

(RE)TURNING TO THE POETIC I/EYE: TOWARDS A LITERACY OF LIGHT

by

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Abstract

Rumi once wrote: “When I stop speaking, this poem will close and open its silent wings” (as cited in Barks, 1999, p. 66). This arts-based dissertation is a personal, poetic, and pedagogical study into the kinship between poetic discourse and spiritual expression where I attend to the question: *what does it mean to dwell poetically?* (Heidegger, 1971; Hölderin, 1984). I contextualize poetry as “the articulation of contemplative perception” (Laude, 2004, p. 11), “a phenomenology of the soul” (Bachelard, 1964, p. xxi), wherein poetic knowledge is a *theoria* (Lakhani, 2010). I refer to *theoria* as a way of intellectual seeing that recognizes the sacred in the mundane, which becomes central to my own poetic vision.

In enacting this (re)search where writing is the inquiry (Richardson, 2000), I use phenomenologically informed perspectives of a/r/tography in qualitative research that “seeks to show and evoke the presence of a lived experience” (Todres, 2007, p. xi), where theorizing through the inquiry process brings forth understandings (Irwin & Springgay, 2008). In this meta work of researching poetry through poetry, I consider each poetic turn a mediation and meditation in “living a life of deep meaning through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden” (Irwin, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 10). In a research endeavour that is revelatory, this research site becomes *insight*.

I draw upon Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) metaphor of the rhizome, the underground root system of plants and theoretical underpinning of a/r/tography, which I reconceptualise in the sky to represent my dissertation as writing into a

poetics of light. In visualizing what I imagine as a “sky of inquiry,” I make a call for research that has a “wider epistemological embrace” (Todres, 2007, p. 180) in the poetic gaze changing how, what and whom we *see* (Leggo, 2004a; Cheetham, 2012). Through lyrical ways, each layer of my inquiry sheds light towards understanding poetry as a contemplative pedagogy. In (re)turning to the poetic I/eye, this research represents a pledge to pedagogical encounters that nurture spiritual literacy where purposeful engagement in creative practices can become a gateway to the realms of spirituality.

Preface

This thesis is the original and creative work of the author. No ethics review was required for this research. Grateful acknowledgments for permissions to include the following:

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All songs in this thesis are original works and are collaboration between the author, Yasmine Rajabali and Joe Cruz, unless otherwise stated. All songs and copyright are registered with SOCAN, the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers. Master recordings are owned by the author and Yasmine Rajabali. Grateful acknowledgements are given to my fellow collaborators for permissions to include the audio.

All spoken word audio tracks are the sole creation of the author.

Figure 1-*Luminous Sky* (photograph) is my own image.

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List of Audio Media

(Located in the supplementary materials and errata collection¹)

<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

1) Rhizome in the Sky (spoken word)

2) Sama (song)

3) Sandals in the Snow (spoken word)

4) Waiting (song)

5) Evoking You (song)

6) Epiphany (song)

7) Ali (spoken word)

8) Karim (spoken word)

9) Mother Tongue (spoken word)

¹ Please note that on UBC's cIRcle repository all audio files are listed in alphabetical order. The reader can locate each file as it appears in the thesis as listed above by scrolling down alphabetically.

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And in the end, for the poetry and the lyrics, I am humbled.

Thank you for coming through me. What a joy and privilege this has been.

Dedication

For Karim (my heart):

Who is gentle and kind

and sees light

in everyone

and

everything.

Epigraph

*Everything that is made beautiful and fair and lovely is made for the eye of one who
sees.*

(Rumi, as cited in Helminski, 2000, p. 5)

Prologue

In the Keeness of Seeing

What does it feel like to be the rain?

To be a drop of many drops within a drop
of rain gathering
finding and forming
merging in the womb
of an earth hovering cloud
releasing and revealing
itself onto an eager waiting leaf
tracing a tender pattern of understanding
on the keen green veins
in a luxurious lingering
of a drop on a leaf
slightly bowing to the giving of grace
making the green
more seen
by Me—
who for a moment looks out my kitchen window
while making a cup
of congenial tea
to notice a sole drop of rain
dwelling
on the tip of a leaf
like a luminous pearl
earring I once noticed
worn by a woman
with onyx black hair

the white flashing in-between
to be seen by those who seek to see
its baring beauty

What does it feel like to be the leaf?
Silently communing with the rain
creating loving patterns in the palm
of one's very hand holding
drops that eventually will
be relinquished—
like the palm of my hand
now that holds a pen
creating a love that
I will too release
in renewal and gratitude.

I enter into this dissertation with an eagerness to know the poetic experience as it is living and breathing through me. In this way of attending, it is the I/eye that hones in to the subtle signs that are then set alight through words that speak of heightened moments awakening in poetry. This attentive engagement with the world in words is where creative communion brings a grace that leads into purpose and meaning. As spring sings nature in its full potentiality, blooming in a wide-eyed awakens, I know poetry as a language that transcends and lifts an experience to the fullness of being. I come here as *all*, poet, lyricist, researcher, and teacher, embodying the fluid identities that symbiotically takes me towards keener knowing in the ebbing and flowing that becomes this work. In the light of understanding(s) that poetic knowing may bring, as in the raindrops that lingered luxuriously and

lovingly on the keen green veins of the sole leaf that called me to pen these opening verses, I enter this space proclaiming:

I am that leaf

and the raindrops are the words

and the patterns are

This.

This dissertation represents a process of questing, an “evocative representation” (Richardson, 2000, p. 913) of qualitative research where writing itself becomes the inquiry. I subject myself to the experience of writing and, in turn, I am the subject of the inquiry. In this aesthetically rich space, vulnerability opens to the experience of a “self-reflective and transformational process of self-creation” (Richardson, 2000, p. 931). As Kates (2005) states in *Personal Creativity as Soul Work*, I am “a sovereign cartographer of [my] own life, work, desires and destiny” (p. 203), and my research has, in turn, become my personal odyssey (Denzin, 2008), my practice, my pledge, and my pilgrimage.

What is reaffirming through this journey is the emphasis on (re)search as a generative process of exchange in the primacy of an unfolding—or as I conceptualize—an unfurling mind, body, heart, and soul. In the movement and moment of the doing, in the vulnerability of this “nervous performative writing” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxx), I am living this process as an “embodied methodological praxis” (Saldaña, 2011, p. 13). I am enacting an a/r/tographic inquiry that prioritizes the steady rhythms and reverberations of researching that is created through a dialogic that is in/out/through the artist/researcher/teacher

identities. This keenness of sight is an outcome of being fully engaged in what one does towards arriving at a state of “perceiving freshly” (Sumara & Carson, 1997, p. xvi). And I am actively participating in creating understandings that are rhizomorphic (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), constantly in the act of creation in a movement that is both a shifting and turning into and, also, a (re)turning back into self. Each poetic line descends into deeper layers of understanding and then knowing, cycling through the colours of my being and my becoming.

This is transformation.

Through the generative processes of practitioner-based research there is momentum, and I am living through the questions into the answers (Rilke, 1984) bringing forth new curiosities. Thus, “theorizing through inquiry seeks understanding by way of evolution of questions within the living inquiry processes of the practitioner” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxiii). This (re)search is in a perpetual space of becomings—not a fixed geographical place—but where site is *insight*. To be in this (re)search as a space and place, entails self to be open, flowing, relinquishing, dynamic and fluxing to process, that is *always in process* (Leggo & Irwin, 2014).

I am being becoming (de Cosson, 2002) and also becoming into Being.

In this dissertation I make a call to research that has a “wider epistemological embrace” (Todres, 2007, p. 180) in twofold understandings. Firstly, in using phenomenologically informed perspectives through a/r/tography, my emphasis is on qualitative research that “seeks to show and evoke the presence of a lived experience through words” (Todres, 2007, p. xi). The breadth of (re)search becomes

a steady breath of arriving towards the very flesh of understandings (Abram, 1997), where knowing is a sensuously intimate process of revealing. A/r/tographic awareness is “living a life of deep meaning through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden” (Irwin, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 9). Secondly, as my work is situated in spirituality, a wider embrace is to recognize in-between spaces as places of renewal, and to let *mystery be mystery* by not reducing it to categorical thought (Todres, 2007), but to come away with a “felt sense” (Gendlin, 1982) of the human spiritual experience, of a touching and a transcendence. A/r/tography is both tension and openings, that is, vulnerability leading into freedom. This is a freedom of expression and expressing what is coming through in these summit moments of heightened engagement.

I am aware that in capturing the potential aliveness of an emerging phenomenon, there exist experiences that escape linguistic capture. Practicing poetry as inquiry also gives integrity to the white spaces that emit meaning in their own silent ways. These white spaces is where poetic desire harbours, and as a (re)searcher, I am attentive to what is said and unsaid but somehow still radiating through, *flickering*. I proclaim this dissertation to be my poetics of light. Hejinian (2000) theorizes poetry and poetics as “reciprocally transformative” in that “poetry has its capacity for poetics, for self-reflexivity, for speaking about itself; it is by its virtue of this that poetry can turn language upon itself and thus exceed its own limits” (p. 1). Herein, I state that this work—not only the poetry, but the prose, the lyrics, the music, the spoken word—are all shaped by my poetic seeing that is a primal force of my being.

It is just like breathing.

And my thesis:

Poetry and spirituality

as one creative entity

living in

and through

relational harmony,

strengthening and nourishing

each other giving

contemplative ways of

seeing, being, and becoming.

In the heartbeat of this inquiry is a process of evocation and validation, where knowing is experiencing through negotiating subject, spirit, and source. I understand this process as coming to the “realness” of what is being felt and I am moving with a “rich soft wanting” (Sandburg, 1964, p. 18), capturing the essence of the experience. I am writing towards revealing the heart of the inquiry.

And I am essencing.

Thus, the soul of my theorizing through the poetic experience is situated in poetry as an emotion and motion borne in the soul (Bachelard, 1964; Heaney, 1995) wherein “poets speak on the thresholds of being” (Bachelard, 1964, p. xvi). In the gateway of becoming is where I contextualize poetic discourse as “the articulation of contemplative perception” (Laude, 2004, p. 11), wherein knowledge is a theoria driven by “an embodiment of a desire that comes up from the ground of the soul” (Lakhani, 2010, p. 11). As “prayer is a supreme act of creative imagination” (Corbin, as cited in Cheetham, 2012, p. xi), I propose creative activity as an act of prayer in

the notion of poetic consciousness as revelatory and dialogical—a calling to and answering of. In the cognitive and emotional shifts of being, I am encountering the depths and breadths of spiritual experiencing. Each layer of this inquiry then strengthens understandings, where poetry is both an epistemology and an ontology (Leggo, 2006b). Poetry is a way to know the world(s)—material and spiritual—but also a way of being where in poetry’s givenness, for me, there comes balance, a coming back to centre. I resonate with Lakhani (2010) who writes of the metaphysics of poetic expression is that “to know is to be anchored in one’s spiritual center” (p. 181), it is to be aware of who one is.

This work, in turn, becomes a manifestation of a soul’s revealing as an “outcome” of dwelling and indwelling in poetic knowing. In my writing towards understanding what I call the “Real” is where I am attuning to the soul of my own being, as I am connecting to a sacred presence that illumines my world. For me, to engage deeply in my artistic practice is where I experience the Real. It is through the synergy of both intellectual pursuit and imaginative prowess in which I can experience and access the transcendent levels of reality. This is a vertical space encompassing both my material and spiritual worlds, earth and heaven, a worldview that has breadth, height, and depth (Lakhani, 2010). Furthermore, this is a worldview where intellect and faith are not separate, but where intellectual pursuit is my faith-in-action, allowing me to witness, see, and revere my creation.

I consider how to contextualize and conceptualize what perhaps does in the end “evade the cage of definition” (Whyte, 1994, p. 13). I resonate with and refer to Hazrat Inayat Khan (2012) who writes that, “if there could be a definition of

spirituality, it is the tuning of the heart” (p. 174)—in poetic vision, seeing leads into attuning to the melody of one’s breathing with the world(s). In turn, to engage in this dissertation is to be in this dialogical dance that gives promise and possibility to poetry as intention to move with and to name Earth as “being, consciousness, experience, and the material body are enmeshed within phenomenological states that extend and merge self into a intricate and constantly mutating social geography” (Hayes, Sameshima & Watson, 2015, p. 39).

In my intention to document a deepening awareness into the lived experience of the poetic and the mystical as contributors to both healing and to loving, I take a phenomenological stance to this work as my meaning making becomes the quintessential element of my experiencing (Patton, 2002). I am writing my experience of phenomena as seen through the I/eye that is living it, towards unveiling and revealing the essence or the heart of what is holding my attention and intention. In turn, I hope the reader comes away with a strong sense and understanding of what *this* has felt like. I also resonate and draw from hermeneutics as more broadly defined beyond a theory of text interpretation to how experiences are interpreted. I am always in a mode of interpretation from experiencing the life world, to writing this world in poems, to reflecting on the poetic event and how it enriches spiritual understandings. In whirling as inquiry, as I will propose, I am highly peaked, attentive and engaged in all moments of this work; *I am always in interpretation*. Spirituality, therein, is not only a way of being in the world but is a way of interpreting the world; a stance to spirit reflects our own deep yearning for meaning. And as this work will communicate, this becomes a dialogical

encountering that is giving, generative and gracious. Thus, I take “ a phenomenological concern for describing our ways-of-being in the world with a hermeneutic concern for interpreting the social-symbolic world” (Geelan & Taylor, 2001, par. 16), and presenting this world in poetic ways for others to enter the work and circle in their own interpretations.

In moving through what is personally significant to me as a (re)searcher researching poetry through poetry, is to be in a place where understanding is given, revealed, and then affirmed in a perpetual process of being in the experience *of*, in the layers of meta-understandings. In my own seeing is the “I” and the “Thou” and the “Other;” that which the eye perceives is always in relation to/with/through/upon another, *being*.

And I am I and I am thou and I am also, at times, the Other.

As Leggo writes (2004a):

We are born into relations with others, relations that have been inscribed by dynamics of politics and economics and history and education and religion, and we are defined by those relations, even as we seek to define ourselves as Other, as different, as unique. (par. 7)

In this keenness of seeing, I perceive others to be and then become through me: poetry changing how, what and whom we do *see* (Cheetham, 2012). In this profundity, I add “political” to this undertaking in representing poetry’s educative ability for both agentive and empathetic understandings towards living harmoniously in our pluralistic world.

Poetry names, claims, and frames this work. Hafiz wrote: “what we speak

becomes the house we live in” (Ladinski, 1999, p. 281). In this homing and honing into poetry is my em/bodied representation of a questing that marries the intellect and heart through lyrical renderings. I move and (re)turn through the thresholds of my own poetic awareness in a philosophical inquiry to the vertical and musical experience of a spiritual process of attuning, in-being (Heidegger, 1985) and in-seeing (Rilke, 1984), documenting my poetics of light encountering questions of life, of faith and of destiny. As my life has been informed, inspired, and inspirited through mysticism, I bring into this scholarship poet-philosophers that give meaning to the experience of spirituality as “meeting mystery” (Todres, 2007, p. 184) while illuminating the very heights of the transcendental potential of language. In my Shia Ismaili Muslim tradition, the richness of the Sufi poets—Rumi, Hafiz, Fariduddin Attar, Inayat Khan, Shams Tabrizi, Nizami, Khalil Gibran—kindle meaning into what it means to be human, *being*. In knowing what it means to be human is to know what lies beyond. The heart of these poets and their poetry harbours the notion that the act and intention of the search is what brings the beauty. And this searching is key to the human experiencing and the shape that spirituality may take. Thus, in poets such as Rumi who speak of the divine experience of love as the human experience of love, there is a bridge of understanding that speaks to people as a whole. Herein is where there is plurality, and it is my hope that this work is reaching out to others in (re)presenting the *human* spirit. And I am a life emerging in the veritable light of poetic creation (Bachelard, 1964).

My teachings and the guidance that my faith bestows upon me inspire this quest.

And I am always writing with/in Faith.

And in the poetic I/eye is where I negotiate, comprehend, and understand phenomena, both the seen and unseen, in a work that is a unity of intellectual, intuitive, imaginative, and spiritual power. This imaginal place of a coming to know is rooted in (re)search that awakens and strengthens my own sense of spiritual literacy, that is, a sharpening and a deepening of my own faculties of intuition and perception.

And how does one see and read the Sacred in the mundane?

Like the natural flow of a freshwater river that finds itself merging into the ocean, this work is the water of life that courses through my veins.

I come to the riverbank
And peer into the river
Suddenly,
I see myself
And the river too

And it is being in the flow² of an experiencing that allows for this type of literacy, this tuning in to Life. I claim that this mode of attending does not mean proficiency or any such expertise: it is a way of being in the flow of this type of experiencing, of being in the I/eye where the eye is also the ear and the heart, to be seeing, to be listening, to be feeling, deeply. What does this kind of attending require? *It is hope*

² I am grateful for my conversation with Pauline Sameshima (personal communication, June 9th, 2016) who offered the notion of “flow” to me.

and wonder and reverence and silence and vision and yearning and presence and imagination and compassion and love and forgiveness. In this space, there is also eruption and disruption.

There is struggle.

There is always wind.

In the echoes of the wind of words is the calling out and back to a place of grace. And it is the process and processing of the journey that is the integrity of this dissertation, in a gradual lighting of the way, in a lightedness that gains *light by light by light*. I am *reaching* for light.

I ask: *How does this enlightened self-fulfillment allow me to be of service to others?* This education has allowed me to move more softly and compassionately through my evolving world(s). In my own literacy of light as an artist, researcher, and teacher, I state that to engage in poetry revives the “spiritual vision of imagination” (Lakhani, 2010, p. 228), and in reviving this imagination in our secular lives, we can create a transitional space of learning between material and spiritual spheres. Therein, engagement in the arts can bring one to the threshold of spirituality. Embracing spiritual sources of knowing can lead to peak educational experiences that fill our desire for solitude, wholeness, love, and connection to one’s world(s). This work takes a contemplative stance to education and the pedagogy, herein, is that contemplation is an essential part of learning for teacher and for student. This work represents my own teacher inquiry and how this self in work, this soul in work, can strengthen the teaching I/eye.

It is my hope that this work will follow the line of research in the field of holistic learning, spirituality, and teaching (Ashton & Denton, 2006; Denton, 2005; Kates, 2010; Leggo, 2006a; Miller, 2005; Moore, 2005) where I deeply resonate with the Aga Khan's notion (1979) that: "Creativity knows no frontiers: it is not of the East nor the West, of the North nor the South, but it sometimes needs awakening, to be set alight, to be shown a purpose" (par. 37). I propose that it is a *(re)awakening*, which not only gives permission, but is also towards self preservation. In this preservation is where one can find a sense of purpose.

And I am purposing now.

As a steward of poetry, I find this purposing in a question where Aoki (1990/2005) also found inspiration. The site of this inquiry will now turn and (re)turn to the personal, the poetic, the philosophical, and the pedagogical in/seeking:

What does it mean to dwell poetically? (Heidegger, 1971; Hölderin, 1984). In this privilege of a ruminative enterprise of traversing time and space through language, this dissertation gives in/sight to a question that quivers in the sheer possibility of a life that is writing into the light of knowing. And each word will be shedding light upon:

How does one dwell in the poetic I/eye?

This is how I do.

On Process

As the reader has already encountered, I use white space not only in my poetry but in my prose as well. There are moments when I am called to write and linger across the page. In this dissertation that is an *a/r/tographic* performative work³ with a pastiche of poetry, lyrics, song, and spoken word, the page becomes a “performance site of reflection” (Bochner & Ellis, as cited in Springgay, Irwin, & Kind, 2005, p. 902). As I participate in the process and praxis of a deep embodied creative engagement, knowing rises to the surface. In what I call my *a/r/tobiographical*⁴ writing, the integrity of this work is what it is perpetually becoming during the very process of doing, where graphy is at the heart of my personal and pedagogical exploration(s). The spaces represent a process that in turn represent my mediating (re)search, which requires a heightened presence. In this work that has a sheer depth of feeling, vulnerability, and emotion, I enter a dialogic place where I am conversing intimately with self as a way of both shedding and entering another layer of my inquiry. In my *a/r/tobiographical* writing as a raw and honest chronicling of a life, I conceptualize each line as moving closer to the heart of self, bringing *me* into authentic and veritable ways of being in life and in (re)search. My poems, therein, are *a/r/tographic* renderings. As I consider *a/r/tography* and *a/r/tobiography* interchangeable terms in this work, the stress on “biography”

³ In my section “On Method and Metaphor” I explain and explore *a/r/tography* as my methodology for this (re)search.

⁴ As in autobiography, in *a/r/tobiographical* writing I document the personal stories of my artist, researcher, and teacher identities.

details various aspects of a life and the explication of specific intimate experiences that illuminate the inquiry at hand.

And in this inquiry as a dialogue led by desire, I am deeply listening and there is an intuitive process that guides my writing. In a work that is spiritual in nature, I understand the process as one in which I take “intuitive leaps” (Shidmehr, 2014) that allow me to step into another *space*. In this space is a place where I then enter into another dimension towards knowing. This leap may be subtle or profound or a (re)affirmation and I work and write with/in the spaces where “lyrical thinking [becomes] a form of intuition” (Shidmehr, 2014, p. 16).

And there is rhythm here too. In the ebb and flow of my own artistic praxis of endeavouring in poetry and lyrics, there is a lyricism to the work that resonates in my prose as well. This reflects my own lyrical living and being fully immersed in an identity that is contiguously connected: artist/researcher/teacher. I explore and play with the aesthetic potential of lyrical resonances in a work that is a singing of self (Lee, 1998; Neilsen Glenn, 2014) and where there is music everywhere, *a rhythm to (re)search*. I take a lyrical stance to the writing where I listen and attend to writing with “a heightened awareness of musicality... an ear for the aural potential of the work” (Neilsen Glenn, 2014, p. 143).

In a dissertation that I call a “(re)turning,” there are sections where I may return to a certain quote, poet, or scholar, and this is purposeful and reflects my writing process. Through each chapter, which I have called a “point of light,” I may return to an idea with new eyes and as a song coming back to the chorus, and this gives me a sense of affirmation and renewal.

My prayer beads

Look!

