

Attention to Place: Learning to Listen

CRAIG MacDONALD

University of Prince Edward Island

SEAN WIEBE

University of Prince Edward Island

The Homeward Journey

“Direct the attention of the novice to what the novice must watch, listen, and feel to practice the skill. The education of attention is undertaken through story and song and through modeling rather than verbal directions.” (Chambers, 2008, p. 119)

Listen. Attend. Respond. “The author,” says Schwandt (2001) in his Dictionary entry on autoethnography, “invites readers into the text to relive the experience rather than to interpret or analyze what the author is saying” (p. 13). What we each mean to present is a kind of story, and it arises like any story, we suppose, in shared experience. We ask ourselves what we mean by shared experience, and find that it need not be that something/nothing in common that is supposed to consist between two persons and their respective given bodies of experience. Habemus corpus: here’s what we’ve got. Can’t be sure if it’s living or dying. The last we heard was it is finished.

You may decide what to do with it; analysis of our words can never yield your choice, or ours, in this or any matter. We know what it is like to look at another person and ask what we have in common, as if it were either there or not there—to be found, or not; to be remembered, or reconstructed or not, as the case may be. But this would imply that our experiences, or yours, were somehow fixed, definite, finished, and could then be compared, examined, analysed without first being united in some other fashion. It would even imply that our experiences and yours were altogether explicitly ordered, filed, and categorized under thoroughly common headings. No: for us it is a matter of deliberately sharing (meant here in the most earnest of senses), even though our experiences may be quite different. What we share, what we may then find a way of saying we have in common, is chosen at every moment from the first; it is edited, deliberate and (de)liberated. We begin and end with the invitation. Welcome.

A story of shared experience, becoming in its telling a shared past, arises in conversation. Any conversation, we venture, arises in a kind of struggle (of *agôn*, as in protagonist or antagonist or, yes, agony); struggle arises in life; and life, in consciousness. Pinar (2004) has identified curriculum as the “complicated conversation” it takes to temper “information . . . with intellectual judgment, critical thinking, ethics, and self-reflexivity” (p. 8). This is our project. Our stories, our consciousness, arise as we go back to where our flesh (the flesh of our heads, our hearts, our bodies and our souls) has come to be in a time that was before now. We were born, and grew up, here. We come home from school to this place. We study here, and do our homework at the kitchen table, on the living-room floor, at desks in our rooms. As English teachers, we experience our classrooms in the stories we and our students share. This is the conversation to which we mean to invite.

Whether once or many times, we have arrived here; the stories of this place, these stories which are always becoming our own, are the stories

that give this place to us. They are the stories by which this place gives itself to us. Our stories pre-exist our present selves, just as our place pre-exists us. Always there “before reflection begins—an inalienable presence” (Merleau-Ponty, 1962/1989, p. vii), or indeed “always already gone” (Merritt, 2010), home awaits us. We pay attention, and find ourselves here, being in the flesh, breathing in the air, standing on the ground.

Before we were able to say anything, this place had something to say. Coming to be here, we have come to hear—and then to say that we hear, to tell that we are here. By paying attention to what our place tells us, we become responsible, are in a position to respond to the way things have been and how that emerges in who we are; and then “human experience, identity, and culture”, as Gruenewald (2003) says, “are intimate with and inseparable from our relationship with places” (p. 627). This place is alive with stories, alive with us. We learn to listen as our home speaks us into becoming, tells us like a story, tells us what happened next. We remember ourselves, being here, the last time.

Interrogatory Introspections

“At times I have the feeling someone else is working on this with me. I read a passage I haven’t looked at in weeks and I don’t remember much of it, or only dimly, and I say to myself, Well, that’s not bad”. (Davis, 1995, p. 51)

Autoethnography, where we now mean to take place, may be distinguished from ethnography in “self-awareness about and reporting of one’s own experiences and introspections as a primary data source”, in order to construct a way of living (Patton, 2002, p. 86; see Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This sense of introspection lending to construction, as we

to tend to our place and “mind the time” (Ledwell, 2004, p. 12)—this is what finally qualifies us as storytellers. Telling stories, we look in and find ourselves in the presence of a spectre, a “relentless double” as Butler (2009, p. 8) sees it: in the spectacle of human events, of being in the mirror. Davis (1995) has demonstrated memory under this species, whose ghostly qualities we think we can observe with Block’s (1998) “tell-tale heart.” As we begin, we break, provisionally, with the uncertainty of the emergent and indeterminate, “filled with agitation and restless, relentless questioning and speculation” (Thompson, 2007, p. 105) or, as Derrida (1994) said, “speculation always speculates on some specter, it speculates in the mirror of what it produces, on the spectacle that it gives itself and that it gives itself to see. It believes in what it believes it sees: in representations” (p. 146). Further, more: we’re here on spec. We expectorate (see Kierkegaard, 1843/1983, pp. 27-53), expel from our breast, what may be sputum. Ahem. Were we expecting this?

