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Brett Sillers

Who will be the throat of these hours...if not I, if not you?

for the 2 am Collective

Rishma Dunlop
York University

Beginnings

thinking of the poet
yet unborn in this dark
who will be the throat of these hours
...if not I,
if not you?

Muriel Rukeyser [1]

Journal Entry

July 2, 2002

I enter the classroom at the University of British Columbia. First class of a Graduate Seminar on *Women, Writing and Imagination: Curriculum as Aesthetic Text*. A friend of mine, a poet, inquired about this title when he saw the course syllabus I was proposing to the Centre for the Study of Curriculum and Instruction...“You mean you can propose this and teach it?” “Yes, and I do,” I responded. “we invent what we desire.”

Strange sensation being back at UBC as a Visiting Professor, two years after completing my Ph.D. at this university. It feels like home, a familiar landscape of verdant trees and lush gardens, the scent of the ocean along Marine Drive.

The graduate students are all women. I introduce myself and then ask participants to introduce themselves. Introductions. The act of naming selves...*Sari, Emma, Nicola, Liisa, Shannon, Ranjit, Lien,*

Danielle, Jodi, Karin, Lara, Maricel, Eileen, Lori, Nadia, Jacqui, Monique, Debra. One woman named Liisa had been introduced to my poetry by a colleague of mine at UBC, Marlene Asselin. Liisa told me that my poem “Waltz” was read at her wedding. I am immensely moved by this, the notion of my poem included in the ceremonies and rituals of love. Amazed also at the ways in which individuals’ narratives connect and intersect the stories and lives of others.

A woman named Nicola introduces herself, speaks about the readings I have asked them to prepare for class – Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own* and Louise De Salvo’s article: “Portrait of the Puttana as a Middle-Aged Woolf Scholar.” [2] She tells us that in these readings she has begun to make connections between Virginia Woolf’s narratives, and suicide, De Salvo’s writings, and the suicide of her own mother. She tells us her mother committed suicide, walked into Heart Lake with a rock hung around her neck.

The room falls silent. All I can hear are the loud air fans blowing cold air into the classroom. After a pause, we continue the last few introductions. Now, in this place, in this time, I wonder, what do we perceive of each other? Despite the startling nature of Nicola’s revelation on this first day together, it seems to fit, given the nature of the readings I have chosen for this teaching/learning journey. This curriculum, *curriculum vitae*, this course of our lives. It is a disruption, rupture of the careful discourse of university classrooms, as appropriate a place as any to begin. Perhaps this course will be a navigation, a reading/writing of narratives moving between a waltz of love and a mother’s suicide.

I leave the class that day with the image of Nicola’s mother walking into still waters, stones around her throat. Something turns inside me and I know this class will be a deeply emotional space, curriculum of the emotional. I hope that it will transgress boundaries in ways that acknowledge the darkness and light of human knowing and living. I am struck with the impression of these women as individuals of courage. A new generation of women writers/academics. A classroom full of hope, faith, and possibility. I hope that our learning and teaching here may in some ways embody hope and beauty, pushing at the existing order of things, silence made speech. A woman’s throat opened into voice.

Towards a Theory of Beauty, Aesthetics and Living Curriculum

Theoria [L. *theoria*, a theory, from Gr. *Theoria*, a looking at, from *theoreo*, to see, from *theoros*, an observer.] A supposition explaining something; a doctrine or scheme of things resting merely on speculation; hypothesis; plan or system suggested...

Beauty the quality attributed to whatever pleases the senses or mind, as by line, colour, form, texture, proportion, rhythmic motion, tone, etc., or by behaviour, attitude, etc.

Aesthetic adj. [Gr. *Aisthetikos*, sensitive, *aisthanesthai*, to perceive IE. base *awis-*, hence akin to L. *audire*, to hear] 1. Of or in relation to aesthetics 2. Of beauty 3. Sensitive to art and beauty; showing good taste; artistic.

Curriculum [L. *lit.*, a running course, race, career < *currere*, to run. 1. A fixed series of studies required, as in a college, for graduation, qualification in a major field of study, etc. 2. All of the courses collectively, offered in a school, college, etc., or in a particular subject.

Curriculum vitae [L., course of a life] summary of one’s personal history and professional qualifications. As that submitted by a job applicant; *résumé*.

