

Time of a Thesis: Academic Marginalia; Or Postcards from the Road

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Abstract

Postcards share with others the highlights of holidays, memories of places and events, and brief stories of experiences abroad. They hold the quick jottings to a friend back home, made while in a moment of rest and reflection on a train, at the beach, in a café. They are intimate artifacts, yet they are also public. Their text is available for anyone to read, exposed and vulnerable outside of the safety of a sealed envelope. The postcard reveals itself to all who choose to turn their gaze toward it, to read its signs, and meditate on its meanings. The following postcards written to “R,” to the reader—and in parallel dialog with another text addressed to “S”—are a narrative invitation to travel on a reflective journey through academia, tracing the experiences of graduate studies in

science education and curriculum studies, the external and internal barriers that bounded the navigation of the field, and the cartography of decisions that opened up possibilities for successes at the margins of the academy.

Keywords: deconstruction, academic responsibility, place based education, autoethnography, writing, research ethics, graduate education

Résumé

Les cartes postales permettent de partager avec les autres les meilleurs moments des vacances, le souvenir de places et d'événements, et des histoires courtes d'expériences vécues à l'étranger. Elles transportent nos brefs commentaires à un ami à la maison, écrits durant un moment de repos et de réflexion dans un train, à la place ou dans un café. Ce sont des témoins intimes, et pourtant, également publics. Leur texte est accessible à quiconque veut le lire, exposé et vulnérable hors de la sécurité d'une enveloppe scellée. La carte postale se dévoile à tous ceux qui choisissent de la regarder, de lire ses marques, et de méditer sur leur signification. La carte postale suivante, adressée à « R », au lecteur - et en dialogue parallèle avec un autre texte adressé à « S » - est une invitation narrative à un voyage réflexif à travers le monde universitaire, relatant les expériences vécues aux études supérieures dans le programme d'études des sciences de l'éducation, les obstacles externes et internes ayant restreint le champ de navigation, et la cartographie des décisions ayant ouvert les possibilités de succès en marge de l'université.

Mots-clés : déconstruction, responsabilité scolaire, éducation axée sur les lieux, autoethnographie, rédaction, recherche éthique, enseignement supérieur

Allow me to begin by whispering a confidence which I shall not abuse: never have I felt so young and at the same time so old. At the same time, in the same instant...and it is one and the same feeling, as if two stories and two times, two rhythms were engaged in a sort of altercation in one and the same feeling of oneself, in a sort of anachrony of oneself, anachrony in oneself. It is in this way that I can, to an extent, make sense of myself of a certain confusion of identity. This confusion is, certainly, not completely foreign to me and I do not always complain about it; but just now it has suddenly got much worse and this bout is not far from leaving me bereft of speech.

—Jacques Derrida, “The Time of a Thesis: Punctuations” (1983a)

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Day 1: Victoria, British Columbia to Chilliwack, British Columbia

Distance: 182 km (includes 46-km ferry)

After submitting my final copy of my master's thesis at UVic, I raced to Swartz Bay and somehow made the 1:00 ferry to Tsawwassen. It was such a bittersweet crossing. I love this place so much, and am so familiar with each turn through the pass away from my beloved island home. I am spending the night with old friends in Chilliwack. Drinks and laughs, and after over a decade of invitations, I finally watched "Gimme Shelter" with Dave. Tomorrow I hope to get an early start on my drive through and out of the comfort of BC's mountains, rivers, and lakes, and into what comes next.

Dear R,

My wonderings and wanderings in and out of, out and into science and environmental education began, I believe, when I was a child growing up on Vancouver Island in British Columbia, Canada. On weekends and holidays, my family spent much of our time in provincial and national parks, camping, hiking, and exploring. From an early age, my sister and I came to know tidal pool communities at French Beach and how they change with our presence (sea anemones will close tightly when tickled and tingle your finger with their sticky tentacles). We chased the fast-flowing tides out and back for what felt like miles and miles, covering and uncovering the hundreds of sand dollars at Rath Trevor Beach. We used long and slippery ropes of bull kelp as lassos and popped with our pinching fingers and our stomping feet the swollen blisters of rockweed. We pulled at the brittle peeling layers of bark of arbutus trees along the rocky coastlines. My wonderings about the natural world stem from my own history, from my personal experiences, from my wanderings, with and in place, and my connections to my environmental home.