[This place could even be the Magic Mountain of a last-century novel (Mann, 1924/1969). But it isn’t. We’re just getting a few things off our chest.]

Ahem. We may well dispute—and that’s life, we say. In and from the living body we cast words, spell worlds, cast spells: this sense of construction lends agency and autonomy, opportunity, to (re)make our world, to bring forth past events, to (re)live, (re)think, (re)claim them as something that we are making new; we are tied to the past but not knotted up in it.¹ It is well-known that the Tao that can be described is not the true Tao; a way, if it is of life, of living in the here and now, is perhaps found, not described as a way to live; it is the way that we are already on when we look to take our bearings. (This difference shows most importantly in the specific order, the sense, the necessity, a representation appears to have, as a thing apart.) Our representation of life is different from the experience itself, as a map is not co-extensive—nor, really, alike in any way but as an analogy—with the ground it may

nevertheless chart. For Deleuze & Parnet (2002), the map is constrained, not to what it might represent, but to intersecting lines called “dominant significations” (p. 45). We take our bearing, but not north by northwest in the politics of where we are or where we’ve been. Like the Tao, the ground is always unraveling, located in the intersection of paths, of our ways of living, of the trajectories of our actions. Says Deleuze (1995): “I tend to think of things as sets of lines to be unraveled but also to be made to intersect” (p. 161). Our stories are maps of maps, the grounded experience not being solid ground, but a line of flight. Because we write the effects of actions upon each other’s actions, we also ask of ourselves, what do we see there in those intersections, those significations? What does the ground itself chart?

Here, perhaps, is new ground, uncharted territory, in the field. Eisner (quoted in Patton, 2002) says an artistic contribution’s main criterion is the question of the “number and quality of the questions that the work raises” (p. 87). By representing our experiences, we mean to explore our own sense of living in these experiences, and to do so in a way that carries meaning to you, our reader. We are not offering knowledge on the platter, as if the hunt were finished. We bring questions instead, which we imagine as fare for the ears, fit to lodge there, if not between the eyes. (What, for instance, is the value, the qualitative difference, of the claim that a story can be “based on a true story”?) Not stuck between the teeth, not lying prone on a platter. What is a true story, after all? We look away from the platter, for some other vessel. Is it not in the true nature of a story to be fiction? Hear our questions, here—if not on a platter, then where? Well, is fiction only possible in the absence of truth? Hear our questions issuing lively from a horn. Isn’t truth, essence, always at risk as we imagine and assert the coherence we always desire and never have?

We have plenty of questions. We make them up as we go along, because with questions begins quest, and vice versa. Hunter-posers, we?

Poser-poets? Questions are calls as of a horn: to the hunt; to battle; to aid. Questions are calls to remembrance. But now, remembering this, we already hear the Last Post. We are re-mem-bering the lost past, listening to the silence (. . .), then hearing the Reveille. The poet speaks: "They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old: Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn" (Binyon, 1917, p. 40). But perhaps this is the last thing we need to hear right now. Suffice to say that life, even the good life, is like our memories of others: we understand life as struggle, not as (pass-/)posit-ive consumption with a comment to the effect that it was delicious. Nevertheless, and given the choice, it is the horn of plenty we take up.

The power to tell the truth about ourselves, to shoot it down and to bring it on our shoulders home, to order everything into one great story, a narrative feast, is never really ours. Our stories, though we really need them, begin and end as fictions, inventions, contrivances. The stories we tell are, Watson (19 March, 2009) has reminded us, "attempts to cover our nothingness with something that says 'this is what it's all about'" (personal communication).

Leading the Story

Ahem. This text began in conversations we'd been having since we met, and no doubt in some we were having before that. Sooner or later there were words on pages, and those pages formed, for one thing, part of an approach to the question of methods in Craig MacDonald's (2010) autoethnographic Master's thesis. The larger work seeks its own furusato ("old village"), in conversation with others who have had to do with eikaiwa ("English conversation") in Japan.