Women, Writing and Imagination: Curriculum as Aesthetic Text. Through the course readings of women’s writings, including genres of memoir, autobiography, testimonial, poetry, personal essay, and the explorations of a wide range of writing practices and forms of creative/academic writing, course

participants created writing portfolios to reflect and record the collaborative and individual experiences in the seminar. My impulse is to envision curriculum as a living, breathing course of a life, a curriculum vitae, one that embodies aesthetics as the study or theory of beauty and of the psychological responses to it. Specifically, as aesthetics is a philosophy that deals with art, its creative sources, and its effects, the course is concerned with how curriculum might be envisioned and enriched by such a framework in the context of women writers in academia.

Participants in the seminar experimented in multiple genres, moving from responses to readings, trying memoir entries, personal essays, poetry. I invited them to envision the course as a journey through a *jardins d'essais* to appropriate Rimbaud's term. Wandering through a garden of attempts, our writing practices envisioned in the context of the French verb *essayer*, to attempt, to try.

Our experiences led the 18 participants, along with the professor, from theorizing about writing practices through shared readings and writings to the production of a collaborative writing project of inquiry on the possibilities of women's writing in the academy. *Choreopoem, a poem for a chorus of voices*. We title the poem: "She Tries Her Tongue: A Blueprint for Women's Collaborative Writing." *Multiple. Many-voiced lyric hum*. In our culminating writing practice in our course, we created a poem for the performance of 19 voices, a poem that explores the nature of women's writing. Performative, aesthetic text, research inquiry created through the processes of a collaborative endeavor. The work has generated collaborative conference presentation proposals that include dialogues and debates about feminist collaborative processes, as well as performances of the collaborative work. The effect of our experiences together in this particular community has been profound. A unique alchemy seemed to develop among this group of women, a diverse group from vastly differing racial, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds and at different stages of academic studies and careers as educators. Our classroom became fertile ground for intellectual and creative discussion. I looked forward to every day – an immense gift for a professor. In the intense, truncated three week format of summer session, we learned to treasure our daily hours together and the course led to the formation of a reading/writing collective, *The 2am Collective*, that has continued after the culmination of the course. As Monique Richoux. wrote in her journal about leaving the classroom one day: "I felt I had left a time and place of magic and beauty. Our course at UBC...the beauty – not the room, but the discourse."[\[3\]](#)

As we now work on shaping conference presentations and performances, the focus of our inquiries and presentations of collaborative writing projects will be to illuminate the value and quality possible in women's collaborative writing as a method of curriculum inquiry, while also exposing the difficulties in such a process in academia. Feminist scholarship that upholds collaboration is investigated in consideration of the difficulties academic systems of hierarchies and competition impose upon women scholars. Perspectives included in our inquiries are derived from theories of feminist life writing, [\[4\]](#) numerous cultural studies approaches to the teaching of writing, literary theory, as well as perspectives drawn from fine arts disciplines, aesthetics, philosophy, as well as writing workshop methods as modes of educational inquiry. Beginning with a reading of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, feminist and curricular theorizing emerged from readings of Adrienne Rich, Eavan Boland, Audre Lorde, Bronwen Wallace, Ursula LeGuin, Nancy Mairs, bell hooks, as well as numerous other women poets and artists included in course readings.

As professor of the seminar, I also became part of the collaborative community, becoming involved and implicated in the risk-taking in my invitation to graduate researchers to engage in collaborative process, as well as in the difficulties inherent in such an undertaking. Our work led to explorations of the difficulties encountered with evaluation in academia of such aesthetic research endeavors. From my perspective, to approach what might be envisioned as radical revision of human community [\[5\]](#) within the context of academic communities, the perspectives and methods used in the course and in our presentations reflect a collaborative interrogation of what constitutes belonging in writing, in curriculum, and in the perceptions of self and other in community. Methods of inquiry and presentation

include multivocal presentations of debates, struggles, and pleasure that emerged from the collaborative writing process. Additionally, performances of the choreopoem produced for 19 voices, demonstrate the possibilities and power of such a form of inquiry for educational research. Collaborative presentations of our work illuminate differing points of view of participants and the negotiations that ensued to produce the choreopoem as a form of inquiry and theorizing about curriculum as aesthetic text. *Many-throated lyric hum.*

Poems are theories,
carving scars of memory
into the world's body,
on the long spine of history.

