

Pedagogical Experiences: Emergent Conversations In/With Place/s

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Abstract

In this paper, we find and share emergent and relational learning practices through intra-actions with people, places, and materials. We are pedagogical and artistic practitioners who learn from experiencing the world with others and explore relational “intra-actions” (Barad, 2003) that facilitate knowledge-making practices. Contrary to mainstream Anthropocentric understandings, we do not see humans as the only agents in learning. Rather, we learn *with* other beings—places, materials, humans, and more-than-humans—as we attend to and move with each other.

Becoming-With¹ Humans and More-Than-Humans, Places and Materials as Pedagogical Practice

In this paper, we theorize learning practices with/in our pedagogical experiences with places. We outline an artistic and holistic approach to knowledge-making that focuses on being-with humans and more-than-humans, places, and materials. Working across borders and temporalities, we come to know specific places through walking and responsive creative practices including artmaking and storying.

We share a connected and holistic way of learning, an alternative to dominant developmental and outcomes-based educational practices. Interconnected encounters shape how we come to know through embodied relations in and with places. Inspired by new materialist theories, we acknowledge the agencies of materials, beings, and places, and learn through their intra-actions with us. We teach and learn together. Storied images emerge from these encounters where we “move with, not passively observe” surroundings (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016, p. 42). We consider three examples of such pedagogical intra-actions below. In each of these examples, we were called to attend where “to attend to something means to pause” (p. 39). When humans and more-than-humans, places, and materials pause and interact it becomes possible to notice, and for artworks to emerge, extending understandings.

We believe learning occurs in relation with others. This is informed by the theoretical work of Haraway (2007; 2016) and Barad (2003; 2007; 2012). We are inspired by educators who incorporate relational ontologies in their research practices, such as the a/r/tographers (Irwin 2006; Springgay et al., 2008a; Springgay et al., 2008b; Triggs et al., 2014) and early childhood educators (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Blaise et al., 2017). In this paper, we investigate our changing relations with others, including three places.



Fig. 1: Squaw Peak, Rock Canyon, Utah. Photo: C. Peterken.

Walking-With Rock Canyon

Rock Canyon has various trails, and here Squaw Peak is centered, looming overhead, structural layers of rock presenting changes over time. Gray clouds on this walk outline jagged rocks and wildflowers call attention and line paths. Yellow beacons draw feet further. Making an image, a piece of artwork with a

camera, brings this to light and returns us to this place and moment. What might we learn while attending to our surroundings as we move² through them? This practice sustains us, and our relations with other beings, including each other.

Regular walking practices with local places provide opportunities for learning. We learn to attend to our bodies as they experience places, forming and reforming relations between places and beings across times and responding imaginatively. Close attending enables stories and/or artworks to emerge.

Rock Canyon is part of my life in Provo. Regularly I walk with Rock Canyon. The rocky outcrops and surrounding mountains awe and overwhelm. The beach with some cliffs, but open and flat generally, had been my home for 10 years prior. This is such a different place: the flat expanse of the Australian landscape contrasts with the looming mountains of Utah County. The plants are also different from Mornington Peninsula bayside bush of Tea Tree, Banksia, Salt Bush, grasses, and succulents. The many years with the beach, the walking, wandering, and wondering about Indigenous peoples that lived there before are now shifted to Rock Canyon. Stories of the local area indicate First Nations peoples (Rock Canyon Provo, Utah, 2018). Death is in this place, as are conflict and lack of understanding. "Squaw Peak" (Fig. 1) holds the memory of an Indigenous woman falling/jumping to her death rather than be captured by white men with guns. The beauty of the mountains and changing flora and fauna each season do not erase this discomfort in the rocks, paths, and trails. Squaw Peak peeks out at me through trees and buildings as I walk my neighborhood. The contours of Squaw Peak's surface emerge and call to be noticed. They hold the truth of this place. The rock-woman-sky falling story brings wondering; these rocks might have held on and let go. Connections are with and in between the rocks, sky, animals, seasons, running water, plants, and Indigenous peoples who made/make this their home.