How they turn

And

(Re)turn

As each point of light explores a facet of my dwelling in the poetic eye/I as an artist/researcher/teacher, there are not only keener understandings but also a strengthening of self that comes from the process. My hope is that the reader will come away with the themes that I intimately and sensually explore in poetry as a spiritual praxis.⁵ Through the journey of this writing, there are many theorists that walk on and off the stage of this work and this, too, is purposeful as I draw in others who give richness and perspective to my own experiencing as I am living it. *I am drawing in and I am drawing out.* The intention is to give holistic understandings and broaden the vision and reach of not only this work, but of what living spirituality can look like and feel like in our world. And in my life where spirituality is a continuous and integrated experience, that is, a way of life that infuses all aspects of my world(s), I proclaim that I am always a soul-in-learning.

⁵ In my next section “On Engaging” I propose the ways in which the reader may experience this work.

On Engaging

In post-modern theorizing, in the personalization of participating in a research endeavour that is an imaginative aesthetic transaction (Saldaña, 2011), I want to propose a way of how readers may engage and receive this work. This could also speak to a possible evaluative entry point, a way of experiencing and assessing “the artistic in the academic circle” (Prendergast & Belliveau, 2013, p. 204).

As there is lively scholarship on assessment, validity, and interpretation of arts-based research⁶, I bring to the dialogue the notion of my dissertation being not only generative (Barone & Eisner, 2012), in that it “reshapes our conception of some aspect of the world or that sheds light on aspects of the world we had not seen before” (p. 152), but also (re)generative. This poetics of light, as I claim it to be, (re)presents (re)search that is offering cycles of reflection and renewal, and in this renewal is the hope of illuminating ontological understandings of the human condition. Renewal is an outcome of being enmeshed in a process that is in perpetuum, where wisdom is coming from a place of becoming(s) bringing with it this newness of knowing. My own process of moving through each layer of the inquiry is integral to this being what it is, and the strengthening that occurs is only through the *moving through*.

However, the reader does not necessarily have to move with me, although I would desire her or him to. But each “point of light” can stand on its own and give in its own way, in its own *shining* (Heidegger, 1971). Thus, there are many points of

⁶ In particular I refer to Gouzouasis’ (2008) provocative piece: Toccata on assessment, validity & interpretation.

entry and of departure. And as in a vista that opens up before me to see the possibility of what lies ahead, each point strengthens my field of vision allowing me to get closer to the essence of the inquiry. In the processes of being and breathing with/in the work, in this living inquiry, is where there is a heartbeat and a heart. The heartbeat of this dissertation is how I conceptualize my living inquiry as lyrical, rhythmic, and generating momentum commencing with the very first word in my opening poem: "On the Keeness of Seeing." The heart of this dissertation then begins with my first point of light, "Fire in my Eyes," where I sensually explore, trace, and document my dwelling in the poetic I/eye. Here in the poetry and spoken word and music, each lifts the colours of the (re)search to places and spaces that evoke emotive experiences that bring a lyricism of its own kind. The integrity of the work is rooted in the capacity to linger with and then leave its impressions, where my journey may speak to others in soulful ways. The spiritual scope, nature and breadth of this work then must be assessed not only in its immediacy, but also in its capacity to (re)turn to, that is, in its rhizomorphic potential to continuously contribute to knowing some *thing*.

And my epiphanies need not be yours but what may you come away with?

I conceptualize my own hope for scholarship as research that has *wings*, that rises and lifts into the sky of inquiry. This dissertation has a capacity for always reaching (Barone & Eisner, 2012) *up and up and up*, where there is this sense of (re)generative power in writing that must be assessed on its own effects to lift these spiritual understandings. In the movement of becoming (re)generative is where I am weaving this work together in writing that is threading knowing. Thus, there is a

metaphoric threading through the I, as in the eye of a needle where thread passes through and pulls out strong. I tread through both obstacles and openings, back through self in a self-awareness that is reflective and reflexive.

I want to state that as much as this is my journey-in-revealing, it is my own experiencing that leads to a “breathing-in” (Hillman, 1989), and also a metaphoric breathing-out, with, and through others that will experience and engage the work into being in their own intimate ways. And “In the method of imagination, the researcher stills a moment, captures and invests a particular meaning to an experience...and draws attention to it, hoping the reader may be opened to seeing anew” (Green, as cited in Hayes, Sameshima & Watson, 2014, p. 47).

And what is IT that you may see, anew?

The melody of my own breathing desires others to evoke it, where poetry is evoked by this unity, that is, where my hermeneutic circle metaphorically embraces others who ride the wave of its own revealing.

My words need you, too.

Poignantly, this furthers my own understanding of poetry as a pluralistic endeavour to speak to the diversity of meanings a poem may hold for an individual in a reading transaction formed by our “gender, ethnic and social background and cultural environment” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. viii). In a work that is an experiencing of poetry as it is shaping a material-spiritual identity, I speak to the plurality of ways where “there are hundreds of ways of kneeling and kissing the ground” (Rumi, as cited in Barks, 2003, p. 123).

This is one way.

In undertaking a scholarly path towards illuminating the very intimacy of a spiritual phenomenon as it is experienced through aesthetic encountering, I understand how “research, like art, could be accessible, evocative, empathetic, provocative” and how research “settles in your body deeply and completely” (Cole, 2004, p. 16). Barone and Eisner (2012) suggest evocation and illumination as criteria for assessment and in this work that is in/sight, I embrace the notion that, “sight can be promoted, and evocation moves that process forward” (p.154). Moreover, “when illumination is combined within a vivid experience, the work will serve to illuminate cognitively and respond emotionally” (p. 154). In turn, evocation is an integral and primary response, which then results in “an epistemological means for acquisition” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 153). In receiving this work, my intention is that in the moving through the cycles of evocation and illumination, there are also spaces in which to rest, to reflect, and to linger in (re)search that renews faith in itself “between possibilities and impossibilities where inspired newness is ongoing and constituted and reconstituted” (Aoki, 1996/2005 p. 422).

In dwelling in the poetic I/eye is pleasure, promise, and possibility in (re)turning to what once was, only to discover what it could still be *becoming*. In poetic vision is to illuminate a world pregnant with infinitely rich meanings. I see with more than the *eye*. Aoki (1990/2005) writes, to dwell poetically is to be in “a deeper realm beyond the reach of the eye, a realm where we might begin to hear the beat of the earth’s rhythm” (p. 375). And to me, Rumi captures the essence of spiritual literacy in that “The light which shines in the eyes is really the light of the heart” (Rumi, as cited in Helminski, 2000, p. 85). In poetry as listening to light

(Leggo, 1999), poetry becomes *into* lightedness. In the hopes of this illumination, I trust and relinquish to a journey that is an offering of “written love” (Bachelard, 1969), where I experience all of my poetry as devotional. I (re)turn to the leaf and rain poem now becoming into song. In lyrical understandings is where I am looking to the sky with new eyes:

*I see the raindrops
fall from the sky a blue
waiting is an eager leaf
ready to feel anew
Oh! how the drops linger
on the keen green
what a joy to witness
what love really means*

On Song

I open with Schuon (2002) who writes that “out of my heart flowed many songs; I sought them not, they were inspired in me” (p. 3). Schuon speaks of the heart of his own process, where poetry comes in and through the heart of revealing. With words that carry with it their own intention is then an openness that one must possess for this coming through. Schuon sees himself as a conduit, a portal through which poetry sings out. The thesis of my work can be understood in poetry as pure revelation. In poetry I heed where it guides me, in every poetic turn taking me lyrically to listening to the music of my own heart speaking in the very pulse and beats of an embodied praxis. As Schuon sees poetry as song, I have written both lyrics and poetry, and poetry becoming song, and song becoming poetry, and by delving and dancing in both forms I am responding to the music that words carry, attuned to both the tone and the tune. In the privilege of creating this *music*, my own purposing comes in living a lyrical life that is always in the searching of and to and from and through. I AM becoming in form, in a form that is fluid as in the water of life. In the swirling and in the whirling, I believed that one hand had the poetry and the other had the music, but now in both my hands, there is no separation. Hence, in the ebb and flow of my poetic and lyrical inquiry, I sensually, textually, and vertically explore my evolving world(s). To embrace and write in both forms is where, for me, there is the ability to reach into the heights of this work that has transcendental intentions.

And thus, this epiphany allows me to see my journey of this dissertation beginning over a decade ago, with lyrics that became a concept album that somehow changed my destiny. I can follow that line to this moment now, a musical and vertical line, reaching up and up. To stand back is to give vision and in my line of sight, in this poetic I/eye, I see the sky, *open*.

And it began with a song called “Sama” which was, as my sister Yasmine noted, a musical breath of emergence. It is Yasmine’s voice that carries the lyrics in this collection of soul-songs I penned that spoke of an intimate and sensuous journey of the beauty and resiliency of the human spirit. There are layers of voices herein, my voice embodied in the lyrics, Yasmine’s voice that weaves the melody and Joe Cruz, producer and musical colleague, who was open to my guiding the process, not knowing but somehow just knowing where we needed to go. Speaking to him years later, I apologized for being too much, too passionate, and he replied: “your passion, it was integral to the process” (Personal communication, September 5, 2003). And I have much gratitude. Moreover, it is the voices of the colourful musicians that we commissioned who added and brought their own narratives to the telling, to the music of each song as it unfolded.

I have learnt that in collaboration can be the supreme creation.

Each song is a questing and each song is a story. I strive for unity in my poetry, a wholeness that comes, a newness that comes and in the space of song, always a (re)turning—a verse, a verse, a chorus, a verse, a bridge, back to chorus. In this dissertation I offer four of these songs, “Sama” (2004), “Waiting” (2004), “Epiphany” (2004) and then “Evoking You” (2012), where we came back to the

studio again eight years later with the seeds of a burgeoning song. In making my decision about what songs to offer, this process of writing leads me into the songs that add another layer to my inquiry. What songs strengthen my notion of poetry as spiritual process and what lyrics simply just need to be *sung*? In the vertical notion that songs rise (Bachelard, 1988), what is IT that is rising? And I address this through the process of this work allowing the revelations to come forth.

What gives me the most humbling affirmations in this long line of inquiry is embodied in the “Sama,” the whirling of the dervish that inspired this soul-song many years ago and how it continues to *turn*. What began as muse and then music is now method and motivation. I understand I was always purposing, moving towards some *thing*. How in the light of knowing this now, moments upon moments upon moments, all have meanings.

And it was that one moment when I walked into the studio to speak to Joe about commissioning him for our project. I had a Rumi book in hand, some lyrics, and rough notes, a melody here and there.

Do you know this poet? I asked.

He said, *Not so much. Tell me.*

Let me read you a few verses. This is the lyrical inspiration for this album and I also have some CDs I would like to play. I want music that feels like this. Can we do that?

He turned to me: *“Yes ... let’s try.”*

On Method and Metaphor

In this search I am Artist (personal, autobiographical), Researcher (poetic inquiry, poetics), and Teacher (pedagogical). In locating my research in arts-based research and specifically in a/r/tography, I follow the leadership, the passion, and the commitment of fellow a/r/tographers⁷ who in their own rhizomorphic ways, have inspired “a desire to explore new territory, a borderland of reformation and transformation, a geographic, spiritual, social, pedagogical, psychological, and physical site, intersubjectivity and intrasubjectivity situated in and through dialogue” (Irwin, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 9). It is the phenomenological aspect and conceptualization of the a/r/tographic process that resonates with my researching in and through poetic inquiry, where I am engaging in embodied language towards documenting a personal landscape. In this space of (re)search, I am interrogating, puncturing, and also celebrating making meaning, where writing is—word by word—creating a sense of wholeness in an emptying then filling, again.

As an a/r/tographer, I give integrity and promise to the third space (Bhaba, 1990) of a spiritual (re)searching where the richness of my work exists on the very border of both knowing and doing, reaching and touching, relinquishing and receiving, and being and becoming. In participating in “borderland pedagogy” (Irwin, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 9), I am a crosser of boundaries and in this boundary space there is richness. This is a space where I know meaning making to

⁷ See the book *Being with A/r/tography* (2008) for a dynamic collection of researchers doing evocative a/r/tographic work. There are many who have lit the path for me.

be vulnerable, vibrant, and open to the vertical dimensions of human experiencing. In the third space of encountering is also my third identity of teacher. Through the lens of a/r/tographic awareness, poetry is always pedagogy. Poignantly, through the metaphoric third eye and in third space with my three fluxing and fluid identities is wherein I move in/out/through this (re)search in a methodological meditative praxis. I am a soul-in-learning intersecting, crossing, and merging the boundaries of art, spirituality, and education for both personal and social transformation. A/r/tographic language and meaning making pave the pathway(s) to understanding the rendering(s) of this extended rumination that is a purposeful slow opening.

There are two metaphors that enable me to conceptualize how I move through this (re)search in reflective/reflexive ways. The generative power of the metaphor through the a/r/tographic lens of inquiry gives rise to both a simultaneous loss and gain of meaning in perpetual pedagogical moments that are “invoking the presence of what it is not, and also what it might become . . . to see and reveal attributes in new ways, to cross boundaries, and to shape intersubjective relationships” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905). This is (re)search that breathes into its own space, capaciously unfurling to the very breadth and scope of inquiry enfolding into unfolding, *out*.

On the wings of words...

Whirling as Inquiry

As Richardson (2000) writes of writing as inquiry, I state that whirling is my inquiry. I position this whirling movement as enacting a contemplative praxis towards a poetic pedagogy in what Lincoln and Denzin (2005) call a sacred pedagogical practice. The whirling—the Sufi *Sama*—with one hand to the heavens and the other to the earth, represents the materialization and spiritualization (Bochner & Ellis, 2002) of this (re)search endeavour as well as my spiritually secular existence as an Ismaili Muslim in the striving for balance in (re)search *as* life. That is, the negotiation between the sacred and the profane aspects of human becoming in an understanding of the material giving to the spiritual and the spiritual giving to the material.

Furthermore, this scholarship needs both the grounding and the lifting to fully actualize its sheer capacity to travel through the vastness of its own inquiry. In this sense, integral to the whirling is the need for foundation—the horizontal—to fully experience the potentials of the vertical and, in *turning*, this is where the lifting of meanings happen. Thus, the a/r/tographic lens of research is a performative space and in this dissertation is where I visualize the words as perpetually performing.

And the white spaces are too.

In keen reflection is where the light of inquiry is relative and relational and Richardson (2000) writes of crystallization: “What we see depends upon the angle of repose” (p. 934), to stand back, to stand in, to turn one’s head now ever so slightly.

This is the changing colour of my being.

In this space of aesthetic expansion is where whirling as a pedagogy acknowledges the act of meaning making as passing through from level to level in bringing out the very essence of the inquiry. In turn, this is (re)search that is revelatory. In this space is a “continuum, a turning back and a moving forward” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 905). To be in a place of reflective attentiveness (Steinbock, 2007), of both inward and outward, of back and forth, of taking and giving is where also reflexivity can be conceptualized. As Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) write: “Reflexivity implies the ability to reflect inward toward oneself as an inquirer; outward to the cultural, historical, linguistic, political, and other forces that shape everything about inquiry” (p. 222). In theorizing my praxis is a constant turning to and returning to my inner self, shifting into sight. I receive through the very act of doing, and relinquishing to process is a slow purposeful flame of inquiry that gives impetus to greater depths of negotiating and knowing self.

This *Sama* gives rise to our faith in human possibility and what we can *see*. To whirl is to be in a place of both touching the familiar and unfamiliar in sensual and textual ways (Irwin & Springgay, 2008) and also to recognize that we need to forget ourselves to become (Steinbock, 2007). What I mean by this is a succumbing to not only process but also, an acknowledgement of what narratives we must let go of to get to a place of understanding *in purposing*. And I move into heightened and summit places of both pain and beauty in re/writing and re/turning that “exists at the intersections of knowing and being” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 900), in a rupturing that is towards growth and grace. In this space of puncturing the wounds,

of remembering being, I practice this living inquiry as a spiritual hermeneutics
“wherein such faith be marked by a quality of critical openness that keeps the eyes
alert at every moment, with an awareness that guards against the lapse into
forgetfulness” (Lakhani, 2010, p. 11).

And:

One eye opens

One eye closes

One eye opens

One eye closes

I represent a lived/living body on the very gateway to spiritual encountering.

Take it in

Let it go

Take it in

Let it go

Take *IT* in

Let it go

I need to remember to let it go.

And in this place, I enter this “passage to somewhere else” (Springgay et al.,
2005, p. 909) where poetry is the portal. I am engaging in qualitative research as it
captures the “potential aliveness” of a phenomenon as it is emerging and happening
(Todres, 2007). In a/r/tographic questing as *in* process, *in* practice, and *in* finding
purpose is where entering is a vulnerable open space harboured in desire.

In this hermeneutic circling as whirling, there is music.

And Sama means to listen.

I am tuning in and I am turning in.

In writing as transmission and transmitting, the reverberations of my poetic making generate for me a rhythmic beat to follow through to its own destiny.

The concept of reverberations is a primal force in this work as it gives rise to (re)search that echoes and lingers in and of itself, in a space where words resound and where white spaces are nothingness. Linguistic capturing is only one aspect of this inquiry as what is not explicitly said but still there. What cannot be seen but *felt*? The dervish considers this notion as the intention of the whirling motion is for the spirit to merge with the self. In the heart that is moved by this force, power, and love comes an understanding and a silent knowing that gives off/of music that can lift both participant and witness. It is in this context where I see my a/r/tography as becoming “witness,” a synergy and symbiosis that arises between writer and reader. This is a state of keen being with ourselves as only an outcome of being with each other, in relativity as in relation to and in the in-between of us.

I am existing only because of You.

Reverberations of this search resound towards openings for others to engage. I envision another “lifting” to occur, in research that is giving to and giving of and giving in and giving with and giving, *always*. In poetry as my whirling, access is given to the mysterious and creative forces of the universe and thus, to one’s own inner strength and power.

And to *Sama* is to be in the sheer Remembrance of You.

And it is the heart of the Sufi that is *Being* moved.

In Whirling

I am

Touching

Touching

Touching

Points

of

Light

Here

There

Here

There

Crisscrossing

Network of

light

lines

Rhizomorphic

Impressions

on

my body Burning

DESIRE

Feeling

Nothingness

But

Every

Thing

And:

We come spinning out of nothingness, scattering stars like dust.

(Rumi, n.d.-a, par. 1)

Rhizome (Re)imagined: A Rhizome in the Sky

The poet and mystic Hafiz once wrote: “ A poet is someone who can pour light into a cup, then raise it to nourish your beautiful parched holy mouth” (as cited in Ladinsky, 1999, p. 8). Inspired by Hafiz I then ask: *What is this light?* As a poet I aspire into the light of knowing with each line turning and illuminating into keener understandings of my lifeworld(s). In this process I am perpetually reaching towards what I call an illuminated “writedness,” where artistic and aesthetic endeavouring is the articulation of contemplative in/sight (Laude, 2004). My art forms the shape of my own becoming into the fullness of being. I experience the profundity of the metaphysics of the immediate (Kearney, 2008), fused with the journeying of the past and the possibility of what the future holds in the hand that writes this soul-into-learning. In this calling-into-becoming is where I am experiencing poetry as the “science of the Real” (Emerson, 1982, p. 265), in the sheer capacity and vastness of the human mind exploring its own horizons opening to the influx of inspiration, of light, of ecstasy and of love (Emerson, 1982). To participate in the “science of the Real” is where I document a raw and authentic experiencing, capturing the realness of what I am encountering.

I conceptualize my (re)search as reaching in and out and then up, with a heartbeat of inquiry opening into an embrace that is enfolding to the spiritual ways and dimensions of knowing. In my (re)search as a questing is then a vertical space that is vast, generous, and capacious, and I imaginally put forth this *Rhizome in the Sky* with each understanding becoming a point of light. In each point of light is an illumination, a newness, and this is where I experience turning points, a shifting of

seeing being. Here, I am living forward (Todres, 2007), dwelling in the textorium of a sensual attending, of exploring places in the in-between of “two points of orientation, hinting at meaning that is not quite there or yet unsaid” (Springgay et al., 2005, p. 904).

And I write poetry as questing towards revealing what I call source, where this light that Hafiz speaks of *is*. I ring the bell of poetic intentions with lyrics that I imagine resounding in space, then *echoing*. In poetic encountering, I am always reaching towards a transcendental experiencing that becomes a lifting of writer, of word and of world(s)—both material and spiritual. Thus, in the horizontal (the earth) meeting the vertical (the heavens) is the cross where I write poems that transverse my own inner space of epiphanies that are longitudinal (Bateson, 1994), which brings my whole being and breadth of experience into expression. To visualize my (re)searching in a space of verticality is where I conceptualize what I call the *sky of inquiry*, a place of infinite possibility. In writing poems that ruminate both on the natural world and the nature of my being is where I/eye attend to the nuances of my living breathing inquiry, tuning in to the subtlety as in the hues of the morning sky. Herein, I see spirit existing within me and above me.

And the sky is in I/eye.

Here there is aeriality, a space where (re)search is mystical, seeking, and perpetually moving as clouds that undulate softly over the stoic mountain peak. In the sky of inquiry lies the potential of what it will become as “imagination by its nature would prefer to always rise” (Bachelard, 1988, p. ix). And moving through each point of inquiry as it comes to fruition through the processes and conditions

that arise through a/r/tographic inquiry, keeps me held in a place of perpetual reflective attentiveness (Steinbock, 2007). Reaching and touching the next stage becomes a marker of journeying through the (re)search; each point of light is a “point sublime” (Breton, as cited by Hejinian, 2000, p. 3); the metaphoric wings of inquiry open on the inside. And I relinquish my self in a space where writing “involves the whole being in the developing stages of lightness” (Bachelard, 1988, p. 259). This lightness of being is towards knowing as a revelatory pursuit.

As an a/r/tographer, I take up the invitation to contemplate and complicate alternative notions of space and time (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xx). In my poem “Rhizome in the Sky,” I open by (re)imagining and (re)conceptualizing Deleuze and Guattari’s (1997) metaphor of the rhizome with its interconnected complexity, multiplicity, and in-between space. I then take these underground roots that deepen down in the dark earth and I place them in the sky where I extend these lines of flight into points of light with the branches reaching out heavenward on an endless journey of perpetual becomings. I methodologically affirm “any elongated form reaches out toward the height, [reaches] toward light” (Bachelard, 1988, p. 259). In the symbolic potency of the poetic image through the lens of spiritual revealing is where the transcendental power of poetry cannot be reduced to the horizontal (Laude, 2004).