Datum: Choreopoem as Inquiry on Women's Collaborative Writing

pl data. [L] Something given or admitted; some fact, proposition, quantity, or condition granted or known, from which other facts, propositions, etc., are to be deduced.

Data sources for our inquiry and for future collaborative presentations are participants' journal entries, course writings from process portfolios, conversations between participants, and the final collaborative choreopoem titled: "She Tries Her Tongue: A Blueprint for Women's Collaborative Writing." The choreopoem is available to be shared with audiences after presentations in writing as well as in audiotape form.

Our intentions were to identify writing itself and collaborative writing as inquiry, building community as a form of pedagogy, considering the creative process as a research object, focusing on the learner and insisting on the significance of doing this work in academia. The choreopoem we created becomes the data, embodying our intents, embodying the nature of our inquiry.

The Poem as A New Field of Vision: This Writing as (Re)vision and Bordercrossing

I can expect a reader to feel my limits as I cannot, in terms of her or his own landscape, to ask: But what has this to do with me? Do I exist in this poem? We go to poetry because we believe it has something to do with us. We also go to poetry to receive the experience of the not me, enter a field of vision we could not otherwise apprehend.

Adrienne Rich [\[6\]](#)

Participants see the choreopoem for multiple voices as reflective of a collaborative process that led to the formation of a unique community of writers/scholars. The choreopoem provides a powerful form for feminist theorizing, one that admits agency and voice to all members of a writing and researching community. This said, a caution about feminist theorizing. Feminism as a compelling ethic that seeks to rectify inequities for women is a necessary, central concern for society. However, just as we may be convinced of its central value, feminism is not an aesthetic. All art begins in the locations where certainty ends. Poetry begins here, deeply rooted in the ambiguities, blood rememberings, human obsessions and desires that cannot embody ethics, but may be capable of measures of truth. Slippery words. Debatable distinctions. Feminism may help us envision ourselves in society differently, define ourselves as writers. But the place in which a poem begins, this is a dark margin, ambiguous, born of the imagination, of an impulse towards beauty, a way of knowing unclaimable by any "ism."

Sometimes, our readings led to openings out of darkness. Two seminar participants responded to a poem

by Bronwen Wallace [7] about battered women with stories of their own abuse. Their silences are broken only in the form of poetry, a poetry that narrates and witnesses – the poem we read together and the poems they have written and share with us to speak about their experiences. Poems speaking what they could not say otherwise. As our readings of Audre Lorde’s essays “Poetry is not a Luxury,” and “The Transformation of Silence into Action” revealed, our poems could be transformations of silences into action. [8] As Lorde wrote:

...poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experience of our daily lives. [9]

Represented in the terrible true story, in the telling and retelling, is the possible imagining of a different reality. What may be perceived as intolerable can become the medium of its own transformation, through the beauty of the medium, the art, the poetry, through the poet’s love for the art and medium of poetry. This notion is reinforced by our reading of Adrienne Rich who writes:

At a certain point, a woman writing this poem, has had to reckon the power of poetry as distinct from the power of the nuclear bomb, of the radioactive lessons of her planet, the power of poverty to reduce people to spectators of distantly conjured events. She can't remain a spectator. [10]

Words are being set down in a force field. [11] The choreopoem can be envisioned as a form that succeeds in embodying and expressing concerns that integrate the personal and the political as inextricably intertwined. The form of inquiry enabled dialogic exchanges that spoke across the vast differences of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and socio-cultural and linguistic backgrounds of this learning and teaching community. In addition, the presentations in various forms of this collaborative work are driven by the collective desire to illuminate the innovative and far reaching possibilities of collaborative writing process as method of inquiry, one that enriches our visions of what constitutes knowledge, scholarship, curriculum, and community.

Grapho [Gr. I write]: Writing Together

Cartography

I once believed that one word had the power to change things. That language was a skin we could inhabit. Now I know that the poet’s exile is pure sound at the edges of the world’s body.

Country, nation, history. I am changing the story. My hand is moving across your page and it is in the mapping of your bones and sinews that I find the words: *grief, love, beauty, testament.*

Your mouth yields the vermilion fruit of the word *home.* Let me die here.