But the first of the following stories came from Sean Wiebe's side of the conversation. It relates something about becoming an author, in elementary school. It begins to tell one story, then tells another, and so

on. The second story is MacDonald's account of a "similar" experience, offered not so much as an answer but rather as a simpler kind of response than that, more in the way of that reminds me of the time . . .

We mind the time. These stories are for our fellow-teachers, our fellow-learners; they are for all to hear, all who are here in our home, the language classroom. Did you ever ask someone, what language do you want to learn? Or, what do you want to do in this language? What does this language have to do with you? In the conversation that we have found ourselves having, a teacher directs a learner to stories of place, wherein both may reclaim a past, may remember freely; where this is curriculum, we hope that a unique emotional response arises, such that everyone's relationship to this place, this classroom, this home to our becoming, can make itself heard, can (re)position itself freely.

From the Field to the Text (Related by Sean Wiebe)

This story, if taken as an example, began as an interview but in the writing was also becoming something else, a kind of mixed genre of creative nonfiction and autobiographical research. The details, as I had planned to tell them, were going to be situated in high school. I have taught writing at high school for 15 years, and now, in teaching writing at the University of Prince Edward Island, I am curious about what writing teachers do and do not do in high school that stays with students through university studies and later into their adult lives.

In my own high school days, there was a creative writing teacher who wrote poetry and her opinion of what I wrote, which cannot be separated from her opinion of me, mattered a great deal to how I was coming to understand and present myself in the world. During my grade 11 and grade 12 years I was gradually shifting peer groups, trying on a few new things. For the first time I tried the debating club, the writing club, and I noticed band students (as if they had suddenly appeared

from nowhere) getting up early to practice an instrument in the same way I was getting up early to go for a run. I was still entrenched in the athletic world, playing hockey some 15 hours a week, so no doubt my trying on of things was enabled by this teacher's indirect encouragement. Whether through marginal comments, or through her teaching, there was a setting out before me of the possibilities in writing, as if I might, in pursuing a proficiency of words, realize possibilities that couldn't be experienced on the ice.

I left high school thinking that I could write well, and hoping in a vague way that my words would find publication. The limit of my imagination in those days was a novel or a collection of poems, and I certainly wouldn't have used a word like publication. I remember having a subscription to *Writer's Digest*. How I came to be a subscriber must have been from a teacher's influence, an off-handed comment that slid its way into my consciousness. What my memory has left me is not so much a significant event, or a turning point, or even a choice between two roads, but a culmination of seemingly irrelevant details that enabled the ongoing construction of a writing identity.

It was my initial plan in writing this story to talk at some length about a professor's influence, about the coming back to poetry after a four-year BA where the pleasure of playing with words was stripped out of me. But in the writing of one memory, I am now remembering a few things that had been forgotten when I began.² As can be the case in autobiographical work, whether narrative or poetic, I experience a commitment to follow the words, to explore digressions that come out in the process of writing the planned story.

For the first time in a long time, a writing memory from my grade two class is surfacing again. The details are fuzzy but two moments still linger inside. It is a memory that has come back to me before, but is not one that has come back to me often. And I remember that the last time I remembered this event, it was still these two moments that were salient.

I don't know why these two, but perhaps the telling of them will give some clues.

One moment is my friend reading his story to the class. For a time, he was my best friend, as that summer we had gone fishing together down at the Fraser river. I think our fathers must have played softball together, as his house was some distance from mine, and having just moved to that part of the city, I can't imagine any other way that we would have met during the summer. That September we arrived in grade two as friends, and stayed so until he read his story to the class.

His story was short, rushed off five minutes before he was to read it, and received what I was hoping for myself: lots of audience laughter and positive peer recognition – clapping even. Mine was the opposite experience in every way. It was slaved over the night before – in hindsight much too long – and received, well, nothing. Not a smidgen of a smile.

I even remember complaining to the teacher, which is the second event which has strength in my memory. Even after the two readings, I was convinced mine was the better story. According to my grade two self at the time, what was wrong was the audience reaction? What happened? Why couldn't the teacher make them clap? Or laugh? Or at least see the story behind the story, that is, how words are often ourselves, right out there on the page. What mattered was the feeling that this was my best work, and best work deserved something. I remember the teacher trying to explain to me something about the value of humour and so on, but I left the classroom crying. I am not sure what words would have made the difference for me then. And perhaps not surprisingly it was also the end of that summer friendship.