My interest in natural history and biology continued through secondary school in Chilliwack, British Columbia, and I was motivated further by the influence and openness of my teacher, Mr. Bridge. In Biology 11, he took a group of students on a field trip for several days to Bamfield Marine Station on the west coast of Vancouver Island. I remember that he also allowed my plant collection assignment to be submitted in a cooler rather than pressed in a book; I curated a collection of BC algae. After a year's detour as a chemistry major at the University of Alberta, I returned to my roots and passions on the West Coast and began working toward my BSc in Biology at the University of Victoria.

I loved my biology courses at UVic. The labs were my favourite part of

Dear S,

In "The Future of the Profession or the Unconditional University," Jacques Derrida (see Trifonas & Peters, 2005) interrogates the ground of academic responsibility and the faith to knowledge within the university as a community. Derrida deconstructs the "human-istic" orientations of disciplinary space and physical place that directly address the academic responsibility of educational institutions and, by extension, those who teach, work, and inhabit their *eco-logies*. What does this rehabilitation of self, according to the demands of episteme, mean exactly to the future of the "professor" of knowledge? To downplay the accountability of the teaching body of the university as a pedagogical institution outside the domain of research they reproduce is to condone a legacy of inclusion and exclusion. There is no space left to welcome other possibilities and the human conditions of knowing—*impossible conditions*—that orient who we are beyond knowledge, toward a rediscovering of meaning in the familiar and strange materiality of space and place. An unyielding and unconditional openness to the horizons of difference that signify the radicality of Otherness. Not determining the discovery of what knowledge is "right" and "wrong" for each of us for the sake of exerting power over others.

the program and I especially liked going out to do fieldwork in the coastal areas around Victoria. I remember a spring low-tide exploration late at night by an old Chinese cemetery. We wore headlamps and carefully found our way down to the massive pools, normally protected by the cold waters of the Strait of Juan de Fuca, that were now open to us in the moonlight. Again, my science learning was connected to place and to the place that was my home. But I also enjoyed delving into other histories and other stories, and other ways of knowing. I wanted to teach and after considering secondary school teaching, I knew that I wanted to teach more than science. I wanted to open up curiosity and wonder for students across curricular areas and wanted to allow children to experience the authentic, situated, and real learning opportunities that I had been afforded. I continued my studies at UVic, completed a Bachelor of Education, and began my formal teaching career as an elementary school teacher.

I was an elementary school teacher for six years and during that time I worked as a classroom teacher in Grades 3–6 and as a supply teacher for kindergarten through Grade 12. I also taught in a variety of school contexts, from rural schools in the Fraser Valley in British Columbia to inner city state schools in Central London, England. Teaching in London was an incredible experience. It challenged me as a teacher, as I took on so many roles for my students and their families, and I was teaching in a city with cultures that were very new to me. After teaching there for some time, I came to realize that my students, even those who were born and raised in London, did not know much about their community and their city. London allowed for so many unique learning experiences and I took every opportunity that came to my students and me. In history and geography, we explored the Cabinet War Rooms and walked along Victoria Embankment to

Derrida alludes to this unconditional responsibility toward the material conditions of difference and the production of otherness via the cosmopolitical—referred to as “mondialization” or “worldwide-ization”—within the disciplines (Derrida & Trifonas, 2002). This is a knowledge rooted in the enigmas of subjective experience that inflect knowing. It is a matter of locating the axiomaticity of difference in meaning-making and its *inter-relatability*, within a hospitable space and place that only an open concept of “community” and “education” can entreat them to because there is difference in meaning-making.