Rishma Dunlop [12]

As part of our daily experiments with writing practices and genres for academic/creative writing, I asked participants to respond to an essay by poet Adrienne Rich in *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics*. The essay is titled “Someone is writing a poem.” I then asked them to use as a writing prompt, the line *Somewhere, a woman is writing a poem*, to generate a poem. I wanted writers to consider our readings of Eavan Boland’s work in *Object Lessons: The History of the Woman Poet in Our Times*. I wanted them to consider her words about writing in her poem “What Language Did”:

Write us out of the poem.
Make us human
in cadences of change and mortal pain
and words we can grow old and die in. [\[13\]](#)

Difficulty: The Contested Space of Women’s Collaboration

The Claim of Philia

[Gr. Philos, loving]

In the act,
sword scrawls of ink
dark pools
staining uncharted sheets,
imprint the struggle,
the tip prying
open the chambers,
spitting out the heart
through the slant of tongue.

Rishma Dunlop [\[14\]](#)

Someone is writing a poem. Words are being set down in a force field.

Adrienne Rich [\[15\]](#)

Collaboration. Collaborate, from collaborare, to work together especially in some literary, artistic, or scientific undertaking. The following day, each participant brought their pieces of writing and shared them orally. We then proceeded to work in collaborative response groups, then editing and revising to create a collaborative poem that included all our voices. The first session went well. I gave specific guidelines for working in peer editing groups in a Writing Workshop format. Participants seem to enjoy the session, constructive feedback is offered and the writing community seems excited about what we are doing.

July 11, 2002. Second day of peer editing. I have now suggested that we take this collaborative poem of linked stanzas a step further, suggesting we publish the piece in *Educational Insights*. The editing session is not as comfortable. In retrospect, I realized that I did not repeat or reinforce the guidelines for peer editing that I had provided in our first session. I made the assumption that we were now experienced at the process of responding to the writing of others in our community. Words like “honouring” and “valuing” get slippery as we try to produce a “product” for publication. I am struck by how easily we slip out of pleasure and joy, at the sheer enjoyment of creativity, into the traps of what is required and perceived as academic writing. One woman reacts to my critique by removing herself from the collaborative process, leaves the room. Silenced. I have silenced her. This culpability mine. I try to

“fix” the situation, talk to her in the hallway, apologize. The day ends in discomfort, a difficult location for me after the days of beauty I have been experiencing with these women.

I spend the night, sleepless, interrogating my own teaching, my own motives. I believe that education must be a process of questioning our own assumptions constantly, revising our positions so that we can connect with other hearts and minds in ways that open us to the possibilities of the beautiful, a thought, an impulse, a word, an entire language that might strike us like a shooting star. This means that the difficult, the terrifying, is also sustained and honored as integral to the journey.

The next morning, I addressed the class quietly, told them my thoughts, my willingness to put the collaborative poem aside if that is what they chose. I wanted participants to know that the publication was not a driving goal for me. What is central to my teaching practice is the desire to extend each writer’s sense of what is possible. As a professor, my hope is to create the conditions for a learning community in which this impulse of expanding each others’ sense of possibilities is sustained relationally between us. In this way, desire and daily life meet in a location of promise that enables us to speak to each other in ways that are sensuously vital, deeply alive, full of embodied knowledge. Writing becomes an act of faith.

What had inspired me so feverishly was what I saw in that classroom in the basement of the Scarfe Education Building at The University of British Columbia. A community of women, a new generation of writers/academics who upheld such promise. My own doctoral experience was still so new, completed only two years ago at this same university. It had been an unconventional journey, one in which my identity as poet and fiction writer pushed at the conventions of identity of academic researcher. My dissertation had been a novel, *Boundary Bay* [16], the first to be accepted as a dissertation in a Faculty of Education in Canada. I felt that these women/writers/academics were my legacy in some way, those who might choose uncommon steps, forging new ways of writing and being.