So I have told a story I didn't mean to. In both the planned and unplanned stories teachers figure prominently,, but not their unit or lesson plans, not their teaching strategies, and not really their creative and thought-provoking assignments. What seems to matter in both

stories is how my words were held – a kind of assessment, certainly, as it is the nature of appreciation which can quite literally increase a person’s value. Assessment ought to be more than the professional practice of grading and formal reports. It should include all the ways we value work. With writing, what is too easy to forget is that the work is a person’s words. Words are conceived in the inner being and carry with them all the emotions which are normally kept hidden for a reason. This is not unlike the hidden curriculum. That is, when writing, what is usually hidden is revealed, and what is revealed is the delicate and vulnerable connection between a person’s words and the risks taken in offering those words to the world.

When my partner read over this story, apart from her comments about my “burbling” style, she remembered the time I rushed home from hockey practice to whip up a batch of cookies for a church picnic, one of the “events” being a children’s cookie competition. That she has a memory for our family lore is a welcome blessing for writing autobiographically, as I would not have thought to connect these two stories in my own memory. Here I was, pouring in lots and lots of cocoa powder, lots and lots of sugar, and one cup of oats, in a recipe which was basically not a recipe. It was called “no bake cookies” because after stirring it altogether on the stove the only requirement was freezing. My brother, I learned much later, had been in the kitchen the better part of the afternoon, knee deep so to speak, in a genuinely adult recipe that was so delicate he even needed to scrape the orange peel just so. Like the story above, this one also ended with a blue ribbon, and tears. Anticipating who will be crying at the end of the story, or at the end of the lesson, is part of the creative writing teacher’s occupation.

The Following Story

Applause. Laughter. Recognition. We’re agreed, we’re good, we’re on.

Now marking what we understand as a shift from one first person to another, we announce that the next offers some response, though this is perhaps not meant to interpret the previous story or to be interpreted in light of that predecessor. We invite you to relive, not to analyse. Welcome - not to analyse, at any rate, so much as to appreciate: this is critical, too. If you find yourself analysing along the way, we salute you and affirm that what you do is natural; but we especially wish to remind you of the fallacy, *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. Analysis, we believe, is not the end of the story but only its (continued, or repeated) telling.³

In a world where words like “irony,” “postmodern” and “whatever” sound hollow and dated, we’re bored as anybody, even of these often-repeated terms, yet find it easy to acknowledge an honesty about “the truth” in a work whose influence we’ve embraced throughout the development of this paper: *The End of the Story* (Davis, 1995). It’s not that the author keeps you guessing—what could be novel about that? It’s not that the truth or its “proper sequence,” in the telling, “is revealed by the author.” But her frank representation runs in a sequence which cannot be separated from the fantastical unfolding of “what seems important.” It’s a representation of how impossible it is to write a novel, especially from memory: this is what intrigues us, invites us to relate. Is *currere* any different, we wonder? Are we any further along if we imagine our past experiences in teaching and learning, and not only our desired futures, as the fantastical construction of our here-and-now desires (Pinar, 2004, p. 4)? Davis’s (1995) narrator seems free to deliberate in ways that we believe are fundamentally important to acknowledge in our own projects. She observes,

after all, there are things I like to remember and others I do not like to remember. I like to remember times when I behaved decently, also events that were exciting or interesting for another reason. I don’t like to remember

times when I behaved badly, or ugliness of a drab sort,
though I don't mind a dramatic sort of ugliness (p. 106).

Relating stories, we observe in the telling, calls for attention to such details as well, for if the novelist is a "professional spinner of lies" (Murakami, 2009), we wonder whether the teacher is fundamentally different, noting especially that "no one criticizes the novelist as immoral for telling lies" and that "indeed, the bigger and better his lies and the more ingeniously he creates them, the more he is likely to be praised by the public and the critics" (Murakami, 2009). And why, indeed; if this is the truth: why is it so?

Reflecting Over the Darkness of the Waters (Related by Craig MacDonald)

I am going back to fourth grade at Swampsward School, in the final school year before its population was consolidated with others into S.A. MacPhail Elementary. It was my second year with Miss Fitzhenry (she'd also led us through second grade, back at Nagmanning School). I'd gone on since kindergarten trying to want (like the other boys seemed to do quite uniformly, like I felt I was supposed to) to be a policeman or a fireman or whatever. But I really couldn't shake what Miss Fitzhenry had found so funny, already, two years before: when asked, the only thing I could say I wanted to be was an author. Cute, she might have thought, though she never called me that. I was the only kid in class with this kind of desire. Would she have taken it as unrealistic, I wonder, or unnatural? What if I'd said astronaut?

