in creating spaces whereby the body can enter into new pathways of knowing, disrupting that which is intoned and tacit. Shapiro (2008) elaborates, “The body knows and re-members even the silences of our lives. In dance the familiar can become strange… more than movement, it is the act of transformational possibility” (p. 253).

Dance has a substantial history to de-construct and mobilize in regards to the traditional ‘connoisseurship’, which was based on a male dominant aesthetic of underweight, delicate, nymph ‘like’ movers with superhuman attributes in range of motion. Performances became kinaesthetic pyrotechnic spectacles. Although with the blossoming of Modern Dance some of these tight parameters were kicked off along with the shoes but not until the sixties with the New York based Judson Church Group, was the virtuosity and elitism of dance truly addressed. With this project there was a boldness in defying the spectacularization of dance, resisting the body as merely an expressive form to aesthetically please. Yvonne Reiner, a choreographer in the group, constructed a manifesto, which she later created many of her works from:

No to spectacle, no to virtuosity, no to transformations and magic and make-believe, no to the glamour and transcendency of the start image, no
Reiner went on to create work with the purpose of expunging narratives, dissolving emotiveness and deleting demonstrations of physical prowess. This ‘pushing against’ traditional frameworks of value and appreciation was none the less heralding dance as a vehicle for personally expressive creativity, resulting in a period whereby most dance became very self absorbed, talking to itself about itself, and although very creative, it fell short in attending to what Shapiro (2008) claims as a politically transformational tool. Shapiro is emphasizing the importance of dance as a location to problematize power systems, cultural differences, class, race, and identity and to question our notions of self and other:

> a vision that validates difference, denies universal claims to truth. And seeks to empower people for social transformation is emerging out of this challenge to the Western epistemological dominance in our education institutions. Central to this critique is a renewed attention to the body.  

(Shapiro, 1998, p. 8)

Within this site (the body) Shapiro (2008) makes a very clear distinction between dance training which is anchored in a technical language and bound by a traditionalist methodology of repetition and emulation, to dance education which she claims is “about addressing who we are as people, embracing difference, encountering numerous cultures, interacting and collaborating with others and inviting response” (p. 216). Shapiro is in agreement with Conquergood (2002): the danger of globalization, as stated in Chapter 2, is the erasure of the distinct. In attempts to address multiple cultures and the inter relationships that exist within this term we understand the need to recognize both the commonalities of humankind as well as the differences. Shapiro (2008) claims that at the core of this dilemma is corporeality.

The body here is understood as the concrete material inscribed by cultural values, attitudes, and beliefs and as the vehicle for transcending our limited social identities. The body is a conduit for the particular and universal, the material and the transcendent. When we accept the body as
In Shapiro’s (1998, 2008) work in education, the memory inscribed in the bodies of her students, is surrendered in a variety of experimentations. These memories are recognized as tethered to larger socio-political constructs and are revealed collectively, and in this process, Shapiro, with her students, cultivates a shared language. This language speaks beyond them, as the memories and stories resonate commonalities within the human condition. This moves the meaning beyond the specificity of preconceived frameworks of understandings and dialects that may be cultivated within the intensity of a particular collected group. Shapiro (2008) situates this community building work in a larger context, “To move into global aesthetics means to transcend the art itself and connect the meaning-making process to self and world” (p. 269). In this process the students learn to use dance as a creative and vital tool for articulating visions of self and other.

Through this critical and aesthetic process, the students have named their own oppression and the way in which they have oppressed others. They have recognized that their bodies hold knowledge of their world, and they have learned the meaning of their bodies as the materiality of existence. Coming to know themselves as body and subjects, they explored, examined, and created connections between inner sensibilities (local) and outer context (global). (Shapiro, 2008, p. 270)

Within this process and the compassion that surfaces from it, Shapiro (1998) proposes a re-visioning of self in relation to other and a possibility of finding a home in this “torn and afflicted world” (p. 271).

The communities of practice that Shapiro (2008) bridges with her work in Cultural Studies, Women’s Studies and Dance Education are echoed also in the work of Lisa Doolittle and Anne Flynn (1999). These two scholars have both edited Dancing Bodies: Living Histories, a series of essays connecting dance with other scholars in the social sciences such as Philosophy, Cultural Studies, Anthropology, Linguistics and History. The initiative of creating cross disciplinary studies in dance extended beyond the book to a series of colloquiums in service of forming an advisory in the development of a new
Dance Department in the University of Calgary. This was described by the organizers as an “improvisation of intellects” (Doolittle & Flynn, 1999, p. xvi). Doolittle and Flynn submit universities all too often reflect the same divisiveness and power strata as the world beyond their office walls. By inviting a breadth of communities within and beyond Canada, these dynamic organizers intended to disrupt the myths that often restrain the possibilities of dance from becoming a valuable tool for social change.

We wanted to place dance front and centre on the humanities stage and to shift the perception of dance away from limiting dualities like mind/body, thinking/feeling, rational/irrational, male/female, and objective/subjective, dualities that so quickly assert themselves when we dance only inside the frame of physical education or performing arts.

(Doolittle & Flynn, 1999, p. xvi)

Doolittle and Flynn (1999) agree with Shapiro (2008) that dance inhabits culture not in clean easily defined categories but within and in between the spaces of categorizations which affords it the possibility of acting as a bridge between definitions and binaries, allowing us to consider not only what has been but also what could be. Doolittle and Flynn (1999) write further in relation to this notion of bridging the space in between by their choices of invitees in this series of interchanges.

The research network and conference were both interested in looking at the in-between spaces or intersecting terrain where dance and culture, theory and practice, professor and students, study and play, scholars and artists, academics and community, mountains and prairie, and Canada and America meet. We tried to spend time in the potentially awkward spaces between clear categories to see what it feels like to live with the discomfort of leaving home territory and not knowing exactly where you will wind up.

(p. xvii)

A dancer, choreographer educator and feminist scholar, Albright is located in Ohio State University but has situated much of her research for *Choreographing Difference* in Canada (Albright, 2007). Her book seeks to “shed light on the current debates about how cultural identities are negotiated and embodied” (p. xiii). Albright invites us to deconstruct the traditional mooring of dance appreciation and to ponder identities which are constantly shifting in relation to the proliferation of dominant discourses and their
tacit configurations and formations of the social norm. By dissolving the “veneer of abstraction” (p. xv) and instead engaging in a dialogue about the corporeality of identities shaped and dismantled by and through culture, Albright claims that new critical discourses are emerging within the field of dance. This emergent scholarship in conjunction with active application in the studios and classrooms, on the streets and stages provides valuable tools for the engagement, analysis, and navigation of dance on a new politicized plain. Dance has entered the playing field of scholarships such as Feminist Theory, Cultural Studies, and Anthropology and Sociology, creating richness in research, dialogue, and exchange and thereby informing the practice, which is now becoming relevant to a wider scope than just the trained dancer. Albright celebrates that dance is now reaching to those on the margins as an important tool for self expression and community building. “We must speak a new language, one that cries out against a trivialized notion of arts and aesthetic experiences, and against the oppression of women” (Albright as quoted in Shapiro, 1998, p. 137).

Albright is committed to bringing dancers and scholars to the forefront of critical discourse regarding culture, identity, and empowerment. These dialogues centred on corporeality and cultural embodiment recognize that dance is becoming a very valuable form of discourse within and beyond the academy.

It is my contention that contemporary dance foregrounds a responsive dancing body, one that engages with and challenges static representation of gender, race, sexuality and physical ability, all the while acknowledging how deeply these ideologies influence our daily experience.

(Albright, 1997, p. xiii)

Albright (1997) points to the plethora of conferences now embracing dance and becoming a pivotal language in critical world issues, but most importantly, she points to a shift in both dancers and audience in the event of performance:

I witnessed performers that force audience members to confront the cultural meanings of both the bodies they were watching and their own position as spectators. Twenty years ago, the dancing body was seen as a wonderful source of movement possibilities. Today, however, more and more dancers and choreographers are asking that the audience see their
bodies as a source of cultural identity—a physical presence that moves with and through its gendered, racial, and social meanings. (p. xxvi)

What is that sound?
I have the hiccups.
Well, you should just breathe.
I am breathing, otherwise I would be dead!
I mean you should just breathe deep.
I can’t, I have too much to do. We are only ½ way through this!
I know, but you know the next section is about stopping, breathing deep, and remembering the body.
OK, OK, I will breathe deep, but it will be your fault if we are late for the last page!
Breathe!

In the Wake of Each Utterance
Cancienne and Snowber (2008) are masters at inviting, with a deliciously sensual energy, the person back to the body. She asks, “What would it mean to attend to the impulse of calling the body back to wonder?” (p. 1452). As a student of Snowber, I have the great pleasure of witnessing and experiencing her passion physically, emotionally and academically in re-igniting our sense of the body as the nexus of all our research. She continues her call “I invite you to consider both the body and the art of dance as a garden to move in to, where the gift of gravity and levity draw out the soul” (p. 1452). Not only does she bring the fully sensual lens into play but emphasizes that the body is a sacred space and that our perceptions, research methods and findings, if embodied, are inseparable from a truly spiritual process. Cancienne and Snowber (2008) define spirituality in this context: “Spirituality is concerned with being deeply alive and present
to how growth manifests in our lives. I offer dance a physical space where one can connect to what is within the interior life” (p. 1450). They further this into the realm of what I would call the state of viscerality, “Dance is therefore the ground or the soil in which we can viscerally access the life of the soul and the expanse of the heart” (p. 1450).

It is very refreshing in the realm of the academy where validity attempts to rear its ugly head in the mist of empirical research that we find an impassioned trailblazer, such as Snowber (2002), who shouts loud and clear that the body speaks more than we will ever know through traditional paradigms. “There is a place for us to think with the belly, hear the sound of the heart, and transform language from a set of signifiers to an earthy, alive, poetic speech, grounded in the husk of creation” (p. 4).

Just as Ellie in Chapter 2’s Hyde Park story challenges the speaker: “shut your trap for a moment and listen,” urging us to understand that my embodied interpretation will tell more than she (the speaker) can ever say. Cancienne and Snowber (2008) remind us, “The body knows where our mind may not be able to lead us” (p. 1452). Earlier in this chapter, Barthes (1975) also invites us to find sensuality in words, “What is significance? It is meaning, insofar as it is sensually produced” (p. 61). Snowber (2007) invites her students to transfer their visceral experiences into text:

The lived body is the felt body where one makes connections to emotion. It is also how we experience the flesh: the wind on the neck, fingers typing at the computer, the pain in the lower back, the joy of one’s torso swimming, the swell of lovemaking, and the tears in the belly. (p. 1451)

Snowber (2007) works with graduate students demonstrating the fluidity between text, the body and memory and emphasizes, just as I do with Embodied Poetic Narratives, that a new knowing surfaces. She invites her students to an immediacy in their relation to text, rooting them to the senses of the body through breath, pulse, texture and rhythm. This is exactly what I refer to as achieving a viscerality in the writing process when uncovering memories into words. By this experience of transmediation, as Siegel (1995) coins it in Chapter 1, they enter into a process of discovery, a disruption occurs in their
habituated state of knowing; a tiny explosion in the bedrock of their own individual database. Below is an excerpt from my own journal notes early in the process of writing my thesis that connect to this notion of tiny explosions.

**Thoughts for Thesis**

*Learning is like an earthquake or rather learning comes from the results of an earthquake. We need to make spaces for learning and in order to do that we need to make cracks. This happens by small or major earthquakes in our minds, our souls, our hearts. Small ruptures, that creates the space for new knowledge. Sometimes these ruptures are a relief and sometimes they come with effort and provide some discomfort. What I am interested in is creating learning environments that can allow this to happen. When we think of earthquakes, we think of hiding under a desk and covering our heads. They signal emergency, danger, and damage. I am interested in creating these spaces where we are drawn to the phenomenon opposed to responding to that which is imposed. Inspiration opposed to obligation.*

It is from a similar platform that Snowber generates both her research and writing. Her integration of this deep-seated belief that embodiment/research/spirituality are intrinsically linked, is a gift to the academy and for those who follow behind her trail blazing. It is a lonely trail to lead in a movement so counter to the traditions, the canons of the academy. In December 2009 I performed a Lug for a faculty Christmas luncheon. I was nervous, as it was a large collection of so many I hold with great respect and I was not sure how the improvisation would be received. I started the piece in my traditional costume of overcoat and hat with an addition of a set of white-feathered wings dangling forlornly from my back. I wandered through the decorated table around the garland wrapped pillars and felt increasingly lost amidst the glittering holiday outfits. The event had branded me homeless and, more importantly, I became an uninvited guest. I began to steal what I could from the tables, an ornate centrepiece, a Christmas cracker, cutlery, small chocolates and a piece of bread. As I made my way to the front and turned around I realized my precariously balanced treasure trove under my arms was not at all what I needed, I needed, after all, to be invited. I quietly and shamefully returned the items but kept the piece of bread and held it out to the audience. Similar to the Olympic performance described in Chapter 2, I held it high as a symbol of connection, my body asking, “Can we break bread together?” Many claimed they were moved by the small performance and spoke about how it troubled the increasingly slippery slope of Christmas
in general, and this event in particular, as we slide away from an authentic and simple celebration, and slither into the typical entrapments of consumerism. As I was packing up my equipment, I could see Celeste make her way to me. “I saw you,” she said urgently. “You need to understand that this is the work that I have been doing and one can feel so alone, but you need to know, I saw you.” Now celebrating Snowber’s writing, research and teaching in the academy, as one of her students I want to say back, “I see you!”

I so appreciate the work of scholars such as Snowber (2007) and Barthes (1975) for their diligent work in carving the path to the flesh, the flesh of the body, the flesh of the word and the flesh of the world. For their continued invitations to feel the pumping heart and the spirit of the body as a container for what we know.

Although this spoken word will appear in Chapter 5, I will foreshadow it here where I ask:

\[
\begin{align*}
& \text{How can we learn to talk again} \\
& \text{syllable by syllable} \\
& \text{from deep in our gut through the heat of our breath} \\
& \text{with the pumping heart} \\
& \text{in the wake of each utterance?}
\end{align*}
\]

“Data Dance”

Cancienne (2008) recognizes the importance of embodiment by pushing the boundaries of what is considered ‘data’ in the realm of research. Cancienne has worked equally hard with a multitude of studies to find a way to represent important question around identity, social and gender constructs and cultural difference with embodied renderings.

Arts based researchers (in my case, a choreograpaher/performer/researcher/writer) have the opportunity through written word and performance to construct different representations of identity and the body in regard to gender, race, class, sexuality and disabilities. Exploring post modern performance techniques as a way to rethink and reconstruct the body in performance. (p. 404)
Cancienne (2008) urges art-based researchers to move beyond traditional resources to represent their data.

...performance is a powerful form of representation that expands the resources available to educational researchers. Arts based researchers should reflect on their innovative work by documenting their process as a means to enlarge the body of knowledge that contributes to the arts-based educational research field. (p. 404)

Snowber (2002) echoes this process by stating, “The data of my research will be enfleshed in the physical nuances of lived experience” (p. 21). As Snowber writes of places of discovered learning, Cancienne and Mullen (2003) also write of “discovery learning.” Further, they write about transference from the outer world to the inner world whereby the sensory data, as it becomes embodied, is transformed to a series of metaphors as it is projected and (re)presented to the outer world. This notion of transference echoes identically to my borrowing of the notion of intersubjectivity which is expanded upon in Chapter 5. In this way the subjective inner experience is transformed to an objectified representation. This is where I propose that the traditional boundaries of qualitative and quantitative research become blurred (thankfully) as arts-based educational researcher Barone (2007) proposes, qualitative interpretation is considered an alternate epistemology that moves away from truth claims and towards meaning and understanding of the data. Cancienne and Mullen demarcate this process of choreographing events from data into five stages: (a) taking in, (b) feeling, (c) imaging, (d) transforming, and (e) forming. An exemplar of their embodied research is “Resume in Motion,” a project with a Grade 8 arts class in Virginia USA whereby the goal was to increase kinesthetic awareness within every day contexts especially career related interpersonal scenarios. The class was led through a variety of embodied and written exercises which invited a new lens to what remained tacit in these teenagers’ way of moving through the world. Cancienne and Mullen (2003) emphasize reflectivity as key within embodied practices. They write about this process as curriculum as relationship. “Curriculum as relationship alerts us to how we occupy shared, nonlinguistic space” (p. 162). This statement echoes the relationality and reciprocity that I refer to in several chapters as key in the practice of Embodied Poetic Narratives. This work calls attention
to what I have termed the culturally inscribed body as it invites students to ‘trouble’ stereotyped messages imbedded physically within themselves and others. This focus then arrests the perpetuated covert and oppressive messages in the schools and attempts to re-introduce a more enlightened and liberated way of seeing the body. Cancienne and Mullen (2003) invite students to a location of criticality (not skepticism) as they move through the world. “They can learn about cultural messages and the hidden curriculum that implicitly reinforces gender, sexual and ethnic roles. Limiting options for individuals and groups” (p. 167). But most importantly, much of Cancienne’s and Mullen’s work in the schools addresses bodily learning by promoting a holistic learning platform in order to inspire an integrated sense of self. As these authors’ enthusiastically state, “Because bodily expression exists as a ‘natural’ resource, this awaits translation into powerful pedagogy” (Cancienne & Mullen, 2003). Bagley and Cancienne (2002) write about a study done in 1998 with families whose children have special needs. The results of this study were performed at American Education Research Association (AERA) 1998 and, later, appeared in the first chapter of their co-edited book Dancing the Data (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002). Cancienne writes that the performance of the data brought her to a location outside the data to a location within and this in turn provoked a new way of seeing and understanding the data.

“In analyzing the data for (re)presentation, I found it necessary to reflect in greater depth on the experiences, choices, meanings, and understandings in the data. Similar consideration had to be given to the choice of emphasis, pace and movement” (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002). This also highlights how data analysis and representation are intrinsically linked and Cancienne urges researchers to break out of the traditional ways of viewing this relationship and move into a more liberated approach to this coupling. Bagley and Cancienne write about how this performative representation allowed the research to literally lift the words off the pages.

For me the kinesthetic energy of the live performance gave the text a life like dimension and lifted the experiences and voice of the participants off the printed page. In doing so it enhanced my appreciation of the power of the genre of movement and dance. (Bagley & Cancienne, 2002, p. 15)
They write of this as creating a new space for the researchers:

The opportunity to represent the piece textually as words and movement created a space, which I could make use of and in which to build on existing interests, aptitudes and skills that in an educational research context I feel have been hitherto underdeveloped and underutilized.

(Bagley & Cancienne, 2002, p. 15)

Bagley and Cancienne (2002) reflected on this representation of the data as revealing a new potential for researchers, research participants and those who experience the results. The research serves as a catalyst to new understandings for the challenges parents face with children who have special needs.

**Playing into Our Bodysouls**

Within these scholars and their embodied approaches—troubling traditions and stereotypes, I move to a group mentioned in Chapter 1, InterPlay. Although there are many collectives and movement practitioners working with non dancers (Liz Lurman, Bill T Jones, Joe Laughlin, to name a few), I was drawn to this group and the tenets of their work: storytelling, embodiment and spirituality.

Often when I describe my research people respond by saying “Oh, I see! Dance therapy!” or “Oh that must be very healing!” I am learning not to flinch at this summarization but rather to speak to it in increasingly more informed ways. As I mention in Chapter 5, we learn through resistance and although I do not resist the notion of therapy or spiritual healing I do not make it the objective of my work. I am thankful to InterPlay and the work they do as it serves as a platform for me to understand more about the variations of community work I align myself with and at times push against. InterPlay was formed by Cynthia Winton-Henry and Phil Porter (2004, 1997) and, together, they have written *What the Body Wants* and *Having it all: Body, Mind, Heart and Spirit Together Again at Last*. The ground principles of InterPlay are based on the notion of play and inclusion.
Play with me and I know I belong. Our willingness to play tells the truth about our desire to be ourselves with someone. Physical, creative, erotic, and personal, the beauty of play is that no one has to change. No one has to be healed or done with their work to do it. You don’t have to play at the same level of intensity or ability. People of all ages, races, abilities, genders, sexualities, histories, gifts and curses become potential playmates. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 24)

InterPlay urges people to play big or little, safe or unsafe but just play! This harkens back to Snowber’s urgent invitation to return to a lighter way of being in the world.

Below is an excerpt from one of her Blog series.

**Bodysalms**

It is time to return to your first loves
Where curiosity and wonder
colour, texture, sound, movement and voice
nurture your very essence
and it is your deep beautiful life
which is your research and inquiry
life and art, art and life
are a glorious partnership
and let paradox and mystery find their way to your inquiry
trusting the place of surprise in this path of bridging worlds.

Just as the senior Chinese women from Chapter 2 came to our weekly sessions shedding 50 years to dance with each other, the participants of this movement speak of reclaiming their youth:

When I first saw an InterPlay class in action…I just did not want any part of it…had they gone mad? Grown women actually playing? But I went, and do you know it was at InterPlay that my happy little girl came to life after being buried for 30 years. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 26)

Winton-Henry and Porter (2004) write about the four human expressions that InterPlay is comprised of, stories, movement, stillness, and voice, and emphasize that these serve as portals to wisdom. “Each way reveals a unique aspect of our wisdom and spirit. To interplay with these areas with others in community, even though it is a risk to do so, inspires unparalleled wisdom and grace for those who are willing” (p. 41).
Many participants of InterPlay are from a theological background and are making deep connections to their work on a spiritual level. There is a return to a keyword in many of the journal entries—grace. One participant writes on the word:

As a student of the life of Jesus of Nazareth, I am fascinated by his ability to enact embodied grace beyond religious and social expectations. His life purpose—[I came that they may have life and have it in abundance (John10:10)]—guided him to see grace in each person and to help give form to that grace. With women, he had honest rabbinical conversations. Grace. Grace with the crippled, he restored physical capacity. Grace. With those who had lost their way, he said, follow me. Grace. All of these transactions were rooted in a physicality of grace. Something physical happened. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 34)

As written earlier, inclusivity is key in this work and the door, unlike the professional dance practices I have been birthed from (as outlined in Chapter 1), is always open. In fact as Shapiro urges us to understand, dance should be considered our birthright:

Anyone who can move with full range of motion, and start and stop a dance, becomes a solo dancer. We are demystifying the dance. Dance done by the folks is folk dance. You don’t have to be an expert to have your own birthright. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 69)

This sense of community and communion that is formed in these InterPlay sessions has profound impact on the participants

Once your body is having grace and remembering how to get it, people discover that celebrating in community is incredibly powerful. As a people we learn embodied ways of witnessing and affirming, and find ourselves mysteriously reconnecting to the dance of life.