During the "stay home" time of the COVID-19 measures, Rock Canyon meted out solace as a place of exercise. Newly blooming wildflowers beckoned my camera and eye and listening to the birds gave lightness; the birds, flowers, rocks, and this place teach. The dis/comfort of thinking-with Rock Canyon requires "staying with the trouble" (Haraway, 2016).

Our research adopts the worldview that humans are not separate from the world but are already part of it. This position enables us to acknowledge the agency of other beings with whom we interact. As we move through the world, relations with others change constantly (Triggs et al., 2014). Walking in relation with other beings—and striving to understand what their perspectives might be—leads to imaginative ways of knowing. As we imagine Squaw Peak's role in the rock-woman-sky story, we learn alternative ways of understanding the world that are less human-centered. Being-with each place and responding creatively is a generative pedagogical practice that emerged from our ongoing work as artist/researchers. Through attentive walking and responsive making, we come to understand what it is we are doing, since, for us, theory emerges through these active processes.

Walking and Conversations In/With Place as Pedagogical Practice

Transformative relations with/between beings and selves emerge through walking, storying, and making. This paper is part of our ongoing research (Collins et al., 2012; Burke et al., 2017; Potts, 2017; Peterken, 2018). Stories³ are emplaced and transformed into various artworks through being-with and attending to others in/with place/s.

Our lives are entangled⁴ with more-than-human others. Acknowledging others is one strategy that shifts attention away from being human centered. A non-human-centric position is essential to a relational ontology with more-than-human beings. Becoming attuned to our intra-actions with others, we learn how we become-with them. We are inspired by those using a/r/tography to attend to these others with whom we share worlds. In presenting the relationality of a/r/tography, Irwin (2008, p. 71) affirms: “Being cannot *be* anything but being-with-one-another” (referring to Nancy, 2000, p. 3, emphasis in original). This attunement is echoed and expanded by Haraway: “There is no becoming, there is only becoming-with” (Haraway & Wolfe, 2016, p. 221). “Being-with” and “becoming-with” mean similar, yet distinct things. In both phrases, “with” is central to the relational ontology. Here, the focus is on relations themselves, rather than just humans, as “the partners do not precede the meeting” (Haraway, 2007, p. 4). A focus on phenomena over things is one similarity between Haraway’s concept of becoming-with and Barad’s theory of agential realism where “relata do not preexist relations; rather relata-within-phenomena emerge through specific intra-actions” (Barad, 2012, p. 49). Both understandings of the world are emergent where becomings are formed by intra-actions.

Haraway’s worldview of becoming-with explores how species become together. She argues (2007; 2016) that humans and animals become together, a process of worlding where both parties rely on each other as they co-construct shared worlds, thinking and storying together through multispecies practices. It is from this shared perspective that we come to our research with other beings, places, and materials. Attending to changing relations with more-than-human others is a focus of our walking practice. Making photographs is one way of documenting this process. We invite you to experiment with a relational focus and photographic contemplation when out walking.

Pedagogical Encounters



Fig. 2: Making in dialogue with Rock Canyon. Photo: M. Potts.

For us, walking is not an end in itself, but, rather, part of a range of creative knowledge-making practices that include encounters with other beings on our walk, documenting, and contemplating our interactions. This continues through encounters with art materials in responding to the walk. Attending is an important dimension of walking. Attending can also take place in dialogue with others. For example, in Fig. 2, paper and charcoal facilitate a dialogue between person and rock, focusing attention on rock's texture. Attending to the others with whom we share the world is part of the worldview that underlies this method of knowledge-making. This is our artistic worldview.

Triggs et al. (2014) found, "everyday living is also a creative practice" (p. 23). Similarly, creative walking is a pedagogical practice in our living and work as artist/academics. By closely attending to intra-actions with other beings in our environment, we are inspired to make artworks that, in turn, teach us about our changing relations with places, beings, and materials. In this practice, our focus is on acts of making rather than forming completed artworks; making and art that draw us back to the relations with others that inspired the works. We invite you to form relations with places, beings, and materials where you live by adopting an attentive walking practice that includes making with materials to draw focus to these relations.