Earlier in the winter, perhaps less than a month before I wrote my story for Miss Fitzhenry, what had happened was that I'd gone off by myself, exploring the pond's edge. I wrote about it in a Language Arts assignment whose story I'll relate now.

The assignment, you see, was to write a story. As far as I can recall, it was supposed to be a true story, of something that had really happened. I wrote of finding myself in danger.

That winter there had been an event of some kind, a Sunday afternoon skating event, on a pond up at the end of the road on which my family then lived. Parents and children were skating about near the middle of the pond; but I noticed all the space around them. There was a whole circumference to be explored, far from the centre of things where everybody was skating. Off I went, excited, called to discover the shape of the pond.

The story I wrote for Miss Fitzhenry would have begun with my decision to skate all the way around the edge of the pond, and not with any comment on the frame of mind prompting me to do so. It was just so, I am sure I meant to suggest; my adventure had begun. I wrote of how I'd started skating alone around the edge of the pond, the voices of parents and other children covered over with the scraping of my skates on the ice. I must have written of how clear the ice looked beneath me, how dark the waters beneath the ice; how lovely it was to skim along, a few metres from where trees lined the bank next to the pond. I must have described the spot I was coming to, at full speed, when the ice started to crack. I'm sure I described the cracking sound—coming first from directly below me, then a moment later from different spots all around me. My story was about to reach its crisis as I told of trying to stop, to turn around.

The ice had broken and I'd gone under for a moment. Maybe the water wasn't all that deep, but I couldn't touch bottom. I found myself clinging to the edge of the hole in the ice, with more of this cracking sound on one side as I tried to pull myself out. I called for help. I think it was one of the bigger Boswell boys who heard me and came over, got a stick of some kind, laid flat on his belly on the ice as close as he could get, and managed to haul me out.

I wrote with the satisfaction of a survivor about how good the bath had felt after my parents had whisked me home. I might have written of the colour of my skin before the bath, but anyway I remember writing of how good the bath felt. And that might have been about the end of my story. I decorated the page with a little illustration, in colour-pencil, of me hanging on at the edge of a hole in the ice, jagged cracks seeming to emanate from it, and a speech-balloon inscribed HELP!

I gave it to Miss Fitzhenry thinking I'd managed a pretty fair representation of something that had happened to me. I'd told a true story. Or had the assignment been for a fiction, and was I then feeling satisfied at having told an exciting story, even though it wasn't pure invention but a simple representation of something that had really happened? I only really remember the feeling of satisfaction. I'd expressed myself, given the chance.

I am telling this story now because I remember what Miss Fitzhenry said. Or rather, I'm writing this story now because I don't remember what Miss Fitzhenry said.⁴ I don't actually remember if it was supposed to be a true story or not, and I don't remember whether Miss Fitzhenry was telling me I should have changed some of the details around, made it more exciting (in which case the assignment had been to make something up), or what. What I do remember is the feeling that she hadn't believed me, hadn't taken me seriously, had taken her red pencil and marked what I guess she thought was wrong with my story. As if she'd know, I thought: she hadn't been there. Well, it wasn't the end of the world. It never really is, in my experience.

I went on enjoying spelling bees and rushing through my Math work so I could go to the back of the classroom and read books about Mme Curie, Johnny Appleseed and the Roosevelts, about the Ugly Duckling, about the Graeco-Roman pantheon and the solar system. From these re/searches I remember finding it easy to prepare a report on Mercury, illustrated and bundled in a purple Duo-Tang folder. But it would be

awhile before I tried writing my heart out again, before I tried getting it right, or showing what the life I lived was like. I'd go to the reading corner in the back of the room because that was the other place I could be. Miss Fitzhenry would come by my vacant desk to see if I'd correctly finished my day's problems; she'd check for mistakes with her red pencil, call me back to my desk if she found any.

[How many kids in that class were learning, then, to slow down and hold back from finishing their Math work before others? I only remember being alone on the mat at the back of the room.]