The reunion within a community also resonates much deeper to a reunion of self as the participants write to a reconnecting with the soul and thereby increasing the body spirit. Below is one of many exercises in the book called ‘expand beyond your skin’, “sense the space you take up. Is it a lot of space or just a little? Open your arms out wide. Sense your bigger body” (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 53).
Later in the chapter the author writes of this as connecting to a larger sense of being in the world:

This is why in InterPlay we find grace in the idea that physicality is basic. We are big bodies. Our mind, heart and spirit are one size—the size of our biggest, wildest, most beautiful body. Beyond the limits of skin, reaching as far as the farthest star or coming in as close as a baby in our arms, physicality is an expanding contracting, flexible reality. We are one magical thing: mysterious, vast, tiny microcosms in the biggest body of all. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 55)

Snowber (2007) who is has also been working in the practice of in InterPlay echoes this “Dance is an invitation to climb in to the landscapes of our bodysouls” (p. 1453). The largely spiritual based practice has extremely positive impact on the participants both on an interpersonal, community and global level.

InterPlay and other dance/movement approaches have given me skills and confidence to be with people, to hold them in my hands and in my heart in a different way, to accept persons as they are in that moment. And allow a physical connection of love and support with them to develop. For me, this is a different way of working for a more just world. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 63)

I am very thankful for the work of InterPlay and for the broad spectrum of community-based expressive/movement practices of which I too feel I am a part of. There is no argument with the work done through InterPlay—their intentions are completely aligned with my work, however there is a place where our paths part. There is no denial that I carry with me (as I do my luggage) my history and lived experiences with both my training and performance experience in dance. With this comes a vigour and a necessity to refine and hone like a carpenter sanding a table over and over until the hand glides across the surface, with…ease. On countless occasions I have ‘pushed’ my participants a little further then their perceived boundaries in order to acquire that ‘smoother surface’ in the performance. In Chapter 2, I outlined a distinct teaching situation one with the group of Chinese seniors. In this case, these non-dancers, with their own personal challenges, were pushed beyond the state of ease that participants in InterPlay speak of.
There is a kind of self-forgetfulness in the easy-focus quality of our experience. In fact, ease in the body feels so good and peaceful, it is more like a non-feeling. You may not notice your general sense of openness and wellness. (Winton-Henry & Porter, 2004, p. 49)

I ask the participants to move into discomfort, to ‘sit in the fire’ of crafting a fine performance or a presented improvisation, to be the best that it can be. As Goethe so beautifully wrote in alignment with this idea, “Treat people as if they were what they ought to be, and you help them to become what they are capable of being.” In this comparison, I understand the distinctions and commonalities in the work I do in relation to community initiatives such as InterPlay. Although many of the outcomes are similar, the approaches may be very distinct with a distinct set of emphasis.

I recently witnessed a group of community members, some dancers, some teachers, and some from other areas such as geology. I arrived to a darkened church on a quiet street—which was to be the location of an Interplay performance. It was a rainy Saturday night and a good part of Seattle seemed to be elsewhere. I entered from the side door and descended in to a back hall where 30 people greeted me with smiles and nods. They were sitting in a circle and one dancer was in the centre. She had just finished a solo and seemed exhilarated. For the next hour I watched beautiful configurations and variations of embodied play which involved sensitive touch, sudden physical impulses of movement which resulted in running in circles to playful rolls to spritely skips while expressive faces broadcasted messages of sorrow, passion, fear and curiosity. Authenticity radiated from every pore of these performers.

But what was most significant with this event was the quality of their personal stories. I witnessed three separate stories where the participants sprang to their space in the circle and inhaled deeply the attentiveness from those on the parameter. It was palatable how they moved into their personal narrative full of heart and breath and a complete readiness to respond to each new impulse. The stories were authentic, immediate, and very personal and this is what constituted the value in the room. We smiled with bated breath wanting to know what came next in the narrative, “What happened?”; “What did you do?”; “Then what?”
In all three stories, the tellers were masterful in their endings leaving the viewer with an image that resonated and faded like one last pull on the bell string. Later reflecting on what I saw I realized that the very personal and specific renderings of these narratives are what brought the sensitivity, celebration, and affirmation of power and resilience to each performer. It is this stage that I pass through in Embodied Poetic Narratives sometimes too quickly with an eagerness to move into the place of essentializing the text, fragmenting the stories, parsing through the narratives. I sometimes push too soon to find the resonators so that we can share the telling. So we can draw near to the fire and all bask in the same heat or so we can sing along to the same song after scrolling the dial until we arrive at the same radio station. This is what I call Poetic Narrative as opposed to Personal Narratives. This is a relinquishing of the power of the personal narrative and moving toward the amplitude of a collective voice. But one must journey through personal narrative to arrive at this collective fragmentation. I recognize the challenges and the lack of ease at a certain period in my workshops which seems to result in a bristling as we move from personal narrative to collective authorship. I have learned that this journey from one to the other needs to be bridged carefully and I recognized, and am grateful for Interplay to remind me of the power in personal narrative and the care one must take in journeying from this to a collective narrative formulated for public presentation.

Now how is she going to wrap this up? I know she can finish a sentence.

Hey! What do you mean by that?

**Interconnected Scholarship**

Within this sweep of scholars primarily within Performance Studies and Drama/Dance Education, I recognize a need to explore deeply our lives, our stories, and our sense of who we are in the world with and without words inside and outside traditional learning spaces. Within a variety of meaning-making processes through performative acts, we
have examined the sometimes misunderstood leverage of traditional methods such as text centered and speech-centered learning strategies.

By breaking down conventional practices of knowing through creative doing, I have explored how the body addresses the complexities of meaning making with spoken, written, and embodied languages and the dynamic possibilities of cross disciplinary work within pedagogy and scholarly research. This chapter has outlined a collection of contemporary methods of using the body as a site for progressive and active problematization of stereotypes and has outlined possibilities for rearticulation of an integrated, holistic, and critically aware self.
4. The Borderlands of Collective Storying

OK everyone—clearly I am lined up with the magnetic pole and I know the direction we should take and still you are going off the path! What is up with that?!

Hmmm? Where you taking at us?

I thought we were going this way?

Well no I guess we are not....

What do you mean? Well this is the direction we are moving in.

Well stop!

What do you mean?

Just what I said, “Stop!”

Impossible.

Why?!!

Because this is not the progression of our learning....We have other plans....

What the?!!!! Look, it is written down.

Don’t be so text centric.

So what?

Did Thesaurus get in here? (looking up at the margin)

Perhaps you should go for a walk, a jog, a skate, a....
What the hell are you talking about?

Look Compass, you just need to relax and move like us, through...instead of....

Instead of what?!

Instead of pointing at!

This is the part where we repeat the story right?

Are you sure this is a good idea?

I am sure! It is a very important story.

OK, but you know we are already at page one million!

Breathe! It actually works!

It was my final project for my first graduate seminar. I had donned my overcoat and hat for the inaugural performance of what later became the Lug series. I was clutching my leather suitcase with one hand and with the other I was gathering the letters I had asked my classmates to write; a greeting or farewell, from or to a loved one.

I sat in the stall of the washroom down the hall reading through each of them hoping one would be the obvious choice for my improvisation. Unfortunately they were all good. And then I found the letter. A small note of forgiveness from a late Father to his gay son. I tucked it into my suitcase and returned to the class. It became the source of my improvisation as I moved through kinaesthetic/dramatic metaphors of estrangement—isolation—longing—compassion—regret and finally atonement. At one point in the improvisation I read the letter silently as a flood of emotions entered my body. When I had finished the performance a room full of emotional students all claimed they were absolutely sure I had read their letter.

The Common Binaries of Personal Narratives

This chapter is an exploration of the interstitial spaces within the event of collective storytelling through Embodied Poetic Narratives. I propose that there is power and curiosity in that which is not territorialized. A potency exists, within a silence and stillness, behind the canvas, beyond the notes, between the bodies moving in space. I am thinking of Malevich’s “White on White,” and Warhol’s “Most Wanted Men Painted over in Gray,” John Cage’s famous ‘silent’ composition “4’33” and Isak Dinesen’s
“Blank Page” and I ask if there are empty spaces where collective storying can build new histories, new constructs of self and other and new communities of compassion and reciprocity. I am creating a framework of inquiry whereby I examine the common binaries of personal narratives; self/other, silence/voiced and sequenced/fragmented narratives. The first part of the chapter outlines a theoretical construct of narrative inquiry in relation to personal documentation and individual archival processes in history making. First with a range of contributions from theatre practitioners, mathematicians, scientists and philosophers, dead and alive who lend valuable analysis to this notion of inside/outside, public/private, remembered and constructed.

I address not only the agency cultivated in collective story telling but also explore notions of authenticity within fabrication and the integrity that can lie within co-created stories.

The Interstitial Spaces Between Departures and Arrivals, Beginnings and Ends

With my examinations of my performative research tool, Lugs, I have been curious to probe the traversing of time, space and meaning in the points between arrivals and departures. For this chapter, I am transferring this arc to the event of storying with the points being beginnings and ends of the story and the arc being the evolution of the narrative (see Figure 38).

The blue points in my diagram indicate beginnings and endings implying a contiguity of meaning in the traditional definitions of these words. The red shapes indicate ruptures in the arc of the narrative, the stop moments for the viewer or teller. The yellow points indicate the unexpected tangents we move to (away form the original arc of the narrative) as a consequence of these ruptures. We will begin a story only to arrive somewhere unexpected depending on the context and the condition of the telling. The concept of blurring intentions and actions between that which is remembered and that which is constructed, provoked me to think of German mathematicians August Ferdinand Möbius and Johann Nedic and their Möbius Strip from the mid-1800s. This strip is a surface with
only one boundary—the borders are blurred—the inside becomes the outside and vice versa and this is considered by mathematicians to be non-orientable (see Figure 39).

**Figure 38.** Arrivals/Departure

**Figure 39.** Möbius’ Strip
This single contiguous curve is similar to my proposed narrative arc in concept. The interchangeability of oppositions; outside/inside, self/other boasts a connectivity that is both balanced and fluid. Appelbaum (1995) writes of the temporality of this balance:

Sur-face is inter-face. Surface is a reminder of relation, a tangible sign of the fact that inner and outer mutually penetrate each other and that the distinction is a functional convenience. Surface is a concentrated meeting ground, a place where centrifugal and centripetal tendencies are momentarily held in balance. (p. 81)

This borderless region is also reflected upon in Heidegger’s analogy of the jug; the potter who shapes the jug does not only mould the clay but shapes the void, the emptiness, “The vessel’s thingness does not live at all in the material of which it consists, but rather in the void that holds it” (quoted in Bhabha, 1998, p.19). This state of filling and emptying, telling and retelling a story urges attention to this dynamic space of exchange often referred to as the third space, the interstitial space, or the borderless region.

In this way, I see the storytelling space to be an empty space, a void which is the result of an essentialized process involving a stripping away of scepticism, stigmas, biases, and fears. An open space of invitation to explore the unknown and remembered together.

In the storytelling process of Embodied Poetic Narratives, there is an inversion of perception in our cognitive patterns where Heidegger (1967) claims that we begin to decipher signs in a new way. To see the void as emptiness embraced by a tangible form is to be misconceived by the signs. The void is in fact neither fixed with form nor freed by emptiness but is holding a temporality that can be understood by Kapoor, a sculptor who works with notions of empty space, as the potentiality of expanding available space.

Such an articulation through displacement allows us to decipher emptiness as a ‘sign’, where we really have exteriority of the inward, rather than to pander to the look of the void as it signals a need to be fulfilled. (cited in Bhabha, 1998, p. 20)

This disruption is reflected rigorously and endlessly by a wide scope of scholars and writers: Bhabha (1998) speaks of the transitional space of the void, Shakespeare, the
removal of ground (Craig, 1914), Appelbaum (1995) calls it The Stop, Eugenio Barba’s (1995) definition of this pre-expressed moment is called sets, and Japanese Noh master Azume (as cited in Barba, 1995) speaks of this as Ju Ha Kyu—this only names a few. Appelbaum (1995) writes of this as uncharted territory:

There is a moment in which personal or cultural history stands before two diverging pathways. One leads to a repetition of the known, the tried and true, the old, the established. It is safe, secure and stable. The other finds a renewed importance in the unknown, the uncharted, the new, the dark and dangerous. (p. 16)

This collision of the recognizable and familiar with radically new ways of recognizing signs is what cultivates this third liminal space. I return to the Möbius Strip(ness) of narratives for a brief reflection on the transience and contiguity of co-authorship; documentation versus collective, imaginative construction.

They come together, in this uncanny relationship, by virtue of the difference that holds them apart; a contest between surfaces, elements, materials or meanings that conjures up one, or the other, through a ‘third’ dimension. This is the dimension of doubling and displacement. (Bhabha, 1998, p. 19)

The Möbius Strip(ness) of co-authoring stories and merging memory with creative construction allows for a continuum of space and time provoking questions of the historicity of the arc I am analyzing. With all of this (dis)orientated borderless continuum, where and how do we authenticate personal history? Miller writes of Jaques Lacan that our history is implicated within an emptiness created with the ruptures that occur in this continuum.

The important thing is that at a given moment one arrives at illusion. Around it one finds a sensitive spot, a lesion, a locus of pain, a point of reversal of the whole of history, insofar as it is the history of art and insofar as we are implicated in it; that point concerns the notion that the illusion of space is different from the creation of emptiness. (Miller, 1992, p. 10)
Knowing that our lived experiences are the foundation of a collective storytelling process, I am interested in the historicity that lives within a creative bricolage of mapping our stories together. This led me to think a little more about our ‘true’ stories’ and the make up of our histories which in turn provoked questions of self in relation to genetic structures and determinism. I am asking what actually constructs our histories? How much is genetic, ancestral, and conditioned and how much is simultaneously being formed within the random elements of each moment? As a visual thinker, when studying the look of the Möbius Strip (see Figure 40), I was struck by the resemblance to a DNA double helix.

**Figure 40. Double Helix**

And with this observation I am drawn from Heidegger’s (1967) vessel, through visual association, to genetics structures. From histories constructed to histories determined. When looking at the double helix I am reminded of the percentage of what becomes our personal history is resting in the genetic instructions. The idea of this long-term space storage, our blue prints of self, nags and pulls at the notion of personal agency with our evolutionary process. As we move through time and space, positioning and
repositioning, locating and relocating, how much is determined? This line of inquiry naturally led me to Determinism. Although there are hard determinists and soft determinists, operating on the belief that all that transpires in the constructing of history is determined through an unbroken chain of prior occurrences. This leads to the question, “Is the chain a line or a circle?” “Is it a continuum or is/was there a divine act that sets the rows of dominoes clacking forward?” When we tell the story of our past, is it an unravelling of what was ‘meant to be’ or are we surprised by its evolution and know that conditions and contexts ultimately determined the outcomes? Some philosophers like David Hume claim that even though we have no control of our circumstances and choices—the ‘interpretation’ of events provoking voluntary action gives the illusion of agency. This brings me back to Lacan’s writing of “the moment one arrives at illusion…. (Miller, 1992, p. 10), who speaks about illusion not as misconception but rather as a disruption—a suspension of patterned historical associations to problematize the obvious, the habitual. This ultimately moves us back to this notion of resisting these binaries with the fury to define fact and fiction and instead moves us toward the liminality of the narrative in relation to self, history and the other. With my Lugs as performance and my work with others, I have learned that this creating narratives in relation to self is entirely transient and relational. My story, here and now, exists within the multiple conditions of this moment. The following is a beautiful story about the need to continually come to know our narratives as a stranger. It is a story between Einstein and physicist, Piet Hein:

A physicist is walking along a beach and sees a five-year old child throwing flat stones onto the sea, trying to make them skip. Each stone makes no more than one or two hops. The physicist remembers that he, in his childhood, was very good at this game. So he shows the child how it is done. He throws the stones one after the other, showing how to hold them, at what angles to cast them, at what height over the surface of the water. All the stones thrown by the adult skip many times: seven, eight, even ten times.

“Yes” the child then says, “they skip many times. But that isn’t what I was trying to do. Your stones are making round circles in the water, but I want mine to make square circles.” (Hein, 1968, used with permission)
Einstein responded in the following way: Give the child my compliments and tell him not to be concerned if the stones don’t make square circles in the water. The important thing is to think the thought (Barba, 1995, p. 92).

I now understand that the arc in a narrative is a contiguous pathway without boundaries but with points of disruption where crisis between oppositions colliding becomes an invitation to expression and discovery, not expression itself. The journey through a narrative is not what it appears. There is not necessarily an inception, climax and resolve or a sole identifiable author for that matter, or perhaps there are but entirely on a metaphoric plane; surely a plane where poets congregate with great ease. Leggo is such a poet who continually and vigorously writes and re-writes himself into the world through his work (2004a, 2004b, 2008a, 2008c, 2008d). The following is a poem from Leggo (2008d) who speaks of this fluidity with identification in story telling:

**Yo-Yo**

I & you
the two most used
words in English
full of Buber’s
tensile tension
in Spanish
I is yo
you is tú
I-you you-I I-I you-you yo-yo
yo-tú tú-yo yo-yo tú-tú I-I
I know you
you know me
the stranger within
the stranger without
all connected on a string
that knows the limits
of gravity, or at least
its seductive attraction
the constant challenge
of yo-yo tangles
common and idiosyncratic
DNA, in the mirror,
the conjunction AND
everything, all of us
entwined like vines

(p. 2)

Again, I return to the Möbius Strip as a symbol of the merging and blurring of our
imposed boundaries—public/private, availability/secrecy, practical/psychological—the
existential meanderings of collective storytelling permits a re-joining of these locations
Appelbaum (1995) speaks of it as a membranes to be penetrated. I posit that the surface
in the case of the Möbius Strip and the arcs of the narrative are always shifting and so the
entire meaning making process becomes one big verb and therefore the ‘surfacing’ of self
in the crisis points of stops in any personal narrative arc is always in motion.

Homi Bhabha (1998) writes about this merging when “the material and non material
tangentially touch” (p. 18). If we can look beyond the representation we allow the
material, in this case the body, to transcend to a new plain of meaning. Kapoor speaks to
this through the word “availability.”

In the end it has to do with issues that lie below the material, with the fact
that the materials are there to make something else possible; that is what
interests me. The things that are available, or the non-physical things, the
intellectual things, the possibilities that are available through the material.
(Bhabha, 1998, p. 18)

This notion of working through a material, penetrating the surface of the obvious does
not imply that the material itself is a transmitter or vehicle. Our bodies are not solely the
conduit to the metaphor below the surface but rather the probing device that locates the
interstitial space or the in-between temporality, thereby allowing for the unexpected to
occur. This is the dynamic space of fusion, where the collision of conflicting spaces meet
to form new meanings, Bhabha (1998) refers to this as a “diagonal event.”

The true void—out of balance, caught between one temporality and
another—becomes such a gathering place that stands in an oblique relation
to itself and others. As a ‘diagonal’ event it is, at once, a meeting place of
modes and meanings, and a site of the contentious struggles of perspective and interpretation. (p. 30)

In Shakespeare’s removal of ground Craig (1914) states there is a beautiful phrase for this investigation of storytelling as I examine the relationship to time and space and the construction of history in relationship to self in the ‘telling’ process and as I seek to understand the complexity, depth and treasures that belong to what is considered disruption, crisis, and loss. “Like Hamlet’s Father, a ghost wafting through the night, inviting us to a more removed ground” (Bhabha, 1998, p. 23). Who is the ghost and who is the father in this analogy of storying self? No one and everyone. I posit that collective storytelling moves from a transcending of specificity and belonging, in the sense of authorship, to collective resonances of community.

With Embodied Poetic Narrative I am fostering a collective ground where stories can claim new passports. Concepts move laterally, losing the original authorship, ideas become free agents acquiring potency beyond the original source. Barba (1995) writes about this anonymity. The possibility to achieve this leap from specificity to openness is through cultivating the material. In the case of storying with others, the narratives are very carefully navigated by shaping the energy meticulously. Barba writes of this collective interconnectivity by referring to the performer’s methods,

In order to re-shape her/his own energy artificially, the performer must think of it in tangible, visible, audible forms, must picture it, divide it into a scale, withhold it, suspend it in an immobility which acts, guide it, with varying intensities and velocities, through the design of movements, as if through a slalom course. (p. 71)

Blurred Boundaries of You and I

When I perform a moment in a Lug by holding a book out to the audience with hands seemingly unfamiliar to the form, with pages crumpled under my fingers, with its words upside down and impossible to read and with my eyes searching and wandering the room, I am producing a series of symbols which cohere to an understanding for the audience. Although there is no concrete and singular narrative, there is a shared understanding, a
particular realm of images which are called forth; that is, failed literacy, misunderstanding and new arrival.

If I am attuned and honest to the sourcing of these images I am in fact conjuring secrets which are both revealed and offered to myself and to my audience simultaneously and it is in these moments when my interior becomes one with the exterior and these boundaries become blurred.

Teaching Stories

I am furthering this notion of outside/inside integration with an example from a pedagogic context. Recently I taught a group of seasoned elementary and high school teachers in a course combining notions of social justice with creative movement and writing. I started the course submitting that the group in front of me were my students at that moment rather than conduits to their students who awaited versions of the material about to be taught. This direct pedagogic address brought immediacy to the learning process and exposed my senior students who had been teaching in the field (primary and secondary) for several decades to an approach which is not often invited in their professional development experiences. Teachers are often seeing and experiencing the world through a deductive lens shaving the edges and softening the impact for the necessary palatability the classroom prescribes. Although it is difficult for the teachers to embrace what is demanded in this presencing, it ignites the same emotional consciousness that they expect from their students.

In Grotowski (Polish theatre director) terms they are often ‘screening the violence’ from all their experiences in the world.

Similar to the image I provided from my Lug, I am now asking them to hold the book in an entirely new way. To meet the learning space as a baby with the soles of her feet still soft and tender and to see the text on the pages upside down. As we precede though the
class sourcing images from our lived experiences and allowing them to move through to a shared space and to take physical form, we all experience major physical and emotional disruptions. These ruptures to our habits and conventions as teachers and learners can create fluid pathways of knowing and unknowing and become what Jung (Jacobi, 1973) would coin as *mutual interpenetration*. One teacher finishes a physical autobiography with two stones as props (autobiographical artefacts) and sits down and weeps quietly. Hidden parts of herself have been revealed. Secrets have been released and are fluttering in the room. When she finds the world again she casts a glance at another student/friend across the room and says, “I knew we should have skipped out and gone for a drink at the Cactus Club.” This invited me to attend to this lingering moment of sadness and to encourage my students to embrace this state as part our teaching/learning spaces. To *stay in* the authenticity and the purity of this avenue of rich and vital information driving directly from the depths of self, opposed to an intervention, which diverts this rupture or attempts to *fix* the uncomfortable residue. The students *sat in the fire* of sadness with me. I provided tools and resources to help them stay in and we moved through these moments with a sense of courage and maintained faith that this was a valuable ‘learning curve’.