Now, more than ever, there is an obligation to recognize the presence of the infinite possibilities and multiple horizons of alterity that destabilize the grounding of subjectivity and our knowledge about what it means to be human. This responsibility highlights the problem of exposing or creating locations for otherness within communitarian-based institutions, such as the university, that still occupy the colonized space of traditional knowledge archives and are at the same time alterior to the logic of the status quo simply by producing new forms of knowledge and blazing trails of discovery that change the disciplines. The locations of humanity demarcate the inside and outside borders of community. Even though the syncreticism

view scarring from Second World War bombs. We learned about biodiversity in Hyde Park and Kew Gardens, and Ancient Egypt in the British Museum. We visited London Central Mosque to learn more about and celebrate cultural diversity in our city and community. We voiced our concerns about the involvement of Britain in Iraq and wrote letters to then-prime minister Tony Blair to express our views (and to our delight, Mr. Blair's office did respond in writing). Most children and families delighted in learning more about the richness and wealth of histories that surrounded them. There was some resistance though. I remember a parent speaking with the head teacher about how I was taking too many field trips and that I should be staying back in the school and classroom "where learning happened."

After two and a half years, I returned to British Columbia and elementary teaching in the Fraser Valley. I was cognizant again of my students' lack of knowledge about and connection to the community. To the mountains that surrounded us and their history, to the plants and animals that lived in the forests and hills very near the school (but were considered by many to be a nuisance and a danger), to the local and Indigenous histories and stories of place. My students seemed detached from the environments that they were inherently a part of. Why was this the case? And how might teachers help to motivate and foster students' knowledge of and care of their place, of the community and in the environment? With these questions in mind, I circled again to the west and to Vancouver Island, and began my graduate work in Curriculum Studies at UVic.

of subjectivity defies an essence of being that is not always already heterogeneous:

On the one hand, the demise of the autotelic subject—a subject defined in, of, and by itself—is fuelled by a global vision of a shared community running rampant today. On the other hand, the idea of global citizenship as the seat of human hybridity nurtures the impetus toward a communal proclivity of the autotelic Subject as a shared identity and produces the call for a levelling of difference, quite ironically, through what Jacques Derrida has called the cosmopolitical point of view. The world vision of a new humanity privileges both particularity and, therefore, uniqueness, while at the same time creating the conditions for essentialism and the universalization of difference that effaces differences in a mass sharing of an amorphous "global culture" (Trifonas, 2005, pp. 205–206). If so, how and where are gestures toward the spaces of these new locations enacted within the knowledges by which we define the difference of ourselves as another?



Day 2: Chilliwack, British Columbia to Canmore, Alberta

Distance: 773 km

I was on my way this morning with a packed lunch (thank you Heather!) and excitement to drive the route that I was so familiar with. It was a rainy start to the day, but it cleared up after Merritt. I stopped for a break in Three Valley Gap, a ghost town/tourist trap that has always fascinated me but I have never actually pulled over at to have a look. It was pretty funny and allowed for a much needed stretch. The Rockies always fill me with awe. Their beauty and strength is breathtaking. Lots of memories of place here in Canmore and of my grandparents. Cougar boots, Vanguard camper vans, and a plastic container of Wet Ones in the drink holder. Had a lovely visit with Jackie before heading to bed. Tomorrow the prairies will be opening up before me.

Dear R,

It felt great to be back in Victoria. There was the wonderful familiarity of the island, and of the university, though many new buildings had been added and faces had changed. I was anxious though. I never imagined myself doing graduate studies. I placed the academy on a pedestal and out of reach. Nonetheless, I started my Master of Arts in Curriculum Studies. I recall an early meeting with a faculty member who asked me how I would classify my research interests. Was my work in science education? I did not know. I did know that my interests were broad and drew from a range of disciplines. Environmental education is tricky, of course, as it is inherent to all disciplines but is often covered by the umbrella of science education. It was also hinted to me that I needed to situate myself in academia, and to focus on one discipline. This would allow me to build a name for myself, and to begin a career in the academy if this was my goal.

My first graduate class was the first of three required curriculum studies courses in the program. In this class, I came to know that curriculum was more than the bounded document of prescribed learning outcomes provided by the Ministry of Education to guide my planning and serve as a checklist of sorts, for me to measure if I was being a good teacher. Was I getting through all of those PLOs before the end of June? Was I squeezing the topics that I did not like teaching as much into a blur of lessons in the last few weeks of the school year? Curriculum was more than the checklist, more than the tabbed and dog-eared pages of outcomes. I remember in my defense of my master's thesis, one of the first questions I was asked was, "What is curriculum?" I answered, "Everything, everything is curricular." Every experience, every artifact, every exchange, every act is curricular. Etymologically, curriculum stems from *currere*, a course or run. It is a path, and