Conclusions: Fragments, Maps, Invitations

Lived experience is fragmented (may feel fragmentary) but through interpretation finds connection to a whole. Such a production of meaning is deliberate from the outset in the creative and interpretative act. (Or, at any rate, it's never not de/liberate/d.) Caillois (1942) argued that it is from a place of fundamental fragmentation that the novel is generated. Derrida's (1989) equivocal explanation of the deconstructive reading foregrounded the fragment (p. 18), but did not leave the fragment in isolation. While meaning is fragmented, fragments can be placed in a series, an interpretive move toward coherence. Thus, it is possible to say that lived experiences in their interconnections have a kind of wholeness, a kind of coherence, an ongoing sense of relationship: even when interpreting (or seeking) an event or an object, researchers look for an explanation, and in so doing an event becomes a phenomenon, a theme, perhaps even a discovery.

Lived experienced, perhaps because of its combined fragmentation and wholeness, generates theorizing; Salvio (2007), following Gilmore (2001, pp. 60-67), reminds us that autobiography is theory. (Theories, however speculative, are also theories of lived experiences). Britzman (2004) works from autobiographical fragments of memory in her

educational research. She says she uses her “early days of learning to teach as a means to raise thorny questions” (p. 254). (For us, as well—now language teachers in our own ways—it’s what we may call formative experiences that we turn to, reflect and polish. We see ourselves in a mirror.)

Lacan’s (1977) account (of the production of meaning through metaphor and metonymy) provides a theoretical language through which to explore fragments of experience through chains of meaning. The above narrative accounts illustrate the interweaving of metonymic (substituting) and metaphoric (transferring) chains of signification, of fragments of lived experience. In short, metaphorical substitutions inevitably arise which cover over gaps and discontinuities. The simultaneous telling (which is always an interpretive retelling) situates lived fragments within chains of signification in the immediacy of people, place, and intention. Such processes disrupt each narrative context and foreground speculations and metonymic associations that reveal not only the many intersections and overlaps of narrative fragments, but also the always incomplete lived experiences which necessitate ongoing telling and retelling.

Our hope is that the intention of what could be called *looking into the mirror of narrating a lived experience* allows a fuller account of the fragments we unearth (and produce) in our speculations and shifting contexts of meaning. Additionally, our consideration of the inevitable metonymic and metaphoric coherence which arises from lived fragments draws our attention to the closing down of meanings inherent to all acts of telling.

Creating Worlds, Changing Names

“I believe one writes because one has to create a world in which to live.” (Nin, quoted from Oakley, 1984 by Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 746)

Seeking to tell one story, we tell another. One story demands, deserves another. The scene is not set until you have told a story. But whose stories are we then telling? Whose stories can we tell, and to whom?

Mapping out a place, of home and school, where place and stories are made to order, ordered to match, we arrive at the schema, the schematic map. Yet, if we don't really arrive back at the physical places we can recall, there remains the question of returning to the question: what does the ground itself chart? This appears fully in keeping with the idea of exploring new territory in our field. The map folds and unfolds with surface irregularities and ruptures. Can these be the holes which Leggo (2005, p. 197) says we may write into our lives as we “compose and attend to surface discontinuities, these holes that are connected to the expansive and abundant space of the world”? Where, in all this, is the curriculum hidden?

You may find yourself imagining one place and also at least two different places, when seeking relation in the map we invite you to imagine. The legend, the inscription, interprets for the reader a mapmaker's intention: that symbols in the mind's eye may be assigned specific values. Here, amongst spatial relations, we draw your attention in sequence—to homes where band students practice as we run past at dawn; to a publishing house over the hills and far away; to a university where those who love writing the most will warn us that the love of writing can be beaten out of us in the relatively short course of four years; to a river, a softball diamond, a classroom marked with assessment and a kind of test kitchen—all embraced with forests, ponds, winters and waters freezing over. Whether the map itself contains or points out blind spots, places we have yet to explore—this is a question

for the mind's eye in memory. Is any such gap, or the spot where the map is a little torn, worn out at the crease we've reinforced by repeating the folding and unfolding—is this as captious (keeping in mind the thin ice we may be on) as when we hold the map open and clear our throat, about to read out, for all to hear, what it is that we can see? Is the expectoration a sign of the good health we hold in our dearest expectations as teachers? Do we know, except from experience, that it is possible to walk on thin ice, or on fragments of broken glass? Is the walk the same in each instance of uncertainty, of deferred sentence? If walking on a map gets us no further than would walking on a flag or a crucifix, do we ever really know how we walk at all? Balzac once pointed out that very little is known about how we walk. If this is the issue of an age inaugurated with such words, is it a matter of retracing our steps before we can say we've found the point of happy issue for the matter at hand? There is a *démarche*, and then there is a promenade. For all of this, the matter of the story, the process of finding where stories come from, remains dear to our heart, our health.