It is a contract we make with ourselves and the world when we invite this avenue or flow of sourced images accessing the historicity of our physical and internal constitution of the *I*. An agreement of risk is established raising the stakes of investment. The question is: how do we bring this level of engagement into consideration in our teaching spaces? How do we encourage both teachers and students to enter the realm of the unknown in our exploration of self? Can we claim new sounds in our voice in an entirely new realm, which may be counter to our natural ways of being without feeling like this as a false construction or shallow emulation? Instead of taking a drink at the Cactus Club, can we sit in the fire of *I* and other? Can we find ways to voice what we see, think, and feel about entirely new concepts without losing the ground we stand on? I believe we can and it is therefore that I continue to value the 45 minutes of interaction with my audience equally to my 15 minutes of performance. I strongly believe action, reflection, dialogue and again reflection constitute an important chain in my role as artist/teacher/researcher.
I believe that it is in this event of unravelling embodied stories, both as teacher and student, where we acknowledge and surface the secrets of our unconsciousness. These are truths of the human condition whispered. Truths that are an essential part of cultivating compassionate, rich, and inspiring learning spaces, truths that supersede our control. These secrets in the body that whisper from great depths then slip into the world are expanded on later in this chapter.

To those of you who write music, and write poems,
I say: Our task is to become a moist tongue
By which subtle ideas slip into the world.  (Bly, 2005, p. 13)

In the first year of my Master’s program I arranged a variety of research sites in and around London with the intention of trying Embodied Poetic Narratives on foreign ground. One of the sites was New Vic College in East London where I was scheduled to teach a group of 15 students who were back at school several years after dropping out. They were trying to finish high school long after many of their friends had graduated. They carried with them remnants of substance abuse and violent interventions both physical and emotional.

I was to spend several hours per day with these students for a 2-week-period ending with a scheduled performance at the end of the residency in a 400-seat theatre along with other schools. My agreement with the host teacher involved me leading a meaningful creative process, which would also culminate in a well-rehearsed piece with students who had absolutely no interest in being present in the room.

As we approached the site my host/coordinator attempted to prepare me for the class by stating that the demographic was the most economically challenged in all of England and added that the behavioural issues that come with this condition were not exempted here. My interest, I claimed, was to work with those on the margins and this provided me with yet another opportunity. It was more than just an opportunity. This next teaching story is an exemplar of the shift that I believe needs to happen between researcher, subjects and sites within community engaged practice. In this story a transformation occurred whereby positions and locations shifted allowing ultimate reciprocity between all
participants, a key factor in what I would consider ensuring an optimum learning space. This is the “diagonal event” referred to earlier in this chapter.

The context of creating a performable piece was merely a catalyst to the cultivation of a space of sharing—sharing personal stories, vocal, written, and imagistic. This story was rooted in the teller but tethered to all of us and as they surfaced we begin to experience the intersections that touched us deeply—quickening tolerance, compassion and empathy. Once this matrix of personal meaning-making had been constructed, an ecosystem of mutual respect had been formed, an ecosystem with distinct idiosyncrasies and particular demands. We then began to sequence the material into dance/theatre vignettes. At this point in the process there was a sense of surrendering authorship as the piece actually made itself almost invisibly like the *Ouija board* piece moving slowly towards yes or no with listening fingers lightly resting on its surface. In this way of combining research and artist, I again refer to A/r/tography, which writes of a fusion of knowing, doing and making:

Theory as A/r/tography creates an imaginative turn by theorizing or explaining phenomena through aesthetic experiences that integrate knowing, doing and making: experiences that simultaneously value technique and content through acts of inquiry; experiences that value complexity and difference within a third space.

(Irwin & de Cossen, 2004, p. 31)

I have come to understand that in my process of creating work through the generation of personal stories under a shared and collectively chosen issue, at a certain point the dance/theatre has a mind/heart of its own. Bower writes of this when talking about the combination of culture and personal stories: Recognizing the tension, which avoids representing culture in terms of generic or linguistic determinism, can be understood most readily in terms of an insight attributed to Heidegger (1967) that “language thinks us as we think within the language” (p. 125).

The next story, *The Warm Countries We Are Lucky Enough to Teach In*, served as a catalyst urging myself as researcher to enter into an arena of oneness and to cast aside the location *I* and other. In doing this I offered my stories, mined from deep below, and
placed my fingers on the *Ouija* piece alongside my students. O’Neil and Lambert (1982) harken this experience to the experience of a team of rowers and the sense of one in this activity calling forth a sense of immediacy and reciprocity:

> There is no friction: we ride the natural cadence of our strokes, a continuous cycle. The crew breathes as one. Inhale on the recovery, exhale as we drive our blades through the water, inspiration and expression. In. Out. Row with one body and so with one mind. Nothing exists but: Here. Now. (pp. 124-125)

If I can allow myself to enter a space of vulnerability and take the risks I ask of my students, perhaps I can dispel scepticism and replace it with authentic engagement.

Below is the story of this residency.

**The Warm Countries We Are Lucky Enough to Work in**

*This story covers a 2-week residency with a group of young adults upgrading their academic standards for entry level to university. This was undoubtedly a marginalized group with challenging circumstances; violence at home, low economic status and substance abuse. Despite these socio-economic challenges they were able to come to school everyday, although sometimes two hours late after a host of complication beyond my imagination. My primary objective was to work from their issues, not what I may project to be their issues.*

*When conducting an introductory circle, they all replied that they were not interested in dance and after a few personal offerings I could discern that their notion of blame would be an excellent theme. I responded to their introductions by saying I was honoured to be working with them and that I would probably change their minds about dance.*

*They were pleased with the theme but still sceptical of dance. We began our warm up with loud music, rigorous movement mixed with ‘bratty banter’ (it seemed like the route to go). They came along with me accepting the challenge and enjoying the atmosphere, which was being carefully cultivated. No one could tell or could care less that I was scared to death. This was by far the most challenging group I had worked with to date.*

*Everyday I continued to build their stamina, develop physical skills, that is, fluidity, dynamics, musicality, strength and agility with broad sweeping movements, exploring level changes, three dimensionality, rhythmic shifts and jump phrases, of course accompanied with loud raucous music. I was able to make them move, sweat, hoot and holler despite their scepticism. Occasionally they were combusting with newfound energy taking moments to jump up against walls and skid across the floor and other times they returned to the familiarity of lethargy. Always complaining about the repetitions, the rigor, the duration. I believed that there was a secrecy to the endorphins shifting their body and they were embarrassed and unsure how public they wanted to be revealing these welcomed shifts in their physical being.*

*It was a dance in itself navigating the student’s erratic landscapes of engagement—some in the room, some out. I remembered teaching a group of heroin addicts in Denmark where in the middle of class; a nurse would arrive to administer methadone to some of the students. They would disappear for a few moments and then return to class. We would carry on with the class as if it was only a sip of water needed. My New Vic students would come later after looking after*
their 2-year-old sister (their mother, too drunk to get out of bed). Moving through narrow spaces of tension and violence finding solace with the puppy like love in the room. Sitting on laps braiding hair, pen tattoos carefully drawn then over to punching, kicking, pushing, insulting just enough to have an edge yet soft enough to return to the cuddles.

We were all alchemists mixing regret with anger and longing but most importantly with a belief that compassion can be the underbelly of everything. Slowly through the days I felt the atmosphere cohere, we were creating an ecosystem. I was ‘Kaffrin from Canadaw’ and together we were creating a structure where exposure was allowed, invited. A poem, a song and a few very great moves, then refining, re-writing, repeating....I saw everything, their brilliant voices while privately singing along with their I Pod, and slick, playful moves while stealing a smoke outside. I gathered all of it like a thief in the night pouring it out on the studio floor and suggesting that this is the stuff we perform. The group began to dress for the class, some with special hats, others with chain medallions and others with very tight dance pants and mid torso ‘tanks’. I was honoured; they were inviting me in and celebrating this transition.

As the show drew nearer the tensions and heat of production descended. Our ‘camp’, songs needed music, stories needed to be memorized, and movement needed counts. This contrivance of structures brought an unwelcome challenge to the space and threatened my newly formed relationship with the students. Repetition and rigor were necessary. I needed to take the leap of faith that respect for me would prevail but friendship may dissolve, as I demanded punctuality, clarity, endurance, and consistency. Somewhere I am sure they understood that I demanded it only because I knew they were capable of it. They came every day, they complained constantly, resisted belligerently and yet, they came every day. Their clothes seemed cleaner, aftershave began to linger in the room, and they stayed during breaks. I was again honoured and very grateful that I was able to take the signals and hold them close as I grinded through the physical/practical challenges.

The last day of rehearsal was the most difficult; transitions, cues, entrances and exits, all the stuff that is considered hugely insignificant in their lives that seem to work in broad sweeping sketches; the Jackson Pollocks of East London splashing energy with reckless random impulses. The rehearsal was ending with a final task, to record the stories that would be used in the performance. The time was right; the environment was ripe with trust and charged with the excitement of a pending show. A necessity of limited budget and resources, forced me to record their voices in a broad sweep around the circle overlapping stories not by editing with expensive digital equipment but instead, I moved slowly with my recording device cueing with my hands when to speak and when to stop. The students were exhausted and with their lounging, cuddling postures they listened to the instructions (see Figure 41): “talk about blame—start talking when my hand goes up—stop when the hand goes down.” The stories flowed with ease. The week had been fantastic, it was indeed a very warm country we were in, the time zone was our pumping hearts, the wires of communication were wide-open eyes beaming support and respect across the circle (see Figure 41).

Their stories, emblems of their scars and their pride, flowed readily, with ease and generosity. Got it! I press stop record and whisked it off to an on site technician from the college who would mix it with our music overnight.
The Day of Performance

Technical rehearsal was scheduled at 8:00 a.m., an hour of the day they rarely witness conscious. They were all there, complaining, resisting, insulting, but they were all there.

Moving onto the stage for rehearsal harkened two important memories; one a film from 1996 and the other a dance rehearsal with my company in Egypt.

Memory 1

This memory is from the film “Best Shot” which was changed from the more politically mischievous name “Hoosiers.” The movie is centred on a high school basketball team, which against all odds made it to some kind of championships. Outrageously nervous the team stands shivering on the official court, their gaze scanning the seating capacity with wide eyes, they are deer caught in a conceptual headlight. The coach throws a measuring tape at the team captain and tells him to measure the distance of the hoop to the floor, then emphasizes the distance is the same as their cozy home town gym, “lets get to work”

Memory 2

My company is performing in an international festival in Cairo. We have arrived at the Royal theatre and the dancers are standing like the basketball players, deer on the stage feeling the headlights. I am 50 rows back. A local tea merchant makes his way over to me, he has bare feet and is wearing a long white gown, an ornate silver canteen is strapped to his back with a hose that winds around to the front of his neck. A tray with small empty glasses is extending from one
hand. I assume he is asking me if I would like some tea. I am about to scream in absolute overwhelming joy and fear combined—what exoticism, what luck! Instead I shake my head and tell my dancers to use the second velvet wing to enter and to take six extra steps to compensate for the large stage. I have made the measurement from hoop to floor and it is identical to the integrity and commitment we have at home. I ground them and myself with details of our work—it is the passport to my safety as a foreigner, anywhere....anytime.

I relay the basketball story to the students deciding that this is a better choice of the two. They get through the technical rehearsal but not without the cultivation of some nagging doubts. Will they meet the performing space with the reverence it deserves? Will they freeze in the headlights?

The Performance

The students take the stage with a quiet grace, honesty emulates from every pore. They suddenly seem soft and yet there is strength from the core as they move from scene to scene flawlessly. I am watching but my pounding heart is masking my experience. I am careful to call sound and light cues and to disguise the tight throat and shallow breath, sweaty palms and restless weight shifts. They have finished on a single pin point light illuminating the face of an angel (who is normally cursing and swearing throughout rehearsals) singing her story while the rest of the students extend their hands to touch hers (a quiet high five). Electric charges of faith and empowerment are secretly transmitted between them on stage, but we see and we know what it is. The light fades with her lingering last note and the audience jumps to their feet. It is so clear when performance becomes much more than the accumulated efforts of creation, rehearsal, and presentation and yet the only thing an audience can do is to exude piercing silence during and to stand up howling and slamming hands together when it is over.

As creators and performers, we have to accept this limitation with a certain amount of grace knowing there is so much more to be said. If we are lucky, we can catch that as audience filters out, then we can excuse this limitation even more.

On that night, I had that chance, one of the students came over to me and said, “Well Kaffrin from Canadaw, you did change our minds!”

Reflections on the Teaching Story

Throughout the white water rapids and blustering storms of these processes I believe that authenticity and courage are the driving forces that keep nudging creative material into the space and we are in fact the vessels that are both filled and emptied by this material, these personal stories.

And as we shift in our relationships in the classrooms we move through the ties that are tightened and slackened off, as we would adjust the sails in unpredictable winds to achieve optimum motion forward. I have watched sailors curse and stomp when just as the adjustments are made to shift course, strategizing a new tack to capture the wind—it shifts. Navigating is duelling with forces that are unknown. When the best we can do in controlling our environment is to recognize patterning and deduce a predictability but all
of this is to no avail as we come to the storm of hormones that gusts and blisters within a teenage body as he/she navigates her own path with equally strong forces. Nothing is predictable. The sometimes unpredictable winds that change course and remind us that all of this work is not necessarily about the story but rather what Medina (2005) refers to as the edges of the text; a place where we are encouraged to look beyond the literal confines of narrative to a re-imagined space of personal interpretation, a space where multi modal explorations allow for a breadth and depth in understanding.

In the case of my performances and residencies in the schools, the time we have spent together resonates far beyond the stage and just getting it done for opening night but rather we are setting presidences now charting our course for the inevitability of storms ahead and establish the faith that weathering the turbulence is a choice worth taking.

*The Warm Countries We Are Lucky Enough to Teach* in was a performance collaboration emblematic of lived experiences and the surfacing of personal stories within are paramount in the creative process. This process is disruptive and often uncomfortable as the direction of our narratives can echo rhizomatic patterns devoid of a linear, chronologic sequencing both in content and in the traditional governance of the context, that is, director/actor. Appelbaum (1995) writes about this as an invitation to action:

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

When the students experience the power, intensity and then relief of presenting under lights for a captivated audience they are, of course, exhilarated—adrenaline combined with wonderment—”How did that happen?”; “It went by so fast!” But underneath, there lingers a trembling, a resonation that in many cases has never seen the light of day. I spoke—they listened and more importantly—we spoke—we listened. In this process we begin to trust the body as a transmitter to parts of self that have been lost, buried, or
forgotten. This space of embodied triggering ultimately brings the power of the student’s meaning making process to the learning space and ultimately becomes a resuscitation of the inspired learner. Reiner (1998) writes about this as physical force patterns: “In particular, it will describe how tacit knowledge, of which learners are normally not aware, and which is triggered unconsciously by sensations of force patterns which can be accessed and exploited to improve learning” (para. 1).

The self begins to whisper in this process of creating stories and within this process of creation and presentation the participants feel the shift from I to We as they witness the impact stores have on others and they experience the stirring that occurs in them when listening to their co participants’ stories. It is in these moments of action and reflection that we combine theory and practice, dissolving the binary that often objectifies our participants, neuters the learning space and ostracises us from the heart of the work.

Performing the work is not done as an authorization nor a validation of the process, but rather a means of testing the power of the story. Can we cast these personal nuggets not only across the room in the rehearsal studio, but across the chasm that divides the performer from the spectator? Can we use heart as our sling shot propelling these nuggets into the black space where we know 200 people, perhaps passively, await for an experience. Yes we can and we do. The performance was ignited with even more value after the applause and whistles and hoots. The lights come up and the performers began to navigate the resonations that collide with the immediacy of the event. This is where accolades and humilities intermingle in confusion and chaos.

These are the moments that live on and off the stage and these students will learn to decipher and find meaning for themselves within this. They will learn to take back the heart they have flung out in to the audience and prepare it for the next time. These are the invisible moments of stillness and silence when a performing space becomes charged with the voltage of personal meaning making constructing momentary histories removing the ground, excavating the layers, singing the silence and allowing square rings to appear.
Embodied Theories at Play

For 2 years, I performed throughout the campus exploring notions of place/spectator and theory with the hope of cultivating active dialogue with those who inhabit the academy, with those who are riddled with questions that only surface through solitary mumblings to one’s self while crossing the campus, with those who are often disembodied from these questions that appear constantly. I invited dialogue provoked from performative site-specific explorations, hoping to stir wonder in those who witnessed, hoping that wonder could be birthed into shared words that could create collective forums of explored inquiry right in the middle of busy campus thoroughways. Hoping that self possessed students, faculty, and staff rushing from one class, meeting and appointment to another would be caught in this net of curiosity. Embodied Theories at Play comprised of the body, the site and the object ignited conversations around issues such as belonging, transition, communication, and control. The combination of performance and critical conversation, which followed gave new meaning to my inquiry and to those who were present. This is what I believe Pinar (2008) refers to as ‘democratic-iterations’ whereby the origin source of iteration becomes transformed into a hybrid of interpretations. Benhabib (2006) writes of this notion of erasure in regards to the authentic original:

We never simply produce a replica of the original usage and its intended meaning: rather, every repetition is a form of variation. Every iteration transforms meaning, adds to it, enriches it in ever so-subtle ways. In fact there really is no “originary” source of meaning or an “original” to which all subsequent forms must confirm. (pp. 47-48)

Pinar (2008) also writes of the nature of personal stories and their powerful link to a broader sense of community. “Subjectivity enables engagement with the world informed by study and experience. Such engagement constitutes not only service to others but an othering of one self as well” (p. 24). The late Cheryl Meszaros, philosopher, writer, and museum consultant, refers to this forum of interpretive exchange as the “hermeneutic circle.” Meszaros (2007) describes this concept:

This circle encompasses reciprocal relationships between the parts and the whole. Initially, the hermeneutic circle was seen as a historical aid
whereby one could discover the spirit of a whole historical period in one
individual text and at the same time grasp an individual text in terms of the
whole. (p. 21)

She also describes the part and the whole as recursive in nature of this circle:

More recently, the circle has come to include ideas such as the re-
encounter and the return whereby each time we take the metaphorical
journey between the part and the whole, we alter our understanding of
both the part and the whole. (Meszaros, 2007, p. 21)

In the case of Embodied Theories at Play, the source of my improvisations were
transparent to those who witnessed as they were often provided with quotes from the
texts I will have used as source inspiration. So the circle of interpretation moves from
source of my dance and back again continuing to critically trouble this notion of part and
whole. The source material I speak of is what Meszaros (2007) would refer to as
‘domain knowledge’ and she felt this was critical for the ‘interpreter’ considering it both
potent and a necessary part of interpretation, however, she recognized the idea of ‘front-
loading’ an interpretive arena has many stigmas attached:

Hermeneutics encourages art museum educators to inhabit the sonorous
chiasm that was created when information, facts, and knowledge were
gratuitously severed from understanding and interpretation by the advent
of the omnivorous whatever. This chiasm is not an easy place from which
to take up new forms of interpretive practices. (p. 21)

She also writes about the invisibility in this hermeneutic circle and that indeed it is
understood that the value of the work exists beyond the material visible:

What remained constant, though, was that idea that there was something
residing outside of the work (a procedure, a method, an archaeology) that
would make the invisible realm appear. Krzysztof Pomian, in discussing
this kind of relationship in the context of art exhibitions, suggests that
what is seen on display in an exhibition is understood, valuable and
meaningful only because of the access it offers to a realm of significance
that cannot itself be seen. The visible is therefore significant not for its
own sake but because it affords a glimpse of something beyond the object
itself. (Meszaros, 2007, p. 18)
I propose that the invisibility Meszaros (2007) refers to in viewing exhibitions is the same as the spaces cultivated through my performances and that these learning spaces live within what she terms the hermeneutic circle.

This next section is a series of logs of the Embodied Theories at Play performances (2008 to 2010). I was excited by the series as it opened up the otherwise very functional architectural space of the university to a performative space for public inquiry. As I placed myself in the often disembodied context and disrupted the paths of busy students, faculty and staff members, I found that my research was only amplified and the principles of Embodied Poetic Narratives became even more defined. I struggled with those who mocked me, and passed me by with looks of disdain. I fought against the noise and ‘hub bub’ of the in-between class traffic and yet I needed to find the balance of presence in response to the environment and the necessary attention to my ever evolving narrative. As I wrote these logs, I found my inquiry was recursive, my questions doubled back and through the body. I found myself asking again and again, who is my audience? Why did I need them? What is my relationship to them and these architecturally steeped sites? I discovered a surfacing of important reflections to these complex questions through immediate ponderings of the performance, as well as over time, and in dialogue with those that witnessed them. The following reflections are accompanied with photo documentations of the performance events (see Figures 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48 and 49).
Crashing Membranes

I played with the gnarled texture and shape, tracing it and maintaining the shape. I moved between the two pieces exploring the texture of one and the linearity of the other, tracing my face with the differences and moulding the resonations of their forms to my body. The linearity intersected with the curved form of my body at sporadic intervals however the gnarled form pressed to my face created a recognition of my imprint: organic ad controlled. This was an unexpected complexity in the improvisation. As I continued to problematize what I thought were the binaries of agency and modernity, I felt an increasing tension caused by the proximity of the two pieces which created blasts of physical impulses in my body like two magnets with opposite forces pressed to meet. This acceleration set off ‘toward’ and ‘away’ impulses that crashed the pieces together immediately transforming them into a machine gun, then bayonets.
Place and Other

My fingers crawled along the cement and arrived at the small lever inside the red box where they paused as did my violent contortions. This violent, complicated inquiry was about to end with a collision of questions. The immediate question of course that resonated in the room was “will she pull the emergency lever?”
Can You Hear Me?

Being—silent. Who keeps innerly silent, touches the roots of speech.

(Rilke quoted in Mood, 1975, p. 61)

Figure 45. Embodied Theories at Play 6

The Staircase and the Letter

My suitcase almost fell and in catching it I hooked my hands under and over the railing locking myself to a spot like a bicycle locked to a street lamp. The confusion of my self-imposed trappings created both a lightness and triggered a profound association of our lives of self-imposed imprisonment.
The Skin of Emotion

My hands were fists pulled in close to my torso. I felt I was in a struggle, complicit in a particular violence and yet neutered in my experience of it. Detached or at least struggling to remain detached, the struggle reached a crescendo whereby a suitcase was opened revealing a bundle of onions. I chose one and held it to me, a memory of surrender but not embodied, not present.