Dear S,

Pedagogical institutions put in motion the academic machinery for the cultural reproduction of knowledge and are always already implicated in the perennial question of democracy and discipline, of knowledge and difference, of otherness and social justice, of the right to education for each and every subject and citizen. The "principle of reason"—nothing is without reason and nothing is without reason—grounds the foundations of research ethics within the university (Trifonas, 2000). It has bracketed inquiry by placing limits on knowledge and the conditions of its possibility that has been rooted to the conception of truth in science. The teleology of the pursuit of research has oriented "intellectual labour toward the production of tangible outcomes achieved according to a method of procedural objectivity" (Trifonas, 2004, p. 208). The historicity of its effects determine of epistemological subjectivity within the university community:

The ethics and politics of research—and the role the university may enact in helping to construct the dimensions of a scholastic arena impelled toward the quest for the pragmatic application of results pre-directing the outcomes of inquiry—is fed more and more by competing interests situated outside of

it is a path that we take through life and through institutions (schools).

During my master's course work, not only was the construct of curriculum opened to me but conceptions and representations of knowledge and of knowing were also opened. Biologically, I recognized the interconnectedness of members of the environment, but now I overwhelmingly recognized the wider and inherent complexity in knowing, thinking, and being. Difference made a difference. In representations, I saw that artistic and aesthetic products of research could also be a means of doing research, processes of research. I engaged in mapwork to navigate and represent different, often unspoken, and creative cartographies. And I extended this into my own master's research and research method.

I worked for several months with a class of Grade 4 students on a community mapping project to explore environmental understandings, attitudes, and actions. In the project, we mapped a local provincial park and represented our knowledge of the park's histories (local, natural, Indigenous) in a variety of forms. Students created topographic maps that featured photographs, drawings, and shared anecdotes. They wrote letters to family and friends, and compiled found poetry of their auditory experience of the park. They renamed paint chips with place-specific colours, for example, *ground moss green* and *arbutus peeling bark* (see Jagger, 2013, 2014a, 2016). The inherent openness of community mapping actively engaged the students and honoured their own unique knowledge and narratives of place. This focus on these students in this place was not without question. I remember once presenting my work to a group of science education researchers and being told that it was impossible to make any claims based on the study, that I needed to have a control group to have any meaningful contributions. The difference that I opened

the rationale of the institution itself. Most certainly, academic work focused solely on the future expectation of its profitable utilization, does not and cannot take into account the democratic ideals protecting the welfare of the nation-state, especially when the quest for knowledge becomes driven by particularized and exclusionary agendas arbitrarily guiding the course of inquiry for political or economic reasons (Trifonas 2004, p. 208). The power of regulatory forces and their "in-vest-ment" bears upon the sources and means of knowledge production commodifying its epistemological grounding and research trajectory toward scientific outcomes not always beneficial. The principle of reason functions as a heuristic to instrumental and creative modes of inquiry by highlighting the contrast and complementarity of basic and directed research. Knowledge always already moves toward its re-invention, not its completion. The play of knowledge moves beyond reason and what we already know in the spaces between "old" and "new" to an absent ground of meaning that is yet-to-come. The undecidability of a new academic responsibility would be constructed in the space between the theoretical and performative aspects of disciplinarity that separate the faculties of the university over an abyss of reason. The heterogeneity of the

in my work and the voices that were freed came up against resistance.

I wanted to mirror the openness of the research in my representation of it, in my thesis. In theory, I knew it was possible. I imagined the thesis itself being a map. I played with creating altered books in some of my earlier mapwork and thought that this was a possibility for creatively bringing together the many voices, ideas, and perspectives in the research, for inserting difference into the representation as the students and I had done with our presentation of place. In practice, though, I felt bounded and framed by the rigid, chaptered sequence of introduction, literature review, methodology and methods, results, and discussion. These were the theses I read and the structure that I was presented with. The linearity of the text did not seem to fit with how I came to know research, education, and curriculum. The thesis that I did write, that satisfied without question the requirements of the graduate program that I was in, was a narrative of chapters that introduced the topic, reviewed the literature, described the research methodology and methods, shared the results, and discussed the findings and implications of the research. When I was writing it, I knew that I wanted to do something different but did not yet have the courage to do so. Instead, I fit my work into the existing mould.

research space within the university must efface the traditional epistemological and methodological limits of disciplinarity.