In autoethnography place is a tentative surface on which to, first as where our stories (even by a seeming sleight of hand, a slight abstraction as brief as a story) take place; in so doing we give place to other stories, to stories of others whom the stories need. There is always a meeting-place, a rendezvous; we set a place at the table (for *le pauvre*, as one story or custom goes; another reserves a place for the dead whom we mean to honour.)

If finding a way through experience is in this way an ethical concern, there is also a question of that other approach to objective truth, aesthetics—the interest in what may be perceived, especially as this relates to beauty. “Beauty is truth”, said the ancient Greek urn to the passing generations, and “truth beauty,—that is all/ Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know” (Keats, 1820/1908/1990, p. 210). We even tell our stories in part remembering a long tradition, to please and to

instruct. The representations we make of our lives may be useful in this way.

If its prime goal is to be true to life in a unique way, writing down a story, a history, can even be seen as a life-or-death struggle. "Human history," said Kojève (1969, p. 6) for his part, "is the history of desired Desires." The struggle in life enacts itself in the constant confrontation of our many hearts' desires. We want what you want. We want you to want us. We want your want, your recognition of our want. Or, if semantics are not out of place here, we seek remembrance in humanity, not merely reactivation of cogs as in an ignition. We want Anerkennung.⁵ We want you to remember our history, the story of our actions, our doings and makings. These stories in our lives are the work of our human becoming. We do not live, as human beings, without stories.

Welcome. We speak as teachers, not only in our classrooms. We write as authors, displacing our seeming selves and our past selves as we reflect on becoming what we can be. We walk, or run roughshod, on the terrain that we do best to know, even if there is no terrain that we know best. We believe that this lends well to the conversation in which we call each other to partake.

Notes

¹ Or we are like the resourceful hostages in television dramas, freeing ourselves or each other. Or our past is like the boat we moor in its place down at the harbour, once we have mastered the knots by which to do so.

² We cite Davis (1995) to acknowledge her influence on our thinking, and with that, hope to bring attention to the possibility of her work for informing ethnographic studies in the social sciences: "Is it that when these events are in chronological order they are not propelled forward by cause and effect, by need and satisfaction, they do not spring ahead with

their own energy but are simply dragged forward by the passage of time?" (Davis, 1995, p. 99).

³ Is there an echo here, a posthorn ergo propter horn? An incidental translation we've made of Eduard Mörike's "Auf der Reise" calls for offering at this point.

On the Way

Either in sweet torment,
Either in dull tranquility
I sit nightly in the old Pathfinder,
Am carried so far from you, my Heart,
Far and always farther away.

Silent I sit and alone,
I hold myself in colours in dreams,
The lively post horn rings in them,
& dances the dear moonlight
Along this tone off fresh springs and off tall trees,
& yet to me through window's opening.

I wish myself now this and that.
O could I now, then, through magic mirror
In the goldspun fabric gaze upon your dreams!
Maybe then I'd see deeper in my delight
You in the bower wellbeknownst,
I'd see the enjoyment in hand
At your shoulder called and lingering,
Until I saw my proper self,
Half bold and half joyful-filling,
Nestled up against your lovely cheek.

But no! since I may also just hope,
That now my shadow's with you!
Ah, if your dreams only stood open for me,
I'm sure you'd beckon and watch over me!

Listen. Attend. Respond. There are forests, ponds, streams, winters, waters freezing over in the kind of place we describe. It is not a metropolitan kind of place, but remains cosmopolitan, carrying for instance gendered expectations. It is not historical places, makes no

appeal to historicity of place. It is metaphorical and existential and phenomenological. Here are metaphorical and existential and phenomenological truths, perhaps; or perhaps essayed accuracies would be the better word here. Here, above all, may be entelechy: the form of the living body; that by which we have understanding that can (be) separate and (put) together. An end, a telos—cause—aim—realization—perfection—accomplishment—and so on. Tell us. Spill it. Spell it out.

⁴ “I’m not willing to invent very much. Most things are kept as they were. Maybe I can’t think what to put in place of the truth. Maybe I just have a poor imagination” (Davis, 1995, p. 50).