I walked with the onion towards the audience and read breathlessly the ‘onion bar’ from the Tin Drum, crashing the fourth wall and feeling the emotion and breath behind voicing the text as it clearly made its impact on the listeners.
Longing and Belonging in Red

I slammed over and over again against the steps, like banging on a door, until I was able to clutch a square of tissue paper like a crumpled passport, a bouquet of roses, a ticking explosive, offering it to an audience member. Reluctantly she accepted the offering and I continued the process with the next who sat cold meeting my eyes with steel conviction. The offering was not accepted. Access denied.

Place and Other

I ended the piece by taking the tape off of my mouth as I simultaneously moved out into open space. I was propelled back into the column of delineated space and moved back to the beginning of the space as if being pulled back in time to the history and ancestry of my repression and not being able to break free from these imagined cultural and ancestral shackles.
Figure 48.  Embodied Theories at Play: Montage 1

Note.  Hof, 2010; unpublished, used with permission.
The Removed Ground: 
A Borrowed Story about Expropriation and Fever

In 2007 as part of my Master’s thesis defence, I performed an improvisation based on Kit Grauer’s (Associate Professor, UBC, Arts Education) family history, which exemplified
the dissonance between the factual and imaginative play (Grauer, 2007). This form is what often is referred to in the film industry as “quasi-documentary.” This performance was part of a series of commissions from the Richgate Theatre centred on stories of ancestry from native Richmond folks which would then be staged by actors with directors and dramaturges.

I am alone on the stage, barefoot, cotton dress. I am wringing my hands and circling around a square of dirt like an animal tracing new territory and suddenly I stop and face the audience and begin the ‘story’. This is Kit Grauer’s (2007) story, a story of the expropriation of her family’s land on Sea Island, for the reason of airport expansion. Kit was a child at the time and her memory was disrupted by the disorientation and isolation she experienced from meningitis.

My dance/theatre improvisations were guided by a storyteller as the source narrative and a dramaturge, as a witness, ensuring the integrity of my integration of both the original story and the summoning of my personal stories. In this way I fused my personal narrative with Kit’s, creating a hybrid of stories thereby raising the question of whether I was constructing a fictional narrative or a narrative, which represented Kit’s reality? This is how we arrive at the term “quasi-documentary.” Below are two excerpts from Kit’s retelling of her story.

My name is Kit Grauer and this is the story of my family. My father, my father’s father and my father’s father’s father were all farmers. They came to Richmond, British Columbia in 1853 and started farming the delta soil. This is our story, a story of memory, time, place, and change. When we think of progress it is not always a linear story. My father, as his father before him, was born on Sea Island, one of the islands in the Fraser River delta that now makes up the city of Richmond. They were farmers. (Grauer, 2007, used with permission)

What is left on Sea Island is a single street sign that marks Grauer Road, a road that now leads nowhere—not to the homes and families that once were, not even to the airport. It is one sign of many. This sign is a marker of things past, progress has marched forward. My father was born on Sea Island like his father before him. He did not get his wish; he did not get to die on Sea Island. (Grauer, 2007, used with permission)
We broke Kit’s source story into three parts: Airport, Meningitis, and Farm and with those three parts we created sub categories.

- **Airport**  
  Overwhelmed  
  Blame  
  Powerlessness  
  Deafening noise

- **Meningitis**  
  Disorientation  
  Heat  
  Restlessness  
  Confusion  
  Isolation

- **Farmland**  
  Family  
  Memories  
  Earth

With these three arenas, I was able to weave in and through words, images and emotions creating a bricolage of meaning and by weaving fiction and nonfiction I could transcend the specificity of facts. Throughout this performance, a square of soil was used as a palette of metaphors; held, sprinkled, trodden on, and rolled in, the soil became a vehicle to pieces of the story; the backyard, the runway, skin, regret, tears and heart. The spine of this performance and subsequent performances shifted based on my initial impulse of voice and movement on stage on that given night and that would then begin to create the immediate history of that moment. I worked from collections of phrases such as “It was my backyard”; “There was giving, always giving and then there was the taking…”; “I am trying to remember, I need to tell the story, it is in the telling.” In this way I was not playing Kit in the hospital or her father opening the envelope announcing the reclaiming of the land, but rather I was creating movement from the categories; airport, meningitis and farm and the subcategories; loss, disorientation and memory that triggered individual readings and then triggered personal stories in the audience.
A dialogue was fostered through the accumulation of moments between source material (Kit’s story), those who witnessed (the audience) and my body as a receptor. Memories were provoked, feelings were triggered, concepts revealed. This way of working is an invitation for those who witness to become available to this provocation. Reciprocity within a suspended poetic narrative is then unravelled. If I am truly present in these improvisational journeys, I will consider each moment a surprising dialogue with all that is present in the room, people, furniture, artefacts, temperature, light etc. Davis, Sumara, and Kieren (1996) describe this emergent reality as a dynamic and responsive world:

Knowledge, as we have argued, is neither uncovered nor invented, but emerges in—that is, it is enacted through—the history of our participation in a dynamic and responsive world. It can never be understood merely in terms of either the actions of the subject or the qualities of the object because it emerges in the mutually specifying dynamics of their activities and reactions. (p. 166)

When playing Kit’s story, the fluidity of the character resists opacity of character preventing imaginative readings by the audience and instead allows a porosity whereby characteristics and impressions can me infused by external viewers.

My work in Sea of Stories plays with this notion of unending(ness) in referring to this interpretive principle. With Kit’s story, the story remains with a beginning, middle, and end and yet the way in which it is told will shift imaginatively each night as our relationship to these markers shift according to the contingencies and conditions of each performance. I am thinking about the magical points that exist in my improvisations where I know that I have suddenly constructed a moment that resonates in the audience. I note the thickness of the silence and feel the charge in the air. Have I moved away from the story? I say no and I would further propose that my body is not governed so much by conditions of reality and consequence, that is, gravity weight and momentum or even by the story of Kit’s family but rather by the magic which is created in the play/dance within these conditions or contingencies.
This next part of the chapter addresses the poetics of Embodied Poetic Narrative and the call to enflesh words and fracture signifiers to a sensual place of new understandings.

**The Flesh of the Word**

The torturous five paragraph essay model that sits like an albatross on the shoulders of most researchers prevents us from experimenting with language in our research. I have resonated with the work of Leggo and Milloy as they release us from the shackles of logical linear text as privileged representations of research and primary platforms for proposed and evidenced learning. Leggo (2008b) writes of cracking open these textual conventions:

> Where prose often seems transparent and mistaken for granted, poetry invites the writer and the reader to pay attention to semiotics of figurative language, sound effects, texture, voice, rhythm, shape on the page, line breaks, and stanzaic structure. In a poem, everything signifies. (p. 169)

Milloy (2007) writes of the responsivity to language as involving “inescapable carnalities” which gives access to “veiled visceralities.” She writes that poetry is like a key unlocking secrets in the body. “Inserting poetry into text, we are able to pay attention to subtle, intimate stirrings that precipitate, initiate and mingle with emotions as well as recognition of known already” (p. 3). She further writes of this as a process of emerging self.

> What is needed to flesh out, even with eyes closed, in experiencing fullness of surrounding and in what multiple ways we are enfolded in the fullness, is to include and more keenly acknowledge the verbal and non-verbal signs that not only communicate and signify, but are movements, irreducible parts of the physical, material experience of the kinesthetically engaged body. An emergent individual. A self merging. (Milloy, 2007, p. 3)

Milloy (2007) calls this proprioceptive writing whereby the act of writing is a kinesthetic triggering of self. I parallel how Milloy writes to the call and response of the body to self, with Embodied Poetic Narratives where I cultivate instances for writing that are
intrinsically visceral in their immediacy and urgency. A timed write will occur immediately after a creatively physical exploration of an object. The quickening that occurs creates this viscerality that Milloy refers to.

Milloy (2007) could belong in the middle of Chapter 3 shoulder-to-shoulder with Roland Barthes (1975) as she writes of the sensuality of words “Like a page in which words spill from an inked pen, coming forth, slick with movement. Voracious, voluptuous, volatile. Unstoppable” (Milloy, 2004, p. 16). Barthes (1975) beckons us into words inviting us to graze, to browse scrupulously, to rediscover, describing words as having an intrinsic force: “…it granulates, it crackles, it caresses it grates, it cuts, it comes: that is bliss” (p. 67).

But I am placing her here in Chapter 4 where I highlight her work through the lens of writing/storying the self and other.

I am thinking of writing, the engagement and animation or eros, the movement that can break language out of the prison of transcendent abstraction, that can bring a language of speaking and writing that enhance the corporeal, the flesh and more—a language, words, writing, that brings fullness yet not closure to the self in coming forth from within to the flesh of the world. (Milloy, 2005, p. 547)

Milloy (2007) writes of the presence of self and the necessary absence to allow movement, towards wonder and mystery. Just as I write of the necessary liminality in creating the potency of Embodied Poetic Narratives, Milloy writes of the absence, and in these spaces we bring self into being and becoming. There is an invitation to fragmentation of words and knowledge and what results of this is a relationality of self to the other:

Writing from the body I wait at the edge of absence. Writing, I attempt to salvage the temporality, living from moment to moment, between breaths, between lines. I am no poet in any language I know, but in this landscape of ink sky, words keep rushing in. I am the longest sentence, a question unanswered, My skin is just paper thin. In writing I don’t mean to fill your absence. I mean to provoke it. Into more. (Milloy, 2007, p. 552)
I write about Appelbaum’s (1995) stop in Chapter 1 and Milloy (2004) refers to his stop as a moment to enter into what she terms “carnal presence.” “The absence/stop is the impetus for an experience of self and other in pre reflective space and weaves in to the present, fleshes out the reflection, that can once again retain, even for a moment, a carnal presence” (p. 62). Both Leggo and Milloy write of absence and silence as vital spaces for possibility inspiring a sense of wonder and invitation to move into mystery. Leggo (2008b) writes “Poetry invites a way of uniting the heart, mind, imagination, body and spirit. As a poet I grow more and more enamoured with the echoes of wonder, mystery, and silence that I hear when I attend to the words and world all around me” (p. 167). Milloy (2007) writes of silence as hovering between two places; knowing and unknowing—this echoes the core of this chapter which addresses the liminal spaces of stories known and unknown. Through this invited ambiguity I ask, “As we accept memories that flood into our body do we enhance, decorate, elaborate, embellish and as we do this do we begin to blur the boundaries of lived, constructed and co-created stories of self and other?” I further this probing by asking what is omitted or what is silenced? Milloy (2007) writes, “I am framed by the unspoken” (p. 5). She furthers this power in silence, “Silence articulates, bends time around the text, when language is held at a threshold for a moment” (p. 6). In Chapter 3, Li (2004) encourages us to embrace silence not as a transition space to speech but rather as an invitation to other forms of communication. Leggo (2008c) writes to language as sometimes silent.

**Loganamnosis**

Forgotten words
rise like turnips
in a moon-tugged field.

Each morning I wake
with a trace of soil
around my lips.

Perhaps in the long
night when I assume
I am lost in sleep
I am really pulling
carrots with my teeth,
calling forgotten words.

(p. 4)

Milloy (2005) writes of this as being inside and outside the language and I further this by proposing that these written stories and shared stories bring us inside and outside our lived experiences, asking that we listen to others and by this, foster empathy, compassion and tolerance “I am inside and outside the language, I merge with it, merge with the world” (p. 547). The work of these two scholars revels in the power of words as a portal for the body and all its lived experiences to the world of uncharted territory. Milloy and Leggo invite us through this threshold into the world of mystery where deep listening occurs. By accepting this invitation we allow a fragmentation in what is a solid mass of knowing within and with this splitting into pieces we allow a possibility of an entirely new configuration of self in relation to other. I propose that this is the process of writing oneself into the world collaboratively where we explore the borderlands of collective storying and invite students to take apart and re-build their mass of knowing and to continually create new signifiers, between themselves and the flesh of the world.

In her Master’s thesis, Milloy (2004) writes about interiority as a site that cannot exist alone—she claims there must be a continuous dialogue with the exterior and that these perceived binaries are part of the same. Through Embodied Poetic Narrative I take this fragmentation which Milloy refers to as carnal knowledge, and move it into a space of co-authorship where these words, these movements mesh and meld together until—like wildly curious welders we graft stories together creating a new narrative, a narrative that echoes deep within each of our selves and yet belongs to the collective. I am reminded of the story that begins this chapter:

At one point in the improvisation I read the letter silently as a flood of emotions entered my body. When I had finished the performance a room full of emotional students all claimed they were absolutely sure I had read their letter.

Below is a story written after a performance with Leggo and colleague/collaborator Julia Nolan, where we echo this meshing body and poetry and fracture a mass of knowing into
a space of possibility. It is accompanied with an image from a previous performance by Rickett’s Dance Co. which seems to catch the essence of the story (see Figure 51).

Figure 51. Rickett’s Dance Co. 1

Somewhere between Dinner and Dessert

She is standing, feet firmly planted, eyes closed—shifting almost imperceptibly left and right. The dress she has chosen calls forth the adrenalin of a heightened formality recalling many events where this position usually summons silence…immediately.

Not here….

The crowd is equally ‘dressed’, perhaps not the floor length taffeta they see before them but the necessary tight restricting apparel of this banquet at this conference on this very hot night. Perhaps this is the reason for the reckless irrigation and the loosening of the collars and the kicking off of the shoes. We have entered the scene on the cusp of dessert. Strawberry/chocolate mousses are being distributed amongst this once, but momentarily derailed, academic crowd as a kind of ticket to the next event, the ‘entertainment’. Carl and I are at the side watching Julia standing firm in the centre of our small stage silently calling out for focus. I feel like I am in a well worn wedding reception about to go ‘wrong’. The silence comes reluctantly and we can hear the rattling of spoons against dessert crystal as they turn to their only compensation for this inconvenience. The pouting is palpable.

Julia begins to play and the soft sensual tones fill the air of the banquet hall like a silk ribbon weaving its way around the unbuttoned cuffs, half eaten buns and abandoned shoes. Secrets beneath the tables. I move into the sweet, mellow sound piercing a thick skin and sink my body into the world of kinaesthetic impulse—all senses held close—knowing their role in this mission. Slowly I take the space weaving and intertwining ribbon with Julia’s sound finding nuance and dynamic in her resonating notes.

And then Carl’s voice fills the stage with a poem about boys tobogganing His words carry
an intense musicality that ripple through his entire body as he urges the images forward like small origami birds that take flight and, land beside Julia’s hovering notes and then further into space, on shoulders, in coffee cups, upon forks and laps.

Now the silence in the room has truly arrived
A sudden set of quick punctuated notes from Julia invites erratic fractured movement from my body. Carl’s words from syntax of silence “Am I one of the silenced or one of the silencers?” provokes me to hold hands over his mouth onto his head pushing him down….This work is inviting us to embed our images within each of or disciplines, to cross boundaries and to work inside, not on the parameter.

How can we embrace the power of delight within all of our skills and refined craftmanship?

Carl, Julia, and I have been exploring this as we play together, attending to this balance between technique and, as Csikszentmihályi would term, flow.

We are also very interested in the silence and stillness as much as the movement notes and words.

We are striving to reach the balance between what we know and what we have practiced allowing for the possibility of serendipitous moments. We are disrupting what is tacit.

We are inviting a wholeness—verbal and non verbal as Scott Kretchmar proposes, we are looking at the unexpected combinations of explicit/abstract or perhaps tacit/concrete.

We are learning to acknowledge what we know and yet surrender to the possibilities that comes with a journey on unfamiliar territory.

We are carpenters sanding a table top over and over again inviting a surface smooth enough it reflects the eyes of those who pause long enough to look.

We are building skyscrapers of blue glass casting fragments of light onto wet sidewalks. We are explorers with machetes working our way through deep, dense forests cutting away bramble and pushing light into our pathways.

It is hard work and sometimes uncomfortable for both the performers and the audience.

Our work is finished as we move out of the space like molasses off a marble surface.

Breathless and yet exhilarated we empty the stage pulling the multi coloured ribbons of sound, words and movement into us like fishermen hauling in our nets to reflect upon our ‘catch’.

The audience returns—not absolutely sure of this diversion amidst their conference “What exactly did this have to do with teaching?”

Only the body knows the answer to this and it is whispering its secrets all the time, we only need to find ways to listen.

The DJ is back with the Village People. The hall is filled with the chants and movement of YMCA. They are back in the skin they know and we gather ourselves and make for the door content in knowing that somewhere between dinner and dessert we all took a short but important journey.

When I reflect upon a line in this story, “Only the body knows the answer to this and it is whispering its secrets all the time, we only need to find ways to listen.” I am conjuring Leggo’s (2008c) promise to live poetically, to live breath(fully) opposed to breathlessly and to allow words and movement to swell and burst into the fullness of possibility.

Monica Prendergast (2009), referenced previously in Chapter 1, writes of the importance of poetry as a form of inquiry, I also believe we can pay honour to performance as both a means of research as well as a practice of craft and refinement. Just as Bagley and Cancienne (2002) urges us to embrace the body as a site for our research and to work
counter to conventions of empirical ‘truths’, Prendergast encourages us to play with words and collective iterations and interpretations as a vital source of our research. Below is a selected series of acclamations/re-affirmations of what Prendergast calls Poetic Inquiry and I celebrate the overlap into how Embodied Poetic Narratives works with words and the body as an entry into exploring self and other through memory. This piece is called, Poetic Inquiry is...: 29 Ways of Looking at Poetry as Qualitative Research, hence the Roman Numerals. They appear out of order as I have selected only those that resonate most directly to my notions of Embodied Poetic Narratives.

**Poetic Inquiry Is...**

I. Poetic inquiry is a form of qualitative research in the social sciences that incorporates poetry in some way as a component of an investigation.

IV. Poetic inquiry is, like narrative inquiry with which it shares many characteristics, interested in drawing on the literary arts in the attempt to more authentically express human experiences.

X. Poetic inquiry is, like all poetry, interested in creative language-based processes of constraint, synthesis, crystallization, image, and lyrical forms.

XIV. Poetic inquiry is most often found in autobiographical, autoethnographical or self-study investigations.

XVII. Poetic inquiry is sometimes a socio-political and critical act of resistance to dominant forms and an effective way to talk back to power.

XVIII. Poetic inquiry is sometimes a phenomenological and existential choice that extends beyond the use of poetic methods to a way of being in the world.

XIX. Poetic inquiry is a way of knowing through poetic language and devices; metaphor, lyric, rhythm, imagery, emotion, attention, wide-awareness, opening to the world, self-revelation.

(Prendergast, 2009, p. 3)
Swarms of Anecdotes

It is the swarms of conditions and contingencies that crowd into the neat packages of accurate representation within the narrative which I am disrupting with Embodied Poetic Narratives as I create a kaleidoscopic effect, fragmenting and constantly reshaping what we see as reality. I have come to understand that translucency in the story is key in allowing the light of our imagination to cast through with ease and brilliance.

The beginning is the end. (Heraclitus as quoted in Leggo, 2004b, p. 45)

And surely the end is the beginning.
That, then, is what I have given my heart to. (Leggo, 2004b, p. 21)

In this circularity embracing fragmentation of time and disruption of truth and fiction—self and other, I believe we create an invisible space where we find both our own stories and yet a merging of authorship and lived experiences. We learn to work on, as Medina (2005) terms “the edge of text, a place where we find each other unshackled, free from narratives that strap us to factual representation.” In both the teaching story from New Vic and the performance of Kit’s story we were able to invite personal investment which was transformed by stripping bare the specificity of the story to a place of shared resonance. In the case of New Vic it was transformed to blame and resistance and in the case of Kit’s story to appropriation and re-acclamation. Both stories arrived at a place of personal and collective power.

A primary objective of my work is to move into the heat of the fire, the fire that steals self agency and then through personal story telling, embodied explorations and manipulations of objects as metaphor we come to a place of recovering and acknowledging empowered individuals within a community. Below are a series of images from a variety of residencies. The following photos serve as examples of fragmented narratives nested within objects and images of personal value (see Figures 52, 53, 54, 55, 56 and 57).
but when I look at this mirror
I would see her eyes.
Lucky charm,
Always lucky,
Always will be,
Born at the same time,
Feeling lucky,
My own lucky penny.
I didn’t bring much back to remember.

I want to go back one more time without my gel
to finish the longing if my desire.

I didn’t bring much back to remember.
Figure 55.  A/r/tography Class 4

Figure 56.  A/r/tography Class 5
Figure 57.  A/r/tography Class 6

a trajectory into present weighted with memory
5. The Event of the Object

Hey what is rattling around inside you? (looking at Suitcase)

It’s my artefact!

Your what?

My artefact—the thing that gets museumized. It’s stuff! Everyone’s got stuff—stuff, stuff, stuff....

All right, settle down....

Look... what you pack and what the next guy packs could be the same and it could be different...it’s all about value.

Yeah?! Well so how much are you insured for with that artefact inside you?

I didn’t mean it that way.

OK go on....

So my artefact could be very important to you.

I doubt it.

Or the next guy.

I doubt it....

OK! I know you get excited seeing a Swiss army knife (pointing to Compass) and I know you get excited about seeing a pen light (pointing to Map)... So there are some things that make you think or feel a particular way.
The Objectification of the Subject, 
Subjectification of the Object

Privileged Positions of Perception

This chapter reviews how we seem to story the world according to our own particular location of perception in relation to objects and further troubles the notion of objects as a static mass by proposing that they inhabit a power to provoke storying of our own lived experiences. My inquiry leads me to explore the dynamic space between the objects and those who ponder them as well as the dynamics between the objects themselves. Typical
of us humans, we tend to believe that we can call just about everything and anything into being. We construct the material world through our logical semiotic packages and allow meaning only by and through these containers. The act of meaning making is contingent on the body summoning the pieces/conjuring the parts for this construction of perception. It seems we privilege our position in the world through our own perception of the other. We therefore define through resistance. We decide when a stone is to be ignored or to be locked in a case and flanked by high security. However I argue that the object becomes a critical piece in our storying ourselves into the world and this vital dynamic between subject/object and story is what I term the event of the object. This understanding has become pivotal in my articulation of Embodied Poetic Narratives and serves as a primary portal with the body and the story in my continued research.

(A spoken word poet followed me into this chapter and when asked politely, in APA style, refused to leave. I apologize for any inconvenience.)