As a pilgrim of poetry, I travel through the generative power of the metaphor in this expansive territory where I experience what I call the *rhizomatic revelations*, of an emptying and filling, of a here and there, of a receiving and a letting go, of unknowing and knowing. And, “it is thus by wandering, and playing in the

rhizomatic liminal passageways, that encounters of experiencing difference mark the birth of newness” (Hayes, Sameshima & Watson, 2015, p. 41).

In the hermeneutic rhythm that I ride in this creating is then a releasing into process as I relinquish my words willingly into the vastness of the eager sky. In this poetic methodological rumination is where my a/r/tography becomes performative, heightened, and generates a momentum that carries me onwards into the heart of this dissertation. And in this aerial space, the intention of my poetic offering is to disrupt the notion of the rhizome as an underground entity that then enables me to discover the transcendental planes of my poetic process as a spiritual endeavouring. In this poetic methodological rumination, I explore the source and the spirit of my artistic desire.

I hope that this poem represents the potential that a good metaphor has for arts-based inquiry and there continues to be much richness here for me. And I (re)mind my readers of the (re)search question: *What does it mean to dwell poetically?* Herein, it is to dance in the rhizomean spaces of possibility (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and I am a poet whirling with words on the thresholds of being becoming and becoming being.

Now, I invite you to come with me lightward bound.

Rhizome in the Sky⁸

I am breaking ground
in this (re)search
with my hands

⁸ Please see supplementary audio file for spoken word track “Rhizome in the Sky.”
<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

Bare

blood

bulbous

Beauty grasping

the sweet soil of a spiritual labouring

a felt sense ⁹

Knowing

what I must do

to uproot

The rootedness

of the rhizome that deepens and deepens

downward

Into the dark dank earth

on which I pull to place

into the open eager sky

Vulnerable

lines of flight reaching out

Heavenward

In words

rushing riding wings ¹⁰

of pure poetic desiring

Orbiting

an endless journey of

vertical becomings branching

Up

⁹ See Gendlin (2004) for a rich discussion of “felt meaning” and “felt intricacy.” “Sometimes the sense of such an edge is already there, calling for our attention, but usually we need a quiet minute of attending to where it can come” (p. 130).

¹⁰ Dillard (1989) contemplates about the practice of writing: “The lines of words speeds past Jupiter and its cumbrous, dizzying orbit...it will be leaving the solar system soon...rushing heaven like a soul” (p. 20).

and up
and *UP*
like the waking arms of the dervish
in a drunkenness spinning out of nothingness
now no sobering

For the lover
who wants to press
her face against the moon ¹¹

And paint the wisps of the clouds
leaving soft lingering
impressions

Wanting to know
the stars
Shining

Scattering
words like pearls
making its own constellation

Suprasensual supernova
semiotic spiritual chain
connecting

Cosmos
eternally into language
always opening

Space
stringing together into the ultimate
order of things

Poetic lines

¹¹ I seek inspiration from Rumi (n.d.-b): "At night, I open the window/ and ask the moon to come/ and press its face against mine/ Breathe into me (par. 1).
<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/144073-at-night-i-open-the-window-and-ask-the-moon>

that tie
back into each other
Moving with hermeneutic humility
Heterogeneity
of a musical multiplicity
In
me
who
Territorializes ¹²
to deterritorialize
to reterritorialize
Who says that I should not retrace? ¹³
this rupturing
renews
Rhizomatic revelations
of ruminative relations
there is joy in repetition ¹⁴
Being in the in-between
where is the middle of the sky?
always plateauing in poems
Into a line of flight
points of light
epiphany

Poetry

¹² See Deleuze and Guattari (1987): "How could movements of deterritorialization and processes of reterritorialization not be relative, always connected, caught up in one another?" (p. 10).

¹³ In my emphasis on (re)tracing I make reference to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who state: "Make a map, not a tracing" (p. 12).

¹⁴ Prince's (1986) song from the Graffiti Bridge album entitled: "There is Joy in Repetition".
<http://genius.com/Prince-joy-in-repetition-lyrics>

is the rhizome
irrupting on the inside
Waiting
for the shooting star
that showers and blesses
Wanting
(re)search that prefers
to rise
Methodologically
towards the height ¹⁵
into the light of human, *Being*
Intimate immensity ¹⁶
becoming intensity ¹⁷
meeting the mystery of
Aerial dimensions
demanding the vertical
acknowledging the horizontal
Grounding
must come
before the lifting
As the ocean

¹⁵ As Bachelard (1988) writes that “any elongated form reaches out towards the height, toward the light” (p. 259), he ruminates on the verticality of a song/poem and the potent affect it has on the human soul. In this space is an unfolding into “pure, luminous air”. This poem is, in part, an exploration into this process of unfolding and the transcendent dimensions of Being.

¹⁶ Bachelard (1969) writes: “Poets help us discover within ourselves such joy in looking that sometimes, in the presence of a perfectly familiar object, we experience an extension of our intimate space...If you want to achieve the existence of a tree, invest it with inner space, this space that has its being in you” (p. 199).

¹⁷ See Irwin (2013) for a provocative description of becoming-intensity, becoming movement and becoming-event as three rhizomatically connected conceptions of becoming a/r/tography.

warms to the sun patterns
 playing tender light awakening
Water that lifts from the deep
 only to return
 as the rain
I meet the cross
 of vertical and horizontal
 intentions
The best and the worst
 in my rhizome
 too ¹⁸
Potato
 couchgrass
 weeds
Tornadoes
 torrential rains
 heat strokes
Wind
 is where
 I enter
To know the pain
 of reknowing
 remembering
(Re)encountering
 the Real
 bringing grace
Unfurling hands
 with imprinted lines of history

¹⁸ I reference Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) conception of the rhizome: "The rhizome includes the best and the worst: potato and couchgrass, or the weed" (p. 7).

touching the sky
Smooth space ¹⁹
for a pilgrim of poetry
who dares desire
Climbing the words
imaging the world
mirroring
What does comes first
the image or the word?
crystallizing into
The shape of me
forming
poems are the inquiry ²⁰
Riding her own melting ²¹
In *You*
Unfolding
Surprise in a line
of chance
crossing thresholds
On threshold
burning
up
To the sun's
revelatory rays

¹⁹ See Massumi's forward in Deleuze and Guattari (1987): "Nomad space is 'smooth,' or open-ended. One can rise up at any point and move to any other. Its mode of distribution is the *nomos*: arraying oneself in an open space" (p. xiii).

²⁰ See Richardson (2000) for her notion of qualitative research wherein writing, itself, is the inquiry.

²¹ Frost (1939/2007) writes in his theory of poetry entitled "The figure a poem makes" that "like a piece of ice on a hot stove, the poem must ride its own melting" (p. 1156).

shining
Lightness upon
 Lightness of
 Lightness to
The promise
 and pedagogical possibility ²²
 of journeying through
Inner Space
 capaciously creative
 commitment to the curricular
Conations of connotations
 colliding into the horizons of a mind
 seeking contemplative endeavouring
An infinite meditation on ²³
 the colours of the changing sky
 attuning to the hue of a heart
Circling
 endless
 seeds of new creation
Blooming into petals reaching
 Up and up
 and *UP*
Embodying the life world
 in words of place and space
 that trace
The nature of human

²² I am inspired by Leggo's (2014) notion of "pedagogical hopefulness" (C. Leggo, personal communication, Dec 11th, 2014).

²³ Merleau-Ponty (2002, p. xxii) referencing Husserl writes of phenomenological inquiry as an "infinite meditation" towards revealing the nature of the world.

becoming
 living into the questions ²⁴
Fatefully
 faith
 fully
Coming in moments
 of the I/eye that opens
 And closes
And *opens*
 and *closes*
 to the brightness
Entering
 luminous moon
 in me
Transforming
 typography
 dancing
To music
 moving sky
 reverie revealing
The heaven
 of textual motivations
 mounting above the clouds
Carried by conjunctions
 of astronomical and
 aerial affirmations

And

²⁴ Rilke (1984), in *Letters to a Young Poet*: "Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer" (p. 35).

And
And...
Awe
 opening to love
 in vertical giving
Listening
 to the melody
 of my breathing ²⁵
Rhythm and rhyming
 word and word
 less
Language homing
 in the soul
 encountering
Newness
 cleansing
 washing
Over and
 over and
 over
Methodological
 meditative
 praxis
Personal
 poetical
 phenomenological
Parallactic

²⁵ Shams Tabrizi (n.d.) in his devotional qasida, “Dam Hama Dam Ali Ali”, writes: “The melody of my breathing is Ali, Ali”. <http://ismaili.net/qasidas/dam02.html>

galactic
potential
Of lyrical lines
descending
then ascending
Then transcending
I/eye
(re)turning into sensual being
Always in the middle
of...
some *thing*
Waiting for the heart
to strike
sublimity
In the stars
that need us
to witness
Their glowing
eye/I
am half my poems
And half me
but always
Thou
Theophany ²⁶
towards
(re)search
That requires
rotating

²⁶ By “theophany” I refer to the manifestation of Spirit to a human being that becomes tangible and knowable. Herein, I contextualize this (re)search as a revelatory praxis; a materialization of a spiritual endeavouring.

into the keenness of seeing
A revolution
 revolving
 in soul (re)knowing
Remembrance to
 witness
 witness
I AM
 a hand
 to the heavens
And the
 other
 to the earth
Drawing lines
 in the sand
 to see it
Reflected above
 in celestial clarity
 this line that holds she
Rooted in the axis
 that cuts and runs
 through her centering
This
 is my schooling
 in *slowness*
Now
 turning
 in
To poetry
 (re)turning back into
 me

Turning

into each line
lingering

Leaving signs

of my whirling
undulating

Swirling Starry Starry Night ²⁷

dissolving
to the Great Sun

In which eventually

I will too
subside ²⁸

Herein is my breathing

in to exhaling out to
naming of and claiming

This

and
that:

“My soul is from elsewhere

and I intend to
end

Up

there.” ²⁹

²⁷ I make reference to both Van Gogh's (1889) *The Starry Night* and Mclean's (1971) lyrics to "Vincent". <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/donmclean/vincentstarrystarrynight.html>

²⁸ I am inspired by the climactic ending of Attar's (1889) mystical allegorical poem, *Conference of the Birds*: "Rays that have wander'd into Darkness wide Return, and back into your Sun subside" (par. 79).

²⁹ Rumi in Barks, 1997, p. 2.

Point of Light: *Fire in My Eyes*

*With fire in my eyes*³⁰
and time on my side
I am letting go of
all the fear in my life
morning air
it embraces me
breath is life
sweet reverie
Soul is open I could fly
Soul is open I could die...

(Rajabali, 2004, track 4)

The wound...that's where the light enters you.

(Rumi, as cited in Barks, 1995, p. 142)

I have been a pilgrim of poetry journeying through my life lyrically on an intimate path of mystery and discovery, of lightness and darkness, of music and echoing silences that play the inner strings of my soul. I have relinquished myself to this path of creativity in all its duality, in both times of elation and in sorrow and in knowing that it is here, that I most profoundly experience self reconnecting with the soul's rhythmic vibrations. I am on a whirling musical journey inspired by seeking, in the unity and wholeness of poetry that keeps me writing and moving as it gives in light, love, purpose and wisdom. I am keenly a sovereign surveyor (Kates, 2005) of

³⁰ "Fire in my Eyes" is part of a collection of songs for which I was the lyricist. This body of work can be found on: <http://www.yasminemusic.com>

my life writing into (re)search that documents my personal questing of a work that becomes an odyssey (Denzin, 2008), of an intellectual and spiritual wandering. I meander purposefully, always in attentiveness to the music of the nuance.

I open with a verse from “Fire in My Eyes” as it was a pivotal moment in my embodied experience of travelling through poetic expression where I had a deep felt sense of “Divine heightened” (Morrison, 2009, p. 89), and where the flickering flames of poetry reached out, embraced me, and held me in its merciful grace. I was the moth that not only had singed my wings, but that had entered the spirit-filled flame even momentarily. Inayat Khan (1978, p. 108) writes:

Moth: I gave you my life.

Flame: I allowed you to kiss me.

In that moment as I had evoked the state of my life world, the words catalyzed me into a state of healing, or becoming to heal, and I somehow emerged from my pain and was lifted above in clarity. At that time, I had been writing out of wounds, first physical ones leading to emotional and spiritual ones that removed me seemingly from who I was and who I could become. I was injured and could not see in front of *me*. However, in my pain, I had forgotten to remember that I was still in becoming and that there was purpose here in this place of my life—this space of a small studio downtown apartment with its yellow walls that were to bring inspiration, to bring the sun “in.” I was residing in the liminal, experiencing the in-between, a place of disruption on the thresholds of waiting and wanting.

More than my physical surroundings, I had felt smallness in the world with an unnamed purpose that was yearning and burning in me, and this despair had led

to darkness that consumed me in its own echoing. In reflection, it was through the dark, in the absence of the light, where both the ontological significance (Levin, 1988) and spiritual purpose of darkness reside. Somehow, I was being led into some lightness, a little opening that sparked my heart. Here is where this soul-song shone in lucent lyrical light becoming a conduit for courage and the “wound became an entry point to spirit” (Denton, 2006, p. 131). The mystics write that in the rose’s thorns is the most beauty and, yes, I had been covered in these thorns— raw flesh wounds scarring my soul and my vision. I could not see through them. I could not understand why. And somehow, there was this keen moment, a moment that came after so many years of waiting for change, for a spark, for this light. And then there was this interception—almost an intervention—when some *thing* arose in me and I had the sheer clarity to answer that calling. Now, I understand these wounds of wisdom.

The harder she fell, the higher she climbed

And now she is shining

Bright.

In the rawness of the wound, in the place of vulnerability, came vibrations humming with a lyrical intention and in this turning to the words, brought forth the poetry and myself into an impassioned moment of a shining (Heidegger, 1971), an emerging from and out. Hitherto, here were the verses and here was I, and I am song and it is me. After many years of physical, emotional, and spiritual struggle, writing became an act to reclaiming, to remembering, to revealing the fire that I had in my eyes—this fire being my spirit. In the epiphanic chorus of “Fire in my Eyes,” I

proclaimed to the world to take witness to the resiliency of my life call.

Yes, I AM here.

It is in the keenness of this moment, over a decade ago, where this questing begins and where I started to know poetry as writing into the light, a light that gives and generates and radiates. This is where the grace is, in the beauty of an understanding that changes who you can become. And in this calling is where my education begins of a soul's schooling towards knowing itself through words and world(s). And I (re)listen to the album *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998, track 14) where she sings in the music of her own experiencing: "And deep in my heart / The answer it was in me / And I made up my mind / To define my own destiny."³¹

It was in this one enigmatic moment of my creating words which seemed to be almost too simplistic, but in this simplicity came the essence of what I was experiencing in a tuning in to *me*. And like a melody that rises into the sky, this was an elevated place of being, and this was *more* than words. Alone, in a vulnerability that was vibrant, became a precursor to the verses of "Fire in My Eyes" that brought me to a place of hope and humbling. It was the beginning, an opening, a crack of light (Cohen, 1992), of what was to follow and what I was meant to also follow on this line of desire and discovery. And I am following:

Up

Up

Up

³¹ These lyrics are from Lauryn Hill's final track on her album sharing the same title: "The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill." See YouTube for the full song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QRUba8smRj0>

With each word was a taking in and letting go and with each word, brought tears and thanks; this writing space being a salvation of the most *exquisite* kind. In documenting my own experience of dwelling in the poetic I/eye, I begin with this experience as it was a pivotal moment that sparked the line of this inquiry. In my literacy of light, I began to see and feel what this light is and it is not that I had lost the light, I recognize that now. In poetry I had (re)turned to *IT*.

And I wonder now, what if I had not written these words?

But I had somehow stopped and listened and attended to what I have come to know as the melody of my own breathing and this radiated with presence and possibility that then “echo[ed] within” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 369). As language dually reduced into essence and yet heightened the experience, this song could not capture how open my spirit felt to this body-world conversation. The flesh of my being could feel the trees that swayed sensually and purposefully to the wind whose gentle caresses I too experienced with “the waves of newness” (Bachelard, 1964, p. 237) and renewal that washed upon my soul.

And the echoes of an understanding reverberate in the wind of words.

The wind blows ceremoniously
over the stilled harbour
catapulting heavenward
into Van Gogh’s vibrantly vulnerable
sky
I feel its breath
enter my body
nestling my soul
with its soft caress

when did I become the wind?
when did it become
Me?

The desire towards aesthetic expression—to claim and contain on the page—is to acknowledge the capacity in which expression creates not only being (Bachelard, 1964) but also becoming. In writing my consciousness had opened and shifted to a place where I gained purpose again in the world, a world that reciprocates (Abram, 1997, p. 33) as much as I do the world. In turn, I relinquished to the dialogic “dance of the human body with the larger body of the earth” (Searle, 2012, p. 53). “Fire in my Eyes” and its resonances then led to the collection of songs I penned in order to proclaim the journey of a soul in all of its suffering, crisis of faith, struggle with identity, questions of destiny and love’s desire.

And poetry kindles my flame.

In retrospect, this process was my own (re)education, my humanization into learning to be and become. In the cross of both intentions, I started to breathe softly into my own becoming where the word was the very act and affirmation of being, always in the crux of patience and possibility. It was in this space of puncturing the wounds where I began to practice living inquiry as a spiritual evolution through both critical and creative dimensions marked by faith. In this awareness was a “guard[ing] against the lapse of forgetfulness” (Lakhani, 2010, p. 11). I began to remember and also be in remembrance. I turned my very being to poetry and started writing into pain and *onwards*. To partake in poetic expression as an encountering with light from a divine source is where epiphany became theophany, to recognize the Real. In this space, in the in-between of living in both the material

and spiritual worlds is where poetic knowledge is a theoria (Lakhani, 2010), an act of contemplation to witness reality in its sacred presence, to realize and then to touch what IS. In poetic awareness, there is not only remembrance but, also, reorientation and reintegration to the centre of one's spiritual source. Through the very absence, there is a presence of what is hidden, coming forth in the interplay of light flickering with the dark.

I know light only because I know the dark.

I turned to Rumi who eloquently wrote:

I am so small that I can barely be seen

How can this great love be inside of me?

Look at your eyes. They are small

but they see enormous things. (Barks, 1997, p. 279)

In Bachelard's (1964) "intimate immensity" (p. 210) of poetry I choose to live, personally and pedagogically, in the potency of the poetic image as a work of art that somehow always is an "infinite solitude" (Rilke, 1984, p. 23). To be in poetic desire is to live in the white open spaces on a page of pure intentioning where "writing creates a space that belongs to the unsayable" (van Manen, 2006, p. 718).

IT is understood.

To then study poetry is to acknowledge that in the alchemy of poetic creation is something that cannot be reduced or named. To see poetic consciousness as a revelation is to consider how creativity and imagination are a dialogic with what is divine and sublime. And I make "an evocation that calls out, asking for a response, a living inquiry, transforming static moments into momentum" (Springgay et al., 2005,

p. 907). In this momentum I am unfolding. In this (re)searching I turn to Whyte (1994) who writes that the soul “is the indefinable essence of a person’s spirit and being” (p. 13). The cognitive and emotional shifting to a spiritual experience that draws one out of the mode of the mundane to a contemplative space is where I know poetry as my supplication. The mystic and poet Hafiz has the words that ignite my seeking of:

Poems now rising in great white flocks

Against my mind’s vast hills

Startled by God

Breaking a branch

When his foot

Touches

Earth

Near

Me. (Ladinsky, 1999, p. 21)

And thus, as a soul-in-learning, poetry has been teaching me to attend to its calling as when I relinquish to the lines, I am brought to a place of grace, of experiencing what I know as the *rhizomatic revelations*. Dwelling in the poetic I/Eye is a living loving inquiry (Shira, 2010) that while placing primacy on the present is not a sobering enterprise but indeed a “drunkenness as a triumphant irruption of the plant in us” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9). And in this place of celebration there is love here.

And when in Love,

once you fall,

you fall.

Revelation

I see a lone leaf separating
From the Crimson King Maple tree
Succumbing to the gentle bough
Of the warm whirling winds
Unfurling
In one last revelatory dance
Enclothed by the merciful sun
That flickers soft patterns onto its being
Like the light that enters the stain glassed
Cathedral dome on a sacred Sunday
Morning
I want to be that lone leaf
Revelling in the sheer exquisite beauty
Of being purposefully alive before
Submitting
To the sweet red Earth
Upon the intricate design of
Creation

Point of Light: *Fate Has Brought Me to Your Door*

My life has been informed and inspired by mysticism as I attend to living esoterically, spiritually, poetically, and musically in a space of in-seeing (Rilke, 1984), in-being (Heidegger, 1985), in-relation to and of, and in the in-between. In conceptualizing my lyrical living, the ethereal dance of the whirling dervish is where the music comes from within and the reverberations echo outward and upwards. In this slow purpose-filled generative turning is where poetic inquiry becomes not only revelation now, but also a radiance that lifts my being with the promise towards the light of self-knowledge. As I documented in my first point of light, “Fire” fuelled a desire, and here is where I took a lyrical turn. That is, I turned in myself emotionally bringing me onto the page.

And then each line of poetry is also a turning into.

With each poetic turn in this contemplative practice are moments of both mediation and meditation. A/r/tographic seeking allows me to be a mystic and in this (re)search that is a performative inquiry, I dance with words. As I move with/in mystery in the alchemy that enters art, I am in understanding of both faith and fate. Here, is where I practice a spiritual language in exercising a literacy that allows me to see some *thing* in sheer clarity.

As whirling metaphorically conceptualizes my poetic practice, I participate in the act of meaning making as a passing through/in/out bringing forth the very essence of the inquiry. To see the process to knowing as a journeying is where this questing is inspired with the whole intention of body, heart, mind and soul. And

who I am is a product of where I am in this space and time.

And here is ALL of me.

In this intimate encountering with self comes the complexity of a life's history and also its destiny. A/r/tographic practice as spiritual practice acknowledges the past, the present and the future, as well as the vastness of a moment of raw living inquiry that, in its nakedness and vibrating vulnerability, contains the narrative of a life that has been lived, is living, and is still becoming. This is the line of flight that crosses through and also *up*.

In the unfolding rhythms of whirling that bring discovery of self and thou, the dance of this body-based spiritual hermeneutics is where, for me, poetry gives a deep "felt sense" (Gendlin, 2004, p. 133) to a body writing the world as "experiencing [the] experience" (Hejinian, 2000, p. 3). Poetic discourse "offers contemplative attention to the place from where language is born" (Galvin & Todres, 2009, p. 314). Thus, this language is a primal singing to and of the world.