My self-interrogation about ethics, of ethical ways of being in the academy, as a professor, leads me to believe that ethics are contained in how we speak with one another, how the conversation is negotiated. An ethical position is held in the “how” of this new ground, in the uncoercive rearranging of desire. In our quest for new literacies, living literacies, the notion of privilege is not useful, rather, what is vitally important is the focus on imagining what we know, admitting our phenomenological worlds, making the public sphere visible through an ethic of democratic dialogue. As Gayatri Spivak states, this is a vision of literacy as an intuition of the public sphere. [17]

Everyone took their turn speaking. The woman who had left the classroom in response to my critique told me there was nothing to “fix.” The fact that we were all back in the same room, everyone speaking, working through our perceptions as a community was proof of this. Although discomfort and dissent were voiced, in the end the decision was made that we were indeed in a process of collaboration. What we had created was in itself proof. Our writing together took us to a location where the possibility of the ethical moment was contained in the exchanges and dialogues between us as individuals. This ethical moment then extends its possibility outwards to public and collective realms. It may not have occurred with consensus at all times, however, no community worth building is devoid of struggle or difficult knowing. The challenge of collaboration asked us to acknowledge we were not experts at this. As Nicola Doughty wrote: “There is not an expert among us in this process of collaboration. Just open hands, open hearts...stumbling. Together.” [18] We were laying new ground. *Terra nova*. Feeling our way, falteringly, disrupting academic ground. Together.

...someone writing a poem believes in, depends on a delicate, vibrating range of difference, that an “I” can become a “we” without extinguishing others, that a partly common language exists to which strangers can bring their own heartbeat, memories, images. A language that itself has learned from the heartbeat, memories, images of strangers.

Adrienne Rich [\[19\]](#)

This classroom is where we have made the work meet our lives. As poet Eavan Boland writes:

There were times when I sat down at that table, or came up the stairs, my key in my hand, to open the door well after midnight, when I missed something. I wanted a story. I wanted to read or hear the narrative of someone else – a woman and a poet – who had gone here, and been there. Who had lifted a kettle to a gas stove. Who had set her skirt out over a chair, near to the clothes dryer, to have it without creases for the morning. Who had made the life meet the work and had set it down: the difficulties and rewards; the senses of lack. I remember thinking that it need not be perfect or important. Just there; just available. And I have remembered that. [\[20\]](#)

Journal Entry

July 19, 2002

Last class. I have written a letter and poem for the class which I read to them. Then we perform and tape-record our poem, performing it as a choreopoem with all our voices. Many voices and tears intermingling. When Emma reads, even those who are dry-eyed are moved intensely. I glance over to Sari and glimpse her new entry in her journal for July 19. She writes:

And finally, tears. Emma reads from her verse in our collaborative poem and I am struck, as in heart-convulsed, with the power of what we have all shared, known, learned and accomplished together. And the biggest part of the gift that this class has been is that today doesn't feel like an ending—rather, a beginning.

Sari Weintraub [\[21\]](#)

We are surprised by our own writings, the places of knowing these writings transported us to and how they connected us with knowledge of others, other locations, other ways of thinking and perceiving. Astonish me, I said to my students at the beginning of the course. And they did. We astonished each other. The astonishing weight of new knowledge. I am reminded of Adrienne Rich's words: "What poetry is made of is so old, so familiar, that it's easy to forget that it's not just words, but polyrhythmic sounds, speech in its first endeavors (every poem breaks a silence that had to be overcome), prismatic meanings lit by each others' light, stained by each others' shadows. [\[22\]](#)

A beginning, *heart-convulsed*.

Coda

Let her have her liturgy of wet vowels and syllables.
Let her be the throat of these hours.

Rishma Dunlop [\[23\]](#)

November 26, 2002, Toronto

First flakes of snow falling softly across the city skyline. A winter scene like a child's snowglobe outside my window as I write. My office at York piled high with the end of the semester marking. I read the poem I wrote for the 2am Collective titled "Breathing Lessons" and it takes me back to this past summer at The

University of British Columbia, to that classroom in the Scarfe Building. I am reading my journal entry on that last day of class, and the poem I read to the seminar on our last day together. The words remind me of who I am, of who I want to be with others, and of how much this teaching, writing, collaborating experience, moved me, transformed me.

July 18, 2002, Journal Entry

Last day of our course tomorrow. Long past midnight, emotional. I want to write something to say goodbye to my students tomorrow. Difficult to find the words to describe the experience of being with them these past intense three weeks. The classroom as location of light and beauty. I am searching for words that are morning-stirred. I want them to feel Derek Walcott's notion that for poets it is always morning in the world. [24] I want them to feel as if it is always morning in the world. Let them hear what the dawn says. Let them feel this way, dawn-flushed and renewed by the sensibility that education itself can be an openness to beauty and that this recognition can change us.