We privilege the world’s order through our perception
Our MO is through this deception
Deciding when a stone is ignored or held tenderly on our hands, our own precious folklore
On our knees, sealing the deal, a life long promise, a perpetually turning wheel
We check in and out of signifiers like a hotel
Order up our own significance like a side of fries
We are the syntax between material and space
We are the nexus of perception and thereby have complete control of the material world (as we know it)
We story the thing like a beast
We wrestle it to the ground until it holds a white flag up high shouting “you win”
When really it’s just a tie

I posit that not only the material world can and does refuse to be shackled in to this notion of univocality—singular voice(ness). Clearly this is demonstrated by continuous natural disasters that obliterate massive chunks of populations despite our objections, but also the world of things, the so-called inanimate world of say, toaster ovens, shoe laces, and Barbie dolls. Further to this, there exists an interstitial space where reciprocity and
even participation in perceptive resonances live, which seems to muddy the water in terms of who is naming who. I am interested in troubling this further by disrupting the traditionally privileged positionality of the body. I am undoubtedly heading towards messy territory and at the risk of countering the query of my position in this chapter, I am going to ‘name’ this the event of the object. Merleau-Ponty (cited in McCann, 1993) claims that our immediate encounter with objects involves a reciprocality laced with the tension of communication and comingling. There is a relentlessness of the natural and material world that seems to function on its own accord despite our metaphysically onerous (and self righteous) whips and hand cuffs claiming the right to name. Thomas Merton frames this beautifully in the following poem:

The rain surrounded the cabin….with a whole world of meaning, of secrecy, of rumor. Think of it: all that speech pouring down, selling nothing, judging nobody, drenching the thick mulch of dead leaves, soaking the trees, filling the gullies and crannies of the wood with water, washing out the places where men have stripped the hill side….Nobody started it, nobody is going to stop it. It will talk as long as it wants, the rain. As long as it talks I am going to listen.

(Merton as quoted in Abram, 1996, p. 255)

This space forms a co dependent relationship between the object and the body whereby history is both remembered and constructed, where time is fluid.

The “real world” in which we find ourselves, then—the very world our sciences strive to fathom—is not a sheer “object” from which all subjects and subjective qualities could be pared away, but is rather an intertwined matrix of sensation and perception. (Abram, 1996, p. 39)

Taking this notion of co dependency, why the stigma carried with objects? Abram (1996) describes this as the tension between phenomenology and epistemological traditions of thought.

Behind the reticence to examine objects as centerpieces of thought was the value placed, at least within the Western tradition, on formal, propositional ways of knowing. In thinking about science, certainly, abstract reasoning was traditionally recognized as a standard, canonical
Let’s ponder the precious heirloom, an artefact passed through time carrying several generations of stories despite its tarnish and cracks. It could be held in the hands of an avid archivist in the family or in the hands of a young family member lacking the maturity to understand its significance or even an adopted or foster child to that family, and then who or what is storying whom? Turkle (2007) writes about a young girl who stands on her aunt’s kitchen table and pulls down, from a hard-to-reach cupboard, a ‘family box’; a collection of random objects discarded by family members. Fascinated and also driven by more than curiosity, the young girl searches for clues of her father who abandoned her at birth. She is hoping to find a link to this person and a possibility of rescuing or resuscitating what has been profoundly lost. We clearly understand the potency of the object—otherwise we would not have museums or shrines or junk drawers for that matter. But do we understand the importance of the permanence of the object as an anchor to the temporality of the body? Arendt (1958) writes about the relations of a community of things allowing convergence and interrelationality and even dependence by the nature of their permanence. She echoes this concept beautifully in the following passage, “Men, their ever-changing nature notwithstanding, can retrieve their sameness, that is their identity by being related to the same chair and the same table” (p. 137).

This chapter indulges a closer examination of objects in relation to the body and the phenomenological event within this interstitial space cultivated by these locations. I am exploring this fertile ground where meaning making occurs despite and in spite of ourselves.

The mutual inscription of others in my experience, and (as I must assume) of myself in their experiences, effects the interweaving of our individual phenomenal fields into a single, ever-shifting fabric, a single phenomenal world or “reality.” (Abram, 1996, p. 39)

One becomes worn by the emblems of traditional thinking of form/subject/object and the tarnished Cartesianism of these arguments. A survey of scholars from 20th Century to
current has provided me with a delectable smorgasbord of thinking in regards to the event of the object.

We find it familiar to consider objects as useful or aesthetic, as necessities or vain companions to our emotional lives or a provocation to thought. The notion of evocative objects brings together these two less familiar ideas underscoring the inseparability of thought and feeling in our relationship to things. We think with the objects we love; we love the objects we think with. (Turkle, 2007, p. 6)

This inquiry ponders the dissolving borderland between objects and body within strongly voiced scholars such as Husserl (cited in Macann, 1993), Heidegger (1967), Arendt (1958) and Merleau-Ponty (cited in McCann, 1993), to more current thinkers such as Harman (2005), Turkle (2007) and Elkins (1997). However, I am staking the territory, clearly as an investigation that will remain within a philosophical realm, as I recognize the potential for this study to seep into an unmanageability beyond this and into the world of psychology.

I am feeling kinda tight
Holding on with dear might, with this notion that the mind is altogether separate and that it is our fate that if we don’t have the spark plugs firing the messages at exactly the right place and the right speed
Or at all
The world as we know it goes AWOL
This tarnished Cartesianism that can’t fit with any ism in my heart
Does not fly, nor does it pass me by
I need to integrate, I cannot separate
I need to mitigate, insulate, percolate, this connection between the body as a whole and the object within.

**Rods, Pulleys and Fulcrums**

There is a constant history of embedding analogies of the body in relation to the object through creative ‘handlings’ of objectification, in fact, our history is brimming with
examples of such manipulations of the body in order to somehow better understand ourselves in relation to the world of things.

…the body has been a geometric diagram, a set of metal casting, a stack of bricks, a heap of T squares and charts, a remora, a vacuum cleaner, and a collection of levers and pulleys—to name just examples of twentieth-century artworks by Duchamp, de Cirico, Ernst, Picabia, and Picasso. We have all seen bodies that are maps, still lifes, circus tightropes acts (in Bidloo’s dissection), mountain villages, and knots (as in Cellini’s Medusa). Certainly the body is a fount of analogies, allowing us to understand things that are not bodies, but it is at least as important that the body receives analogies so well, helping us to understand it.

(Elkins, 1997, p. 147)

It is the curiosity of the body in attempts to understand the object as it pushes, pulls, and twists materials until it becomes managed, palatable, and acquired. It is the body’s attempts to control the element, its need to gentrify the material world. And in turn, we will see the material world by twisting its own perceptions until a body is recognized. The abstract becomes an acquired body of knowledge.

We have moved to a world where our instincts are colonized
Articulation becomes cornered by emoticons
The raw guts of an impulse become gentrified
Where the back alleys of our secrets become a Martha Graham Penthouse
Where eloquence is replaced by Twitter
How can we learn to talk again syllable-by-syllable
From deep in our gut through the heat of our breath
With the pumping heart in the wake of each utterance

Harman (2005) refers to Merleau-Ponty as he writes about this as the “flesh of the world as a kind of molten plasma that conducts meaning from the body of the object to the I” (p. 53). This is what Merleau-Ponty explains to be carnal knowledge and goes on to posit that to have a body is already to be embracing things rather than to be detached from them, “…the thickness of the body…[is] the sole means I have to go unto the heart of the things, by making myself a world and making them flesh” (p. 139). He furthers this concept by saying “the presence of the world is precisely its flesh to my flesh” (p. 54).
Interesting that Merleau-Ponty does not qualify the external world as the presence of properties or elements but, rather flesh, implying a life force manifest within.

When I see a form—any form, any shape at all—I am also seeing a body. I may be looking at only a smudge on a piece of paper, but I see it as a single form, a unit unto itself, a thing, a body.

When we are confronted with an unfamiliar object—a blot, a funny smear, a strange configuration of paint, a mirage, a frightening apparition, a wild landscape, a brass microscope, a building made of brick and rock— we seek a body in it; we try to see something like ourselves.

(Elkins, 1997, p. 129)

I want to tell about that elegant gallery with the fur coats and the champagne glasses.

Well I am not finished yet.

I know but this is a good example of what you are talking about.

You just want to gloat because you were invited to a fur coat/champagne kind of occasion.

I was asked to animate Canadian sculptor Cory Fuhr’s opening by dancing in a very crowed space in Vancouver’s elegant Elliot Lewis Gallery in Arthur Erickson’s Waterfall building. Having worked for over a decade at the Vancouver Art Gallery animating shows for both children and adults, this seemed like a fairly familiar assignment, however it was not. How would I create a symbiosis between my warm pliable body and the steel figures made from bicycle gears, pulleys, and steel rods? On opening night I moved between the fur coats and the cocktail glasses echoing the shape of the figure shown below, but it wasn’t until a few children pushed through the crowd and started to echo my movement that something started to **cook**. The space was austere in the true style of Erickson; glass, cement and steel. Despite this cold environment, the children brought a playfulness and heat to the room. They started hanging and swinging off a collection of beams—playing with pendulum, fulcrums, and gravity. I joined them following their lead and then came to understand that we were together bringing a new understanding to Fuhr’s work—his abstraction of the form through industrial materials (see Figure 58)
could not be understood by emulating the shape of the dance but by playfully bringing to life the industrial mechanics of his materials. The bridge between his materials and the form was the overlap of industrial and human kinetics. I was grateful for the children who innocently moved towards the fusion of body and object which was at the core of this work.

Figure 58. Elliot Lewis Gallery Project

With David Abram’s (1996) sentient body, I understand the ‘call to arms’ as we become educated out of nature and out of our senses, but this notion that we must be present in the world—meet the world, understand and respond to the world with, as Abram quotes Merleau-Ponty, “a direct bodily resonance” is actually spoken from a very privileged location. Abram (1996) goes on to explain that we are not a closed circuit that we
actually need objects to finish the circuit or to complete a sense of meaning; we are in fact an open entity. But he moves on to explain that it is through an alertness with the senses comingling with the world that we are able to build this relationship between the world and I.

…thus my divergent senses meet up with each other in the surrounding world, converging and comingling in the things I perceive. We may think of the sensing body as a kind of open circuit that completes only in things, and in the world. (Abram, 1996, p. 125)

Again I iterate that this ‘open circuit’ is from a privileged position. I, myself, have all of my senses intact, with the exception of reading glasses at night, but what if….

The Sentient Objects

I have recently experienced my friend’s life radically shift, the result of an accident rendering his body permanently paralyzed. He jokes “I am just one big head” and I respond with an equally jocular tone, “You must be ready to do your doctoral degree.” He is strapped to his chair, his spine is full of steel; he does not know what is going on beyond his heart, a foreign object below. He has learned to breathe again relying on the diaphragm as his intercostals have taken a permanent vacation. His arms have become foreign species that tend to move and gesticulate on their own accord—barely listening to the brain’s nuanced messages, in fact ignoring them most of the time. I see his wife perched on his hospital bed, vibrant and exotic both in clothing and movement, her expression is effervescent. I wonder if her sense of her own body in relation to the world has also radically shifted—the bed and the chair, the bags and the pumps have become a part of her body as they have become part of her husband’s. My question before entering his hospital room the first time was; “Does disembodiment necessitate a new history with the world?” I took a deep breath and was astounded by the answer that rushed forward and filled my body instantly. As I entered his room I could see my friend was extremely embodied. The increments of movement he had both in the face in concert with his badly behaved arms—spelled out the old familiar language of this individual. The eloquence of
the remnants of the body broadcasted loud and clear and filled the space. The essence of his very being dominated the room and thereby dissipated my fear. We talked one afternoon about the work I had done with a professional dancer and a quadriplegic—how the chair became the symbiosis of the object and the body. This concept was understood deeply as we experimented with fulcrum, leverage, emotional tone, and metaphor: we worked together—steel, muscles, bones and wheels. This experience with my friend crashed some of my righteous notions that perception and understanding must be based within a sentient fabric—a fully activated sensual being. As Abram (1996) writes of the body being fully awake, all senses attuned to the moment—where is the acknowledgement that some of those senses may have checked out for life? Appelbaum (1995) addresses this possibility by stating that defective senses are often being referred to as a gift of “divination.” Appelbaum posits that the deficit actually creates an ability to perceive the world through a two-fold-ness, which not only allows understanding of the world through a functional perception, but also through the energy that fuels that reality. He uses the example of the blind man and also refers to Descartes’ writing of this as a situated metaphor. “They look into not only human nature but also that from which human nature springs. It is a small wonder that we call their gift divination” (Appelbaum, 1995, p. 80). Appelbaum explains how the blind man’s cane is a channel for the; “fluid vibratory energy to move from object to body in this example the perception is served through something very palpable—the cane” (p. 98). Descartes names this conduit as a “luminous body” (p. 98). It is through alignment of space/time in conjunction with proximity which allows this passage of perception. However these factors that operate traditional thought processes in a straight line of contingency are not always the case, Descartes writes of the triad between them. For the sake of clarity, we continue with the example of the blind man where this triad is created between the body, the object, and perception. “This consortium of dynamics grants the possibility of entering the borderless regions of object/subject. The blind man both perceives the manifest and the form in which the manifest arises” (p. 80). Appelbaum (1995) claims this as a means to re-engender the body, to begin to ‘read’ the world in an entirely new
text—it is the text of the thing and the inseparability between the thing and self in relation to time and space and this is the stop moment which is outlined in previous chapters.

The stop lives in the interstices of action, and ordinary recluse. It shuns the spotlight yet exerts a definite and important control over what takes place. Furthermore, it gives us a key to a deeper engagement in a meaning that unfolds our lives. For it offers a choice. Either to remain habit-bound or to regain a freedom in one’s approach to an endeavor. The stop is the advent of an intelligence of choice.  

(p. xi)

I have one more is that OK?

Is it long?!

No!

**Through Resistance**

I remember being at a party with a good friend who was blind. I knew some of the people, but he was a stranger to all. We were in the kitchen, where most people are drawn and we were having a conversation and simultaneously scouting the room determining the socio/political/economic demographic of this collection of folks. The radar was on high speed as we located ourselves in relation to the grid. My eyes darted around the room focusing and re-focusing the discrepancies in distance and then entering the data at a lightning pace into my interpretive machine. My friend was conducting exactly the same experiment but with both hands, fingers behind and beside him as he leaned against the counter allowing complete mobility to traverse the landscape of objects. Corkscrews, spice jars, place mats, bottle caps, buttons and wash cloths, his data base entries were probably more complex and more accurate than mine. For example, I am sure he could determine the kinds of conversations he was about to have based on the quality of grout on the counter tiles.

*Your digits read the counter*
*The Braille of this demographic*
*The here and now, this place, this time*
No text or statistics, no discourse or logistics just determining the age of this grout and the length of this crack and following the line of drops from that bottle
Surely no single malt
The track of these cracks, they are your map....

This is the nearness to things that Appelbaum (1995) writes of, the continuum between object and body which celebrates the intention and the perception as an integrated whole in this particular relationship. Further to this, he writes of the mode of being with the blind man’s cane creating a natural perception through resistance. The cane moves back and forth on the path of the blind man and his perception of place is identified by the resistance perceived when the cane hits or bumps objects in the path.

A correspondence exists between cane and mobility to the extent that the body is the condensed intention of the cane. The cane wants to perceive what is in the way of travel. The body concentrates the selfsame impulse and muscularly actualizes it. (p. 98)

Knowing this, why is there such stigmatization in the notion of troubling our habituated thought patterns? Clearly it is through resistance that we fuel our progress towards enlightenment, well, maybe not enlightenment but at least points of discovery.

Effort carries with it the perception of a relation between the being that moves and wants to move and a certain obstacle that opposes its movement: without a subject or will that determines movement, without resistance, there is no effort, and without effort, no knowledge…
(Maine de Biran as quoted in Appelbaum, 1995, p. 100)

This resistance is what Appelbaum identifies as the arrests and disruptions which comprise his concept of the STOP. Objects resist the organic sequencing of cause and effect within one’s everydayness. Appelbaum (1995) speaks of this as awareness meeting strain “without impediments its perception would be without content” (p. 99).

I lied, I have one more....

I don’t believe you anymore.
Perfect because it is through resistance....!!!!!

The Shoe, the Subject, and the Story

We pick up the phone—we turn on the computer, we start the car with a mindless, habitually driven accuracy. But suddenly when walking past a shop window on the way to a meeting, we see a pair of yellow shoes that remind us of a childhood birthday party and we stop. Depending on the quality of presence at that moment we may allow memories to surface, memories that we may not have known—memories that have laid dormant and hidden under the folds of our lived experiences (some of these deemed unworthy of conscious recognition). In that moment of presence and seeing the shoes, Elkins (1997) writes of a sense of dissolving that tangible distinction between object and observer:

And so looking has force: it tears, it is sharp. It is an acid. In this end, it corrodes the object and observer until they are lost in the field of vision. I once was solid and now I am dissolved: that is the voice of seeing. (p. 45)

And so in this ‘seeing’ we become the instant of the shoe. It stories us behind the shop window and we surrender to this. So when on my path to work I am stopped suddenly by the impulse to look at the pair of shoes in the window, I am combining the awareness of this trigger and how it effects me with the arrest of my direct, habituated urgency to get to work. The resistance of this interruption in my morning routine, combined with the surrender to an embodied childhood memory, is what Appelbaum (1995) calls affirmation meeting denial and this is a moment when a stop occurs. Elkins (1997) further parallels this with Heidegger’s notion of “betweeness” in the sense that the subject is objectified and in turn the object becomes subjectified. The shoes become my life and I move fully into this object of provocation.

When I think of Heidegger’s way, what I have been calling the observer evaporates, and what really takes place is a “betweeness” (for lack of a better word): part of me is the object, and part of the object is me. There is no such thing as a pure self, or a pure object apart from that self. (Elkins, 1997, p. 243)
In this way, Elkin’s book is brilliantly appropriate in its title, *The Object Stares Back*. Another commonly witnessed example—the flag that lies draped over the soldier’s coffin becomes the subject of his existence and the presence of his sacrifice. It is then folded and carefully placed in the hands of the grieving mother—the subject/object is horrifically transformed into a memory. This entanglement becomes an activated space where memory meets presence and ignites a profound reflectivity. It is this space where habituated thought patterns are suspended and the unexpected may surface. Appelbaum (1995) describes this event as “an unexpected collision [which] compels the attention to awareness” (p. 81). He explains this further, “The stop neutralizes a tendency of percipient energy to animate intellectual categories through which events are viewed. Assumptions about a world external to the perceiver are neutralized” (p. 80). This neutralization is the opening through which new information can enter—the possibility of discovery is created. This is what I call *fracturing the signifier* understanding that whatever meaning has been historically and habitually grafted to the object gets blown apart within a moment—this again, is Appelbaum’s stop. Elkins (1997) writes of this:

> If I observe attentively enough, I find that my observations are tangled with the object, that the object is part of the world and therefore part of me that looking is something I do but also something that happens to me—so that the neat architecture of the sentence becomes the morass. (p. 35)

**The Thingness of I**

Author of Evocative Objects, Turkle (2007) had collected a series of stories illuminating how the dynamic relation between humans and objects invites metaphorical frameworks for us to think about things and for things to *think* us.

Objects are able to catalyze self-creation. When Igor Kopytoff writes about “biography of things,” he deepens our understanding of how a new car becomes a new skin. How a change of jewellery can become its own voyage to a new world. Objects bring together thought and feeling. (p. 8)
Carol Stroheck, from the MIT Media Lab in an American elementary school, taught children how to tie knots and talk about their experience with hopes that this would lead them to deeper understanding of mathematic principals.

Knot making showed me how commonplace objects can help people think purposefully about continuity and separation, combination and deviation. Through knots I learned that engaging objects can help people to build intuition about mathematics. (Stroheck as quoted in Turkle, 2007, p. 6)

And I propose that these understandings transcend mathematics. Actually the doing of weaving, folding and exchanging, fosters creative constructive problem solving skills, which in turn cultivates life long lessons in all aspects of living relationships positively. Levi-Strauss writes of this notion by positing that we speak through the medium of objects, “Material things for Levi-Strauss, were goods-to-think-with as well, following the pun in French, they were good-to-think-with as well” (as quoted in Turkle, 2007, p. 4). In one passage of Evocative Objects, Olibia Daste writes of actively archiving the memories of her grand mother with a collection of artefacts quickly placed in a suitcase while her house was being cleared for resale. She raced through the house grabbing what she could; objects transcended their form and became the resonations of conversations, laughter, and bad jokes.

The red cardigan still had her scented handkerchief folded in the pocket; her white plastic pear necklace was scented with her perfume and still had her foundation rubbed in. From the kitchen I took our two pink-and green flower-painted teacups in which we had our morning coffee. I was taking our breakfasts with us; our long animated conversations; our ritual of sharing our dreams; our nightmares and laughter.

(Daste quoted in Turkle, 2007, p. 247)

Merleau-Ponty (cited in McCann, 1993) writes about the sensory integration of objects, such as the perfume scented necklace in the passage above, and our experiences and memories of them by stating that this primal connection is impossible to separate the experience of an object from our sensing the object.
...the sensory ‘properties’ of a thing together constitute one and the same thing, just as my gaze, my touch and all my other senses are together the powers of one and the same body integrated into one and the same action. (Turkle, 2007, p. 48)

She dwells in the senses to re-awaken her memories and to such an intense level that she worries the memories will recede along with the ink and the perfume:

The suitcase brings her back to me with the worry that I will lose her if I open the suitcase too often; her smell will evaporate, the letters will fade, and the clothes will no longer hold her shape. (Turkle, 2007, p. 249)

The senses in this way become windows, gateways, and doors to the world of discovery. When teaching university writing classes for immigrants who have not yet found ease with English, I use the senses as my entry point. I bring paper bags filled with rich smells like coffee and lavender, unique tastes like candy coated caraway seeds and odd textures like duct tape turned inside out. They reach into the bag and through this invitation to trigger stories through the senses; they begin to write with a sense of abandonment, almost with urgency. They become transported as they surface from their hunched posture momentarily only to gaze beyond the walls of the classroom, thank god! I believe if we can invoke this gaze beyond the classroom, then we, as teachers, know our students are truly being ‘moved’. This provocation triggers a voice that has been silent—a voice that may have cowered in the corner, now makes its way through the rich smell of coffee grinds to the surface of a shared experience. It is in this articulation, this exposure, that I propose, a personal agency is cultivated. “Our bodies are the ultimate form of sincerity. Even the most pompous cynic, scoffing at governments and at the ignorance of his colleagues, rarely mocks his own arm, or sneers at the heartbeat within” (Harman, 2005, p. 49). Proust (1992) writes of this absolute authenticity sustaining through the most challenging conditions:

But when from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest; and bear unflinchingly, in the tiny
and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vat structure of recollection. (p. 160)

**Aggregates, Umbrellas, and Firewalls**

As Proust (1992) writes of the sustaining power of the senses, Arendt (1958) writes of the permanence of objects as being critical to our sense of selves in relation to the world. Arendt points to this notion of objects being the static reference point of our ever shifting lives and the echoes that sustain throughout the temporality of humans who gather and disperse. In this flow of relationality, there is a sense of permanence brought by the objects that both separate and gather; they are an anchoring; they are the reference points of that which outlasts us—and thereby become that which identifies shared meaning and understandings. We have now come full circle to the family heirloom mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. We cannot hold a digital image and have the same effect as the grandmother’s pearl necklace. We begin to lose this value of the object as creating this relational dynamic with the onslaught and increasing density of digital literacies when objects lose, as Heidegger calls it their presence-at-hand.