I (re)turn to my body of song. Over a decade ago I first witnessed the dervish spin. I remember how this female dervish gingerly entered the centre and started to unfold out and up and with each of her turns, I was breathing in and out. As she gathered momentum, I felt her luminosity. What was stirring in her was stirring in me. *This* is what happened in the in-between. I could feel my heart move and when I looked at her feet, how she was *lifting*.

After, I sat with a strong Americano in a little coffee shop by a window where I could peer out to the street. I didn't raise my head at all as the words gathered their own momentum turning on the page, they came in lyrical flow, ready and ripe

for song. I penned my soul-song *Sama* there.

As my sister Yasmine—the voice that gives the melody, music, and tenderness to my songs—let me read her the lyrics, she echoed the same tune I had held in my mind as she sang “Sama, Sama, Sama” back to me. In deep reflection on that moment, I think of two sisters holding hands now, *spinning*. How in the studio, this language of longing was then born, a language speaking of separation and illumination, a language that sister brings into the spirit of a song. And now as I deeply reflect on the song “Sama,” I contemplate the meta-layers. The lyrics speak of the dervish turning and I am also turning on the page, the words are moving, and here everything is a (re)turning.

And it was Rumi’s verse of the lover at the door of the Beloved³² that this song speaks of.

Please, please just open the door?

I am knocking from the inside.

Sama ³³ (Rajabali, Rajabali, & Cruz, 2004)

*Lost within my youth
I’m yearning for your fruit
My Beloved I search for
Night and day
I pray, I pray, I pray*

Fate has brought me to your door
Dry my tears don’t want to cry no more

³² Rumi writes of a lover knocking at the door of the Beloved and when asked who is there, he exclaims, it is “I”. After years of search, he returns and knocks again. When asked who is there, he exclaims “It is Thou”. The door, it opens (Rumi in Waley’s (1993) *Sufism: The Alchemy of the Heart*, p. 45).

³³ Please see supplementary audio file for song “Sama.” <http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

Gently knock but you turn me away
No room for you and I in this place

I search the valleys of my heart
In my soul, within my mind
If you seek, then you shall find
Where the light was once confined

*Dance on earth to the heavens
Arms outstretched, unforbidden
Dance as the spirit moves through you
Love Divine, Eternal and True
Sama, Sama, Sama*

This journey is almost complete
I now understand His gift
It is neither me nor He
We are one Eternally...

*Dance on earth to the heavens
Arms outstretched, unforbidden
Dance as the spirit moves through you
Love Divine, Eternal and True
Sama, Fana³⁴, Sama*

Once again I am at your door
The you in me is what I was looking for
You let me in and I am consumed
In the love of you
My inner being has been moved
And I am now *You*...

³⁴ Fana refers to fana-fillah, the act of merging with Spirit, a passing-away-in.

Point of Light: *No One Sees You, but I/Eye Do*

I bring to light here Attar's (1889) luminous spiritual allegory, *Conference of the Birds*, where thirty birds of the world are seeking the king who is called the Simurgh. The birds, in their diversity, share a common quest as pilgrims, journeying through the various stages of their arduous questing in which their pains and pleasures are animated in order to depict the outer and inner landscapes they traverse. The layers of their seeking become the seven valleys of knowing where this journey of the soul in Attar's cosmic imagery gives colour to a wordless experience in which the supreme quest is the truth about their own identity. In the end, in what is called the valley of annihilation, in the "collision of light and life, the thirty birds see what appears to be the king they sought in one instance, and in the next a reflection of their own image" (Keshavaraz, 2006, p. 112). In finding the very unity beneath their superficial diversity, the birds are brought to a path of illumination and in its threshold, they rise against the planes of common life and not only come closer to touch the divinity of all things, but merge with it, and "I" becomes "Thou." In the sensuous intensity of this metaphoric journey that Attar creates, we feel that he lived the mysteries he conveyed and in his poetic imagination the lover is seeking the Beloved, becoming each other, fulfilling the very intention of a soul's longing. I bring forth this allegory as it gives spirit to my poetic consciousness, one in which, as in the birds pilgrimage, I seek this mergence of "light and life" in words journeying inwards as I move softly through my evolving worlds.

And I feel like a little bird

Fly fly

Flying

Through the mergence, there is then emergence in the veritable awakening of the light of poetic creation (Bachelard, 1964) and poetry becomes nothing less but a commitment to heed the soul's rhythms:

In your Light, I learn how to love

In your beauty, how to make poems

You dance inside my chest

Where no one sees you,

But sometimes I do,

And that sight becomes this art. (Rumi, as cited in Barks, 2003, p. 7)

In this vision is the site of my own learning life, what Lincoln and Denzin (2005) call a "sacred pedagogical practice"³⁵ and this process speaks to my poetry as writing with one hand up to the heavens and one hand down to the earth. I am in-seeking of balance between my material and spiritual life in knowing that each aspect nourishes each other into ethical ways of being in the world. And spirituality is a way of engaging in the world where faith and world are infused and poetry is giving of this balance. Here, there is always this balancing, a negotiating of words and space, of form and content, of self and whom I may write of in authentic ways. In writing that is beauty and blood, I am witnessing and allowing this pulse of process as "it becomes flesh, the flesh, itself, becoming the world" (Irigaray, 2002, p. 11). There is a breaking down of boundaries between the outer and the inner opening up

³⁵ I am also inspired by Bickel's (2008) work on a/r/tography as ritual and sacred aesthetic.

a new world (Rosenblatt, 1978), and in this dissertation, I document my poetics of vision. *I am breaking layers of myself like shattering ice, entering into the cold waters only then to be warmed by the sun's merciful glow.*

I relinquish and breathe into the third spaces (Bhaba, 1990), as painful as it may be, as each layer gives in generative depths of meanings and I am somehow always lifted, seeking brings solace. I pay keen attention to the third entity that enters this inquiry, that unveils the mysterious even momentarily, that ebbs and flow in the in-between of what is hidden and revealed, of what I am coming to know as *The Real*. Therein, in this third space, there is perhaps what I can refer to as the third gaze, a gaze that comes from within, a gaze that then allows me to *SPIN*.

I Write Poetry

The Sufis spin
in remembrance of
God yearning
to fill
the heart
with Love
a hand towards the heavens
the other
down
wards
to the earth
I have seen them spinning
sublime swirling
cloaked cloud butterflies
a whirling
womb of
wondering wanting
lifting
till only the Heart
remains
now

Luminous.

I cannot spin
I am clumsy
without balance
or
grounding

So,
I write poetry.
to stir the heart of
what
lies within

I write poetry
to *Spin*

Like de Cosson (2002) who claims that he is “(researching) the process of my doing” (p. 132), “I am researching the process of my doing and of my *not* doing,” to submit and honour this third gaze, of a source enshrouded with mystery, where searching is boundless. This is desire that becomes and then *becomes*. In my “pedagogy of being becoming” (de Cosson, 2002, p. 128), I render to always being in place of processing, in this whirling womb of wonder and wanting. In my pedagogy of becoming, I am then learning to actualize my full being. As Denton (2006) writes of her wounds as informing her practice of the heart, she “catalyzes” her exploration through poetry and as I “catalyze,” I also musicalize, lyricalize, verticalize and spiritualize my own (re)search as a spirited site of deepening understandings of the soul of the poetic experience. In this breath, I am in-theorizing³⁶ how spirit

³⁶ As in my poetry and lyrics, my theorizing shares the same processes of inquiry. That is, through the reaching in and then out, I gain the vision that enables me to keep moving forward in my (re)search.

continues to enter my a/r/tographic praxis. My methodological calling to a/r/tography is that the act of searching is an expression of my faith.

And spirit is always becoming.

I am a Flicker From Your Flame

I am a flicker from your flame which illuminates my core
The very utterance of your name speaks to my very soul
My heart beats in rhythm to every step you take
This pain of separation, yet I silently wait

The wind blows ceremoniously over the blue harbour
The trees stand graciously into a warm salute
And as the shade of the sky transforms to a brilliant hue
The earth resonates: *Allahu, Allahu*—the source of light is You

My eyes need not open as it's the heart that embraces you
And as you make your presence clear, love itself fills the room
There is no future or no past, just the stillness of this moment
Every cell in my being Awake, no longer dormant

Oh, I am just a ripple and you, the tide that brings me home
Oh, I am just an lonely vessel sailing towards your shore
Grant me wisdom to seek the truth in both the worlds I live
Your guiding light, merciful eyes, your benevolence

As I am a flicker from your flame which illuminates my core
The very utterance of your name speaks to my very soul
My heart beats in rhythm to every step you take
This pain of separation, yet I silently wait

Point of Light: *Sandals in the Snow*

Like a piece of ice on a hot stove, the poem must ride its own melting.

(Frost, 1939/2007, p. 1156)

In poetry I remember places of being. In poetry I remember being in places. As a poet, I am intrigued with how poetry holds a memory in the embrace of its words, how keen moments come together, crystallize and continue to give in the remembrance of and to a lifeworld. I offer a poem and theorize its layered meanings as inspired by the (re)generative potential of poetic awareness, in the very givenness that poetry can bring. Herein, I contextualize poetry as “a motion of the soul” (Heaney, 1995, p. 192), “an orientation of the spirit” (Havel as cited in Heaney, p. 4), where verse is guided by the desire to not only know what is Real, but to remember the human experience as it is *being*. In the soul of poetic knowing is this remembering. Moreover, in poetry as a spiritual praxis, there is both critical and creative communion with self marked by faith and remembrance. Within this process of spiritual hermeneutics, I opened with Frost who writes of poetic lines as a purposeful descension unto itself, whereby I contemplate this unfolding of each poetic line melting into pools of self reflection: a (re)turning. In poetry as witness (Bachelard, 1964; Kramer, 2016), I propose poetry as “witness,” in the unity that a poem can bring, in a oneness of space and time. It is in the retelling that crystallizes the moments with a vividness that allows me to be brought back to the centre of an experience.

Poetry then descends to transcend the experiencing of and anchors itself

somewhere in the beyond (Havel, as cited in Heaney, 1995). The integrity of a poetic seeking lies in its ability to be both very much *here* and *there*. In the cross of this horizontal and vertical intention—in the primacy of the present and in the resonances that echo eternally—is where I write poetry. Neilsen Glenn (2010) writes of the “infinite relational resonances” (p. 6) of lyrical expression and in my poem as lyric, in my poem as bell (Zwicky, 1992), I consider the resounding notion of poetic inquiry as awakening and reverberating a memory that resides bone deep in me.

And herein is how poetry winters a memory.

Harbouring and holding.

In my poem “Sandals in the Snow” I claim in the opening verse, in fact, that I do not remember this memory of the first falling of snow that my mother and I shared and witnessed together. It is through her telling that I remember. In the hush of that sacred snow felt morning, a memory is harboured. In the writing and (re)telling of the memory, poetic inquiry strengthens the sensual ability to (re)imagine what the experience holds. I propose that poetry can nurture our ruminative relations with both the material and the spiritual world and all that encompasses our becomings.

I (re)turn to the notion of “riding its own melting” (Frost, 1939/2007, p. 1156) and how I had a “felt sense” (Gendlin, 2004) of knowing and how the body moved me forward, carried me through negotiating inward and outward as “the capacity of language is rooted in the human body as reflexively sensed from the inside” (p. 128). In my body as poetic, in this poetic body as sensing, I attuned to the

openings of each line as I reached to touch the memory. And with the snowflakes, I tasted and experienced in and through my poem as it melted upon me and there is renewal.

Rumi writes: “Be melting snow/Wash yourself of yourself” (as cited in Barks, 1997, p. 13), and in this concept of *Oneness*, where the individual flakes melt together to become one with all, is the wholeness of the poem. In the wholeness that poetry might bring, in this notion of coherence (Zwicky, 1995; Shidmehr, 2014), my poetic offering is “more” (Gendlin, 2004) than method, more than a memory. It becomes the mother I write of. And:

Oh!
How the words
They hold
Me
Now.

Sandals in the Snow³⁷

My mother tells me of
A memory
That I cannot remember
But is bone deep in me—
Like the cold of the snow
On that wintery day in Nanaimo
As she woke to witness
Her first fall of white covering
Our housing complex
Alone with me

³⁷ Please see supplementary audio file for spoken word track “Sandals in the Snow.”
<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

Far from the African tropical rhythms
That she innately knew
Now muted by the silence of the snow felted
Morning
A hushing—
That nature will bring

I was only two
And I am much older now then
She was that day in Nanaimo
I imagine
Her gingerly opening the curtain
As I lay sleeping
To let the morning light in
To only see the white
Opening eyes peering into the sky
Looking up and up
Struck
With wonder
Awaiting

She wears sandals
And me too
Not knowing the cold
That the snow will bring
And we venture outside
A mother and a child
In the warmth of a shared moment
That I recreate now
A felt sense of a memory in those flakes of snow—
Of a little red jacket
In the white pristine
A pink baby tongue tasting
Crystals
A snow angel
And then
Me
Spinning
Arms outstretched
Eyes closed

Head uplifted
Feeling the
Melting

And the mother
Who looks on
And on
Not feeling the coldness
In a forgiving embrace
With the grace
Nature will bring—
A calming
In the lightness
Of the child
Now
That she will teach
To feel the
Mystery
Of
IT
All.

And as winter brings its wonder with the whirling snow in which I have become a part of now, in this *withness*, a moment is crystallized and brought into its own lightedness. In the writing, what has guided and affirmed my (re)searching is an “illuminated rightness” (Heaney, 1995, p. xvii) that moves me into each line. It is the soul that seeks to remember, and the memory is now held in clarity, in a clearing (Heidegger, 1971) that opens, and then remains open. In poetry there is no closing. Poems are a (re)search site that desires a returning. I resonate with Richardson (2000) who states that evocative texts can be conceptualized as crystals and in this central imaginary, “what we see depends on the angle of our repose” (p. 934).

The richness of the poem is where this memory rings a truth that stands for, and in, itself. As Heidegger (1971) writes: “Truth happens in the temple’s standing

where it is. This does not mean that something is correctly represented and rendered here, but that what is as whole is brought into unconcealedness and held therein” (p. 54). The “truth” of this moment is the presence of the poem, *being* in itself. As a moth entering the flame, illumined by its own burning as a becoming into, this poem is me, *becoming*.

Herein, it is the line of destiny that I also trace where in poetry I gain a keener understanding of where I am now and why I am, now, as an *a/r/tobiographer*³⁸ who is dedicating a life to “meeting mystery” (Todres, 2007, p. 184) in poetry as a spiritual practice. In this place of enchantment, as in the purity of the pristine snow, is where “nature wears the colour of the spirit” (Emerson, 1982, p. 39) and the mother in the poetry allows me to feel this unity. It is this moment that teaches a life as the snowflakes diffuse the light. I have come to know my (re)searching as a poetics of light where my scholarly inquiry is a “singing out in lyrical language like light that seeps into and through cracks and gaps” (Leggo, 2006b, p. 86). In the whiteness of the spaces in between the words, the desire of the poet lives in the unsaid, in what is deeply understood in silences that do speak.

In “Sandals in the Snow,” I am spinning and in its momentum, I ruminate on the notion of growing into the light that Bachelard (1988) writes about, a light that transforms my moving being. This poem is born from this energy. In the poem as a whirling, a hand to the heavens and the other to the earth, the heart is stirred

³⁸ I remind the reader of my notion of *a/r/tobiography*. As in autobiography, *a/r/tobiographical* writing narrates, documents and reflects on the personal stories of my artist, researcher, and teacher identities. As I consider *a/r/tography* and *a/r/tobiography* interchangeable terms in this work, the stress on “biography” details various aspects of a life and the explication of specific intimate experiences that illuminate the inquiry at hand.

through spirit as poetry and poetry as spirit. This poem embodies both. In the silence of the snow, I danced to the “music of the sky” (Laude, 2004) and came to know its song as I (Schuon, 2002). In the song that is I, is also the song that is Thou.

Herein, in this poem there is so much “more” (Gendlin, 2004), as it is more resilient than any photograph, has more integrity in the imagery that gives and gives in its imaginative prowess. This is a (re)generative space in a poem that stands in its own shining, reflecting, and refracting light outwards and inwards. Hereby, a simple—almost mundane—memory of a mother and a child is now sacred, and in the winter that I write of, this poem may hibernate for a while to be remembered with each and every snowfall, *again and again and again*.

And, wherein, I (re)affirm now:

Each day
I get a little closer
to knowing
You,
Please
don't show me
all
that You
Are
I want to be forever
lost
in the music
of You,
Revealing

Point of Light: *The Dawning of Desire*

Dawn of Desire

The dawn of desire
creeps upon the morning
merging itself
with the promise of
a new day
the morning dew
is my poetry
quivering
in the possibility
of what is to
unfold
relinquishing
my words
to the vastness of
the open seamless
sky

In the sky of inquiry I conceptualize my (re)search to be and to become. In this schooling in slowness, I have had the privilege of traversing time and space through poetry, and in this place poems are desire clothed in form. Heidegger (n.d., par. 1) eloquently wrote: “Longing is the agony of the nearness of the distant.” And in poetry, I am perpetually getting closer to some *thing*. I perceive longing as the very impetus of poetic intention, that is, where in the crux of wanting is the desire to come closer to the “gaze of something that stares back at us” (van Manen, 2002, p.

5). In this call to wonder in the face of the world (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) is an infinite line of inquiry that is fuelled with a desire to gaze inwards at oneself in relation to the world that reciprocates our very becoming with and through it. In the longing that gives rise to desiring is a call to remembering. This becomes a dialogical act of remembrance.

I only exist because of You.

You exist because I do.

Poetry exists in the world of the spirit. In the act of re(turning) to our deepest selves is where poetry becomes a sacred space to live, to be and breathe wherein “the world of becoming is the one in which we become ourselves; the world where our understanding, expression and creation takes place; the particularly human world in and through which we become more human” (Fujita, 2002, p. 132). And poetry strengthens the human spirit. My metaphor of the sky of inquiry represents the boundless potential in which I climb and explore these terrains of time and space. The vastness of the sky that is in eye/I, speaks to the sheer capacity of the human mind.

I contemplate a life encountering the inner desires of a soul that wants to be proclaimed, (re)presenting my being in a world in words. My poetry is always *reaching* towards what lies at the ontological core of being between the interplay of reflection and memory that inspirits the intimacy of this inquiry. In my personal investigation where I conceptualize poetry as scattering into an “open seamless sky,” vulnerability reverberates in the process of doing and releasing. My own

vulnerability and ability to document my journey in authentic ways is the integrity of this (re)search.

And how Desire rises.

In my poetry I experience a heightened place, a nervous space, and as the words are on the thresholds of becoming, there is an urgency now that enters my being.

I must write THIS.

In a longing to know is to be “vulnerable to the givenness of what is giving itself in its [own] self-givenness” (Steinbock, 2007, p. 5). And poetry is a dialogue with desire between the writer who brings her full intention and attention to the page and what *it* is that also needs to be known. In dwelling in my poetic I/eye, I am learning, is where every *thing* is giving.

To subject one’s self to the experience of writing is to be the subject of the inquiry (Richardson, 2000). As Frost (1939/2007) conceptualizes, a poem like ice that melts upon oneself into reflective waters signifies the changes of a material form that then takes on another shape. As knowing takes the shape of understanding, I resonate with hooks (1999) who states that writing “is a way to experience the ecstatic . . . when I am immersed so deeply in the act of thinking and writing everything else, even flesh, falls away” (p. 35). In this falling away of flesh I am standing, left with the bones of inquiry, bare but strong.

This is my transformation.

Ice into water

Flesh into bone.

The beauty of poetry lies in the yearning, an intimate journey that revels in the drunkenness of drawing closer to the gaze of something that one cannot fully know, but that keeps one held.

I am holding a pen holding Desire.

And the lines of poetry are lined with the hope that something will purposefully reveal through the intention to know it, to claim it, to name it. As Bachelard (1969) writes, poetic reverie is where “all senses awaken and fall in harmony” (p. 6), and I contextualize this “drunkenness” as relinquishing a self to a heightened attentiveness to being, listening and, also, dreaming. In the music of this desire, the dreamer as poet is “already hearing the sounds of the written words” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 6). *To be a poet is to know the power of dreams.* In poetic desire, each poetic turn is an infinite meditation (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), and where I am coming to learn once more Rumi’s lamenting: “My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that and I intend to end up there” (Barks, 1997, p. 2). I ponder how the writing of these lines strengthened his desire.

One must write to know IT.

Writing is both meditation and also mediation, subtle and profound.

In *Hegel’s Dialectic of Desire and Recognition*, Hyppolite’s (1996) commentary on Hegel’s desire posits that self-consciousness is at the heart of desire:

“Consciousness is knowledge of another, knowledge of the sensuous world in general; self-consciousness, on the contrary, is self-knowledge and is expressed in the identity I” (p. 68). When engaged in deep systematic reflection, a turning inwards, there is a unity with the world and with I. This turning in and out—*in and*

then out—brings my being into unity. Poetry is this unity. The eye that looks out and the I that looks in. My poetic truth(s) are what rings true, in this space of where I AM. Truth is light for even a moment. An artist's desire is to find the desire that rises up from the deep into a dawning. I desire poetry, which not only allows me to live sensuously in the sensuous world, but also is a pathway to self-knowledge: "this being is not the being of nature but the being of desire, the disquiet of the self" (Hyppolite, 1996, p. 77). Here is clarity.

*There, is a hushing
Like the falling of the snow
Quieting the earth
Where white is light
Manifest.*

Lilburn (1997) acknowledges that desire itself is never satisfied, but aesthetic contemplation allows us to see the shape and the face and the colours of *it*.

In this disquieting of the self, aesthetic space is an interruption (Nielsen Glenn, 2004) where "hope dwells in the spaces of possibility" (Leggo, 2004b, p. 22) of being provoked by the art of one's self through "evocative representations" (Richardson, 2000, p. 931). Herein, "we can experience the self-reflective and transformational process of self-creation" (Richardson, 2000, p. 931). To embrace the Eros of language is to embrace the disruption that has called it into being and into remembering to be. As Dickinson (as cited in Parini, 2008, p. 101) experienced that, "after a great pain, a formal feeling comes." Esmail (1998) writes of poetry's capacity to create "meanings in reserve" (p. 21) through the generative power of the

imagery that keeps it unfolding and enfolding into new creations. I consider the notion of not only meanings in reserve, but also, also, *moments in reserve*, always a becoming into the meaning of. Each moment upon moment holds intuitive power and potential. I am turning into process and purpose.