Day 3: Canmore, Alberta to Steinbach, Manitoba

Distance: 1,520 km

What a long drive. I started off at 6 a.m. and did not stop until 11:30 p.m. Driving out of the mountains and into the prairies past Calgary was a turning point. I had not been along this route since I was 10 years old and moving with my family back to BC from southern Ontario. The vastness of the sky and the land are breathtaking. I passed by exits and overpasses leading to towns from stories of my mother's childhood... Tilley, Brooks, Medicine Hat. As I drove on, I wondered "Where are all of these other travellers going? And where have they come from?" The sky opened up into a show of angry light past Portage la Prairie in a massive thunderstorm that lasted to beyond Winnipeg. It is wonderful to not be sitting, and tomorrow I am looking forward to getting back to hills and rock and water in northern Ontario.

Dear R,

My doctoral studies began on a Monday evening. I arrived in Toronto on Saturday night after driving across five provinces in four and a half days and, after staying with family for a couple of nights, moved into my new place on Monday afternoon. I felt really displaced and disoriented. Where was I? What was I doing there? My first few courses were focused on science and environmental education, and on research methodologies. I became more comfortable stretching out my ideas into practice, and often played with alternative forms of representation for assignments and course papers. I made works of textual and textural layers, layered books, layered maps, layered art. I freed myself to present and re-present in ways that spoke to and interacted with the ecology of ideas that I was working with and in. And while I was becoming more comfortable with opening up and sharing my voice how I wanted to, I was also held back. I remember being asked to *please just write a paper* rather than work difference into my representation. Was it because a different form was difficult to assess? To read? Or was difference itself the problem?

As most doctoral students do, I quickly got myself on the conference circuit and presented on my own and with colleagues at general educational research meetings and gatherings focused on science and environmental education research. The more traditional empirical research that I proposed was well received in these communities, but I found that when I opened my methodologies or my representations or my theoretical approaches, I encountered resistance. On a few occasions, my proposals to science education research conferences brought very mixed responses. On one hand, some viewed my work as refreshing and much needed in science education. On the other hand, some simply stated that my work

Dear S,

And yet, the dividing line separating theory and practice is real but has limited relevance: given that the deferred dividends of the acts of research are indeterminable until the “use-value of” outcomes materializes and renders the “results” viable in relation to the question of implementation. As I have explained elsewhere,

in this sense, what has been at stake with respect to the purpose of research in all of its manifestations as a mode of conquering the symbiotic field of the human and non-human Other, concerns the “control” of knowledge and the industry or commodification of its results as intellectual by-products to be used by the State apparatus. This desire to command the path and ethics of science should pivot around the “higher priority” of academic responsibility (Trifonas 2005, p. 9). The “use-value” of research cannot be determined from its aims, “so as to clearly distinguish between the profitability of application and the destructive effects of misappropriation, despite the usual factoring-in of ‘reasonable’ margins of error” (Trifonas 2005, p. 209). The defensibility of self-regulating mechanisms of the university that constitute the autonomy of its knowledge are ground in the research goals and purposes, thus securing

did not make sense and certainly did not fit in science education.

I was uncomfortable presenting at conferences and, to be honest, I still am. My first paper presentation was at a major science education research conference, and I co-presented with a colleague. Following his opening few slides I began to speak, and almost immediately a woman shouted from the back row, "SPEAK UP!" I responded not by speaking up but by speeding up and with a heated face of crimson blush. I also forgot nearly all that I wished to say on our paper. Thankfully, my co-presenter fielded questions, and later made light of the session. Since then, I have gone overboard with preparation for talks, even going so far as to write myself a script, in hopes of keeping my nerves under wraps, my speech evenly paced, my voice loud and clear, and my blush natural.