Writing becomes a further intra-action, another layer of creative practice. Writing emerges from and in relation with our walking and making. Writing to think, and writing to change our thinking in the drafting and editing processes, is part of our methodology (Richardson & St Pierre, 2008). We learn, with writing, to decenter the human by changing our language. Through enacting this process, we begin to think of others first (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016; Kimmerer, 2013). In turn, this helps us see how agency emerges between places, beings, and materials. Writing in this way is a nonlinear process. Words emerge and are changed as we circle back to make sense and to become-with. Stories that are more than words as images-vignettes-places-bodies-theory intra-act on these pages with making.

We become open to connect practice and theory in relation with each other and more-than-human others. We engage in entangled intra-relations with materials (Barad, 2007), places, evolving selves, and post-colonial storytelling in Australia, New Zealand, and the United States. Our shared walking began in Morwell National Park in 2011. We also walked along Port Phillip Bay at Frankston and Pearcedale Conservation Park, both in Victoria, Australia, as well as Rock Canyon, Park City, Bridal Veil Falls, and the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Each walking experience told a story, contributing to our connections with places and with art made in relation to the walks, ourselves, and other beings. This process required walking in/with places with minds open to listening to humans and more-than-humans, listening to learn, requiring us to enter into dialogue with other beings with whom we share these experiences (Blaise et al., 2017) and responding creatively to them.



Fig. 3: Teasels, gloves, and embroidery threads. Photos: C. Peterken.

Teasel Teasing With Park City Rail Trail

Making ties together the threads of our walks and research. These gloves hold the memories of place and walking experiences in embroidery. They also respond to the world, attending to incidental Teasels beside the path in Utah that might not otherwise be acknowledged.

A path in Park City opened for walking and Teasels emerged beside the path; or rather, Teasels teased. They called out before I recognized them. Teasels startled me. How were they here, in Utah? The encounter with this plant triggered memories of being a little child in England where Teasels grew. Regular countryside walking near where we lived and collections of grasses, flowers, sticks, and objects from nature were part of my childhood. Names of plants, animals, birds, and fish in streams as we walked were spoken by my father as a way to come to know the place and its delights and fears. This is how the plant here beside the path was with me; the plant knew me, we were together, becoming-with. Teasels had been absent for many years, but their look and prickly feel enticed childlike touch as these Teasels offered their rough spikes and comb-like texture. Roughness and prickling bringing about focused attention. The photographs of the Teasel-walking collect and present this encounter for more learning. The Teasels teach as later, the gloves and their embroidery are with this encounter. Teasels and their images pull at my memories, again teasing me, in the stitching of their lines and cones. The threads become-with Teasels, gloves, memories, me, and Park City walking. The artwork that appeared with the gloves, the walking, and the Teasels, open to learning more through intra-actions each time they are worn.

Learning in nature, places, memories, making and sharing stories is not new and we advocate for learning that comes in relation and embraces greater attention to and being-with more-than-humans. Encountering Teasels and attending to intra-actions with them brings about more than a pause (Pacini-Ketchabaw et al., 2016). This pause and subsequent pondering with Teasels activated creative practice. The gloves waited for their embroidery. Threads followed the photographic outlines, the spiky cones. Being-with evoked a making response to this walk and brought about learning with Teasels; knowing Teasels, and Park City Rail Trail.

More-Than-Human Agencies

Our attentive walking practice focuses on relations between humans and others. On our Rock Canyon walk, we attended to relationships between us and Weather. Some people are becoming disconnected from Weather (Ingold, 2010, p. S131; Handley, 2018, 22.51). Yet, kinesthetic awareness is an important dimension of knowledge-making. We need to feel what Weather is doing. Going outside with dogs and mountains and Weather is kinesthetically engaging, helping us attune ourselves to what can be learned with them. Focusing attention on relations between us can lead to artistic responses to these experiences.

During the walk with Rock Canyon, we were open to encounters with other beings, including people and dogs walking down the trail as we walked up. While humans were happy to be out in the warm sun, dogs seemed to enjoy the experience more deeply. How does Dog experience this place? With joy!