Poetry, as desire's longing, is also the "waiting in the world of becoming" (Fujita, 2002, p. 125) with a sureness that destiny is in the poetry where self is singing to the world (Lee, 1998; Neilsen, 2008) in a lyrical language where desire gives into desire. I gave in to love's desire one lonely afternoon as I was walking along Ambleside beach. I was in despair and felt profoundly empty.

Where is Love?

I was seeking, but didn't know I was seeking, perhaps a moment of passivity gazing at the placid ocean that was necessary for the words to come which did in a surge-filled moment, in "a collision of light and life" (Keshavaraz, 2006, p. 112), where I had to eagerly find a pen so I wouldn't miss the lyrical call. This was a moment that was in reserve, waiting for the call to become a lyrical inquiry that did change my destiny in what was to come. As in the depths of the ocean that I was walking alongside, Neilsen Glenn poignantly writes of lyrical inquiry as "an ability to listen beyond the surface of the what's said and to see beyond the surface of what's given; the capacity and willingness to wait, a long patience that reaps insight" (2014, p. 142). And when my sister sang the melody that brought my soul song to being, I had to just weep at the words that in their surprising simplicity touched the inner strings of a soul gazing at itself, *waiting*.

Some thing is always waiting.

Waiting³⁹ (Rajabali, Rajabali, & Cruz, 2004)

How blue is the ocean that brings forth the tide
Like my lonely heart drowning deep inside
Lovers walking hand in hand but no one for me
Who will fulfill my destiny?
Who will fulfill my destiny?

This emptiness in my heart is too much to bear
So I patiently wait and for him I prepare
If you feel that I'm not ready for it to reveal
Will You please let me heal?

Bring me a lover
That will stay forever
Bring me a lover
And I will surrender
And never stray again
And never stray again

If all things are determined in this life
Was all this pain meant to be right?
I've been down this road
Oh, so many times
If I seek then will I find?
If I seek then will I find?

Bring me a lover
May he stay forever?
Bring me a lover
And I will surrender
And never stray again
I will never stray again

³⁹ Please see supplementary audio track for song "Waiting."
<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

Point of Light: *Home Coming*

The first time I felt raw emotion was when I was almost six and my sister, Yasmine, was born. I bring this experience into being as when I ruminate upon the first time that I felt “poetic;” I reflect on the same experience in this kindred kindling of emotion. This windswept feeling—rising waves inside of me—is poetry. I trace the thread of my own history of weaving this (re)search back to the tear I surprisingly shed when she came home.

And I remember.

I was in the poetics of experiencing and encountering the hues of my own horizons, to be pushed into the edges of naked emotion, to be real, to be raw. Into this opening, what was not there, now, here it *Is*. When she was born, I became a poet. And it is somehow the fate of She who must sing herself out into the world like the echoing resonances of a bird’s calling.

Here I am and I am and I am...

And verticality brings harmony (Bachelard, 1988).

She lifting lyrics into Song
Of the most High
Sister like sparrow
Melody’s rising and scattering
Into the sky
And, yes, oh, yes
Here
You
Are.

And I ask now what is transcending in-between poetry becoming lyric becoming
song?

Love IS.

Bringing Home Yasmine

I was nearly six
when she was almost
not born labouring
inside my mother
good and long
in the dark watery womb
of a soul in the in-between
yearning to breathe
the outside
rupturing the only rhizome
she knew crossing threshold
emerging
among the blood
and the pain
into the light—
Four pounds
Singing

I somehow remember
the dripping
of vanilla ice cream
and how Rahima and me
unabashedly ate the cones in my father's
old beige dodge pick up
with plastic bags that he put
around our necks in
a nurturing roughness
to catch the drops
And then the
dishes that were
piled up in the kitchen
without my mother

while the IV
must have been
dripping
down
into her
delicate arms
That now carried my baby sister
born on the first day of Spring
named after a fragrant flower
my father was wearing
on his lapelle
“Yasmine” he said
pronounced and proud
as my mother lowered her down
gingerly to me
who then peered to see
Her
startling smallness
surprised by the lone tear
that fell from my face
rising with emotion
of a great love
that was somehow inside of me—
knowing
then
that my life would
never
be
the
same.

In dwelling in my poetic I/eye, I am reaching to others in the words and in the white spaces too. In the writing of my poem “Rahima,” I contemplate how poetry reaches in. And when the words cannot be spoken out and to, *there* is poetry.

Rahima

“Ana gone school?”
she would ask
my mother
as she awakened
to spend
the morning
pressing
her three-year-old face
against the frosted
window pane
on the inside
a blurred
looking out
for me
who she
would see
eventually
returning
to find her
wide brown eyed
waiting by the door
I, six years old now
and too grown up
 or too young
to notice how
she loved
often
I, not stopping
but
bouncing up the stairs
with the promise
of new friends in
A world outside
us two
now
her solace
in having me home
always

reaching
up—

*Would it have made
the
difference
now
to have reached out
then
momentarily to touch
the soft earnest face
of the one
who waits
Instinctively
Lovingly?*

A sister
whose empty
room I sat in
sixteen years later
the first
to let go
every so often
She
passing through
home
speaking stories
of mountains and music
of lovers and longings
To I,
who could see her
clearly
wide brown eyed soft
woman for whom I wait
always
pressing my face
against the window
of her life
Only
to let me in
at times
earnestly

wanting to
reach
in
from
the outside.

And in poetry I do not stand on the outside. I turn in to what is held on the inside, revealing a deeply embodied perceptual praxis. From in to out and out to back in, I move in this endless hermeneutic circling. With each turn comes a knowing, a keen understanding and then back to center, and then back out, *stronger*. This is the centre of self that experiences the center of the experience. I am drawing in and drawing out in a rhizomorphic patterning. In enacting my a/r/tographic praxis, as I stated in my Prologue, are the patterns of my own becoming as in the raindrops that come together and linger on a leaf. And I am claiming and being claimed. In this naming, at times, comes the pain. I draw and withdraw through this pain that gathers the grace that only poetry can bring to me.

And on the beach in Jericho one grey afternoon in May, my I/eye hones in to three birds homing on a log. Something so familiar calls me forth in three birds as in three sisters.

Poetry is a honing in and a homing in.

In my writing of this poem, in retrospect, I ruminate on why I did not describe the appearance or colour of the birds and then I understand that in their aeriality, they are “the colour of infinity” (Bachelard, 1988, p. 77). Hirshfield (2007) asks: “Is there some quality in birds—the way their presence among us might be withdrawn at any moment, or the way that part of us follows them into the distance—that causes them to recur?” (p. 143). And I ask: *what does not distance us from the birds’ journey?*

Three

I see three birds
perching
on a weathered log
crossing
into the line
of the low tide—
half onto the sand
and half into the waters
where now a trinity of birds
sit in one momentary stay
facing
the vastness
of the briny blue ocean
breathing

I know this
language of the birds
as the wind's embrace lifts me
forward
to something so familiar
in three birds
like three sisters
three years apart
of three lives
always in the possibility
of flight
to the west, to the north and to the south
spaces in between
of us
who once shared a single womb
wandering now afar
to come home, ever so often
like the birds where no words
are necessary
of a silence that gestures
and then speaks:

I know

I know

I know

I can almost hear them say
as they move together

Oh, how they show love
how this will have to endure

As one then takes her flight
not looking
behind anymore
to follow the single stroke
of a paint brushed cloud
to her own
destiny disappearing
into the light
onwards
and then another,
leaving the other,
to follow with only her eyes
knowing she needs to stay
Here—

like my mother
who lost both sisters
and then sat with the empty bodies
she could not follow
with even her eyes
and
how I feel this pain now
of no returning
as I can almost hear the lone bird
whisper in the hollows
of my own heart
Oh, please come home?

Point of Light: *Evoking You*

The world and I reciprocate one another. The landscape as I directly experience it is hardly a determinate object; it is an ambiguous realm that responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in turn.

(Abram, 1997, p. 33)

I am intrigued with Abram's (1997) phenomenological notion of the world as a sensuous entity that ebbs and flows with every single movement of our being in a meeting of horizons between us and the world that is always pulsating, always in motion, "into which we move and that moves with us" (Gadamer, 1989, p. 304). Poetry is the pulsing of experiencing.

Pulsing, pulsing, pulsing

ALL is.

To consider this infinite conversation is to affirm the multiple layers of meaning that are given to any human experience. To (re)turn to the world, as in the metaphor of the dervish, is to cycle through desire, interpretation, and revelation and to be in a space where we are not merely a spectator (Merleau-Ponty, 2002), but where the nature of our perspective and perception makes possible the expansiveness of the horizons of our encountering.

And "what you seek, is [also] seeking you" (Rumi, n.d.-c, par. 1).

And what you see, does it see you too?

In the act of living interpretation as an unfolding of meanings, we are brought to the very gateway of knowing. What we see are governed by all aspects of our

whole being in the world—mental, emotional, physical and spiritual. In a sense, the vastness or smallness of our understandings are from where we are metaphorically standing at a particular time and space. In essence, poetry becomes a way to express my standpoints, of what and where I am *standing in*.

I bring forth this dialogue at this point of my inquiry because like Abram (1997) who bridges ecological and spiritual being in the intertwining web of experience in a landscape that is lived from within, I am seeking to know the landscape of poetry and how it evokes in us, through us, with us, the words that reflect a world of our unique perceptions. Esmail (1998) writes of the poetic experience as “generat[ing] lines of meaning which emerge and radiate inwards and outwards” (p. 21), into what I call *rhizomatic revelations*. In lingering through the landscape of language, poetry can ground one’s self again, back to our bodies, back to our spirit, back to the ecosystems we inhabit.

The transactional theory of evoking a poem (Rosenblatt, 1978) is a potent notion that calls to my own inquiry in looking to poetry as “language that always stays near the source and hears the coursing of that primal Silence” (Cheetham, 2012, p. 247), in whatever name we choose to give this “source.” The process of interiorization (Cheetham, 2012) is where we depart from external reality into a spiritual one; the lines of flight, therein, are lit with points of light. In my experience, each poem allows me to linger in the spaces in-between the dark and light, moving with sureness in its infinite verticality knowing that “in the very appearing of the phenomenon is concealed the essence of what is” (Aoki, as cited in Pinar, 2005, p.

13). To be a poet is to be a defender of interiority, always in love with the cosmos (Irigaray, 2002).

I see the heart of the tree
carved by nature's hand
and I feel the soul of the Ocean
waves rhythmic and robust,
This must be essence.

To contextualize poetry as a spiritual process and practice is to know poetic expression as a search, this “search for the truth of being” (Esmail, 1998, p. 73). In turn, to know the divine, one must be willing to know one's self, to contemplate the inner human landscape. I resonate with the premise that all questions on the nature of art, music and poetry are, in essence, theological (Cheetham, 2012), bringing one to the threshold of the Divine, the Source, and the Real. Poetry as an act of living spiritual interpretation, of self-awareness towards “achieving your own theophany—where the spring of the Water of Life is found, at the center of the world” (Cheetham, 2012, p. 153). In poetry as a spiritual pathway is the centre of the world on a page; this page being a vessel for the “Water of Life” that nourishes and nurtures the soul calling the Soul.

Now, wash over me.

Rosenblatt (1978) explored how the reader enters the text of a poem and what occurs in the process of encountering a poem. In this process of aesthetic contemplation, readers shape their own evocations in a transaction where the whole of one's life history is brought to the making of meaning.

And I bring All of me.

In poetry that is always performing, the communion of self and word and world(s) is one of continuing awareness, both an opening and a constraint.

*I push and it pushes me back,
pushing me back to seeing.*

The text, in Rosenblatt's (1978) interpretation is giving, but only as much as the reader is willing to enter into a transaction with the text and can "pay attention to the openness" (p. 88). The reader fills in the gaps and spaces and adopts an aesthetic stance to reading. In this transaction, there are moments of satisfaction that are gained in continuing to journey in the text. In essence, I contemplate this as exercising a commitment in action to experience its own thresholds in seeing the world imaginally.

I am
reading
a poem
reading
Me
reading
a Poem
reading
Me.

Herein, poetry is performing a contemplative pedagogy in action where desire is at the cross of intentions between the poem and the reader where the text itself must speak: "you must prove to me that it desires me" (Barthes, 1975, p. 6). Here lies the "truth" of poetry. What it is at any given time and space is what one desires to *see* and this desire is symbiotic. That is, the author desires the reader so

that the text will be revealed and known and the reader desires to know what the text holds. And my (re)search *performs* for the reader. I *become* only through and in relation to You. Hence, my poems must be known. To see a poem as lived and “burned” through one’s own history, is to acknowledge not only our historicity (Gadamer, 1989) and what we bring to the transaction, but also a call to words where paying “attention to language is a way, then, to reopen the question of what it means to be human” (Ricoeur, as cited in Esmail, 1998, p. 71).

And what it means to be human is to know what lies beyond.

Although Rosenblatt (1978) does not address spirituality, her theory calls to me in that in the process of “evoking” there is the past, the present and the future. In “evoking” there is something continuously becoming and to experience poetry is to engage in a modality that is revelatory. Poetry is human presence, of writer and of reader. What we are evoking—particularly in the writing of poetry—is both transcendent and immanent where “transcendence engages us with the mystery of reality, while immanence engages with its intimacy” (Lakhani, 2010, p. 182). And in poetry are both the mundane and the sacred. In poetry the profane reaches into the profound.

I contemplate not only what is evoked but also what I am invoking. In the heartbeat of my inquiry is the affirmation that “we are spiritual beings having a human experience” (Teilhard de Chardin, n.d. par. 1), and I pose the question that perpetually guides my (re)searching: *What is IT then that I am invoking?*

Ogden Point

I am standing at Ogden Point in Victoria, British Columbia, looking out into the Blue. My eyes expand to the breadth of the landscape, the ocean, the mountains, the sky. And the sky is in eye. A bird crosses into my vision and then becomes a speckle as the clouds move to the wind. The earth is turning. How the light flickers on the surface of the waters playing patterns shining like crystals, reflecting and refracting. And a poet is "a producer of lights [who] knows what heat source light comes from" (Bachelard, 1969, p. xxi). Here, I wrote the lyrics that became a song after eight years of leaving music.⁴⁰

IT found me again. What is the learning here? The poetic I/eye, it never closes.

Evoking You ⁴¹ (Rajabali, Rajabali, & Cruz, 2012)

My ancestors are here
I feel their spirits near
Echoes of a distant land
Ground me to the grains of sand

The tide doesn't come home
But I know its journey is my own
Your love is going to bring it here
There is nothing left to fear

*Everything I see evokes You
A rose in my heart eternally bloom
The sky surrounds a brilliant hue
Resonates your name, evoking you*

⁴⁰ Yasmine, Joe and I returned to studio in 2012 after a long hiatus to write and record "Evoking You."

⁴¹ Please see supplementary audio file for song "Evoking You."
<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

My soul's uplifted, a sound sublime
Signalling the coming of the tide
Hope, renewal, gratitude
In the very 'nature' of You
And I
Will never feel alone
Safe in God's abode
A sureness of my soul
And You
Giver of life
Keeper of the night
This light upon light upon light...

*Everything I see evokes You
A rose in my heart eternally bloom
The sky surrounds a brilliant hue
Resonates your name, evoking you*

Point of Light: *On Writing a Poem* ⁴²

*The sky
Is a suspended blue ocean
The stars are fish
That swim
The planets are the white whales
I sometimes hitch a ride on
And the sun and all light
Have forever fused themselves
Into my heart and upon
My skin.*

(Hafiz, as cited in Ladinsky, 1996, p. 67)

Not unlike the poet, the phenomenologist directs the gaze toward the regions where meaning originates, wells up, percolates through the porous membranes of past sedimentations— and then infuses us, permeates us, infects us, touches us...

(van Manen, 2007, p. 11)

As I practice phenomenologically informed perspectives of a/r/tography as wedded to poetic inquiry, I peel another layer of my (re)search by undertaking an intimate exploration of the kinship between phenomenology and poetry. Herein is where both evocative expressions place primacy on the sensual experiences of living and being in the world. It is in this space where attending to language reawakens the

⁴² A version of the chapter has been published in: Rajabali, A. (2014). On writing a poem: A phenomenological inquiry. *Creative Approaches to Research*, (7)2, 39-50.

essence of what is lived, breathed and burned through. Dahlberg (2006) writes that “when we attend intentionality to a phenomenon, when we understand that phenomenon and what it is, we are involved in essences” (p. 12). Like poetry, phenomenology requires a heightened attentiveness, a poetic sensibility, attuning one’s self to the subtle movements of the body experiencing, resonating with both presence and possibility. In my work I illuminate what I experience in my lifeworld. Poetry is a place to attend to the nuances of what I am encountering. My poetic language is evoked from a breathing sensing body in an ongoing conversation with the world that reciprocates and generates. I am experiencing the embodied flesh of an experience relived through the flesh and Eros of language (Abram, 1997). In this breadth, the writer/poet/researcher thrives on thresholds, documenting the doorways of being where being creates expression and expression, in turn, creates being. In this deepening of human understanding, language is then a “medium for experiencing experience” (Hejinian, 2000, p. 3). In willingly participating in this act of writing the body in the world, the process becomes not only poetic in its keen attention to language as it reduces and also exceeds its own capacities, but it also becomes a pedagogical encounter wherein “knowledge always speaks” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 57). In crystallizing this encounter through the act of writing, the union of experience and word becomes a practice of perceiving perceptions from within. In my quest, I not only bring some aspect of the living quivering world into being, but I become the world.

Words become a world.

The singing of a life world (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) is a provocative metaphor for a primal telling where each organism plays a part into its own becoming. In bridging both poetry and phenomenology, the intention of what is to be lifted off the page is the heart of the experience, a moment, an emotion, a feeling, an encounter, a snapshot of humanity in its vulnerability and resiliency. However there are different levels of directness, that is, the integrity of phenomenological writing is its explicit nature to explicate an episode documenting the living breathing moments of a body as it is experiencing some *thing*. And in poetry, it is the metaphoric possibilities, the prowess and potential of language that opens up meaning making. Both modes of representation can bestow a multiplicity of meanings and interpretations in illuminating some poignant aspect of human endeavouring, and here there can be transformation and connection for writer and reader.

Richardson's (2000) metaphor of a crystal in her discussion of social science research texts that are "evocative representations," cast light on the notion of writing that can illuminate, deepen and reflect human understandings. The metaphoric crystal also holds diverse truths in that what we will see depends on where we *are*, in our "angle of repose" (p. 934).

And the light comes in only when I am ready.

Reflecting and refracting from me.

Evocative writing "touches where we live, in our bodies" (Richardson, 2000, p. 931) and these words do not reach for some conclusive evidence, but instead for some sense of what lies at the ontological core of our being, between the interplay of reflection and memory that inspirits our personal investigations.

Ultimately, writing is the inquiry and intention, a process of coming to know what things are. It is in this writerly space, where absence is as telling as presence and where language as a discourse of representation substitutes for the phenomenon itself. It is here where “one can run up against the human wall of language or where one might be permitted to momentarily gaze through its crevices” (van Manen, 2006, p. 718). In this possibility of openings is where there is hope and desire. Writing itself becomes a process of the flickering between light and dark where lightness and darkness ebb and flow in cycles of knowing. Writing is a glimpsing into creating meaning. Bringing an object into one’s gaze is mediated by the tension and at times, obligation of rendering it to the page. In my work I am seeking understanding and in this process, I am coming to know what something is as *it* is mediated through me.

The core intimacy of poetic expression leads Bachelard (1964) to understand “poetry as a phenomenology of the soul” (p. xxi)—a primal expression of human life. The vibrancy of the poetic image sets off reverberations in language that sings to and about the world. This notion of language that takes root in us speaks to the nature of an experience that calls for it to be named because “writing creates a space that belongs to the unsayable” (van Manen, 2006, p. 718). In this process of naming the unnamed (Derrida, 1978), there is then a renewal where one emerges in the awakening of creation (Bachelard, 1964), in the process of becoming said. In writing there is both passivity and liberation, that is, a willingness for the words to come through and a certain freedom that comes from the given understandings.

To enter or puncture liminal spaces is also to dwell in places that are painful and yet need to be claimed and contained on the page. Writing becomes a political and pedagogical act. hooks (1999) states for her in the “moment I whirl with words, when I dance in the ecstatic circle of love surrounded by ideas, it is an act of transgression...there are no binding limitations” (p. 45). In turn, phenomenological writing becomes a tool for deeper understanding of living human diversity as a vehicle in which to fearlessly say the unsayable, “to see the nakedness of the now” (van Manen, 2006, p. 718). To be in this place where even “flesh then falls away” (hooks, 1999, p. 35) is to be in the very bones of raw inquiry. In the notion of the now is also contained the past, the history of our understandings that enable one to see what one sees and then, also, what one is becoming through writing. I conceptualize this as being in the fullness of an experience. In this type of seeing, of being in the poetic I/eye, is where both poetry and phenomenology can strengthen pluralistic understandings of what it means to be human.

Poetry, in the way of Rumi, requires rapture, a revelry with the world and the word, a relinquishing of boundaries, a stripping down of self, this nakedness where one is consumed with only the experiencing of what is coming through. And this is a place that I am coming to know as presence, of being here and also giving into the spirit that enters my writing. Thus, this is not a place of only intellectual engagement but of heightened emotions guided by keen intuition. In poetry there is a rawness of being, a human endeavouring that sparks the body, mind, and soul, of what I know as a peaking of consciousness.

And what calls an experience to the page? In the broad spectrum of human emotions, the notion that something has to echo or has to speak to our consciousness (Merleau-Ponty, 2002) in the very depths of our being, bridges the sheer diversity of feelings that can call one into writing. van Manen (2002) puts forth that the impetus for this desire is a call to wonder as we are “drawn by the gaze of something that stares back at us” (p. 5). In this premise, we are then to acknowledge the reciprocity of the world, as it becomes us as much as we become it in this “wider dance of the human body with the larger body of the earth” (Searle, 2012, p. 53). To be thrown into the natural world is to consider how much our own perceptions are determined by our own presence at a given time and space and what factors may limit or expand the field of our experiences and then our perception. To document a moment is to know where we are and were at certain points of our lives. Phenomenology and poetry call us to a heightened attentive sense of being-in-moment. In practicing this living inquiry is where there is a communion with and through the world and the possibilities of traversing a personal landscape journeying through the hues of emotion. This questing guided by the capacity and the vastness of our own vision opening (or closing) to the earth.