⁵ —acknowledgement, recognition—see Kojève’s definition of humanity: “The man who desires a thing humanly acts not so much to possess the thing as to make another recognize his right . . . to that thing, to make another recognize him as the owner of the thing. And he does this—in the final analysis—in order to make the other recognize his superiority over the other. It is only Desire of such a Recognition (Anerkennung), it is only Action that flows from such a Desire, that creates, realizes, and reveals a human, non-biological I” (Kojève, 1947/1969, p. 40).

References

- Beckett, S. (1994). *Waiting for Godot: A tragicomedy in two acts*. New York, NY: Grove. (Original work published in 1952)
- Belle & Sebastian (2000). *I fought in a war. On Fold your hands child, you walk like a peasant* [CD]. London, UK: Jeepster.
- Binyon, L. (1917). “For the fallen.” *The cause: Poems of the war*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.
- Block, A.A. (1998). ‘And he pretended to be a stranger to them . . .’: Maxine Greene and Teacher as stranger. In W.F. Pinar (Ed.), *The passionate mind of Maxine Greene: ‘I am . . . not yet’* (pp. 14–29). London, UK: Falmer.

- Britzman, D. (2004). Monsters in literature. *College English*, 11(2), 253-265.
- Caillois, Roger. (1942) *Puissances du roman*. Marseille, FR: Sagittaire.
- Chambers, C. (2008). Where are we? Finding common ground in a curriculum of place. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 6(2), 113-128.
- Conrad, J. (1988). Heart of darkness. In R. Kimbrough (Ed.), *Heart of darkness: An authoritative text; Backgrounds and sources; Criticism* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: Norton. (Original work published 1899).
- Davis, L. (1995). *The End of the Story*. New York, NY: Picador.
- Deleuze G. (1995). *Negotiations, 1972-1990* (M. Joughin, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia. (Original work published 1990).
- Deleuze, G., & Parnet, C. (2002). *Dialogues II* (H. Tomlinson & B. Habberjam, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Derrida, J (1989). *Memoires for Paul de Man* (C. Lindsay, J. Culler, E. Cadava, and P. Kamuf, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University.
- Derrida, (1994). *Spectres of Marx* (P. Kamuf, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge.
- Eisner, E.W. (1996). Should a novel count as a dissertation in education? *Research in the Teaching of English*, 30(4), 403-427.
- Ellis, C., & Bochner, A.P. (2000). Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject. In N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 733-68). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Gilmore, L. (2001). *The limits of autobiography: Trauma, testimony, theory*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Gruenewald, D.A. (2003). Foundations of place: A multidisciplinary framework for place-conscious education. *American Educational Research Journal*, 40(3), 619-645.
- Kierkegaard, S. (1983). Fear and Trembling. In H.V. Hong & E.H. Hong (Ed. & Trans.). *Fear and trembling/Repetition: Kierkegaard's writings*, VI. Princeton, NJ: UP. (Original work published 1843)

- Lacan, J. (1977). *The four fundamental concepts of psycho-analysis* (J.-A. Miller, Ed., A. Sheridan, Trans.). New York, NY: Norton. (Original work published 1973)
- Ledwell, F.J. (2004). *Island sketchbook*. Charlottetown, PEI: Acorn.
- Leggo, C. (2005). An archipelago of fragments. *Men & Masculinities*, 8(2), 195-207.
- MacDonald, C. (2010). *Letters, home: (Re)Constructing my place in language teaching*. Unpublished master's thesis, University of Prince Edward Island, Charlottetown, PEI, Canada.
- Mann, T. (1969). *The Magic Mountain*. (H.T. Lowe-Porter, Trans.). New York, NY: Vintage. (Original work published 1924)
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1989). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). London, UK: Routledge. (Original work published in 1962)
- Merritt, S. (2010). *Always already gone. On Realism* [record]. New York, NY: Nonesuch.
- Murakami, H. (2009). The novelist in wartime. *Salon*. Retrieved February 18, 2011, from http://www.salon.com/books/feature/2009/02/20/haruki_murakami.
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Pinar W.F. (2004). *What is curriculum theory?* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Salvio, P. (2007). *Anne Sexton: Teacher of weird abundance*. Albany, NY: SUNY.
- Schwandt, T.A. (2001). *Dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Thompson, T.L. (2007). Finding ourselves in a predicament: Now what do I do? *Phenomenology & Practice*, 1(1), 97-1