*becoming one with Winnie the dog enjoying the snow
so joyful
playing
learning with others how to appreciate the weather
enjoying snow
fascinating and exciting when it snows*

In this encounter Winnie the dog responds to Rock Canyon by making footprints with warming snow (Fig. 4).⁵ More-than-humans (e.g., dogs) can respond to places, too. Here dogs and humans co-construct slush by making footprints together.



Fig. 4: Dog making footprints with snow and sun. Photo: C. Peterken.

Dogs explored the materiality of the snow, inviting us to enjoy with them, together with the pitch of Rock Canyon. If we were to begin from the taken-for-granted Anthropocentric perspective, we would tell you, through our writing, what we did, what we found (out), and how it was measured. This is not that. Instead, learning emerged from and with the walk and the intra-action between weather, snow, dogs, and people. When out walking, we encourage you to attend to the agencies of other beings as they interact with you. For example, how does the temperature affect your relationship to your surroundings as you walk?

Learning With Rock Canyon, Snow, Dogs, and People

On Presidents' Day, Miriam and Corinna went to Rock Canyon with David. We set out with intentions to attend, to notice ways in which interactions unfolded, with an openness to see what might emerge from the intra-actions between beings in this place at this time, curious how today's group of discrete elements might affect one another.



Fig 5: Footprints Rock Canyon, Utah. Photo: M. Potts.

The emergence of story is a creative response to our encounter with Rock Canyon. Fig. 5 shows where story began. Rock Canyon's mud held human footprints in relation to animal prints. At this point on the trail where sunshine melted snow, story emerged in dialogue with David's memories.

As the path turned a corner into the sunshine, snow began to squeak beneath our feet. Turning to the ground, David examined footprints in the mud where sun had melted the snow (Fig. 5), explaining the difference between cat and dog prints. We imagined the size of the animals that made the prints: large dogs and cats. We imagined Cougar living in Rock Canyon. Stories emerged from relations between sun, mud, animals, sounds, sights, and people. We enjoyed being-with each other, learning with snow and dogs and people.

The emergence of knowledge from interactions between places and beings, and then the creation of responding images, is an example of the way creativity (e.g., stories, visual artworks, and poetry) becomes part of the knowledge-making process. This knowledge is made up of this encounter, this material, this place and these people and the artistic response in their connected storying:

*Melting snow and mud.
Temperature.
How temperature felt ...
Part of embodied experience.*

As artists, our creative practices include attentive walking, documenting (including writing and photography), and creative responses. We attend to footprints, we take and crop photographs, we create stories with this place. This is not just a documentation of the footprints, but more than that, a record of our *attending* to them. Editing photographs, so that they might show clearly, could lead to artistic creations. Primarily, we share *thinking* practices that connect us to more-than-humans.

As we walked around Rock Canyon, our footprints left marks alongside those of others in snow and mud. Working with Weather, Rock Canyon has been accumulating and erasing footprints of many species for centuries. Rock Canyon also experiences seasonal fluctuations in temperature, along with plants and animals like us. We recognize Rock Canyon as a cocreator of our shared world. Learning to consider Rock Canyon as a being is a significant de-centering practice. We encourage you to see liveliness emerge in local places through noticing the agencies of more-than-human others via their interactions with you while walking.

Walking, Making, and Thinking With the Great Salt Lake



Fig. 6: Footprints with salt, Great Salt Lake, Utah. Photo: M. Potts.

*Salt and sand without coast? An inland beach.
Our Australian eyes are baffled by the Great Salt Lake.
Who could possibly flourish in this saline place?*⁶

Relating to places is an ongoing creative practice. Our research is not outcomes-driven. Rather, it is experiential, emergent, and exploratory, focusing on making *processes*. Again, as we walk, footprints call us to attend, and an image calls us to return for making and thinking. Have you ever experienced patterns forming and reforming on damp sand? Can you imagine making artworks that respond to this delicate sensation? Moving from the present sensation back into memory and forward into future possibility, Miriam wonders what could be made possible in the future? She begins to imagine an artwork responding to the glittery crystals of the Great Salt Lake (Fig. 7). This artwork will become something different from how she imagines it today as artworks emerge in dialogue with materials. During the making process, she will learn from materials as they work *with* her in response to the sensations of visiting the Great Salt Lake.