What do we take IN?

As I enter the poetic space of this inquiry, I acknowledge the act of “poetry as a site for the consciousness of perception” (Hejinian, 2000, p. 67). As language can lift an experience into heightened ways of seeing and understanding, the full breadth of what occurs is left to remain and linger in the gaps. In presenting a poem followed by the lived experience of writing the poem, I engage in poetics in my

phenomenological reflection. There could be in fact very little separation in the space in between the poem and the experience of writing it—both inspired with the process of a phenomenological investigation. In writing the lived experience, the question of how this poem has come into being becomes a philosophical question. The process of engaging in metapoetics or metapoetry with the lens of phenomenology has, in turn, called my attention to the writer as a feeling sensing body. At this point in my inquiry, I am getting closer to knowing the body that writes.

And what calls me to an encounter?

IT.

Promise

I place my foot
Upon the sand
That gives gently
To the presence of
My body
On this slightly frigid December
Morning
Where the cold air fills my eyes
With an awakened intensity
A sudden expansion of the
Landscape before me
Where I witness the eager rays
Of light
Break through
The horizon
With a pronounced promise
Of a day
Peaking
To the rhythms
Of the ocean

That I now too
Inhabit

My life world—
In the very breath
That appears
Lingers
Disappears
Before
Me
Breath upon breath
This milky cloud of being
That keeps me moving
As the sand upon sand upon sand
Is lifting
Shifting
Releasing
Remaining
Becoming part of
The journey
I purposefully make
To the edge of the morning's shore

Where I observe
A lone seagull
Steadying the waters
Steadying the lone seagull
Momentarily
Communing
With the ocean in the between
Of flight

This line of flight
That I am now a part of
A Bird
An Ocean
Sand
A Woman

Its own Rhizome ⁴³

That

Gives

Moves

Generates

Produces

Desires

My own

Maternal consciousness

That heightens

And

Aches

As She

Sits

On the womb

Of the ocean

That supports her

As the sand supports

Me

In a state of becoming

And

The bird, Now

As if sensing the sudden keenness of my own horizons

The sheer intensity of my thinking

Takes flight into her own

As if to answer my unsaid

Question on this now

Sacred slightly frigid December

Morning

Leaving

Me

To ponder

With wonder

The part we all play

In each others

Veritable

Becomings

⁴³ See Deleuze and Guattari (1987)

Entering

I stare at the barren page that seems to blink blankly back at me as if to question my own readiness to write this poem. I sit at my cluttered dark wood stained slightly key scratched dining table which is becoming my personal library, a testament to my own evolving thinking and burgeoning interests where Heidegger, Ponty, Dilthey, Gadamer, Derrida, Irigaray, hooks, van Manen, and Hafiz and Rumi live, dwell and linger and bear witness to my mission. This poem that I try to create in this space— that place— to write the words that have been burning in and through my mind for four months since that morning in Parksville in December where I witnessed a lone bird on the blue waters.

But like every poem I write, I need to walk with it first, to let the words find their way, their own rhyme and reason to commit to the page. This blank page, which feels lonely as I still sit in my white robe in the late morning and sip a dark, now, lukewarm bitter espresso that gives a sense of the comforting routine of a morning. And I listen to the ebb and flow of the raindrops, light to heavy and back to light drops that find themselves on the window and I turn my gaze without moving my body. I keenly sense my loneliness on this Saturday, which is unlike the others, where I have a rare morning of silence coupled with a surge of ensuing creativity and I feel that surge in my flesh, stronger than it has been for some time. But I want music, a little Marvin Gaye (1971/2003, track 1), a little “What’s Going On?” But I resist, as if calling to the words themselves to fill this void. I sense the tension, the vulnerability of rendering one’s self on the page, the tightness in my upper spine. I feel my eyebrows lift as I think about the sand, the beach, the air, my breath, the sadness that has been sitting in the

core of my chest with these words that I lived but still do not know. That epiphanic moment on the beach lives in my memory, does not allow me to leave it, compels me to relive it.

My mind takes me to Annie Dillard (1989) and how she laments that the only thing that will teach you to write is the blank page itself and I feel the pull towards it. The pull I feel to sit and write is more than the pull to get up and leave it. I feel a moment of in-betweenness of almost getting up off the chair...

But my desire is greater and I feel my feet firmly rooted and I lean in to the writing. I submit willingly to this communion with words in a journey of both desire and doubt. My eyes shift only for a fleeting moment to the cherry tree filled pink blossoms outside the window gathering rain as if to give a sudden inspiration...

I type...I am. No! I delete.

I type...I enter. No! I delete.

I type...I see. No! I delete again. My throat tightened and feels trapped with restrained breath.

I sense the familiar line between my forehead wrinkle and deepen as I hear my sister's voice: You will need Botox if you keep doing that...

My wrist and forearm tense as I go again to the again stark page...

I talk to myself out loud and close my eyes while my fingers still hover over the keyboard.

See it, smell it...sense it...start at the beginning...

*I smell the air of that morning, summoning the moment, the salty sharpness, and the
"beachness."*

*I see myself there. I remember vividly placing my foot upon the sand and my eyes filling
with the scene before me.*

I shall pause there. I shall start here.

I open my eyes and breathe into the first verse:

I place my foot (enter)

Upon the sand (enter)

That gives gently (enter)

To the presence of (enter)

My body (enter)

*And my lips come together and I exhale loudly as I enter this sacred sublime
place evoking the words evoking me giving into them as they come now with grace and
purpose...a knowing...a sensing...an attending to its rhythms and form and where I
should "enter." I feel the familiar tears filling my eyes in the humbling beauty of this
moment of creation coming through me as I linger in a space that I can only call Spirit,
this commitment I make to what is in me, transcending me in wanting and wonder.*

*And the rain continues to fall almost lovingly now as I lean into this poetic calling on
what was only minutes ago a lonely Saturday morning.*

(Re)turning

By intentionally engaging in this multilayered inquiry, I have stood at different points of distance. From first unpacking the notion of poetry and phenomenology as kindred concepts, I have placed myself somewhat on the outside to be able to see in.

I/eye stand back to see in.

Secondly, my poetry bridges this distance, in that it gives light to the nature of an experience that has been lived. Dilthey (1985) writes that it is the calling of the poet to explicate lived experience, this lived experience that is “a structural nexus which preserves the past as ‘presence’ in the present” (p. 16). Moreover, the notion of experiencing an absolute presence and expansive perception both as heightened states of being in moments that render it with meaning and purpose, leaves one to consider what could have possibly been left as fleeting and unnoticed. Merleau-Ponty (2007) states that what makes an event lived is that it occurs at “close quarters” and Dilthey (1985) puts forth that “a feeling is a relatively fleeting subjective state related to representational consciousness, a lived experience is described as a more lasting mode in which reality is possessed” (p. 16). *And what will I see the next time I come back to this place? In what ways will this particular experience still speak?*

In the context of my poem, “Promise,” in both its creation and content, I consider the nature of a lived experience with the readiness, willingness, and openness of both heart and perception that it entails, but also how the world gives

and reciprocates in this infinite meditation (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) of meanings. These meanings upon meanings in moments that render it to being, in turn, are given to us as much as we are relinquishing them upon the world.

Rendering and relinquishing is the process.

The rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), as a central metaphor for my a/r/tobiographic writing, considers the in-between spaces and places where meanings live and linger and also the intertwined parts of meaning making. It is only through entering one space that one can access the other.

I understand this only by knowing what has come before.

As well as relational meaning making in which “we are through and through relation to the world” (Merleau-Ponty, 2007, p. 67), the rhizomatic notion of multiple non-hierarchical entry and exit points carry the sheer diversity and complexity of human experience. To inherently know that “I am not the spectator, I am involved” (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 354) is to acknowledge the potential of our own being in and with the world and the sheer promise of revelations that can enrich human understandings. The poetic eye and the phenomenological eye are both motivated by perception, a moment of wonder that echoes and resonates in a place where knowledge can speak most profoundly in silences.

In the silences come the understandings.

Merleau-Ponty writes: “It is in ourselves that we shall find the unity of phenomenology and its true sense” (2007, p. 56). The word “unity” provokes a process where the interplay of perception and reflection, of living through a “lived

through” encounter leads to a coming together of self in world and moreover, an elevated sense of one in the world. I am standing in the experience and yet above it at the same time. To me, pure phenomenology is not a possibility and this is due to my poetic sensibility that wants to speak in metaphors and implicitly. Every experience gives metaphoric understandings. My phenomenological attending to my lived experience of writing “Promise” allowed me to enter a third space of knowing, where insight is gained when paying attention to the nuances in-between the witnessing and the writing. In my dialogue highlighting the concept of distance, this particular process was driven with the intention to become bodily aware in and to the very flesh and bones of my experience. This is the intimacy of a body that goes into the world sensually and readily.

To dwell in this textorium is to enter by way of deep reflection as a pathway in which to appropriate aspects of the lived experience in the very nature of its primal impressional life as it was revealed. As I consider this phenomenological process, I contemplate how the experience is (re)lived on the page and how, in turn, this leads to a deepening and strengthening of the very experience. Evoking these particular and chosen moments of my lifeworld in a contained space is both to reduce the experience to its essence and lift it at the same time. This, I conceptualize, is both at the cross of horizontal and vertical, bridging the world we write of with the spirit of an experiencing that continues to rise. This becomes a (re)generative endeavouring. The notion of evoking an experience, a “calling-into-being” (Corbin, 1983, p. 87), is powerful in the nature of phenomenological inquiry in that we evoke the experience through the act of writing as much as the text itself brings us face to

face with what we have lived through. In poetic understandings, the words continue to make meanings upon meanings as we return and I put forth here that both poetry and phenomenology is *writing with wings*.

To turn to things themselves (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) is to see with a certain courtesy (Lilburn, 1997). I present this idea of turning to conceptualize a body moving and facing an object of inquiry that resonates with a keen wanting to know or understand. Wonder, as a Merleau-Pontian (2002) prerequisite, is also fuelled by a sheer desire to claim the experience as one's own. To consider the notion of presence is also intriguing in that to be present in the writing of a lived experience is to possess a different type of presence in comparison to the presence felt at the time of the living through. What I found is that to bring that same sort of presence to the page, the burned through experience that has imprinted itself on the body, is to be present to the presence of what occurred. *What is the truth?* To get to essence is no easy endeavour. As I was writing about writing, these layers of presence became more pronounced. To be engaged in both a metapoetic and phenomenological treatment is to exercise the nature of my consciousness as it cycles in perception, memory, and reflection in body, in mind, and in soul.

As the poet's intention is to create the appearance of experience (Leavy, 2009), phenomenology is to explicate the essence of this experience with a primacy that is perhaps more sobering. As poetry lives in metaphors, much of "Promise" relies on the unsaid and the power of the poetic image. I also consider this act of negotiation in "Entering" in what is chosen and what ultimately is not brought to the page. *Which factors govern my own powers of perception upon reflection? Which*

moments have value? What is remembered and what is hidden? What is lost and what is gained?

In my future revisiting of this inquiry, I am intrigued in what it can still become in the spirit of the unfinished nature of phenomenology. I perceive the willingness to relearn and to return as the integrity of this inquiry. It is in the state of becomings that I understand being in the world as an eternal process of experiencing experience, this infinite meditation (Merleau-Ponty, 2007) that continues to give. It is also here that I have now come to know philosophy as a place for perpetual beginnings (Merleau-Ponty, 2007). Phenomenology, like poetry, has not only given rise to a heightened attentiveness of seeing and being but a space to continue to wander and meander in the wonder (Leggo, 2004a). Here I stand as both witness and participant. Herein, I understand how some *thing* becomes. I affirm that writing, for me, is a sacred place of boundless rays of light, a light of knowing that only words will bring.

And I am understanding what it means to be literate in light.

Point of Light: I AM

And In poetry I am all things.

Poetry reaches into the very soul of things (Lakhani, 2010).

In poetry I am a soul encloded in poetic form.

In the words and

in

the

white

open

spaces

of

desire.

I am form and formless.

Where else can I be both?

Here, in poetry

I

just

AM.

I am East Africa
mystical, material, vibrant, vulnerable,
rich and poor
moving softly through my evolving worlds

I am my young mother
fleeing, salvaging, yearning, carrying
me in her arms to a foreign place
with a man who could never fulfill her dreams

I am Ali, my father, in the garden,
weeding, watering, root-feeding, tending
A silent form of love
ruby red in rough hands blooming

I am Wilbur's Charlotte ⁴⁴
saviour, confidante, champion, giver
believing in the power of friendship
even when she did not believe in me

I am the Pacific Ocean
salty, vast, placid, summer
holidays on Vancouver Island
family moments enduring through loss

I am *The Color Purple* ⁴⁵
sisterhood, solidarity, suffering, strength
solace in the moments of God's beauty
redeeming grace and new beginnings

I am artist, researcher, teacher and student
discovering, conversing, creating, seeking
A sliver from the tree of knowledge
branching up and up into Hope

⁴⁴ E.B. White's (1952) *Charlotte's Web* is one of my first book memories and I still return to read every so often.

⁴⁵ Alice Walker's (1982) *The Color Purple* moved me so profoundly as a young adult and the themes and lessons gained herein, still linger.

I am morning powerwalks
Uphill
Uphill
Uphill
Uphill
Still stopping—
to revel in the bare beauty
of a lone flower bud waiting
for spring
Patient. Dignified. Understanding
that all things
will reveal
itself
In
time.

And in (re)search as revelation, in “I AM,” writing becomes my mediation and my meditation on identity. And perhaps each poem is about an identity. I am engaging in “living a life of deep meaning through perceptual practices that reveal what was once hidden” (Irwin, as cited in Pinar, 2004, p. 9). Here, in “I AM” are some of the essences of who I am. I feel like the flower at the end of my poem, of four years a blooming in this schooling of slowness and forty years a blooming in my schooling of a soul-in-learning.

Like petals of my heart
words watering seeds of an understanding
Grace,
How
It
grows.

Point of Light: *The Melody of My Breathing*

Poems are rough notations of the music we are.

(Rumi in Barks, 2003, p. 27)

I open with the philosopher-poet Rumi who contemplates on both the nature of poetry and the nature of human *being*. I ruminate on his notion of poems as expressing an immediacy of a desire—this roughness he speaks of—to express and capture the rhythms of our lives in this space where identity is music, as in the sound of the wind on the surface of the ocean or the echoing resonances of a bird’s calling. In this place where music becomes the “notation” and representation of the melody of experiencing experience, I know poetry as a perpetual “calling-into-being” (Corbin, 1983, p. 87), that is, of epiphanies as cyclical as the seasons.

As a painter’s first brushstroke sets a colour into motion, I encounter the tones and hues of an endless hermeneutic circle in poetic seeing; each poetic turning a phenomenological place of heightened presence and possibility to the sea and spectrum of human emotions. Khan (1994) writes of music in twofold understandings: “We shall find that the beats of the pulse and the heart, the inhaling and exhaling of the breath, are all the work of rhythm” (p. 74). In rhythm that is both breath and then becomes sound—inside and outside—music is our primal and primary utterance. Moreover, as in the nature of our beings, the whole of nature is also breathing and becoming, moving, forming and expressing life in line, in colour, in the rising and the falling “and the signs of life given by this living beauty is Music” (p. 74). Hence, to attune to the rhythms of this beauty calling is to harmonize with

creation and the Creator of this Music wherein there is light, a profundity as “behind all manifestations is the perfect spirit, the spirit of wisdom” (p. 73). In poetry, I experience the very breath and breadth of creating, creation and Creator.

As poet, I am absorbing, drawing in to withdraw again into a Source that keeps me held in this circle. Rumi speaks of poetry as a “rough notation,” perhaps acknowledging the limitations of form that cannot truly encapsulate the boundlessness that keeps one eternally moving in and out and through the realms of love, *dwelling*. In poetry is where I touch both spheres of the human and the divine, in this cross of horizontal and vertical, of material meeting spiritual. Poetry becomes a materialization of a spiritual enterprise (Corbin, 1983). In this third space of both experiencing form and formlessness is “the site of a living pedagogy...of generative possibilities and hope” (Aoki, 2003/2005, p. 429). In my poetics of being newness comes, in a washing over and emerging in the veritable light of poetic knowing (Bachelard, 1964). In this (re)generative power of the metaphor one can be and experience the very “plentitude of being” (Esmail, 1998, p. 72) in which the transcendental resonances give and echo.

My poems, to me, are a suprasensual, semiotic, spiritual chain of language connecting to the cosmos that is governed by a faith that opens and deepens the faculties of perception, wherein desire becomes “newness” becomes the knowledge becoming love. My poems are living spirituality, a “*theoria*” (Lakhani, 2010), a way of engaging the world (Leggo, 2004a), where world with faith strengthen into authentic ways of seeing *being*. In turn, the discovery of knowledge is a responsibility enabling better understandings. My traditional teachings (re)mind me

to be eternally seeking as a social obligation to honour and nurture the full potentiality of all life. In poetry I am a soul-in-learning wherein the words I speak become the house I live in (Hafiz, as cited in Ladinsky, 1999). In this homing, in language as this house of being (Heidegger, 1971), I am in relation, always in the middle of some *thing*.

In this contemplative pedagogy in action, I become “thought and soul embodied in the oneness of a lived moment” (Aoki, 1992/2005, p. 197). As Aoki teaches that we live and breathe curriculum, he reaffirms my own work as (re)searcher and revelatory: I become the music becoming me. The epiphany is that poetry is the dance, is the whirling into the Music. As Leonard Cohen (1984, track 1) sings out: “Lift me like an olive branch and be my homeward dove/Dance me to the end of love.”

And I am on Rathtrevor Beach⁴⁶ and I am seeking. I have come here to find a source of inspiration, to simply feel inspired again. And what transpired transformed my own being into an “immanent realm” (Aoki, 1992/2005) of grace, experiencing. This was a place of unfoldment, of where there was a poetic order of things, of nature’s revealing and unfurling to me and in me. In this unity of a sensuous symbiosis—of a calling and an answering—the landscape “responds to my emotions and calls forth feelings from me in return” (Abram, 1997, p. 33). In the writing of, I contemplate how the poem falls into its own self. In this process of

⁴⁶ Rathtrevor Beach is in Parksville, British Columbia. At low tide, the ocean recedes a kilometer afar. One can then walk to what feels like the centre of the ocean.

words moving, comes what I can only call a hermeneutic humility towards a poem
that fuels the desire of this pilgrim that feels and knows the inspiration, again.

Rathrevor Beach

One summer morning
On Rathrevor beach
I go in search of poems
On the wings of desire
To discover
Words that give music
To a longing for
Lines
That will bloom like rows of
Tulips
Reaching
To the Sun
Whose gentle gaze
Warms its petals and keeps its face
Vertical and musical
Dancing to the rhythms of the
Softness of the subtly sensuous wind

In the sand seeking
I pick up an empty shell
And cradle it in my hands
To then trace the veritable lines
That give the perfect pattern to its
Being a shell
Of lines that I wish to write
To be in the very flesh of language
That would echo the inner strings
Of my heart
That I find somewhere in the hollowness
Of this shell which in its angelic beauty
Decorates the sand
And I as I lift it to the sky
It recalls a butterfly

I then place its silent wings
In-between the line of the water
And the sand's edge
To notice the lines of the butterfly shell
Continuing in the oceans rhythmic calling
Repeating unto itself in rippling—
Lines of perpetual meditation
Of one heart beating and repeating

And as I hearken to the melody of the ocean's breathing
Harmonizing with the wind
I begin to pray and follow the pulsating lines to the horizon
Onwards to the sky
Where for a moment I envision my own hands
Whirling with the whispering clouds
Vertically and musically
Questing with unison to that infinite line
That in its grace and givenness
Gives
To a poet
Her soul's true
Lyrical calling

On Rathrevor Beach
I/eye
Found
Poetry.

“On Rathrevor Beach,” I reaffirm through the grace of poetry itself, the central thesis and heartbeat of this dissertation as the kinship between poetry and spiritual contemplation as nourishing and nurturing each other. On the physical terrain of the beach, I followed the signs onwards to spiritual spaces. Herein, I became a follower of not only signs, but also the lines, like the ones on my own hands that imprinted these moments of revealing onto my soul. *And If I wrote this poem again, I would want to write about the lines on my hands like the lines on the*

shell...the hand that places the shell in-between the line of the sand and the beginning of the Ocean's...the lines of the hand that writes the lines too.

This poem, in its own becoming, has lit the path for me to enter a deeper layer of my (re)searching, and *I am living in the lines*. Herein, is the poetic order of things, falling into a cosmic harmony, and all around Me, is the poetry. *There*, is a unity: a unity in the earth that breathes this oneness into all living things.

Breathe unto me.

In turn, represented in “Rathrevor” is that I am a diligent follower of its journey, I am in pursuit of the purpose that guides me, this purposing in poetry. This is not only a place of heightened seeing, but where all senses are peaked. Here in the poetic I/eye is to be in a place where seeing and hearing are harmonized. *Listening gives me vision*. Aoki (1990/2005) writes that “the time is ripe for us to call upon *sonare* to dwell juxtaposed with *videre*. It seems urgent that we come to be more fully sonorous beings than we are” (p. 373). In my work that speaks of the *eye*, I do not only place primacy on my ability to see but also to hear. My lyrical (re)search leads me to a place where there is musicality and when I enter a “deeper realm beyond the reach of the eye, a realm where [I] might begin to hear the beat of the earth’s rhythm” (Aoki, 1990/2005, p. 375). And I am listening to the melody. In this music, I have been given the in/sight to a listening. On Rathrevor Beach, I was a pilgrim of poetry and I walked with Aoki’s poetic vision, attuning myself to the music of the sky (Laude & McDonald, 2004) and revelling in the lyrical rhythms of the land’s echoing with/to/through me. This is the place that I fully envisioned the “Rhizome in the Sky” with its points of light, and this poem takes me a little closer

now, suspended in one of those spaces in-between light.

Here in-between the light is only more light.

What is powerful about Aoki's vision is the notion of the chance, that is, by chance to listen, to hearken, to heed, to may be allowed to hear. This then, is revelation. And I muse on the music of the primal heartbeat that pulses through me and the earth symbiotically. *In sound there is light.* Poetry is the unfolding of a soul opening to its very echoing in a world that then turns to us and I see this as a process of attunement to a life song. Poetry is the melody of my breathing. This is most intimate and sensuous listening to the soul-self. And in theorizing the world is where my own lyrical and philosophical process of attuning (Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Leggo & Sinner, 2012) becomes manifest.