…when things lose their inherent work as use-objects and are reduced to mere subjective values, we lose the shared world of stable, enduring things that relate and separate us in common interest.

(Arendt as quoted in Barney, 2004, p. 46)

When working with the Lugs, I am constantly working in partnership with objects such as tissue paper, duct tape, chalk, handkerchiefs, understanding that each object is brimming with infused meaning beyond the everydayness of its use. “To create such an object is to de-create the external images that normally identify it, re-shaping the plasma of their qualities into a hybrid structure” (Harman, 2005, p. 109). The power that objects bring to the world is clearly undermined by most. We continue to operate on the stigmas that objects are an excessive apparatus to our daily-ness and, therefore, secondary in our meaning making processes:

Behind the reticence to examine objects as centerpieces of emotional life was perhaps the sense that one was studying materialism, disparaged as
excess, or collecting, disparaged as hobbyism, or fetishism, disparaged as perversion. Behind the reticence to examine objects as centerpieces of thought was the value placed, at least within the Western tradition, on formal, propositional ways of knowing. (Turkle, 2007, p. 6)

This concept pushes phenomenology into the category of solipsism, rendering the ‘individual personal experience’ of the object illegitimate within the epistemological analysis of relationality. Not only is this solipsistic viewpoint rampant, but we also believe that the nature of objects is constructed through and with us. Harman (2005) furthers this notion of self-centred perception by saying “the very experience of transcendent things is possible only provided that their project is borne…within myself” (p. 50). Harman also writes of the unavoidable act of inscripting other within ourselves, constructing an ever shifting fabric of shared experiences:

The mutual inscription of others in my experience, and (as I must assume) of myself in their experiences, effects the interweaving of four individual phenomenal fields into a single, ever-shifting fabric. A single phenomenal world of ‘reality.’ (p. 39)

Husserl argues against this stating that the object carves not only the physical manifestations of its own properties but also qualities attached to it that operate on a distinct level despite our interpretive machines: “…qualities belong to objects as themselves rather than to our consciousness of them. Far from appearing as contents of my mind, qualities are already attached to things. Even as these things recede from me” (Husserl quoted in Harman, 2005, p. 47).

Despite this symbiosis, Harman (2005) claims that the object is univocal—a stone is a stone and with it comes the properties it owns which constitute it as a distinctive entity from say a pencil. He furthers this claim by referring to Derrida’s notion that the ‘being’ of things is integral to the naming of the thing and counters this by claiming that although an object can be, and is, transformed by our individual reading of it, we cannot deny the properties of its being. A stone is a stone and not a pencil.

It is only to recognize that the infinite dissemination of meaning does not entail an infinite dissemination of being. In other words, the fact that the
“proper” of the candle can never be univocally spoken does not mean that that there is no such thing as the proper of the candle.

(Harman, 2005, p. 110)

He further asserts that there is an endless depth in the life of objects such as candles and stars and urges us to unleash “the music in the heart of things” (Harman, 2005, p. 110) rather than beat them into a pulp of meaning. Again we return to Appelbaum’s (1995) availability to discover, and this ability lives within his concept of the stop. Harman (2005) believes that objects exist negatively in their distinction from each other and positively in the rationality of that which constitutes them. “This means that relations unfold only on the inside of an object, since every medium is nothing less than such an inside” (p. 193). And this world that lies within the object is defined as a determinate sensual place. The sensual place is what brings the notion of interiority to the object:

...an object is not just dead shapeless matter, but rather a specific entity with a specific form that has set up shop in the world in some particular way. The first positive statement we can make is that since objects are different for one another, they must have interior notes or qualities.

(Harman, 2005, p. 192)

He continues to assert that if we consider the interiors of objects then we move beyond the form and into what he would consider the element. His definition of an “element” in relation to how we view objects is the following, “a sensual object incarnated in a highly specific form” (Harman, 2005, p. 194). Harman asserts that an element is a sensual object coated in accidents, “like a car glistening with ice after an overnight storm” (p. 194). The immediacy and authenticity of the elements of objects is underlined in this beautiful passage by Harman (2005):

Elements have no alibi for their actions at any moment, and seek none: they stand before us, utterly and fully employed in specific form. Sincerely being just what they are. If objects hedge their bets within any specific perception, elements bet the farm on being exactly and specifically whatever they are right now. (p. 194)

Harman (2005) raises the question regarding interrelationality between objects with terms such as firewall and vacuums with queries such as “we need to know what firewalls a
substance contains to prevent it from being penetrated by just any old relation to any old entity” (p. 96) or an even more complicated question “…in what does the being of a thing consist?” (p. 96). He continues the inquiry asking if an object is in fact a form, an aggregate of properties, does this imply that by the very nature of this definition it is sealed within a vacuum? Harman refers to this notion of the relationality and oneness of objects as an intriguing paradox; “We often overlook that there is a certain degree of paradox to any relation, since it involves a multiplicity that is also somehow one” (p. 96). These questions open up a seemingly infinite number of doors, which to step through, would not service the focus of this chapter. I will focus less on the definitions and the boundaries of objects and more on the causal relations of objects as this will segue to the next section of this chapter introduced by Compass. Harman (2005) does speak of the causal nature of objects that work in collision with each other.

It should be remembered that there is no question here of brute efficient causation between masses slamming into one another or mutually influence through electromagnetic and gravitational fields. Rather, we are speaking of a kind of formal causation between metaphysical substance. One whose nature has not yet been exactly determined. (p. 99)

Heidegger (1967) furthers this notion of the object proper by also writing of the interior of things. He agrees that objects are not just empty forms of matter defining a distinction from the mass of other objects. He posits that our neurological perceptions of this matter do not just privilege us with the exclusive position of relationality; objects exist within a relationality of their own particular realm. When I choose objects for my workshop, I am acutely conscious of the implications of these choices. I understand that the triangulation between three objects not only gives my participants’ choice but moves the perception of this grouping to the realm of collection. Having visited his house: a hallway of oars, a kitchen of 1920s root beer bottles, a dining room of Woodward’s cafeteria dishes from the 1950s, I asked my master’s supervisor, “What constitutes a collection?” He was clearly the right person to ask—”Three,” he answered, “if I have two it is a comparative exercise, if I have three it is a collection.” For example, when I lay out an onion, an antique book and a handkerchief to a group of seniors who are first generation immigrants, I have a sense that I have narrowed the arena of imaginative play with body,
story and object. As Harman (2005) speaks of the paradox between the overarching oneness that can also contain discrete parts, I understand that the realm I have created with my careful selection of objects invites both a unification in the participants provocation and yet still maintains an invitation to personal selectivity and distinction/identity of voice.

I always need a box of Kleenex for these stories….I don’t mind....

**Museumizations**

For a graduate seminar, I recently experimented with this continued curiosity of the object, the subject, and the story. It is not by accident that I first laid the objects on a black cloth and, by doing this, extricated them from their natural context. I echo the citation of Appelbaum (1995) earlier in this chapter, I “neutralize[d] a tendency of percipient energy to animate intellectual categories” (p. 80). I took these objects out of their ordinary context and placed them in a charged context, thus allowing them to be perceived differently. This is what I term the *museumization* of an object. This museumization afforded them the possibility to disrupt the common everyday signifiers attached to them. This disruption continued through the process as I encouraged an unconventional *handling* of the object both textually and kinesthetically. It is the notion of the element as the interiority of the object coupled with the concept of *presencing* the object’s elements that interests me—so several devices were employed in this process in order to trigger immediacy of response or what I call *first impulse*. I then laid three objects on the fabric; a pad lock used for high school lockers, a cell phone, and a key strung on a shoelace. I placed this collection in the middle of our standing circle and proceeded to give a warm up that involved stretching large muscle groups, mobilizing joints and finally increasing the heart rate. The movements were simple and accumulated until we were able to repeat a sequence several times. We began to feel the heat, increased heart rate and the excited charge of remembering sequences with a rapid fast firing syntax. This way of allowing memories and stories to surface through a heightened sense of awareness, a quickened heart rate and a deepened breath, is echoed throughout
this thesis as a state of viscerality. With this state, I have prepared both the physical and emotional ‘spark-plugs’ that could fire quickly with abandon. As a result I have provoked an altered state in the body—a kind of surrendering to the moment and with our closed circle I have also invited an activated and intimate space with a focus directed towards the three objects. Without letting a moment slip, I ask the participants to move closer and ponder the objects—they then moved to a piece of paper and began to write—from a trigger phrase, “I remember when…” or “The first time…” The writing was timed and there was a sense of urgency imposed on this task—don’t think, relax—allow the story to surface from the image that is triggered. We were conjuring stories that may or may not have been lived experiences. The blurring of fiction and non-fiction was the first necessary point of surrendering as a ‘state’ in this entire process. Time was up and the furious writing activity ceased. We stood and balls were thrown and caught. “Catch—say something you remember from what you have written—throw!”; “Repeat!” This was repeated and more balls were brought into the game—soon there was a cacophony of words and phrases from the writing. Without a conscious listening we were allowing the relationality of our perspectives to take effect. We had begun to co-mingle the narratives. This was the second stage of surrender. The students were then asked to take their text with a quickened heart rate and with the re-awakening of a first impulse state, and circle words or phrases that surfaced for them—The purpose of this exercise immediately before was to prevent an analytical frame of thinking and to perhaps allow the participants to feel the effects of words from other stories to enter into their choices. They then imported these circled words and phrases to another paper and re-configured them creating what I term the dysfunctional haiku, a poem which refuses to be roped to a chair—an anarchistic sonnet or a resistant rhyme. I ask that parts of the poem be memorized. This allows the body to absorb the text—to swallow the words so to speak. This embodiment of text frees the body for the next level of the journey. I invited the participants to engage with the object they were most inspired or provoked by in any way other than its common use. This enabled two primary outcomes: (a) It immediately pushed the object into a place of metaphor disengaging or dislodging its tacit signifiers; and (b) it invited us to understand more deeply the kinesthetic properties
of the object in regards to its weight, pliability, and surface. This process of experimentation became coupled with vocalized parts of the poetic response of these objects. As a result a deeper understanding of the elements that live both inside of us and in the object is created. This then is shared with other participants and thereby an enlivened and co-mingled engagement of abstract narrative brought forward another level of meaning making. A community had been built within the intimacy of this engagement whereby signifiers were being fractured and re-built again—together:

It is not by accident that the car was parked at the side of the road for a very long time
The car shivering in the storm
Telling its new story at dawn, encrusted by ice.
It is not by accident that the key on a shoestring is placed on a shroud
Or that you could see it as the opening to your story
It is not by accident that your story seeps into mine
And now I cannot tell them apart
It is not by accident that at the end of our story I can feel you take my hand and give it an almost imperceptible squeeze.

How then does this process serve any purpose other than open a space to re-construct our relation to objects? This sequenced activity that brings immediacy, presence and surrender to a place of shared stories—often brings new information about us in relation to the world and when it is conducted in an activated and intimate space of reciprocity, re-enforces a sense of common understandings through individual voice. This is what Husserl claims as the intersubjective space (cited in McCann, 1993). The diagram below (see Figure 59) explains this through concentric circles starting with the ‘museumized’ objects which in turn trigger personal stories and memories within a subjective space. These stories, shared with others, begin to trigger more stories which, then, transforms this space from subjective to intersubjective. It is through our collective lived experiences that we begin to see the connections between these stories which then brings common understandings and this in turn coheres the group. This is what I believe to be the foundation of an effective community building model.
The event of the object
- using artifacts as an embodied generative process towards common understandings

common understandings
As Abram (1996) refers to Husserl in his defense of phenomenology:

Carefully describing the way in which the subjective fields of experience mediated by the body, opens onto other subjectivities—other selves besides one’s own self—Husserl sought to counter the charges of solipsism that had been directed against his phenomenology. (p. 37)

He furthers this in regards to this notion that to know one self deeply is to be able to know others, hence pushing the qualitative angle of his philosophy to a level of deeper understanding of the nature of the mind in relation to appearance and relationality.

Husserl struggles long and hard to answer this important criticism. How does our subjective experience enable us to recognize the reality of other selves, other experiencing beings? The solution seemed to implicate the body—one’s own as well as that of the other—as a singularly important structure within the phenomenal field. The body is that mysterious and multifaceted phenomenon that seems always to accompany one’s awareness, and indeed to be the very location of one’s awareness within the field of appearances. (Abram, 1996, p. 37)

Through this act of disrupting habitual thought and fracturing the everydayness of signifiers we come to a space where not only new meaning, but also collective new meanings can be discovered and shared. This, I posit, must be foundational for both restorative and constructive acts of building community and thereby strengthening personal voice. As Abram (1996) so beautiful writes, “It is the informing of my perceptions by the evident perceptions and sensations of other bodily entities that established for me, the relative solidarity of the world” (p. 38).
6. Voicing the Performative Body

What do you think of this picture?

It’s fine.

No, not that.

Well what do you mean then?

What does it make you think of, what does it remind you of?

Oh... well why didn’t you ask that?!

OK... well now I am.

OK then...that is a little different, that is like asking me what is behind the frame.

A Brief Interruption

I can feel the thick silence of the room. My hair creates a curtain over my face drawing my focus inward. My breath is slow and steady. I can distinguish almost inaudible groans that seem to help sustain the musculature and precision of my movements, I can see through my peripheral sightline that my colleagues are descending in their chairs with the same tempo. I can feel the wetness of a smashed tomato under my left foot and the remains of the one in my hand will soon drop to the table as I begin to release the muscular tension in my torso in its slow sustained (10 minutes) journey of collapse. I have a long way to go before my complete surrender to gravity; not only are my muscles in the lower part of my body starting to retaliate but my mind is becoming anxious, knowing the various obstacles on the table of which I was standing on; glasses of water, tomatoes, papers, will need to be navigated without conscious intent along this arduous uncharted path. My body is almost all the way down as it moves from sitting to recline. It is one of the most challenging points in the dance as my abdominal muscles are engaged full throttle supporting the weight of the torso as it incrementally and smoothly descends towards the table until a moment when something happened and I knew the performance had radically changed....
So?...

Well, wasn’t this where an audience member thought Kathryn was going to lay down on a glass of water and kill herself, or at least get wet?

Yes, that’s right, because he read the performance through his own eyes and needed to save her.

With his own eyes?

No! With his own hands, so he removed the glass.

Hmmm...did he also have a cape?

**Body: Embodiment**

This chapter outlines performances and teaching encounters, which exemplify theories and practices in regards to the ways creative bodied acts are *read* and the power that resides within the spaces of dialogue. Through a ricocheting approach I highlight primarily two contemporary artists, as well as my own practices, who surface, what I believe to be the tenents of an empowered voice; authenticity and immediacy. I also outline current research with Dr. Lynn Fels (Ricketts & Fels, 2010) where Performative Inquiry and Embodied Poetic Narrative are integrated into a process that explores further these notions of capture and reading the body. I ask, “Do the words authenticity and immediacy live in the same place as accuracy and precision?” This leads me to examine the blurred borders between art and science in explorations and definitions of the body and to further this towards a clarification/precision of or the denial of that clarification/precision when *reading* the body. We are, it seems, more comfortable with binaries as a means for clarity/accuracy, and in the case of the *body*, it would be more efficient to put researchers in a categorical arena of empiricist investigations; researching factual properties of the human anatomy, or artist; observing conceptual phenomenan of the *being*. One cannot deny the obvious bridge between these worlds and the work of Leonardo da Vinci however, for the purpose of examining the gray area of the studied
body, I have chosen John Isaac within a project called *Spectacular Bodies* (Kemp & Wallace, 2000) as one of a small group of artists selected as major contributors to this endeavour of examining, the wonderment of both artistic representation and medical imagery through history and to further trouble this notion of *precise/accurate* readings of the body. John Isaac proposes a clear dichotomy in examining the body between objectification in relation to other and subjectification in examining self: “…the fundamental difference between art and science is that the methodology of science describes and institutionalizes the ‘other’ while art naturally leans more towards an articulation of self…” (quoted in Kemp & Wallace, 2000, p. 158).

However, I posit that these distinctions are not always so apparent. I have chosen two artists’ work as exemplifiers of this notion of the possible ambiguity—Eadweard Muybridge and Robert Longo—two artists I have been studying for many years. Part of my fascination with these two artists is their curiosity in examining the human body in what is perceived as a scientific methodology—to dissect, analyze and magnify from a micro-centric perspective, yet their results are far from what would be considered factual data. Just as the previous chapter dissects our notion of objects as subservient to our utilitarian tendencies, I will be using these artists’ work as a catalyst questioning and hypothesizing the differences and similarities in the investigation of the body through the Arts and Sciences both as form and function as well as metaphoric vessels of meaning making processes.

**1/100th of a Second: The in-Betweeness in Technology**

I start with Muybridge’s photographic research from the 1880s. He began with the objective to reveal what is hidden from our natural eyes and to use the lens as a way of dissecting the body in motion within a rigorous systematic process. John Isaac speaks of the obsession of human dissection as emblematic of Western human thought and action and as a need to cohere or consort an otherwise fragmented world (cited in Kemp & Wallace, 2000). He believed that artistic inquiry and scientific investigation of the anatomy is a symptom of the need to *name* and this in turn results in a loss of innocence.
This need to take apart, capture and contain, point and name, is defined by Jonathon Sawdry as the “dissective culture.” Despite Muybridge’s rigor in process, working with absolute precision within a time frame of 1/100th of a second, the results were more than austere/clinical. I propose that his work bridged the two dichotomous fields. “Exploiting photography’s affinities with science and art, Muybridge produced pictures that adhered to the requirements of neither field, but offered a fascinating new view of the human body” (Ratcliffe, 1985, p. 1).

Photographers throughout history attempted to remain within the confines of science/information and art/aesthetics to no avail. Muybridge’s work, incremental captures of human movement, explored the range of gender, age, ability and race with the primary goal of revealing what is hidden from our natural eyes (Haas, 1976).

This notion of capturing truth through the photographic lens is explored by Berger and Mohr (1982) in *Another Way of Telling*. The speak of truth and the camera as a tool of capture. Berger and Mohr say the camera *quotes* instead of *translates* as it has no language of its own. “The photographic quotation is within its limits, incontrovertible yet the quotation placed like a fact in an explicit argument, can misinform” (p. 96). At one level there are no photographs, which can be denied. “All photographs have the status of fact. What has to be examined is in what way photography can and cannot give meaning to facts” (p. 96). Berger and Mohr (1982) also speak about the camera as a (dis)connector. “The camera makes reality atomic, manageable and opaque. It is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity but which confers on each moment the character of mystery” (p. 49).

Had Muybridge’s work remained in the realm of what Berger and Mohr (1982) cite as the “quote,” or had their photographs remained in what they call the “status of the fact,” perhaps their work would not have been successful in blurring the boundaries between art and science. In regards to this, Muybridge spoke of how the hyper systemization of his work actually created a platform for the opposite to reveal itself (Haas, 1976). With the grids as background, the precision and angles revealed one aspect allowing for a context of opposing results. In this context the human body was able to reveal a living rhythm
and heart in the movement and gesture. With this, Muybridge claimed that we are not seeing the beginning and end of a movement but rather we are witness to seeing through a movement. A reviewer from *The National*, in 1888, spoke of Muybridge’s work in this regard; “His record of ‘naked’ facts revealing the nuances and subtleties of the human body’s function, is simply a mine of facts that no artist could afford to neglect” (as quoted in Ratcliffe, 1985, p. 1). In this way I draw a parallel to Lugs where I invite those who witness the performances to see through the dance and into the images as provocations to their own images and invitations to their distinct *readings*. This invitation allows for a departure from traditional and very limited ways of viewing dance where virtuosity and staging comprises the viewer’s experience. And when leading workshops with children I may ask them to look through a painting and tell what is on the other side.

Muybridge then went on to urge artists to consider each series in its entirety (see Figure 60), rather than a single awkward frame (Haas, 1976). He continued to warn them not to copy but rather to interpret the wealth of information.

Muybridge stated that he wanted to see the world from the perspective of a bullet’s trajectory (as cited in Haas, 1976). This, Muybridge considered to be the revealing of truths in human motion which nature otherwise conceals. This obsession with finding the truth that lies within the outer core was not just present with Muybridge. An entire movement that came with the aspects of developing technology, photography being one of these developments, microscopy and X-rays being others, triggered a new movement towards having access to the inner body.

…these developments in art and medical imaging occurred over the same time span is not coincidental. The kinds of truths for which artists and medical researchers were mutually searching lay not just within and under the surface appearance of things as they had for generating, but at different levels of reality, more abstract and often ever-more minute.

(Kemp & Wallace, 2000, p. 18)
This idea of seeing through a movement harkens back to those who were known as the “anatomically minded draftsman.” Leon Battista Alberti’s *On Painting* from 1435AD speaks of the internal as laying the essential foundation for the external form (Kemp & Wallace, 2000). This sets up a circuitous route exemplifying the notion of seeing through the form to the internal world. “First…sketch in the bones for as they bend very little indeed, they always occupy a determined position. Then add sinews and muscle, and finally clothe the bones and the muscles with flesh and skin” (p. 47).
Although this perspective is still just speaking about bones and sinew as the inner we can move a little closer to notions of self as inner with 18th Century polymath Albrecht von Haller who states physiology is in fact enacted anatomy and anatomy is perceived as structural physiology (Kemp & Wallace, 2000). This bridges into Chapters 4 and 5 whereby we begin to blur the boundaries between the written word and the object as being shaped and formed by the body but rather invite a circuitous process whereby reciprocal readings and provocations can occur. An inner life in the story and the object allows a dynamic relation with the body.