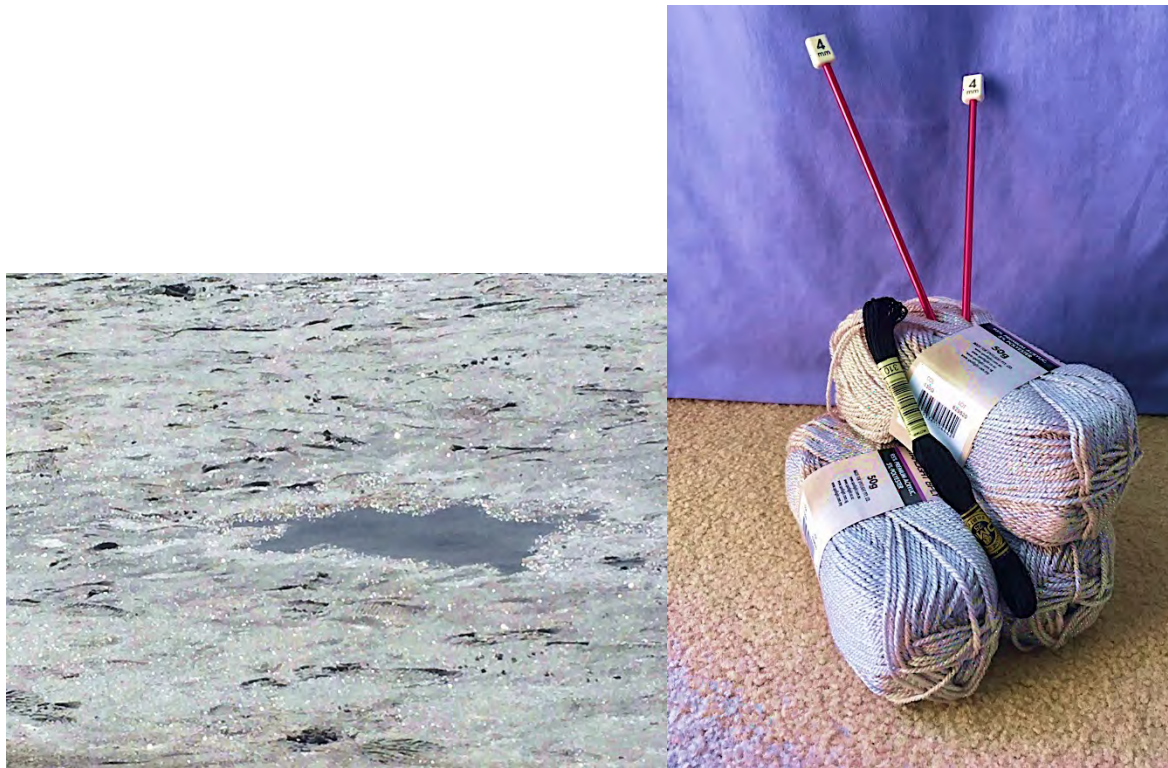


Fig. 7: Glittery yarn begs to respond to experiencing shimmering Great Salt Lake. Photos: M. Potts.

Experiencing the Great Salt Lake occurs on both material and semiotic levels. Materially, we are fascinated by the shimmer of the salt crystals (Fig. 7). Here sparkle emerges from the play of light on salt crystals in relation to human and camera eyes. Culturally, we respond to Smithson's (1970) *Spiral Jetty*, a famous piece of Land Art installed within the Lake (Fig. 8; see also DIA, 1995).

*Not being a boat
the irony of the Spiral Jetty (DIA, 1995) eludes us.
Rather, the structure invites us to walk along it, spiraling into its center.
Once there, we pause.
Then we feel free to climb across and over the land-formed barriers to exit.*



Fig. 8. Robert Smithson, Spiral Jetty (1970), rock, earth, salt water, c. 460 m x 4.6 m. Photo: C. Peterken, 2020.