Breathing Lessons

*Graduate Seminar on Women, Writing, and Imagination
University of British Columbia, July 19, 2002*

Somewhere, together in a classroom,
women are reading, writing their lives.
In their homes, they leave the press and
weight of chores and lovers and children,
houses of madness and rage and wounds and love.

Here, the early morning light,
the fragrance of coffee,
streams through their bones, dust motes
meeting the conditions of their days.
The sun warms them, bone-deep into the words.

They write, tentative, trying their tongues until
their voices rise above whispers, creating maps of
stars and dreams, prayers like moving water, fierce
and tender, poems singing mad love from their spines.

Somehow, they are bound together.
In these hours, silence becomes speech, in
voices of honey and stone, poems cupping the
insides of their throats milk-washed with ink.

This is knowledge, born of the
scorched root of their own furious
loves, their words breathing them
onto the pages ahead.

Somewhere, together in a classroom
women are writing poems
sparks flying from their fingers.

Terra nova. Full-throated.

Postscript

Professor's notebooks. Woman poet in the ivory tower. Conversations, dialogues with my students, with myself, with the 2am collective, this new community we are becoming. Subversive tongue. Grammar of blood and bones and milk. Ungrammatical. Essaying the feminine. Writing through the academy. We have shared the making, our hearts and frequencies have been altered. This is palpable. I can taste it. No endings but beginnings. This, then, becomes poetry, a location for the beautiful, for convulsive beauty, the surrealist manifesto of Andre Breton in which oppositional forces reside alongside each other. Beauty that is often difficult, falling just short of fear. For this is radical revision of academic community. No hierarchy of first authors. Research/writing collective, born of the morning hours. Willful suspension of ego, trust is enabled to spread like honey. Intensity, passion and commitment. A new geography is born. A shifting, complex space. Radical, idealistic, worth preserving. The poem as revolution. The woman poet as revolutionary.

2am Dedications: Considering Possibilities of Collaborative Writing as Inquiry

For Danielle, Lori, Jodi, Nicola, Eileen, Jacqui, Nadia, Liisa, Maricel, Lara, Emma, Shannon, Ranjit, Monique, Karin, Lien, Sari, Debra

We are left with further questions. What does collaborative inquiry offer us? What does it make possible? How might this inquiry extend our sense of possibilities, our ways of knowing and reading/writing the world?

Collaboration. Collaborate, from *collaborare*, to work together especially in some literary, artistic, or scientific undertaking. I am reminded of the Korean monks who used to write linked verse together, each poet contributing a couplet on a meditative topic. Poetry as a form of prayer. Poetry as cognition, a thinking through, a writing through of things.

Collaborative writing as inquiry makes it possible:

To feel less alone. To connect in a moment of ethical relationship with another, with others, across differences. For women writing, this feminist impulse becomes a language to speak to each other through a poetics that embodies our day to day, as Jodi writes, from the complexities of "our sticky souls." Writing ourselves onto the pages ahead. This aesthetic text we become.

To speak past and silenced wounds. Habitable grief. The thin vein of blood, edgelit. Writing through bloodremembering. As Rilke writes: "For it is not yet the memories themselves. Not till they have turned to blood within us, to glance and gesture, nameless and no longer to be distinguished from ourselves – not till then can it happen that in a most rare hour the first word of a verse arises in their midst and goes forth from them." [\[25\]](#)

To imagine bones made lovely again, a woman's voice full of verse.

To write 2am poetry. To feed this hungry lover, sometimes our first allegiance. Darkness, darkness. A type of madness. Madwoman in the ivory tower. Through darkness, the eye begins to see. Words stirred by morning, opening us onto the pages ahead. This book spined by our making.

To answer the questions: How do I become this curriculum, this living course as woman writer? What

does poetry have to do with me? with us? To listen to Audre Lorde who tells us that “Poetry is not a luxury.” [26] “Poetry is activity and survival...this then can be a means of saving your life.” And silence becomes speech. In the daily conditions of our lives, across continents we stitch ourselves...writing that saves our lives.