It was also believed to be a key factor in the revolution of naturalistic renderings from the renaissance to be rigorous in the mastery of the body as a functioning system of motion and emotion. We finally move to Leonardo Da Vinci who, when speaking of The Last Supper says:

> It was necessary to understand at the deepest level, the inner causes of outer effects. To re-create the configurations adopted by the bodies and faces of the protagonists, it was necessary to track the ebb and flow of the sensation and emotion to the innermost impulses of the characters in dramatic situations. (quoted in Kemp & Wallace, 2000, p. 71)

Anatomical artists of the first half of the 20th Century were indeed able to recognize and value inner emotion and empathy as integral to their portrayals of the human figure. Maliaf speaks of Muybridge’s work as “seeking to photograph the expressiveness of the body” (quoted in Haas, 1976) and supports this hypothesis in recognizing one of his titles being, “Turning around in surprise and running away” (Muybridge quoted in Haas, 1976). This title would indicate his move from pure documentation of instinctive response to scripting an expressive action. Muybridge spoke of stripping the action in order to reveal the muscle and bone and then attempting to strip away muscle and bone to reveal the music of the gesture. I also speak and write about viewing Lugs as an invitation to hear the music in the gesture or the texture in the image. Although coming from an opposite starting point, the painters from the renaissance intersected this concept at the point of explanations and codifications of the exterior manifestations of the inner sanctum. With Leonardo’s coining of the intentions of the mind, there is a common
thread of curiosity and even dedication to reveal the interconnectedness of the soul with the \textit{house} it inhabits (Kemp & Wallace, 2000). The “divine architecture” as the Renaissance theorist and artists agreed comprised of an integration of the external form and the internal emotional landscape. This integration is precisely where we begin to see beyond the costume and the props of my performance to a conjuring of unlimited images, provocations, and associations. Although Muybridge believed he was taking apart human motion and finding out what happens with the spaces between (cited in Haas, 1976), I believe he fell into what Kemp and Wallace (2000) call “contextual looking… which invites the viewer of the images to play creative and imaginative roles in thinking about images of the subject that is literally closest to our hearts and minds…” (p. 19). This is what Carter Ratcliffe (1985) means in his reference to what romantics call “imaginative sympathy.”

\textbf{Imaginative sympathy!} What a great set of words! This small but brilliant team of words must be key in how Kathryn invites the witness to her Lugs and the dialogue with her workshops.

\section*{Sandbags and Tea Cups: Urgency and Immediacy}

Robert Longo is another photographer and visual artist who arrives at the same place of “imaginative sympathy” (Ratcliffe, 1985). Contrary to Muybridge, Longo builds his image on the eroticism and urgency and the heat within crisis but conducts his photo sessions with the same accuracy; capturing the micro second of a moment. He is best known for his deconstruction of the representational narrative within the work of the twisting and undulating figures of \textit{Men in the Cities}. This is a series of pencil etchings from photographs from 1981 where Longo dresses subjects in what critic Richard Price calls, dropdeadchicness (chic, who are in danger of literally dropping dead) (as cited in Ratcliffe, 1985). He then proceeds to throw tennis balls at them recording their instinctive reactions, which are described by Price as “dancing, dying, dancing, dying” (p. 87). Price speaks of the fate of these severely chic Manhattan figures as vacuous
shells awaiting our signifiers. “Longo’s art isolates us in the act of projecting significance into a void or many voids” (p. 87).

Figure 61. Longo, Men in the Cities

These images as presented in Figure 61, these misplaced dramas are, as Douglas Crimp claims, freed from the tyranny of the represented which is also a beautiful set of words (Ratcliffe, 1985). Throughout my dance life I have encountered those who suffer from the tyranny of representation as they timidly back away from telling me what they saw, what they felt, when witnessing a performance. This is the fear of “not getting it.” Longo’s figures are in fact falling under the weight of a “hollow mass culture of inauthentic values,” and Ratcliffe (1985) claims these figures can be granted “fictive individuality.” We as the viewer have agency to “name” the meaning of his humans in motion. Alberti’s theory on representing the body previously states, “start with the bones and clothe the figure” (as quoted in Kemp & Wallace, 2000). Muybridge says “strip down the muscle and bone to the music of the gesture” (quoted in Haas, 1976) and Longo says, “If I took the clothes off the people in my drawings all I would get would be white paper” (quoted in Ratcliffe, 1985). These figures exist in an empty vortex forcing or
intuiting the viewer to complete the image. Ratcliffe speaks of this as a yearning and further claims this is what Longo’s work is hinged upon: He states that these figures are in a kind of violent death fall and are actually quite empty. It is the viewer that creates the violence.

It’s not a picture of someone being shot,” Longo reminds us, the person’s being shot every time you look at it….You know who the guy is shooting the person: It’s you. It is the viewer, asserts Longo, who pulls the trigger. (Ratcliffe, 1985, p. 28)

When entering into a space of dialogue with students regarding a reading of a story or a performance, I want them to feel this power. Longo’s interest lies not exclusively with human forms in urgent immediate instinctive response, he is also interested in something much deeper that is triggered through crisis (cited in Ratcliffe, 1985). With this work Longo invites us to engage from an authentic and very present location. This is the reason I no longer choreograph my works but rather remain as a conduit and kinaesthetic conveyer of both the immediacy of the moment fused with my 50 years of lived experiences and 30 years of performance experience. This, I propose, places primacy on an authenticity of spirit echoed both in Muybridge, from a clinical perspective, and Longo, from a more humanist position. Yet both artists meet at authenticity and immediacy which are key principals in engaging interests from the viewer. I realize that for years I have been throwing soft balls at my students inviting immediate responses from questions or thematic brainstorming and it is for the same reason I invite instinctive, authentic responses from this astute presence, no hands in the pockets—no cruise control.

Ouch! What was that for?! Why are you throwing balls at me?

You need to talk about the next performance.

I know that!

Well, it didn’t look like you were quite astute enough

I was OK?
The Collaborative Bog: The Collective Unknown

I had brought Longo’s work to the collection of grad students with the task of creating a conference presentation collaboratively addressing creativity. I was eager to demonstrate what I loved about the images. Could we, I asked them, create a piece that embodies the authenticity of our collaborative engagement together?

My work as a dancer/choreographer for the last 30 years has always embraced the authenticity that lives inside of risk. Often I would build this state into my dances. For example, in one dance, I asked the dancers in my company (Rickett’s Dance Co., 1987) to first have their heads shaved on stage as the audience was arriving and then move through the choreographed adagio balancing small china tea cups on their heads (the programs stated if the cups should fall the performance would be suspended for a moment while the shards of porcelain were swept away from their bare feet).

Another example entailed covering the stage with sandbags creating a state of emergency in the dancer’s playing field both with associative images as well as the dancers’ reality. Holding balance on one leg with an unpredictable shifting in the foundation creates the necessary tension in the dancer’s reality thus integrating the concept of inherent tension. The props (sandbags and tea cups) and actions (balance and sustained movement) created a necessary tension within the dancer that was then transmitted to the audience cultivating immediacy, an urgency and most importantly an astuteness where transformation occurs (see Figures 62 and 63). Urgency/safety are tenuous concepts, privileging the unknown and affording profound possibilities.
Figure 62. Ricketts' Dance Co. 2
My stage managers were constantly reprimanding me: “next time can you consider not using real sand—not using real porcelain or in the case of another piece, couldn’t you not have one of your dancers play the role of the blind man in that particular part? My answer only fuelled their constant exasperation. The tension that lives inside of crisis and the risk that is entailed in holding and navigating that tension is what produces the vitality that actually fuels the work and further to this, the authenticity of that work. These pieces were choreographed but ‘housed’ with improvisational elements through the unpredictability of the props. Now my pieces have become entirely unpredictable with the exception of knowing perhaps a prop I will use and the location of the performance.

![Image](image.png)

Well there is something to be said for understanding by doing, not knowing where you are going; no plan... for example if we just fold this part.

Ouch! Watch your buckle.
Oh don’t be so sensitive you are such a fragile thing, lets take one small section of this—oops sorry did I rip you?

Leave me alone!

I think what Suitcase is trying to say is that if you just fold yourself one piece at a time you will understand where you are in that little area.

Oh cripes...I am exhausted! You don’t understand. I know where I am by seeing and comparing all the parts and then I should get folded properly to...oh...I don’t know...to start again. I guess....

Hmmm, well I understand about the comparing all the parts thing but the needing to be folded back to your original position is just plain....stupid!

I agree....move to another location—that’s what I do!

There you go again with this go with the flow stuff! You both like to do to know and I like to know to do!

What?

So you need to see all the parts.

That’s what I am telling you!

But you are not happy with being disorientated with the folds going this way and that.

Yes!!!

Well it seems to me you have a little tension there...

A little??!!

How about if you try to think of the tension as a good thing like...oh I don’t know...magnetic resistance?

Or a spring lock!

Who are you fooling!? You have not had spring in you locks for years!

Good tension is what I am saying.
Tennessee Williams once wrote of this in an introduction to one of his plays. The trajectory from his sudden success of *The Glass Menagerie* shot him from the single dingy bulb of “off/off” Broadway to the bright neon of expectation. A lavishly furnished penthouse was to host the commission and expectation of the next great work but instead came desolation of inspiration and in its wake, only cigarette burns in the carpet. Williams wrote about this tension:

> The sort of life which I had had previous to this popular success was one that required endurance, a life of clawing and scratching along a sheer surface and holding on tight with raw fingers to every inch of rock higher than the one caught hold of before but it was a good life because it was the sort of life for which the human organism is created.

> I was not aware of how much vital energy had gone into this struggle until the struggle was removed. I was out on a level plateau with my arms still thrashing and my lungs still grabbing at air that no longer resisted. This was security at last.  

(“Featured author,” 1999)

A relocation to a small shack in New Mexico recovered this absent vitality, thus enabling William’s next work, *A Street Car Named Desire*. This crisis, this urgency, which is transferred to vitality, is key to the authenticity I strive to achieve as a performer and I continue to work towards as a teacher.

In my examples of teacups and sandbags there was a notion of bringing authenticity to the construct of the stage. What I loved about the audience’s engagement with the teacup or the sandbag piece was the engagement. They stopped unwrapping the lifesavers, stopped coughing for fear of coughing, stopped rattling the programs and indeed for even a moment stopped breathing; there is a genuine impulse to engage on an immediate and yet deep plain. Breath suspended. These are the openings in performance—the ruptures in our often passive relationships of spectator/performer and this is what I am currently the most interested in with my continued explorations of space and witness in performance.
I enthusiastically conveyed the value in these arrests to my collaborative conference team as I speak to the space/time vitality within these crisis points. I demonstrated the first three minutes of a slow descent to the floor, my arms hanging limp, my limbs shift gently, re-allocating weight as gravity slowly devoured my mass. A slow descent is just that, as we could watch sand steadily drop in an hour glass, we witness gravity pour through the muscle tension of the body pulling the muscle mass down to the floor increment by increment. This exercise is not for those who frequent the movies with bombarding two second edits. It is not possible to move into this journey without embracing an altered state of consciousness as the room recedes and a heightened sense of elongated internal awareness is replaced. During my demonstration to the group, I had transcended in descent to the florescent lighting and dusty linoleum of the seminar room and when I opened my eyes and stood up I could see that the event had also provoked a ‘state’ in the room: Time had slowed down, critical analysis had taken a ‘coffee break’ and breath had deepened—our thick politeness which had dominated our collaborative process had shifted. The demonstration inspired an ensemble of varied descents in our performance at the conference, Gravity in Fugue, a kinaesthetic cacophony of earthbound pioneers searching for a silent, collective voice.

**Interruptions to That Which is Known with the Help of a Tomato**

I recall the moment before this slow movement descent in our performance. I had just finished delivering a poem exploring the substance of creative process as having no core:

**How to Eat a Poem**

Don’t be polite.
Bite in.
Pick it up with your fingers and lick the juice that may run down your chin.
It is ready and ripe now, whenever you are.
You do not need a knife or fork or spoon or plate or napkin or tablecloth.
For there is no core or stem or rind or pit
or seed
or skin
to throw away. (Merriam, 1990)

The poem was read as I simultaneously devoured a large, luscious tomato—I stood barefoot on a long conference table in order to make my point completely clear. The table was *conference* set—covered with white linen and punctuated with tumblers of water, paper, and pens. This was the perfect territory for the academic paper delivery: *formal/academic/sophisticated*, but not this time, when mess and disruption had replaced the pristine scene. I finished splattering tomato guts from my emphatic last line, sputtering pulpy red bits in all directions. I was only vaguely aware of a mixture of expressions in the room ranging from shock, admiration, and disbelief, even repugnance. I then joined the others with the slow 10-minute *pull* to the floor…

We created a collective archaeological, time capsule, time slowed down, stood still and then seemed to hover, contained and yet determined. It was at approximately the seven-minute mark when my weight had unexpectedly shifted forward and then back again, marking the final excruciating stretch of the journey. An essential rule of this exercise—or as I would like to call it, this *kinaesthetic prayer*—is to remain true to the physical path as bones, organs, muscles, and breath collectively navigate gravity, surface, space, and time. My body had chosen a path that involved extreme attention towards stabilizing my core. I was half reclining on the table—feeling the remnants of my tomato extravaganza on my legs—controlling my upper body in its slow final descent to the table when…a slight draft indicated that something quick had moved in and then out of my kinaesthetic sphere. I marked a difference in the audience’s engagement and knew that something had changed. I was not sure what had happened but knew that it was a significant moment and it indeed it was. A glass had been removed.

The moment was almost imperceptible but time altered perspectives in this event, magnifying each micro impulse—like a strawberry seed in a tooth, I knew a minuscule shift had caused an astronomic effect. This particular audience member must have been swift and lithe as a cougar when he sprung from his seat and efficiently extracted the
glass of water from behind my back, confident that by his action he had just prevented a potential disaster. A heroic intervention! This is the moment that resonates still.

This penetration of the fourth wall shifted the defined positions in the room between spectator/performer to what? Perhaps to an unsettled conversation (which was after all the title of the conference). A rupture was created, we were no longer operating within two forms adjunct but rather had entered a liminal space of meaning and there was no turning back to what had been unfolding prior to his intervention.

Not to worry—in my opinion this is the moment where this creative inquiry begins. We, as spectators and audience, are attending to the habits of the conventions of performance, peeling back known surfaces and unwrapping the safety of spectatorship. A welcome intervention! Or was it?

This audience member had predicted a moment, or perhaps many, of extreme unsettledness. Let’s speculate what this/these could have been? What or who had he rescued? The glass could have toppled onto the floor, shattering, disrupting the presentation, alarming the audience and myself. Or perhaps I would have gently knocked it over, soaking both myself and the white tablecloth, and proceeded without interruption into a soggy place of arrival. Either scenario, it would have been an event occurring simultaneously within and outside the performance. The audience was tense by my body’s proximity to the glass, already alert to the tenuous relationship between the glass and my descending back: Will she sense the glass and avoid it?; Will she topple it over?; What will happen?

By his interruption in actively choosing to remove the glass, this audience member invites us all to, ponder, and speculate the possibilities of the glass of water and spectator entering actively into performance. Who is to say the glass had not already been an active partner throughout the presentation (despite its quick abduction by a safety conscious audience member)? If I had sensed the glass in my descent and my path slowly averted, the glass would have played a significant role. Would my path of descent have been entirely different had the glass been absent? The audience member’s choice of
action to intercede on my behalf reminds us of our own choices of engagement as members of an audience within performatve events. At any moment, anyone of us, spectators all, might engage actively within a performance. Was his action a performative event? A performatve disruption? Or simply a disruption by an audience member who could not bear the tension of remaining in his seat, to see what event would unfold. He was, by his actions, stepping simultaneously in and out of performance.

I am grateful for this provocative intervention to our performance ever though I know it caused great perplexity within the intervener and those watching. Evidence of this was extracted from an email correspondence: I asked this particular audience member how he felt about his action.

It was a risk to move the glass and look like a fool or hero....or ignore the glass and potentially injure a friend and have a heavy conscience. I decided to bring it to the attention of other spectators and ask them what I should do.

(audience member, personal communication, used with permission)

He then asked me an interesting question:

Did you not notice the water glass in the performance or did you perform this as a test for the audience?

(audience member, personal communication, used with permission)

A test for the audience? Now this is an interesting concept; the glass had not yet entered my kinesphere (psychical proximity) to be noted, so I can’t answer whether or not I would have used the glass to play with the audience. Nothing was constructed in this descent other than the astute ‘presence’ to embrace the unexpected. The removal of the glass was like a rupture in the sustained silent journey of my body in descent. Miller (1992) writes about a rupture in our continuum as a gift. I see the continuum as being our habits and in this case the habit of how we view performance. Miller writes of Lacan that our history is implicated within an emptiness created by the rupture in this continuum (p. 59).
The important thing is that at a given moment one arrives at illusion. Around it one finds a sensitive spot, a lesion, a locus of pain, a point of reversal of the whole of history, insofar as it is the history of art and insofar as we are implicated in it; that point concerns the notion that the illusion of space is different from the creation of emptiness.

(Miller, 1992, p. 10)

The removal of the glass calls attention to the complacency we are accustomed to as spectators. This is the give-it-to-me-ness that constructs the chasm between audience and spectator. In the removal of the glass, the chasm was bridged. But in the interruption, in the act of entering into the performance to remove a perceived impediment to the performance, was the performance enriched, or disrupted? What about the tension of anticipation, held within the actions embodied by the performer in relationship to his or her context, surroundings, environment? The engagement of audience became focused on whether I would in my descent topple the glass of water or deftly avoid it by sensing its presence and altering the course of my descent—the relationship between the audience and me was similar to that of my earlier choreography as audience members sat on the edge of their chairs waiting for the teacups to fall. It was the tension in this relationship between gravity, teacup and dance that became the performance and this exemplifies what I wrote earlier as an invitation to see through the performance.

Celant (1998) writes about performance artist Laurie Anderson as someone who dismantles the conventions of performer/spectator relationship by constructing what he calls a ‘passage.’

All of Laurie Anderson’s work is directed toward attempting to divine the principles of an “other” performativeness, where the stage is not a threshold that cannot be crossed, but rather a passage, an access to a dialogue between the vital core of life and the audience as a whole. Every event, musical or visual, is for her, an open, transparent instrument not only bound to her identity, but ready to dissolve, to give way to a powerful current of real energy. She thus keeps a distance from the visual ostentation of self and narcissistic self-gratification and favours instead the erruption of a hidden condition of being. This brings Anderson, in her relationship with theatricality, to conceive the stage space as a participatory perimeter, in which the profound reality of life offers itself to perception and to the gaze of all. (p. 15)
This disruption, in this case, was the space created by crashing the fourth wall, the invisible wall protecting the spectator from “active” engagement. This collision of the recognizable and familiar with radically new ways of recognizing signs is what cultivates this third liminal space. Bhabha (1998) writes of the tension between these two relationships; spectator/performer as both a doubling and displacement:

They come together, in this uncanny relationship, by virtue of the difference that holds them apart; a contest between surfaces, elements, materials or meanings that conjures up one, or the other, through a ‘third’ dimension. This is the dimension of doubling and displacement.

(Bhabha, 1998, p. 19)

The conflict between the forms of performance conventions rest on the habits of perception and actions opposed to boldly moving into the uncharted territory. The removal of the glass left an imprint on us all in the room. A trace of that particular history remained inviting us all to question. We were provoked to venture into a new questioning of relationship and responsibility between spectator, performer, and action. This brings me back to Jaques Lacan’s writing of “the moment one arrives at illusion…” (Miller, 1992, p. 10). Lacan speaks about illusion not as misconception but rather as a disruption—a suspension of patterned historical associations to problematize the obvious, the habitual and in this way to bring new understandings to our points of view.

Katsuko Azuma, Japanese Noh master, writes about this rupture as a motive to achieve the same quality of physical/emotional astuteness.

‘Kill the breathing. Kill the rhythm’, Katsuko Azuma’s master repeated to her. To ‘kill’ breathing and to ‘kill’ rhythm means to be aware of the tendency automatically to link gesture to the rhythm of breathing, speaking and music, and to break this link. The opposite of linking automatically is consciously to create a new connection.

(Bhabha, 1998, p. 32)

In relation to my performance—the craft is the intimate knowledge I have of my body and its muscular capacity to sustain a 10 minute descent and linger and yet to be available to the ‘fortuitous’ unexpected moments such as the removal of the glass. Grotowsky
explains the voluntary disorientation we allow as performers, the moving into a dark room to find the furniture, which results in a dilation of our senses and sensibility, an alertness that supersedes knowing one’s lines. It would be useful to know if I, the dancer, would have toppled over the glass. If I was indeed saved from a serious accident (unlikely) or the performance disrupted by a spilled glass, water to be mopped up, or whether the glass would have been gracefully avoided in my descent. Or would yet another rescuer have leapt to his or her feet to intervene? However, a far more important inquiry and recognition are left in the wake of the removed glass.

It is not only interesting but critical how the core of this chapter becomes the resonating question like what would have happened if the glass had not been removed and to ponder what did happen as a contingency of this event? It is precisely this query, these curiosities we carry on our back, that call in us the thirsty pioneer who is relentlessly reading and re-reading the performance, the story and the world.

Thanks to the anatomy driven artists of the Renaissance and theorists and artists of the Avantgarde we are able to look at the spaces between science and art and recognize the ruptures that have allowed us to bring heart to rigorous methodologies when examining the body. Muybridge and Longo’s work have been strong reference points to investigate the many discourses around form and function and the myriad of grays between these often-perceived binaries.

For works of the complexity that we are juxtaposing, whether medical or artistic, there is no single right context. Varied contexts and juxtapositions, allow multiple readings. This is an open exercise in contextual looking, inviting the viewer of the images to play creative and imaginative roles in thinking about images of the subject that are literally closest to our hearts and minds.

For those of you who like playing charades this part of the chapter is not for you.
I like playing charades and getting it right.
Like I said, this part is not for you.
That is just plain rude!

**Body Glossary**

This notion of contextual looking—imaginative reading of the body is echoed in one of my teaching exercises with a term I call body glossary. I showed the illustrative example of a game most of us know, “Charades.” We have entered a codified system whereby my movements are read with the same efficiency as the image. The students called out excitedly in response to the codified movements of Charades. “Four Words! First word! Book—gather—no, catch. Fourth word! Corn—no—wheat—no—rye! Catcher in the Rye!!!” There was satisfaction by the reading of this performance; they got it right (in 7 seconds!). I then showed a sweeping arc with my body and pointed to the top. The readers came fast and furious with their interpretations “sun!—swim!—slide!—curve!—surf!” I am delighted when I can get so many different readings as it signals to me that I have created a space for personal meaning making. If I can provoke a realm of words that possibly live within my original meaning, even better! My word was “crest.”

I apply this *contextual looking* to both my performing and my teaching and in this way I do not lose the structure or skeleton of form or the intentions that live within but rather allow this availability to the moments that may influence this form and most importantly, the unexpected readings that inevitably flow within the structure.

**Interstanding Through Performativity**

This part of the chapter is drawn from a jointly written article with Dr. Lynn Fels, pending publication (Ricketts & Fels, 2010).