My unease in conference participation goes beyond my physical presence. I am also unsettled by how attendees interact with each other and with each other's scholarship, and how these dialogues seem to be, for the most part, self-satisfying. Why is it that graduate students, and new scholars, so often cut down their peers? Dismiss their work without a thought? Seem to purposely ask unanswerable questions in an attempt to publicly trip up fellow early academics? Academia is a highly competitive arena, and one where doctoral students (and pre-tenure professors) stand on uncertain ground. Graduate students and new scholars actively size up their competition at conferences. We are instructed to make connections, knowing full well that these meetings can be taken as informal job interviews. Egos must be stroked. Ideas must be agreed with. Places must be known and taken. Conference presentations are presentations of an academic front, of who you want to be in academia, of who you should be. And so often I feel that identity is not one's true identity. My

the profitability of a future yet-to-come.

Derrida (1983b) has attempted to resituate the ideology of the academic responsibility within the university. The difficulty of this "new" academic responsibility bridges the abyss of academic ethics and responsibility upon which the university is ground and articulated as a research institution: "The unacceptability of a discourse, the non-certification of a research project, the illegitimacy of a course offering are declared by evaluative actions: studying such evaluations is, it seems to me [he emphasizes], one of the tasks most indispensable to the exercise of academic responsibility, most urgent for the maintenance of its dignity" (Derrida 1983b, p. 13). As I have commented elsewhere, "To intervene decisively in the business of the university is to appeal (to) reason, to ask for the concession of reasons out of which to judge judgements made in the name of truth and the imperative for gaining knowledge and teaching" (Trifonas, 2005, p. 211).

In "Toward a Deconstructive Pedagogy of Différance" (Trifonas, 2002), I have addressed how the "conditional and definitive limits...demarcate the freedom of what it is possible to know and to think and what it is possible to say without offending...much guarded sensibilities of 'reason'" as the ideal "of commonly held responses to cultural institutions and

conference self always feels like a nodding, smiling, and agreeing fraud. Why is it that I feel I cannot be myself, my true self, who I am, in academic meetings? I worry that I am not who they want me to be and not who I should be.

The hierarchies of academia were clear in other instances too, and ones that further made me uncomfortable with myself, and made me angry as well. Being a graduate student can inherently put you in a difficult position in those power relationships that are entangled within the ivory tower. Those with power seem to be able to say what they wish, regardless of how inappropriate, offensive, and demeaning (#MeToo). How does one respond when advised to not rely on being a cute blond to get ahead in the field? When someone wonders aloud what you might like in bed? And says that you remind him a lot of Penny, the dumb blond character in *The Big Bang Theory*? Who do you tell about this? And what can be done anyway? I dealt with it by ranting to a small group of friends who were also graduate students in education. One wise friend, who would often push back her chair and share shining words of wisdom, put it very simply: “Asshole’s gonna ass.”

practices” abdicating difference “in favor of a community of shared interpretative responsibility and the unethical hegemony to erect barriers against diversity” (p. 214). Clarity is constructed as an Archemidian point of certainty that entails the responsibility of a “right” response without doubt or reservation.



Day 4: Steinbach, Manitoba to Marathon, Ontario

Distance: 961 km

Fitting that I ended today's drive in Marathon, as it seemed even further than yesterday's. Each bend in the road led to another hill, another lake, another rock face, and yet another corner to turn. There was a wonderful familiarity through the northwest of Ontario. The greens of trees, blues of waters, and greys of clouds and rock connected me back to where I had come from, those colours in BC's palette. And all of these were tied together (at least to me) by the quintessential feature of any Canadian road trip: the seemingly endless freight trains of red Canada wheat cars. I feel very far from home now, though I have stayed on the same highway for the entirety of the journey. I am going to start again early tomorrow morning. I want to make it to Toronto by evening.

Dear R,

My doctoral research focused on the experience of the urban elementary school garden. It stemmed from environmental education and grew into a piece that drew from place-based and garden-based curriculum and pedagogy, post-structuralism and deconstruction, and participatory research approaches. I spent one year in the City Public School community. I volunteered there one to two days per week, and supported students and teachers as they worked in and out of their school garden. Recalling the richness of students' contributions to my earlier community mapping work, I opened this research to the participation of students as researchers. I invited them to not simply be researched but rather to pose questions, plan and conduct data collection and analysis, and disseminate their work. My ideas brought mixed reactions. Some in the academy thought that this was a great idea and an approach not yet taken with students so young. Some thought it was not possible. How could elementary school students possibly do research? Again, I encountered the walls and the resistance. Finally, though, I had the courage and confidence to go with what I knew was right for the project and for the students. I began to dismantle a small part of that enclosure that had bounded me since I began graduate studies.