This is the breath and the breadth.

In my walk on Rathrevor, I felt guided not only on the wings of my poetic desire, but by Spirit that responded to my intention. In this place is a purity, that is, pure intention responds with pure response. And after my encountering, I rushed eagerly back to the cabin skipping with the surfacing of the words so ready and ripe and rising inside.

This must be the intimate immensity (Bachelard, 1964). And poetry needed to seize it all, now. *Like the rippling lines of the ocean's undulating came the lines strumming my heartstrings. I am humming with the world.*

Poetry becomes a shifting of a state of consciousness as well as "a step towards eternity" (Moore, 2005, p. 15), and in this place is to experience the profundity of love. I understand now what it is to feel this eternity on Earth, a

boundlessness of experiencing. In poetry, I am in-loving with the world and this nurtures my words tinged with its own wisdom that allows me to hear the music. As Bachelard (1969) writes, the poetic place is a space where “we are touching the realm of written love” (p. 7). I resonate with Coelho (2008) who notions that when you do something, the soul of the world is affected, and to contextualize this through the act and the art of writing poetry is to grasp the sublime “powers of language to transform reality...in deep and permanent ways” (Parini, 2008, p. 7).

Bachelard (1964) states that in poetry, there is a “growth of being in every instance” (p. 5), in every word and space giving in meaning making. I put forth that in this being becoming (de Cosson, 2002), is the poetry itself, the poet, and the world, all illuminated. The poet’s sole inspiration, then, is to write the words that lift the world into meaning. Parini (2008) writes, “it is in the articulation of spiritual lines between the human mind and the world of external reality that poets find their truest callings” (p. 17). In this spiritual flight, poetic inquiry is the wings and poetry’s potential is a shifting of consciousness into understanding the very essence of things.

To theorize creativity as soul work (Kates, 2010) is to affirm the spiritual sources of knowing where sheer imagination is the window of the soul opening to the centering of one’s heart.

These are the heartstrings in a hearkening into listening.

And this is where my own illumination resounded with Schuon’s (2004) words calling me to listen to the melody of my own breathing, breathing with the earth breathing into my poetry.

What is the sense of Beauty and of Art?

To show the way into our inmost Heart—

To listen to the music of the Sky;

And then to realize: the Song was I. (Laude & McDonald, 2004, p. 164)

And the sky is in I/Eye.

The rhythms of poetic discourse, as the art of moving together (Laude, 2004) is where poetry reveals itself through the musicality of its words descending and then ascending and transcending into lines of flight reverberating with promise and possibilities.

Poetry is the notes of my learning and tones of my becoming.

To seek out poetry “as participating in the music of the infinite” (Laude, 2004, p. 11) is to recognize that in this encountering comes a pattern that aligns itself with creation unfolding, in perennial perpetual patterns of images and sounds. In this space, as on Rath Trevor Beach, is to experience a seamless unity with and through the natural world where through the act of poetization, “all psychic forces fall into harmony” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 16). In attuning to this unity of poetry, comes a “blessed rage for order” (Stevens, as cited in Parini, 2008, p. 99) that mirrors nature and the witnessing of the seasons of our lives.

To associate poetry with living a spiritual life is to be in the constant search for oneness and as a poet, I seek out this union. As a mystic, I am driven by the music of my longing to be with the Beloved, inspired by the ache of separation but also the beauty of finding this unity, even for a blessed moment, in poetic lines where poetry is “Music, the word we use in our everyday language, is nothing less than the picture

of our Beloved” (Khan, 1994, p. 73). In turn, I am inspired and informed by Sufism and the emphasis on the mystical and poetic expression of the Human-Divine, the poetic language of love. I am seeking to get closer to the face and the flesh of my poetry. And in the sensual throes of poetry is where the mystic Hafez once poetically asked and then answered:

Where does the real poetry
Come from?
From the amorous sighs
In this moist dark when making love
With form or
Spirit. (Ladinski, 1999, p. 259)

And in my soul songs, I have explored the notion of human love and divine love. I have expressed Godly love in human ways and human love as Godly love. I end this section with verses from “The God in Me.” In writing “Waiting,” I called out to the ocean to a lover, and in “The God in Me,” my longing was fulfilled. I affirm that in poetry, my life has found love, both human and divine. As hooks (1999) writes, “Love is a transformative force, the ultimate expression of godliness” (p. 117).

And I had spent hours listening to India Arie’s (2001, track 8) “Ready for Love”⁴⁷ singing out the verse that became a crying out to, a calling out, too.

⁴⁷ These lyrics are from “Ready for Love” which is track 8 on India Arie’s (2001) album entitled “Acoustic Soul.” This song captures the sentiment and depth of feeling I was experiencing. See YouTube for full song:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mxkMIS2nuU8>

*Arie expresses her aching desire for "A man who loves music / A man who loves art /
Respects the spirit world / And thinks with his heart."*

And I have found you.

The God in Me ⁴⁸

Sunlight flickers across your face
A sleepy lover softly awakes
Sensual, physical, spiritual are we
Infinite, boundless, endless is He

My waking heart sings your praise
My very soul speaks your name
Yearning, burning, consuming are we
Eternal, timeless, endless is He

*The God in me wants to be close to you
The God in me wants to be close to you
So very close to you....*

Energy like I've never known
Pulls me into your very core
Starlight, moonlight, firelight pales
To the light of love in your stare

He knew us before we came to be
He knew you would be loving me
Two lovers in God's master plan
*Making poetry with our hands
As you love me...*

Layla and Majnun⁴⁹, Rumi and Tabriz⁵⁰

⁴⁸ These lyrics became a song in 2006. This was a creative departure of a unique collaboration with David Marion who wrote the music and produced the track. And as in all the songs in this dissertation, Yasmine Rajabali is the vocalist. You can listen to the audio track here: <http://www.yasminemusic.com/words.html>

⁴⁹ I make reference to Persian poet Nizami's (1978) spiritual allegory and love story of *Layla and Majun* (R. Gelpke, trans.).

We breathe this love, this reason to Be
Sensual, physical, spiritual are we
Infinite, boundless, endless is He

*And the God in me wants me to be close to you
So very close to you...*

⁵⁰ I make reference to the spiritual love shared between Rumi and his teacher, Shams Tabrizi.

Point of Light: *Kneeling and Kissing the Ground*

I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it.

(Walker, 1982, p. 98)

There are hundreds of ways of kneeling and kissing the ground.

(Rumi, as cited in Barks, 2003, p. 123)

I have proclaimed poetry as a contemplative act and intellectual inquiry. In poetry as a witnessing through words, there is a lifting of an experience into an elevated ontological understanding. In poetic knowing is not only testimony, but also a an act of remembering, a calling to language that pledges to be in remembrance to the signs of the sacred. The poetic eye is the eye that re(turns) to notice the colour purple in the fields, that faces an object with wonder in “the light of its divine similitude” (Lakhani, 2010, p. 188). In the act of poetry the turning to things becomes the whirling to the reverence of things. To participate in this dance of remembrance is to experience the spiritual hermeneutics of the dervish in the act of interpreting and remembering this becoming. In this remembrance, comes the relinquishing of self to the process and the giving of self to what lies beyond. I have proposed that poetry can be a contemplative process that cognitively and emotionally shifts experiences into keen insight and understanding, in a union of actualizing both intellectual and imaginative powers. I have also put forth that this process is a spiritual process in the sense that we experience this unity, a sense of interconnectedness within ourselves and with the earth and Spirit. In perceiving

poetry as a poetics of light, it changes what, how, and whom we see (Cheetham, 2012) as it “makes the invisible world visible...reanimates nature for us, connecting spirit and matter” (Parini, 2008, p. 181). To make the unseen seen is to engage in a cycling process of evocation and validation.

On this note, I turn to explore how my own spiritual practice enters the alchemy of poetic expression. While I claim that all poetry is contemplative and is a tuning into spiritual ways of seeing, I do not claim that a religious practice is necessary for this transaction. However, in my own personal embodied experience of writing poetry, I have now come to know my own poetry as “spiritual poetry” and in the heart of my poetry are my prayer calls—this evocation and validation through the words unfolding in each poetic turn as a meditation of a soul in its becoming to know itself. Bakhtin (1986) writes, “even the slightest allusion to another’s utterance gives the speech a dialogical turn” (p. 94), and I consider the evocation/validation of the soul’s speech as a reciprocal act of (re)turning to oneself in a dialogic of desire with spirit. Bakhtin (1986) continues to state that the core of any form of language is “reduced to the spiritual creativity of the individuum” (p. 67), and thus, poetry as expressive heightened language becomes the pinnacle of this spiritual creative force. It is here where the sheer integrity of imaginative forces is relinquishing to the prose of the process.

Corbin, as discussed by Cheetham (2012), proposes that the language of prayer is the ultimate act of creativity where imagination most vividly fulfills its ultimate endeavour in human life. I propose that the act of creativity and imagination becomes a prayerful act in itself, giving and reverberating in divine

lines. In the access of spiritual sources of knowing, the human imagination peaks. This is a vertical space where I have come to understand creativity as given by the Creator.

Please allow me to see.

I pray for this vision.

In the heart of both poetry and prayer is the search itself, and in poetry as an expression of religious experience, poetic awareness is not a state but a search(ing): an expression of knowing that *IT* is becoming. *And how does love become more love?* To whirl in poetic revelry is to be attuning to a calling that is longing to be named and called upon, gracing the poet with the flickering play of light in the journey of revealing. In poetry, as in prayer, is an *epiphany in waiting*. And I wrote these lyrics at 5:00 a.m., as in the peaking of the early morning came the speaking of the soul.

Epiphany⁵¹ (Rajabali, Rajabali, and Cruz, 2004)

Day embraces the dark of night
As my soul wakes to the light
Love, itself, fills the room
And I am lost in you

Your beauty consumes all of me
Every breath flows rhythmically
Time stands still eternally
And I am feeling you

*Life, sweet life
Joy through the pain
Sun in every rain
Life, oh sweet life*

⁵¹ Please see supplementary audio track for song "Epiphany."
<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

*Love is the key
To all its mystery
Black is white
Death is life
When I'm with you
The wrongs are right
You illuminate, rejuvenate, reciprocate
You are my fate*

When I felt you gave me wings
To fly above this pain within
I am the kite you are my wind
And I am loving you

A shooting star captured in my heart
This flicker is now a flame
As every time I connect with you
I get to a higher plane...

*Life, sweet life
Joy through the pain
Sun in every rain
Life, oh sweet life
Love is the key
To all its mystery
Black is white
Death is life
When I'm with you
The wrongs are right
You illuminate, rejuvenate, reciprocate
You are my fate*

To feel the warmth of poetic revelation is where aesthetic space is a place to tend spirit, a place to engage in wide-awakeness (Greene, 1967) in bringing us to the edge of the existential questions where "it" may never arrive. It is the beauty and promise of the searching that keeps one moving. In existentially expressive language, the spiritual and the intellectual, the material and the physical, are not

separate entities, but they nourish each other in a giving and receiving that not only keeps me as poet in remembrance, but reorients, reintegrates, (re)searches and reclaims the center. In poetry, I feel the centre of my human heart touching the heart of a presence in seeing the world in this divine similitude. I am engaging in the very symphony of theophany in “liv[ing] in the glory of love and the light of beauty, which are reflections of God” (Gibran, 1993, p. 85). I hearten to McDonald’s (2004) evocative phrase: “If song is the root of poetry, then prayer is its flower” (p. xv). To be in the petals of poetic grace is where “the consciousness of wonder blossoms forth” (Bachelard, 1969, p. 1), and in spiritual poetry, poets may with hope, “reflect a knowledge of God which has become so ingrained in the substance of the poet’s soul that when she opens her mouth, flowers bloom in every word” (McDonald, 2004, p. xv).

In my early morning prayer, this “knowledge of God” is one that is a felt sense of presence, a light that dances in the chest which comes from the embracing silence sitting in the stillness of a prayer that rises musically and vertically into the early morning sky. Poetic awareness lifts the experience even higher on a line of flight where poetry and prayer share that same line. And I am discovering that poetry is pure presence, not only of the writer and of the reader but of the spirit that enters its creation. In philosophical and spiritual lines, poetry offers a quietly nuanced portrait of a relationship with silence.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you,

Don’t go back to sleep.

(Rumi, as cited in Barks, 1997, p. 3)

4:15 a.m.

At 4:15 a.m.
I drive alone
To morning prayer
Embarking on Burrard bridge
The silent stoic structure
That crosses me into the
Womb of the city
Still in slumberous silence
Enshrouded in the soft resonance
Of lights that will disappear into the break
Of the morning—
I peer up and see a woman
Silhouetted in the high window of her
Apartment
Illuminated by the one
Sole light
Remnants of the night
That lingers behind her
As she gazes upon the
Lonely harbour of
Boats sleeping on the gentle
Breath of the ocean

Is she too seeking salvation in the mercy
Of this eager early morning?

In silence, I now enter this space this place
In-between
Night and the Day
Being and the Becoming
Unsaid and the said
Where desire reveals itself in each
Wanting breath

How
I long for You and I
To sit here together in this
Silence

With no speech to
Separate Us
And
I imagine how our words
Would then bloom
Into flowers that would
Lift up
From our hearts and through
Our mouths and shower
Us with
Petals of Grace

Point of Light: *The Lifting of the Poet*

A poem's greatest eloquence lies in its ability to transcend itself.

(Lakhani, 2010, p. 223)

As I have proposed poetry as grace both descending and then ascending, I am intrigued with the verticality of the poetic experience, which I have conceptualized as lines of light. Steinbock (2007) defines verticality as a “vector of mystery and reverence” (p. 13). In this third space of being exists the promise of transcendence. Poetry, as “artistically expressed language in a heightened state” (Leavy, 2009, p. 64), becomes what Irwin (2004) refers to as “borderland pedagogy” (p. 140). Poetry exists on the edges of things. My poetic intention to move through the periphery allows me to enter the centre of an experience. And there is always some richness here. The poet and poem are both crossers of boundaries where meaning making is vulnerable, vibrant, and open to the circular and vertical dimensions of human experience. Dwelling in the poetic I/eye means to be in a place of intention.

And the world around me, at this moment, allows me to see.

To lift an object into meaning is to be aware that the very object of our inquiry has something to give us—that objects are in themselves for us (Merleau-Ponty, 2007). Poetry is a living praxis against the lapse into a forgetfulness of being (Heidegger, 1995).

This being of ourselves being with others, being.

In poetry there is evocation, and its power of provocation stirs one into seeing. In poetry as a phenomenology of the spirit (Bachelard, 1964) is where I am

knowing the soul as a “sensorium of transcendence” (Voegelin, 2000, p. 147). Poetry seeks sensually into meaning while engaging with mystery. To be a poet is to be open to transcendence, where in the afterglow of poetry are silences still *shaking* the soul of experiencing.

Ring the bell of poetic intentions
And let it resound upon my soul!
If lyric be the bell (Zwicky, 1992)
Then I shall be the vessel
Oh! Listen
To all this music I hold
And I am ringing...

To lift meaning is also to lift the spirit of inquiry, where keen contemplation becomes the highest expression of human endeavour, of a human seeking understanding and lighting a personal path to knowing a world of a multitude of meanings. In my witnessing the soft spinning of the whirling dervish, I have “*witnessed*” a space where body, mind and soul are in unity, where the silence inside resonates with light that enters the eyes, the mind and the heart. Poetry is my whirling, my method, my craft, my prayer and my pedagogy. In words I am lifted to see my world(s). In poetry there is always a rising above. *Within the horizons of my inquiry is the sun of understanding that breaks through the dawn of my lyrical callings.*

And it is here where I have wept in poetry, through poetry, with the profundity of the love in which I am writing and experiencing a “quality of awareness that sees newness, truth and beauty” (Meyer, 2006, p. 165). To experience transcendence is to be drawn out of the mundane into a sublime space of

inner presence where newness flows over and over in perpetual awakenings, a contemplation now magnified by its own immensity (Bachelard, 1964).

Contemplation is also a state of givenness, always *giving*.

To lift one's self and the world into being through words is to see the possibility of the wor(l)d's vulnerable vibrations. In turn, this vulnerability is part of an impassioned soul that "participates in an inner light" (Bachelard, 1964, p. xxi). To write poetry is to experience the fever of a soul's calling into language that reverberates upon itself. As Parini (2008) writes, "poetry extends the boundaries of thought by extending the boundaries of expression itself" (p. 8). To experience poetry as transcendence is to engage in the very capaciousness of its calling. And in this dissertation, I am engaging in the capaciousness and spaciousness of poetry.

To lift the world through poetic expression is also to discover our non-autonomous being as "an infinity of relations" (Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p. 377), where all is integrally continuous and "all beauty in animals and plants is a silent, enduring form of love and yearning" (Rilke, 1984, p. 37). In the music of transcendence, the poet partakes in the call and response of the natural world in an ongoing dialogic where we are both observer and participant. What is IT to be both? In this rich understanding as poet, I ruminate on standing back and stepping in.

Poetry stands back and steps in.

To be called to a poetic encounter as Husserl's "interplay of intentionality" (Steinbock, 2007, p. 9) is to see nature as not only the setting of our own life, but also how our presence is felt in the natural world. The poet sees nature evoking us evoking the nature of our own being. When we are in poetry, we lift our

interconnected evolving worlds into meanings where the language of transcendence is a universal inspirited silence.

Poetry relates and is relational.

Bachelard (1964) writes of the poetic encounter: “The dialectics of inspiration and talent become clear if we consider their two poles: the soul and the mind” (p. xxi). As I have been attending to both the intellect and the soul in this investigation, I also then ruminate on the body that writes, the poet’s hand that transmits transcendence by writing the state of a soul (Hirshfield, 1997). In poetry is both a touching and transcendence.

And poetry makes the unknown more known.

In poetry the words are perpetually performing into the poetic order of things, a unity guided by trust in the conviction that some *thing* will faithfully unfold.

*Poetry is wholeness
coming into order
words following
the line of a mind
dropping
down
and
down
and
down
over and over
coming into order
colouring my poetic imagination
descending
then ascending*

to transcending

UP.

And I ask what is the hue of my poem herein? *It is green.* "Aunty Yasmine" is evoked through a steady heartbeat rhythm that both calls and answers. It gives profoundly in both grief and joy cycling between time and space through self and other. In seeking is where the learning becomes the knowing, and where the knowing leads to spirit.

And I remember you with each word.

Over and over

I (re)turn

In.

I had originally written a few sparse verses in 2012 but could not finish. Yet, the words lingered, waiting to be named. It was through not only inspiration, but also, awaiting the cultivating conditions that provoked it back into being and becoming, a poem in two years.

Poetry asks: Please be patient.

Here, in "Aunty Yasmine" is a slow soft burning flame that is both personal and pedagogical in the deep understanding that time and space has its rooted place in a learning life. And I am learning that dwelling in the I/eye takes time.

Even

After

All this time

The Sun never says to the Earth,

"You owe me."

Look
What happens
With a love like that,
It lights the
Whole
Sky. (Hafiz, as cited in Ladinsky, 1999, p. 34)

Aunty Yasmine⁵²

It was five years ago
that you left this world
aching
for your fervent green eyes
and a laughter
that would resound
heavenward
I carry your resonance
of echoing laughter
in the hollowness
of my heart that harbours
mounting memories of a
life filled with
wondrous wit and musical wisdoms

"It's all relative" she would propose and pause.
"Your relatives and my relatives."

I remember in Vancouver
a family celebration in which
you graced
dancing with my Mother
two sisters revelling in the circling rhythm
of untold stories unfolding in the
arms they outstretched
heavenward

If I would have known

⁵² This poem has been published in: Rajabali, A. (2014). Aunty Yasmine. *Journal of Artistic & Creative Education*, (8)1, 84–89.

that you were destined
not to return to this
earthly life
I would have held you
longer
stronger
placing
your head against my
lamenting
heart—
in the grieving gravity of
the ensuing loss
of the rising
swirling
sublime sadness

And
I am told
when I was a baby filled with fever
you carried me on your bike in a basket
through Nakuru
meandering the dust and the dark heat
with a brightness that only love can carry
how you must have rode
feisty, fearless and fifteen

At one, I fled from my homeland
in which you remained rooted
to the stoic soil
while the sorrow of exile
embodied in my one tiny hand
remaining in the East
clutching the memories
that I will not remember
but that echo *echo echo echo echo echo*

At twenty-one, I returned
to the sensual smells
awakening every cell
of my being

filling the longing with
a patient profound love

The thread
I once held
in that tiny hand
unfurling
as we rode
meandering in your car
through the streets
of Nakuru
with a brightness that only love can carry

*"It is all relative" she would propose and pause.
"Your relatives and my relatives."*

I am also told
that when you died
in that small African town
your body black from cancer
but your eyes still resilient green
and that your soul could be
seen
as it lifted up, out and through
your mouth
heavenward

I knew you were leaving
and oceans away
on the beach in Jericho
I felt you gently go *go go go go go*
And I fell to my knees
And buried my head in the bile bitter grass
But as I looked up
I saw your spirit
riding
with the clouds
illuminating the skies placidly green
and leaving ribbons of luminous laughter
over the mountain
over the valleys
to the Unknown

Point of Light: *Cart Pusher*

I am inspired by Irigaray's (2002) *The Way of Love* and her notion of "Letting be Transcendence" where she writes with a mystical hand: "Air is what is left common between subjects living in different worlds. It is the elemental of the universe, of the life starting from which it is possible to elaborate the transcendental" (p. 67). I bring forth this idea of the communal air that exists in-between of human beings breathing, as I consider the role that I play in the "lifting" of others, in letting the Other be transcendent, in seeing and attuning to the spirit of Other in a world where air is what we share. This air is a conduit of "natural and spiritual life" (Irigaray, 2002, p. 67). In witnessing the spinning of the dervish, I reflect upon how my own presence has contributed to her experience of merging with the divine and dance, and how, in turn, we both emerge through the dialogic as witness and participant harmonizing and becoming, in a sense, some part of each other. This union of synergy and soul lifting a space of spirit that carries each other in this passage in-between, is where humanity is bridged, in the attuning and communing in Irigaray's (2002) air. I propose that in experiencing this nearness, particularly in the graces of silent synergy, is the closest we can come to seeing another's spirit. In turn, to feel this nearness of the other is not to fully become the other, but to intimately experience the commonality of souls living, moving, being and becoming in the ebb and flow of one spiritual ocean. Like the ocean we share the depths of human emotions.