My final exploration of embodiment is with the methodology of Performative Inquiry and its commitment to the body as a vital receptor for discovery and reciprocity (see Figure 64). Lynn Fels (1998) explains the methodology as a means to new understandings through disequilibrium:
Performative Inquiry provides a momentary entrance into “other” worlds through embodied play and reflection, thereby offering students opportunities for intercultural awareness, dialogue, and understanding. Transported into an unexpected environment, the student must re-examine the familiar against the unfamiliar, and through the resulting disequilibrium recover a new balance of meeting oneself within a new environment. (p. 12)

Figure 64. Embodied Theories at Play 9

Fels (1998) speaks about the gift of drama allowing us to not own the stories of others but to allow the fleeting, shifting moments and to honour through the witnessing of the stories embodied. I posit that Performative Inquiry can move one step closer to compassion as critical to this act. I believe through Lugs that I am honouring the stories by allowing them to be embodied with a fusion of associations and emotional conjuring from my own experiences. This moves one step from empathy to an emotional aligning,
no interfacing with the storytellers. This is what Fels would consider the ‘interstanding’ of a moment, the climbing in and breathing the source of the moment. Possible space-moments of learning come into being through (re)playing the landscape of inquiry through creative action and interaction.

The following is a series of reflections and accounts of the work I have been doing with Fels for the last 3 years as part of a SSHRC grant investigating the relationship of technology with the body. As was the case with Muybridge and Longo, this work proposes that there are interstitial spaces within this coupling that surface new understandings of the relationship between technology, witness, performer, and encounter. We are seeking to surface the perceptual shifting(s) made possible through such encounters, as we evoke the heat of embodied technology within improvisational spaces of encounter, surveillance, intimacy, and retreat. Within this constructed vocabulary and improvisational movement, the performer and videographer engage in a dialogue within the immediacy of unfolding moments, seeking intimacy and reciprocity. It is here that we begin to uncover the ways in which collective voice and individual voice is activated.

From moment to moment, what impulse, thought, action will unfold into new understanding?

I step into position, blindfold over my eyes and stand with my back to the audience, while the videographer, Lynn (never secure in the workings of the assorted technology, trustworthiness of camera, battery, input and/or output to computer onto screen) turns on the camera, and stands outside the performance area, five feet from me, she begins to film. Unknown to each other, performer, and videographer are on the threshold of an embodied encounter of surveillance, capture, witnessing, and death.

I take my position in front of the screen after tying my blind fold secure around my head. I did it swiftly and yet transparently hoping if people saw me do it they would soon forget. I surprise myself by taking a stance of mixed messages. My feet are far apart—knees locked and pelvis slightly forward and yet my hands are clasped behind my back. Had I not been blindfolded this last kinaesthetic detail might not have been so unusual—it could have looked like I was unafraid to be exposed, comfortable in my self and moving forward to my audience. However I have my back to those in the room and I am blindfolded which evokes an image for me of moments before
an execution— the accused, accepting his/her plight—despite the corporate apparel of black suit and white shirt.

Johnson (1996) in *Postures of Meditation*, writes of release and resistance to gravity claiming that our attitudes and perceptions are intrinsically linked to the tissues in our body and the resulting posture we inhabit: therefore, the position I took was key to the unfolding of this improvisation for myself, who took the role of soldier; Lynn in immediate response, assumed the role of journalist, and the audience accepted the role of witness.

The standing military position seeks to create good soldiers. By bringing a great deal of tension into his body, the soldier is effectively able to lessen the awareness of his sensations and feelings. Through limiting his awareness and impulses, he becomes much more amenable to following orders and doing the bidding of his superior officers.

(Johnson, 1996, p. 40)

During our subsequent video sessions together, I would execute 10-minute *meltdowns* as described earlier in this chapter, a slow descent to the floor, allowing the pull of gravity and the weight of my body to shape each moment in anticipation of the next. As the first stance provoked militant traits with authoritative implications, the second, as I surrendered to gravity, brought an astuteness balanced with ease.

By relaxing through surrendering the weight of the body to the pull of gravity, we allow unnecessary tension in the body literally to fall away. As the musculature of the body continues to relax, we become much more aware of our sensations and feelings. Formerly the tension in the musculature created a kind of armouring that prevented us from fully feeling the tactile sensations in our bodies. As we relax this tension, we are often flooded by the awareness of this sensation and we become able to experience the body as it is. (Johnson, 1996, p. 41)

In this particular series of performative encounters, videographer, and performer engage in a slow improvised encounter, as each movement unfolded into the next. The videographer zoomed in on different parts of my body—a slow pan across a shoulder, a sustained gaze as my head tipped forward, hair concealing my face, a lingering pause as a shoe turned skyward while my body came to rest, prone on the floor. The videographer,
a novice in the practice of videoing, was tense during these sessions, burdened by the unfamiliarity and awkwardness of the technology—cables tripping her up, anxiety for fear of batteries dying, fingers fumbling with the zoom; her attention was fragmented, slipping in and out of focus like the images seen through the viewfinder. Although I descended within the familiarity of my art, I struggled with the muscular strength demanded of this task and in turn the videographer struggled with the inflexible weight of the camera. Below is a reflection from the videographer:

Through the limited view of the camera’s eye, I trace a creased sleeve to the blurred image of flesh of wrist, and, then, a moment of clarity, as the lens focuses on the performer’s hands, held behind her back as if bound. A startled intake of air; this posture had not been pre-planned. My hand holding the camera recoils, the image disappears from the viewfinder, and then, responding by impulse and intent, “I must get this on film,” I crouch down out of sight, as if beyond the camera lens, there are enemy soldiers in the vicinity (I am also now out of sight from the majority of the audience members so that just as I imagine myself unseen, the videographer is now unseen, only fragments of her presence, and what she is recording is captured and displayed on the screen). I inch forward on my belly, across the threshold of a perceived barrier negotiated by technology between performer and videographer into the space of embodied encounter—how did I get in this position? I must not be seen, something is happening, a prisoner of war, execution, something evil is happening.

I am aware of the lens—as an additional partner in this embodied encounter as the videographer responds to my movements with an intuitive kinaesthetic sense of a dancer sustaining and quickening her moves listening to breath, weight fulcrum and dynamic nuance. The lens is another story. Without grace or discernment it tracks, probes, and traces with an invasive intimacy and a haunting repressiveness. The unforgiving weight of surveillance is ever-present.

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

(Fels, 1998, p. 29)

During one of these performative encounters, a large screen revealed images captured by the videographer as she zoomed in on the turned-up collar of the white shirt, and descended the length of torso. The images were shaky, blurred; only occasionally did clarity appear on the screen and through the viewfinder. The videographer became frustrated by the limitations of the technology that distorted the images. With the presence of an audience, she desired perfection, control. There is a coldness in this
techno-examination, a distance between performer and videographer and audience as they enter into inquiry.

*I begin to release the muscular tension in my torso in its slow sustained journey of descent and yet my hands seem to rise opposed to seeking the weighted gravity laden path to the floor. They accumulate tension and so does my face until half way I can feel myself crouched like a wild animal with a silent roar in protest of some kind of imprisonment. I am also aware of moving in a downward spiral and perhaps facing more towards the audience. This causes a disorientation and provokes a heightened sense of vulnerability.*

Both Fels and I have been using the context of conferences as a potent space of public inquiry activated by the dynamic tension inherent in our disruptions of the conventions of evidenced research. We are excited by crashing the expectations of *packaged* findings and dissolving the self-serving theories that come with this. We are discovering that we embody in action through our interactions with others, our narratives, our histories, in relationship with place and time, relationships and experiences remembered, and newly realized in an ongoing unfolding of new possibilities.

We are inviting research to return to the soft pliable flesh, to the relentless and very telling pulse of the heart, to the deepness and/or quickening of the breath and most importantly to the resounding power of the imagination. We have come to understand the nuances of gesture, smell, touch, sound and sight to inform the lives of teaching, theorizing and performance—which is sensuous knowledge (Snowber, 2002). As Abram (1996) says, “meaning is birthed in the soil of the sensory world, in the heat of meeting, encounter, participation” (pp. 74-75). The nature of embodiment is not only about the body, but it is the intersection of body, mind, soul, and imagination. It is the imagination with flesh on it, the soul with wings, the mind with feet. Embodiment breaks down the binaries of either/or and creates a space for a visceral inquiry into what it means to re/search.

Fels and I now facilitate workshops at conferences in conjunction with annual business meetings whereby we invite researchers to ‘play’ with this notion of crashing the boundaries between researcher and researched. Instead of cameras we provide rolled up tubes of paper as a way of emphasizing the sometimes limited ways in which we
approach our research. Below is a description for the annual business meeting of one of the Arts SIGs of the AERA which Fels and I will be facilitating.

This interactive workshop opens up the space to share through movement, reflective writing and dialogue, our positions as inquiring researchers. Asking questions such as how does the mind, heart, body, and spirit stay interconnected throughout our research work and play?

It is in the tension of these spaces that we are invited to call forth embodied imaginings beyond our anticipation and ‘readings’ from the edges of what have been pre-understood. In this case of these reflections from one particular conference we ask:

Who is this war correspondent, now on the ground, inching belly forward, seeking to film this unnamed victim?

This collaboration brings nodes of understanding through intersecting commonalities, provoking sensations and even recollections of unlived yet imagined experiences. Through particular kinds of emergent embodied encounters such as the ‘prisoner’ and the ‘journalist’ in our inquiry, we temporarily touch upon, are engaged with, and recognize the lived moments of others as we are within that moment of embodiment, thereby creating a possibility for cultivating acceptance, empathy and compassion for the other.

Below is an action poem written by a workshop participant from a conference in Montreal in 2010.

Report on the 31 May 2010 Presentation
“Collapsing Borders Between Researcher and Researched: A Performative Inquiry with the Body, the Camera and the Capture” by Lynn Fels (SFU) and Kathryn Ricketts (SFU), Arts Researchers and Teachers Society (ARTS/SCÉC), CACS/ACÉC, CSSE/SCÉÉ at the 79th Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences/79e Congrès des sciences humaines, H-611, Concordia University, Montréal, Québec

blindfolded
meltdown
hands as if tied
bound behind back as if for execution
burnt air roofing
Johannesen and Gugliemi (2004) in their explorations of architectural space intercepted with computer imagery, call our attention to “the performative act or the relation between the space and the body, remembering that a space is never innocent” (p. 3). As they seek to disrupt spaces with computerized wizardry, they remind us that, “Entering a performative space will always be an event because movement becomes the architecture of appearance and disappearance” (p. 4-5).

When I arrive fully to the floor I begin to turn to my back and simultaneously my hands finger the blindfold. As the energy slowly leaves my body, the blindfold is peeled away but my eyes are motionless. I experience two intersecting trajectories; one towards freedom and one towards loss of self.

Juxtaposing the arc of perspective from blurred to clear as the camera shifts its perspective and adjusts its focus, proposes a tension with notions of intimacy and exposure, recognition, and connection—as the arc of embodied performance intersects the mediated performance facilitated through the camera. Embodied by both performer and videographer, we recognize that this is an intersection full of tension rather than resolution and we come to understand the content and historicity of the performance as generating ever-changing perspectives and/or readings as a viewer/participant.
Our inquiry suggests that engagement within an embodied performative experience through technology, may temporally collapse the location within which the performer and videographer are in interplay, simultaneously evoking the lived experience of the event and the embodied evocation of metaphor and imagery that arise through the experience and as mediated through technology. The videographer responds viscerally and kinaesthetically to the cropped images that come into focus and then blur instantly, so that the residue of their presence is captured on film. These filmed artefacts are evidence of the moment of dissolution between the videographer as standing outside the event, and the moment upon her entry into a shared performative encounter, a trespassing that calls forth obligations of witnessing.

This performative space is what we discovered opens up possibilities and embodies the unknown at the edge of arrival. This comes full circle with the work of Muybridge and Longo, who discovered through the performative process that their images revealed an invisible space where unexpected meanings surfaced. Fels (2010) writes of the fear that is involved with this invitation:

In these cautionary times, I hesitate to open the door of my abode to persistent knocking by strangers, fearing unwelcome responsibility, fearing the not yet known, fearing my own disappearance in the appearance of others. And yet entangled within that fear, communally, spiritually, politically, individually, is a desire, a hunger, a curiosity for new openings, for as yet unimagined journeys and intimacies that take me beyond my current horizon of familiar places.

(A Question of Hospitality, para. 5)

We are always in a moment of departure, a moment of arrival; these ruptures are moments of potential beginnings, possible illuminations, moments of shared learning in which we recognize our responsibilities and our possibilities anew. We speak longingly of roads not yet travelled, seeking destinations that we imagine we already know, moving somewhere away from who we were, in search of who we might become. Fels (2010) encourages us to shake ourselves by the shoulders, awakening ourselves to presence, “be present to this moment, here, now” (You Lay Down a Path in Walking, para. 6).
Our challenge in seeking to understand how we might be in relationship with others is simultaneously one of invitation and resistance—a recognition of relational reciprocity that extends beyond obligations and responsibilities into the realm of new imaginings of what may become possible if we listen to that which awaits us.

(Fels, 2010, To Engage in the World’s Renewal, para. 9)

Fels (2010) also asks us as teachers to enter into these spaces with care, compassion, respect and astuteness and to be wide awake to respond to the extraordinary presence of each individual and “...to dwell in each moment is to offer a lifetime of possibility, a narrative remembered, a resonance that sounds through time” (This Moment, “a Child of Duration,” para. 4).

Our challenge in this call to presence is to remain alive and continuously activated by and connected to our own individual voice—to allow that voice to brim with curiosity and hope as we continue our journey with others. Fels (2010) writes of this as a social responsibility, “Our challenge then is to hold fast to who we have yet to imagine we may become. This is our responsibility to ourselves and to those who await us, and who we have yet to encounter” (To Speak the Unsayable, para. 7).

Our work together with technology has afforded us the possibility to heighten the situatedness of researcher and researched and to ask the questions: “Who are you?”, and “Who am I?,” and this awakened relationality brings forth the social responsibility that Fels (2010) writes about earlier. In the case of my solo and collaborative performances of Lugs, this is my way of ensuring distinction in voice and yet with diligence to remain fluid and continuously in response to groups of learners I have the honour to work with.

This chapter explored first the common binaries of science and art in understanding the potency of embodiment and then further through the work of Muybridge, Longo, and Fels, I investigated witness, capture, intimacy, and liminality. I have come to trust more deeply the spaces that live between binaries such as the flesh of the body and the steel of technology and with this investigation, I posit that our ‘contextual looking’ moves beyond the body and technology, beyond the form and function and urges us to build collectively, a fascia that connects commonly separated entities, such as what I see and
what I read in my seeing. This fascia comes from a deep listening which in turn calls forward a resonating courage to voice the body.

- Hey, why do you look so glum?
- It’s not glum, it’s humility.
- OK why do look so humility?
- What?? Oh brother! Well... I was going to say I was sorry but I won’t bother.
- No, no, yes, yes!! Say you are sorry!
- Well OK... I should not have said that you belonged in a handbook.
- OK... Well I should not have said you would dominate.
- OK....
- Suitcase?...
- Hmmmm? What? Were you talking? I am getting ready for another big event....
- One of those Lug things?
- NO! The conclusion!
Conclusions

A Look Back

We don’t have much time! We are almost at the end of this thing!

The thesis?!

Yes! The thesis!

Precisely!

Precisely what? The thesis?

What? No, almost to the end!

No, No! That is precisely why this text is here. She has been waiting on the margin for a long time....

Well, I have actually seen her all the way through!

No way!

Way!

She has been following us!

Creepy!

She says she is the conclusion.

What?! I thought we were the conclusion!

Let’s talk to her.

Well...She actually doesn’t want to talk to us on the page because she says it would be too late to introduce a new character in the thesis.

What the heck?
She says that despite the fact that she is not a character in our play, nor spoken word poet, nor performance reflection, nor theoretically driven text...

Alright, alright...Get to the point!

She belongs in the conclusion.

That’s what she said? The nerve! And following us like that all the way through?! Rude!

We will just have to tell her, “No.”

Well...actually, it is too late for that....

Why?!

Well...I thought she made a good argument and...

And so?!

She had an idea of how to sum it up in a different way...

And so?!

Listen—the fact is, sometimes people only read the conclusion of these things.

Now you are really being ridiculous!

I say lets give her a spot and we can do a little thing after.

Hmmmm...you know I don’t like this! (see Figure 65)
We have arrived
A 250-page expedition
The Map, The Compass and the Suitcase.
Charting borders and boundaries of arts based research (The Map)
Pointing in directions that resist and attract the body, soul, mind and spirit (The Compass)
Snapping open vessels of understandings/revelations, (The Suitcase).
This has been a performative ‘hike’ through firewalls and aggregates of interstitial spaces.
Spaces between that which we know and that which we do not now, a kind of quasi documentary
where the facts get lost in a meandering path bulging with new growth, brambles of sensation and
imagination.
Habituated patterns and entrenched traditions have been transformed.
Heavily trodden pathways have cracked open for new light, new understandings.
We have understood and departed from ‘dance’ as she (Kathryn) had practiced …narcissistically.
We have understood the departure from each performance as a world premiere of repeated
projections of self—glorified self—virtuosic self.
The curtain now rises on new iterations of self. We have become the intimate witness of the
quintessential stage exit—The BIG finish. The overdue departure of self possessed kinesthetic exhibitions of self.
We arrived to corporeality.
We arrived to the divine architecture of possibility.
She (Kathryn) invited the earthquakes that make the cracks.
Bodysoul earthquakes.
Rupturing the predictability, habituation and the routine.
She (Kathryn) gave us examples; teaching stories, performance reflections.
Enter a classroom and move the furniture aside—earthquake
Put the book on its feet—earthquake
Tell us your name—your real name—earthquake
Earthquakes that shake off of the richtor scale.
We arrived to embodiment of self
To the untold self to self-unknown.
We arrived but not alone…
We arrived to a trilogy— intrinsically linked forces radiating and illuminating new ways of listening and telling.
New ways of digging through the rubble of ‘assimilation’, ‘normalization’ and ‘standardization’.
Words that spelled backward read ‘isolation’.
We see the body that meets the object as a diagonal event—off axis—beyond the centre. The evocative object—the object that stares back. The object removed from its own identification—no longer ‘useful’.
The handkerchief, the onion and the letter
The empty vessels poised and ready to be filled with entirely new signifiers.
The Object as a precious provocation promoting penetration, nudging intersections of lived and constructed moments —mutual interpenetrations, metaphoric manipulations.
The object that becomes museumized, an artefact of time and place and value.
We read of unexpected formulations, merging and fracturing meanings alone and with others.
We read stories about students and performances and how they share, they show, they sometimes cry the meanings. We moved into the crevasses and cracks of articulations.
Just as the teacup on the bald head trembles, rattles and slides as the performer turns unexpectedly to hear new voices. The object announces its membership to you and your world.
We understand that this event of the object/body is the passport to the flesh of the world. The flesh of the word. The flesh of the story, your story.
We share, we show, we sometimes cry.
These stories are the translucent bugs of our memories under the stones. Stones waiting and wanting to be overturned.
This is the luminescent body, this is the sentient self.
These stories—that break into pieces and fall into the hands of others, become embraced by new understandings. The fingers of entirely new perspectives close around them.
With these stories, she (Kathryn)
Dissolved the speculations
Crashed the contingencies
Pierced the possibilities
Fractured the friction and
Troubled the tranquility
of text
She (Kathryn)
Conjured the conditions
Probed the allegations
Situated the insemination of the beating heart through each syllable
Each consonant
Until
We
Arrived
To
The
Space
Be   tween
The
Words
Unshackled from the tyranny of text centered knowing
Into
Deep
Listening
Into the swamps of mystery
Traversing the script to the edge of text from the bog of logic
Through liminal folds of history perhaps forgotten.
Through these stories we witnessed
A voice that surfaces, a song that whispers, a prayer that unfolds
An invisible blessing, a blessing that hisses up through the depths of reticence, through the depths of silence.
Gulping for air—for space, for light!
Resuscitating the lungs of you and I
We have stood together.
We have heard, we have shown and we have sometimes cried.
We understand how moving the axis point of I/World and shifting the centre of reference, surrendering and resisting the laws of our own gravity, we come to new forces—forces within reciprocity.
A radius of one—a parameter of many, a contiguous quantity—moveable location
A core of now.
Resonating reciprocity—inundating immediacy—verifying visceralities
The here of this conglomerated community
The now of this instinctual impulse
Weaves the moment of
This new FLAG
This new ANTHEM
Navigating the cultural inscriptions
Capturing and releasing the force factors of externalized authorities
‘Home’ in the foothold of I on the crevasse of You
Movement by movement, moment by moment towards the peak with a view
A new view
Another place…
This is the location
The momentary arrival
The breath of my work
This is Embodied Poetic Narrative

What are you dong?

I am trying to find a handkerchief.

It is by the onion.

Are you crying?
What’s it to you?

Well I just thought….Here have my hankie…It’s clean.

Well I actually thought she made a lot of sense.

Hmmm….

And she did kind of make me think that….Well, maybe we should stop perhaps arguing so much. We are kind of part of the same thing….

You have a point Compass—no pun intended.

I am always intended…what?! Why are you looking at me like that?

Yes well anyways…I think there is room for all of us in this thing called Embodied Poetic Narrative.

Well, OK then, get in.

What?

Well if you think we are all part of the same….get in.

No offense but you kind of stink in there.

Well what do you expect?! I have been carrying stuff around for the last 90 years!

Get in! It’s only so we can get out of this thesis and move to the next.

I hate to tell you this but I think the next….is just on the other side of this page….
Putting the Pen Down for a Moment

It is quiet now.

I can hear the others on the other side of the page arguing…still…and laughing with relief. I am reminded of how I used to return to the theatre after a performance with my dance company I can hear them raucous with relief tumbling out of the theatre in search for a drink and to await the first early reviews. I always chose to sit in the theatre, in the quiet reverberations of the past performance and to bask in the fast firing fragments of fleeting images. Like a dream, I allowed them to pass through me scattered and unhinged to time, space, and logic.

I savoured these moments where history would meet presence on a truly visceral plane.

And now I put the pen down and invite the same resonations to pass through me, a different kind of performance. At the moment it feels like the performance of my life.

Even though I know there will be more.

The noise on the other side of the page reminds me of this.

I am holding this document and feeling the weight of its journey and know that I now understand deeply how the body can write and move itself into the world and how the world in turn writes and moves itself into the body. And this is what will be my lifelong location of inquiry as I put this document down (see Figure 66) and move/write further into the world of education, arts, literacy and performance.
References