The students took on the research with enthusiasm and curiosity. Their engagement in the research project, and the skill and intuition with which they worked through the research process, was so impressive. They participated with honesty, openness, and humility. The students had a genuine willingness to explore, and to try, and to find out what might actually be possible. They had no boundaries. They were not a part of the academy. They had not been shaped and fit into existing and reproduced traditions of scholarship and steered towards

Dear S,

There is an ethical obligation grounded within the deconstructive attempt to define a new academic responsibility. Derrida (1983b) situates antinomy of the responsibility to question the aporia of the logic blurring the "instrumental" and the "poietic" aims of research "at the outer limits of the authority and power" (p. 14) in a hypothetical "community of thought" (p. 16) committed to the "sounding [of] a call to practice it" (p. 16): a "group-at-large" not one "of research, of science, of philosophy, since these values [of 'professionalism' and 'disciplinarity' no matter how 'radical'] are most often subjected to the unquestioned authority" (p. 16) For Derrida (1983b), the questioning of the ground of the university must come from a "community of the question":

Such a community would interrogate the essence of reason and of the principle of reason, the values of the basic, of the principal, of radicality, of the *arkhe* in general, and it would attempt to draw out all the possible consequences of this questioning. It is not certain that such a thinking can bring together a community or found an institution in the traditional sense

standard research methodologies, methods, and representations. Working with the students was refreshing and rejuvenating. It inspired me and motivated me in my work. I wanted to honour their voices and their participation in my dissertation. But what might this look like?

I struggled with writing my dissertation, *How Does Your Garden Grow? Or, a Poststructural Uprooting of the School Garden* (2014b). I spent about one year playing with ideas and theoretical frameworks. The openings in curriculum and in methodology that the research worked with needed to be mirrored in my re-presentation of the research text. It needed to reflect the openings, the disruptions, and the spaces created by the research. The text itself needed to have spaces, openings, and disruptions, in its physical layout and in its possible readings. And so, I followed Derrida and I wrote a text of multiple texts, a text of multiplicity. A text that I felt was honest to the richness of the research space while also acknowledging the impossibility of the possibility of a single, linear story of the research. I began with two postcards, one to Derrida, from whom I drew inspiration and theoretical justification for my work, and one to the reader, inviting them to come with me through the research story I would share. This first piece, the forward/foreword of my dissertation, offered an introduction to the text and how the text was written. It did not offer instructions for how to read the text. The openness of the text made a procedure for reading impossible.

The forward/foreword was the first part of the dissertation that I shared. The feedback I received was difficult to take. There were concerns about my voice in the writing and that I sounded arrogant. For the first time, I wrote in a way that uniquely shared my voice and my experience. It was different, it's true, but it was honest. It was also questioned whether or not what I had written would

of these words. What is meant by community and institution must be rethought. This thinking must also unmask—an infinite task—all the ruses of end-orienting reason, the paths by which apparently disinterested research can find itself indirectly reappropriated, reinvested by programs of all sorts. That does not mean that “orientation” is bad in itself and that it must be combatted, far from it. Rather, I am defining the necessity for a new way of educating students that will prepare them to undertake new analyses in order to evaluate these ends and choose, when possible, among them all. (Derrida, 1983b, p. 16)

A decision “always risks the worst” (Derrida, 1983b, p. 19) like an instant of madness. The principles of reason founding the university are grounded in ideas that articulate the violence of its being as a research and teaching institution:

It is not a matter simply of questions that one formulates while submitting oneself, as I am doing here [in the discourse], to the principle of reason, but also of preparing oneself thereby to transform the modes of writing, approaches to pedagogy, the procedures

qualify as a dissertation. Perhaps I might just have one chapter or section written in columns as an example, and the rest of the dissertation as a single linear text? I had carefully checked the requirements set out by the university, and in no place was it stated that the thesis must be a linear, five-chapter document. While the meeting did leave me questioning what I was doing, how I would ever be able to make it work, and whether or not it would be accepted, I was also frustrated. Frustrated for again feeling held back and held down, for coming up against another wall. But, I kept on writing and writing. I created a dissertation that responded loudly and clearly to the confining and binding structures of the traditional thesis, that resisted disciplinary classification, and that did not compromise because I would not compromise on it.