To write through spaces of sleep and dreams, of art and desires and daily life. Poems and art that blur the boundaries of our days, to make beautiful the grocery lists, to paint a fresco on the shower stall...canvas edge brush-lettered with poetry.

To invent what we desire from any geography. To imagine writing not as a private grammar but as real singing in the world. A song to live and die in – an Ave Maria sky everywhere.

To feed our hungry daughters, writing in mother’s milk, fluid of our contradictions. Shawls of indigo and silver, poems to warm the throat.

To imagine the breath of infants as an infinite fragrance. Their breath writes us all, our legacy. They will walk, like us, like poets, with uncommon steps. They will create our pages. *The art on white sheets like love.* [27]

To discover how the interrupted spaces of memories, the gaps and fissures, shift us, give us the thread that carries us, hopeful for the soft bellows of butterfly wings.

To heal the bruised peach heart. This watermark, blurred stanza, slow falling of veils. To find a flushed dawn the color of a new perfect peach, sweet, gorgeous, whole.

To catch tears turned into prisms, multi-faceted light. Spill of heart-salt, refracted splay. This poem flooding rivers of dreams. The words are purposes and maps. This light-filled stream that seeps through every crack, speaking the poem.

To believe in the seduction of ink, dancing across the cream-laid papers. Seeking other spellings. This opening a mercy in ivory hallways, in the uplifted air.

To learn to stand, to walk, to speak, those spilled pages salvaged from the fallen espalier of pear trees, from girlhood fairytales to the spine firm fruit of poems in our mouths.

To know the twilight hours of history, lavender turning to ash, as time spills over. [28] Tart, sweet oppositions...lemon recipes of memory and loss... the holding of that taste on tongues that write us.

To let the swollen-bellied voice be born onto parchment, *the tip prying open the chambers, spitting out the heart, through the slant of tongue.*

To write in milk and blood, ink fierce and iridescent, rooted in love. [29]

To break through the page...to write a psalm, an elegy, a poem to grow old in, a poem to die in.

To stretch crumpled wings, our words rising liquid in the air... writing that saves our lives, other lives.

To believe that: *somewhere, a woman is writing a poem. Somewhere, a woman who thought she could say nothing is writing a poem and she will sing forever, blooming in the dark madness of the world.* [30]

To locate our educational experience in a location of beauty. This enables a vision of curriculum as an aesthetic text that reaches towards the beauty of the world, opens our minds to beauty. As Simone Weil writes in *Waiting for God*: the love of the beauty of the world...involves...the love of all the precious

things that bad fortune can destroy. The truly precious things are those forming ladders reaching toward the beauty of the world, openings onto it. Weil's list of precious things begins with education: "numbered among them are the pure and authentic achievements of art and science." [31] As Elaine Scarry states in *On Beauty and Being Just*: "To mistake, or even merely understate, the relation of universities to beauty is one kind of error that can be made. A university is among the precious things that can be destroyed." [32] Our work in educational institutions can perpetuate beauty, sustaining curricula and ways of being that cultivate the will that reaches toward a continuous creative aesthetic impulse.

Invocation

Our conversations, our collaborations, our writing, and our theorizing together provide us with radical revision of community, academic or otherwise. Our collaborations open us up to a feminist imagination that moves us beyond the "ism." This is an imagination that explores the nature and value of our relations to each other, of taking risks. This imagination demands courage. As Toni Morrison writes: "Writing and reading mean being aware of the writer's notion of risk and safety, the serene achievement of, or sweaty fight for, meaning and response-ability." [33] Together, we can consider and uphold the diversity we can account for, while illuminating or thinking about what we cannot account for. As we become capable of inclusivity, we are more able to focus on specific educational contexts that might de-essentialize us, interrogate the "we" in colonial/post-colonial settings. This is what we have tried, attempted, "essayed." Our "essais" emerge in a choreopoem, in a chorus that has tried to imagine a collaborative effort, to feel beneath our surfaces, to speak the unspoken, unrecorded words that spell our lives. This poem becomes a location for an aesthetic knowing, of reading and writing practice, of feminist imaginings of new forms of cognition and creativity. *Somewhere, a woman who thought she could say nothing is writing a poem and she will sing forever, blooming in the dark madness of the world.*

Some readings/writings read, recalled, conversed with, again and again

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