*We arrive at Spiral Jetty.
The art textbook from our Australian art education emerges.
We see and feel it with us.
We know this artwork. The textbook speaks from the past (Hughes, 1980)
'I presented this to you. It was a gift. I knew you would make art and come here, with this
artwork. I prepared you. I taught you. You learned.'
Spiral Jetty beckons...
'Come, come down and walk with me. Feel; experience my rocks and surrounding sand and salt.
I reveal myself.'*

*Walking and meditating with Spiral Jetty becomes image-making.
Photographs of the Great Salt Lake belie our connection and encounter.
This place impacts and changes.
It is pedagogical.
Encountering and making art with Spiral Jetty teaches.*

On one level, our experience with Great Salt Lake reflects Smithson's artistic intention to "get people experiencing art in the natural world" (Mann, 2020). On another, knowledge emerges from intra-actions between beings, places, and materials. Where can you walk with beings, places, and materials, make images, artworks, and/or poetry to respond and attend?

Attentive walking and creative responding are ongoing research practices for us as artists. Discovering how many creatures rely on the Great Salt Lake for sustenance encourages Miriam to learn more about them. Learning about these creatures inspires her to represent them with wool and thread. In the future, she will return here to walk with them in this place.

Learning With/In Places and Materials

Art making and textile work are part of our ongoing individual research processes as artists/academics. Our walking and sharing places builds on our common creative practices, deepening our relations. Fitzpatrick and Bell (2016) identify three important aspects of making: representational, material, and the

practice itself (p. 11). They affirm, “Things or matter have their own power that call a response from us” (p. 12), and in this paper we have explored walking encounters and creative responses, focusing on the practice itself.

Our artistic ways of learning emerged as we experienced these three places—Park City Rail trail, Rock Canyon, and the Great Salt Lake—with other beings and responded creatively. We found that experiencing local places on foot enabled us to attend to and learn with more-than-human others who share these places with us. Intra-actions with beings, places, and materials enabled learning to emerge. Dog demonstrated that more-than-humans can co-construct the world, too. Mud showed relations between humans and more-than humans. Teasels triggered childhood memories that caused creative responses with thread. The glimmer of salt and sun inspires Miriam to respond, continuing her ongoing creative practice with glittering wool. In all these ways, we become aware of our interconnections with beings, places, and materials through experiences of walking with them and creating in response to them.

For us, walking is more than exercise. When we attend to human and more-than-human others with whom we share the walk—animals, plants, and places—knowledge emerges, stories, poetry, and artworks are created, papers written, and relationships built. We encourage you to try our attentive walking practices, looking out for what might emerge from interactions between beings while walking-with places. Pedagogical walking practices such as those described here can lead to other ways of knowing. In our attentive walking practice relational learning emerges from intra-actions between people, places, and materials.

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Park City Rail Trail

Robert Smithson’s (1970) *Spiral Jetty* and the Great Salt Lake

Rock Canyon

As well as Winnie and the other snow angel dogs

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Notes

1. See discussion below on being-with (Irwin, 2008, referring to Nancy, 2000) and becoming-with (Haraway in Haraway & Wolfe, 2016).
2. For us this was walking, but this attentiveness could be taken up in any mode of transportation.
3. Storying is a way of making sense of the world: “A story can allow multiple meanings to travel alongside one another; it can hold open possibilities and interpretations and can refuse the kind of closure that prevents others from speaking or becoming” (van Dooren & Rose, 2016, p. 85).
4. “Entanglement” is a reference to Barad (2007), who acknowledges the ways in which humans are *already* in relation with others.
5. In a relational ontology, “humans are not the only important actors” (Haraway, 2016, p. 55).
6. Actually, the Great Salt Lake is “so alive it smells” and 260 bird species visit, many feeding on Brine Shrimp (Butler, 2018). What does the Great Salt Lake mean to these migratory birds? For American White Pelicans, it is a place to breed and for Eared Grebes, it is a place to feast on Brine Shrimp (Barrett, 2019).

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Miriam Potts is an artist/researcher based in Gippsland, Victoria, who recently completed her doctoral studies at Victoria University in Melbourne, Australia. Currently, Miriam is experimenting with feminist new materialist research methodologies to help her investigate entangled relations between humans and more-than-humans in local places.