Ahead of my doctoral defense, I again, of course again, met with resistance. I was asked to please simplify the text to two columns, rather than the multiple layers that were in dialogue with each other, to limit the very openness that I had intentionally and necessarily brought to the dissertation. The reader did not know how to read the dissertation, and did not even want to read it. My response was very simple. I would not be changing the form of the dissertation. I put my foot down, but what would I be up against in my defense? I felt like I had done so much defensive work already. What else would be thrown at me?

The defense was actually a breeze. This was not a complete surprise because two weeks ahead of my examination date, I received my external reviewer's report on my dissertation. After so much resistance to my work, the letter was a final breaking down of the walls attempting to enclose me and bound my work. His reading of my dissertation fully took up the invitation that I sent. He recognized the inherent interdisciplinarity of the work, the textuality and texture in

of academic exchange, the relation to languages, to other disciplines, to the institution in general, to its inside and its outside. Those who venture forth along this path, it seems to me, need not set themselves up in opposition to the principle of reason, nor give way to "irrationalism." They may continue to assume within the university, along with its memory and tradition, the imperative of professional rigour and competence. (Derrida, 1983b, p. 17)

The meta-logic of deconstruction defines the site of the struggle for a new academic responsibility. A double-sided responsibility would rearticulate the ethics of science and/as research within the university in a deconstructive affirmation that deepens and goes beyond "reflection on the concepts of ethics, science, and responsibility" (Trifonas 2005, p. 213). A rethinking of academic responsibility alters the roles of the teaching body and the principles of research ethics that dominate the ground of the university and being within it.

the dissertation. He acknowledged the timeliness of the research, the challenge of dominant research methodologies, the honouring of students as significant participants and learners, and the creative possibilities opened for what a dissertation might be. Finally, I had the support of the academy for my work.



Day 5: Marathon, Ontario to Toronto, Ontario

Distance: 1,103 km

I made it to Toronto. My god, I am so tired. The journey has been wonderful but exhausting. It has given me a lot of time, so many kilometres, so many hours, stretches of highway, to wonder about where I shall wander next. The past few days have taken me through such a diversity of spaces and places. The richness of this land. The vastness of it. It leaves me awestruck. And now, a new place and a new journey. Where will this next journey take me? Who will I be during the journey? At the journey's end? It is difficult to find comfort in the unknown, but in these tensions we so often realize possibilities that seemed impossible. I am nervous and I am anxious and I am scared. But I am curious.

Dear R,

I made it. I actually made it through to the end of that journey and right into the next. Before I defended my dissertation, I began an assistant professorship position at a small American Midwestern Liberal Arts college. I was a mathematics and science education professor. Science education was still there, a big part of my teaching, though no longer central in my research. While my position at the college was wonderful, and my colleagues and students were incredible to work and learn with, my head and my heart were back in Canada, and after one year in the US, I returned home. I am now an assistant professor in Early Childhood Studies, and science education is very much peripheral to my teaching and research. I teach courses in ecological curriculum, pedagogy, and research; children and nature; mathematics concept development; and history and philosophy of early childhood education. I no longer feel bounded. I no longer feel that I need to limit myself to teaching and researching within one discipline. I no longer have to think and act in terms of disciplines at all. These boundaries are certainly not exclusive to science education; much social science research is firmly planted within rigid structures. And not all science education has these boundaries. There is openness. There is possibility. There is difference always and already there. But what is essential is to have the courage to become lost in the cadence of these openings, and the patience and perseverance to hear, in an honest and authentic way, the music in their disharmony.

....

*All this machinery making modern music
Can still be open hearted
Not so coldly charted
It's really just a question of your honesty, yeah
Your honesty
One likes to believe in the freedom of music
But glittering prizes and endless compromises
Shatter the illusion of integrity.*

—Neil Peart, “The Spirit of Radio”

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