I want to breathe in the sea breeze too.

I bring this notion into this dissertation on bridging poetry and spirituality, to attend to how poetry gives voice and grace, and, in turn, lifts others into their own “shining” (Heidegger, 1971). I believe in the personal healing power of poetry in my own life, but I also recognize that it serves me as a poet to write lines that negotiate my own relative being in this world. How my education in poetry has allowed me to move more compassionately through my revolving worlds. And as I asked in my Prologue, how can this work be in/of service to others? *And I now ask: can poetry be a form of service?*

I have written about the pain, suffering, and wounds of others through my own eyes, and, in turn, in the act of writing the lines, I have become softer, gentle, with a heightened awareness of “Me, My Self and Other” (Meyer, 2010). In poetry as communion with others, I have experienced “a natural sense of compassion [that] arises as we realize how other beings desire much of what we desire” (Mills, 2010, p. 14). In this breadth, poetry is also a spiritual act as it speaks the language of my own encountering moving towards both longing and co-belonging (Irigaray, 2002; Meyer, 2010). I am moving with an intention that breeds interconnectedness. Poetry is not only singular but allows for pluralistic understandings. Poetry, as this way of love, is where grace not only ascends and descends but also transcends to a space where the Other redeems their essential grace. It is also in this grace where there is light, not only the light of illumination, but the light of a soul illuminating.

In my poem, “Cart Pusher,” which I consider a union of the poetic and the sociological (Richardson, 1992), I envision both the lightness and the darkness flickering in unison, creating a shadow that, in essence, becomes the poem itself. The

integrity of the image of the “Cart Pusher” comes from a poetic intention to give the words as pearls, both *luminous and illuminating*. In turn, I also consider utterances as silences and how poetry as a dialogical act is a conversation between *souls-in-waiting*.

And dwelling in the poetic I/Eye is towards knowing Other.

Cart Pusher

I pass her
almost fleetingly
hastening to stop
momentarily
on the bustling
city street corner
as she purposefully pushes
her burgeoning cart
a residue of remnants
in a life left
wheeling heavy strident rhythms of
longing and immediate
despair

I see her
unexpectedly
wanting to see her as
I lightly turn the corner
savouring the Saturday evening air
in anticipation of the jovial companions
waiting
In the nearby restaurant
that promises a succulent steak
and robust red wine
the warmth and wonder of the privilege of not being
the Other
woman whose gaze
I hold
momentarily—

*And
I envision her running
to the open waking arms
of her mother
on a green pasture
of desire and dreams
I, too
harbour and hold*

Herstory I will never
know drowning
in the piercing calls
of the city in which
she disappears and
is
gone.

If I am to believe that
*"I live in a world of others' words"*⁵³
then her resigned silence
spews forth
the utterances
she does not say
And
I wear her brokenness
in this poem as
a string of pearls
that glow with regal resilience
as she pushes her cart
under the murky street lamp
nameless.
voiceless.
emptiness.
casting shadows through the depths

⁵³ Mikhail Bakhtin (1986, p. 143) who writes of the dialogical act of speech.

of this unforgiving foraged
city.

Point of Light: Ali ⁵⁴

“You must share the poem with him,” my sister Yasmine exclaims, and I respond quickly with an emphatic “No.”

“I am not ready and plus, it is Mother’s day and it needs to be all about her. Not good timing and...” I want to continue but Yasmine interjects, “But, you keep putting it off and it would make him so happy and we will all be together. Mom is all about everyone and sharing. It will be glorious. I know it.” She assures me in her usual ways.

“I think you need this too, why are you resisting? What is IT that holds you back? Just let it go, Anar. How much time does one have? I have a feeling... it will make him so happy. He needs this.”

And I take a moment to process what she says, but “I am not ready, Yas. I will find the opening when it comes. I am at peace with that. I promise I will read it to him, in time.” She doesn’t say anything.

A quick goodbye and “love you.”

She texts me that Sunday morning: “Do not forget the camembert and the cumin crackers and your poems.” Smiley face.

And we gather for Mother’s Day at my sister’s apartment overlooking the Pacific Ocean. It is a strikingly blue day, not much cloud but a little faint chill in the air. If you

⁵⁴ The poem “Ali” in this chapter has been published. This is the authors accepted manuscript of a poem published as the version of record in Journal of Poetry Therapy 28th June 2016

<http://www.tandfonline.com/http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08893675.2016.1199509>

stand away from the sun, you would feel the wind. It is spring still becoming.

Everything today feels in the between. I am on her balcony with my laptop as the family lingers here and there and inside and outside.

I am writing also, a few words here and there.

And my brother-in-law, Geoffroy, calls for me to come in for crepes and coffee.

“Let’s sit together now, come.” I am always struck at how maternal he is.

And we eat and laugh at dad’s usual and animated jokes. “Let me tell you one about the old man who had trouble hearing and went to see his doctor.” Okay, we have heard it before but we still giggle into a guffaw.

And in the contented afterglow of a satiating meal with espressos in hand, there is a silence.

We shift almost ceremoniously from the table to the couch and a few chairs.

Yasmine proclaims, “Anar is going to read some poems.”

And dad’s eyes open wide and flicker with interest.

“Oh poetry, yes. You didn’t respond back to the last Rumi quote I sent you.

Was it not profound?”

And I, “Oh, yes it was good, Dad. The one about all of us just being visitors in the world,

I may add that to my dissertation.”

Mom is typically quiet and Rahima puts on another playlist of soul softly in the background. Stevie Wonder (1982/2000, track 8) and his “Ribbon in the Sky.” I look up.

And I say, “No”

Okay then, everyone gestures. Silence.

Silence.

The sun comes in, fills the room and there is some thing in the air.

All feels a bit unusual. There is slight chill, only a little.

And then Karim smiles at me, tender and telling.

And I just begin. I hear the sound of my own voice and I am in utter wonder.

Who is this talking?

Everyone is leaning into a listening (Kramer, 2014).

And, there is a different type of silence now.

And there is no preamble.

There is no precursor.

There is no prologue.

There is just the poetry of "Ali".

Ali⁵⁵

*Gardens are a place
where the ephemeral meets
the eternal
where the eternal
meets the hand of man⁵⁶—
the hands of my father
down deep in the ripe rich soil
dwelling in the garden
for 40 years of
weeding
watering
pruning
rootfeeding*

⁵⁵ Please see supplementary audio file for spoken word track "Ali."

<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

⁵⁶ Excerpt of a speech made by the Aga Khan at the inauguration of the Aga Khan Park in Toronto on May 25th, 2015. Retrieved from <http://ismaili.net/heritage/node/31816>

tending to
the flowers
he brings for me
on special days like
the rhododendron
he planted
when I was ten
to bloom only on my birthday
in May
petals of grace peeking
outside my bedroom window
to the graceless child
a father
who knew the wisdom of plants
cultivating a silent form of love
I could not see then
his heart in the soul of a flower
ruby red in rough hands
how his faith came in these moments
blossoming

I keenly remember now
my kindergarden class
in our backyard
and how we sat in a circle
eating red delicious apples picked
from our tree
he put in a silver bucket
for our eager hands
and vanilla ice cream too
he knew that gardens
can make friends
to the only child of colour
a rootedness to the unrooted
the fruits of his own spiritual labour
flowering

One recent Sunday I asked him:
dad, can you tell me about the garden?
yes, yes

*we have
pink dogwood
Japanese plum
azaleas...deciduous (he stressed)
boxwood hedges
I made them round
five of them, for each one of us,
rosa hunsa
rowan mountain ash
forsythia
camelia
clematis...deeply fragrant it is
crimson king maple
yucca gloriosa
lavender
heather
bamboo
banana
bartlet pear
bing cherry
peach...*

And I started to feel the poetry
in the nature of his own creations
wearing the colours of his spirit
a unity in this work
with the hands that sowed
the earth that always gave back—
to him

*You have made me most happy by asking me, Anar
as he brought me some Jasmine
but, I was silent*

And on the way home
I said to myself softly
*Oh, dad, you have made me most happy
too*

My voice falters in the end becoming soft and timid. Yasmine's tears fall and she lets them. She looks a bit childlike and yet mature. Here we all are in the in-between again.

"Yes, I know, yes, I know." Our eyes speak to each other. And Mom's are wet and soft. Rahima's are closed, slowly open as she turns to face me. I still remember how she turned.

And my father proclaims, "A poet is not made, a poet is born and she takes in everything. She sees things we don't even stop to think about. A poet sees..."

Poetry attends to the beauty of the nuance.

And then I begin to read more...

Poetry is the "more."

I read "Sandals in the Snow."

I read "Three."

And then Rahima says to me, "Do you remember I used to say 'Ana gone school' and wait for you by the door?"

And before she could utter another word, I just begin.

"Ana gone school?"

she would ask

my mother

as she awakened

to spend

the morning

pressing

*her three-year-old face
against the frosted
window pane..."*

*And we are all in rhythm now in the music of this poetic encountering where
Karim speaks out uncharacteristically, asking, now read mine. And here we all sat for
the hour that changed us all. Some thing had lifted.*

Poetry, a homing in.

Poetry, a healing in.

Dad rises to come sit close to me.

"Now, let me tell you about the hummingbirds and Rumi."

Oh yes, dad, oh yes,

My face, aglow

I am one wing

You

Are

The other.

Point of Light: *Karim*

Poetry is the human heart speaking in its own melody.

(Angelou, 2010, p. 15)

In the tones of poetic discourse as experiencing the hues of human becoming, I contextualize poetry as akin to spiritual expression, that is, a (re)awakening to human *being* and standing in the very fullness of life. And poetry colours my imagination into shades of understanding. In the shade there is both darkness and lightness. It is in this space where creativity knows no frontiers—as in the birds in my poem “Three”— in poetic purposing setting alight and reviving “the spiritual vision of imagination”(Lakhani, 2010, p. 228).

In this space of learning where poetry reaches into colourful, vertical, and musical realms to (re)turn onto the page, then nourishes the soul whose “language is at home in poetic imagery” (Moore, 2005, p. 10). Poetry is a pathway for me to evoke and to invoke by creating the conditions for the soul to manifest in learning that may linger. Poetry is reaching towards the soul of things, and in poetry’s essence is the heart of the experience. My poetry (re)awakens, (re)inspires, (re)lives, and revives what lies at the ontological core of human being, entering into a place of perpetual newness.

Poetry is about the eye/I that can still see newness.

This becomes a spiritual place that gives a strengthening in a crystallization of keen understandings, wherein “spirituality should not be a way of escaping from the world but actively engaging in it” (Khan, 2008, p. 129) towards living ethically,

purposefully and lovingly. Cohen (1997) writes that what “our education and culture should be for is preparing the heart for that journey outside of the ribs” (p. 199). In my offering, *Karim*, there is a heart that beats in, out, and through the poem. The hermeneutic rhythm that I ride while writing the poem brings me to the shores of understanding that is not only at the juncture of the vertical and horizontal, but what I conceptualize as a river of swirling eddies. *And this poem whirls*. It journeys from present, to past, returning to present, into a profundity where what remains is the heartbeat of all of my poetry, pure love.

In *Karim* is where human love is deepened into an understanding that could only have come through a relinquishing to the light of a poetic calling that filled me with utter surprise and wonder.

And I/eye engaged with this light.

In the melancholy of this poem, I tuned into another being, in (re)living a history evoking itself through a poetic knowing that brings with it a rushing of grace. I am most human breathing into poems, *indwelling*. I am most human when I am brought into the abode of what lies beyond, reminding me somehow of both the vastness and smallness of who I am. And in attuning to the music of being comes the benevolence of a knowing:

This being human is a guest house
Every morning, a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor. (Rumi in Barks, 1997, p. 109)

And in “*Karim*” I am the guest house, the poetess conduit that somehow brings him

into an understanding. *What guides the pen then?*

It must be love

Here,

Is the heart.

Karim⁵⁷

I am reading Bakhtin⁵⁸
His words spewed
Across my desk
Rendering another Sunday lost
In a dense sea of language

Karim is watching
Bugs Bunny cartoons
Rising laughter of a 45 year-old man
With the tender soul of a child
Innocent to a fault
Wanting of love

A young boy leaving Africa
With his uncle shot in the field
No clothes, no photographs, no returning
Only memories of a previous life
May endure

Not knowing....

The snow that is Montreal
A young boy who looks
From the tiny plane window
To a white blanket
A dark face
A family displaced
And the rising angers of the house

⁵⁷ Please see supplementary audio file for spoken word track "Karim."

<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

⁵⁸ I refer to Bakhtin's (1986) work *Speech genres and other late essays*. I am inspired by his notion that "I live in a world of others' words" (p. 143).

His father loses his fingers
To a merciless machine
In a factory he despises
A once wealthy man now poor
In spirit

This same hand that used to
Beat the young boy
With sticks
For loving all new things
For wanting change
For music, for cartoons
The fingers never recovered
A relationship
Disjointed as the hand
Is

Now
He is wanting of love

He looks to me
With his cartoon heart beating
Outside of his chest

What's up doc?
Would you like some tea?
It may help you
Yes, I say, yes

Never being in love with him more
Than I am
Now

Point of Light: *Mother Tongue*

A story has a beginning. A poem begins. We begin in the middle of things, our bodies holding this history, our words struggling to know themselves.

(Stewart, 2010, p. 86)

In poetry I explore my identity where words become a conduit for expressing who I am. *And I become on the page.* Poetry harbours a deepening desire for connection to the past and a hopefulness for the future. As I turn into each poetic line, I am turning into *myself*. And to be on a blank page is where there is tension, where words struggle and run up against my mind in a rushing to emerge. But the words, they start from the heart. And I negotiate my own identity in a body that holds poetry. Poignantly, although I lost my native language when I came to Canada, I have gained the language of poetry. This is a language born from my soul and in the tongue that speaks the words is where poetry becomes the whole body that feels, tastes, touches, and remembers.

Mother Tongue⁵⁹

I could not speak my mother tongue
a baby of exile
I left Dar-e-salam when I was one
from the red aching dirt to the green vast promising pastures
I made Canada my home
English please

Assimilate. Integrate. Reciprocate.

I spoke it.
I became it.

⁵⁹ Please see supplementary audio file for spoken word track "Mother Tongue."
<http://hdl.handle.net/2429/61130>

I owned it.
My own
language languishing
into the distant hazy
setting Tanzanian Sun
dropping
into
the
depths
of
the
unknown

In the summers, my grandparents would visit
Nanibapa, a proud man in a constant brown suit and fedora
I, often, ponder at his photograph
perched on my parents
antique wooden piano
gathering specks of settling dust
where he remains
furnishing his medals of honour,
the stories of which I do not know
lost
inside
my mother tongue

I recall the mornings
he would eat a slow purposeful breakfast—
warm milk with cornflakes and chai,
Uganda toast, yellow, that would disappear into the hot tea
to be fetched out with a spoon
slurping
the only language we fully shared beyond the broken offerings
of English and Gujarati
Our distance
as apparent as those couples who eat meals in a ritualistic silence
in gestures that speak of the immediate desires of
a few drops of milk,
a cube of sugar,
a brown speckled ripening banana

Oh, how our lives met in this in-between
of
time
space
and
culture
and
how I long to speak to you now
Nanibapa I would say:

Khem cho aage, themai tick che
Thema nana hutha thuma su karatha ⁶⁰
How are you grandfather, all is well?
Please tell me about your youth,
Who were you?

But what I have
are these memories
heavy,
at times,
dissolving like
the Uganda toast
into the chai;
Wet.
Sloppy.
Ready
to be lifted
and
consumed
as these words
I write
that bring you
up
and
out
and
back
in
to
me.

⁶⁰ I attempt a loose transliteration of Gujarati.

Point of Light: *Opening Silent Wings*

I (re)turn to the beginning of this dissertation where I state that this (re)search represents a pledge to pedagogical encounters that nurture spiritual literacy. Through the journey of this work, I have fully endeavoured in my creative calling where being in the poetic I/eye has brought me to the thresholds of myself. In experiencing these thresholds, I have discovered the boundless nature of my being, that is, where search brings discovery of one's own authentic self as being in the world. In this space I have come to know what light is and poetry always brings *me* to light. To feel the luminescence of a poetic knowing is to experience a spiritual radiance where words spread their wings. Through the lines of my poem "Fear," I trace the line of my own life back to a moment in a classroom when I was nine where I stood on the gateway of some *thing* that I am only now coming to fully know. As an artist, researcher and teacher, I am reaffirming that contemplation is an essential part of learning.

Fear

You will write a poem
the teacher announced
I was an awkward nine
a shabby purple sweater
chubby fingers
with bangs my mother cut
uneven and short
to show the sole dark face
of uneasiness
in a classroom of white
a child pulled from the East

now in the West
unrest
in the heart strings of a young soul
needing to feel needed
now
You can write on anything
the teacher said
it is due tomorrow

I took the pencil
to the paper
and
I wrote

Fear
What is it?
It is illusion, it is confusion

the words coming
that I did not know
but knew me
I was lifting
it was Light
rising in my young heart
who started knowing
lyrical lines luminously
descending
to the final line, lamenting:

*There is one thing that fear is not and that is
courage*

I was nine
What did I know?
What did I know?

I stood in line to show
the teacher
my poem
the girl before me
a bounty of blonde
hair
straightly cut bangs
perfectly sitting upon

sapphire eyes
shining

Did you copy this poem?
the teacher accused
me
I was

dropping
dropping
dropping inside
of me

meekly speaking
I didn't copy
This is mine
she gave me a checkmark
a mark—
a mark—
she left me with
a mark—

I ran home at lunch
carried by the heart in my belly
bursting through the front door
to find
my mother sitting on the edge
of her king-size bed
with the bold African print
colouring covered
with laundry as she softly sang to
the love songs on the tiny rusty radio
that gave music to a loneliness
a haziness of a sunlit memory now of
a young mother in yearning:

*Strumming my pain with his fingers*⁶¹
Singing my life with his words

⁶¹ Lyrics to “Killing me Softy” sung by Roberta Flack and written by Norman Gimbel (1973, track 1).

And I offered my poem
to the hands
that once held me
so close on the plane of exile
the young mother with long ebony hair and eager hazel eyes
carried with the promise of a life and of a love
carried with *Fear*—
the poem that I had written
weeping she places it on the fridge
And
the pain mixed with beauty that
we shared between us
in the in-between of us
still remaining
still lingering
in the gaps and spaces
of a lone poem that speaks
in the silences of
a moment of *light*
that I experienced
in poetry
when I was
only nine

At the age of nine, I discovered poetic expression. This was a place where I felt guided on the wings of poetic desire by a spirit that responded eagerly to my calling and gave me the path to write myself into the light of knowing. This was also the space where each poetic turn became a rumination and reflection of a young life in its becoming, where poetic creation became a spiritual expression arisen out of a contemplative process. Through this process came meaning towards healing. This was the onset, the beginning of my knowing poetry as touching the realms of a written love (Bachelard, 1969), where the sublime powers of language could not only transform one's reality, but also create a bridge of understanding.

The poem “Fear” affirms a pedagogical moment that was ripe with richness in which the few verses I penned as a child, provided a powerful medium in which to express my own internal fears and most profoundly, the journey and the fear of my parents, who as new immigrants, were trying to assimilate to a foreign place. There were many layers of discovery here in what was said and unsaid but still pronounced. This was my negotiation of identity, that is, a discovery of my young self being raw, authentic and vulnerable, but yet finding courage through this veritable process of writing. I identify this process, now, as a giving of a certain grace afforded through poetic expression. Through each word and each turn, there was a becoming into. The particular classroom experience that I recall in this poem, which I still remember so vividly, speaks to the notion that I was not seen for whom I was or who I could become. In stating this, I reflect on memory and what and how it remembers.

How does one want to be remembered?

In turn, there was an absence of what I have come to know as the spirit in/of education. I deeply resonate with Kessler (2010) who writes:

When the soul is present in education, attention shifts. We listen with great care not only to what is spoken but also to the messages between the words—tones, gestures and the flicker of feeling across the face. We concentrate on what has heart and meaning. *The yearning, wonder, wisdom, fear, and confusion of students become central to the curriculum.* (p. 58)

And it was in-between the words that I found a certain space, this grace, in which to speak a truth that needed to be proclaimed, negotiated, and affirmed. It was not in

the classroom that I gained this affirmation. In the classroom I became a wounded poet in waiting. The gifts did come with the experience I shared with my mother, but what if the teacher had recognized and seen *Me* and what I was expressing in this potent pedagogical place of promise? What difference would this have made to a child of exile who was in the very processes of becoming? I echo Götz's (1997) claim that the teacher needs to know what the soul is, to recognize its presences and resonances. In this poem was the young soul that was revealing itself in wide-awakeness (Greene, 1967), in a discovery for both language and self, in what was a pinnacle of a true pedagogical encountering. In turn, I affirm that "spirituality is one of the most important qualities a teacher can develop" (Götz, 1997, p. 201). To see teaching through the lens of spirit is to embrace the notion that all human beings have a higher level of consciousness and capability.

I AM so much more.

It is important, herein, to return to the notion of spirituality conceptualized as the "tuning of the heart" (Khan, 2012, p. 174), and this (re)search represents my own process of attunement, this self-work of what I have referred to as my own *schooling in slowness*. In this purposeful and paced process, I have become more intuitive in my own teaching practices as a teacher and educator of the English Language. Through this self-development, I am learning compassion, passion, patience, promise, and potential.

And one must start with the Self.

I see teaching as a place that allows Others to affirm and redeem their essential human graces and where we can offer these spaces across the curriculum

for contemplative engagement and communion. To pursue a teaching life, then, is a pledge to actualize human potentialities, the seen and the unseen, to see a spirit-in-learning where the very spirit of learning is both teacher and student witnessing a journey of perpetual becomings. I affirm Aoki (1992/2005) who writes that “thought and soul merge in a oneness of a lived moment” (p. 196). I resonate with this notion as it not only gives primacy to the present, but to the layers of a life’s history towards pedagogical experiences that see the whole person in learning.

Teaching with spirit acknowledges both “thought and soul” as symbiotic entities. That is, to become intuitive and attentive to what can be all three: a cognitive, emotional, and spiritual shift of being in a heightened living and learning experience that has the capacity to be profound, transformative and enduring. Herein, to consider spirituality in the educational context is to acknowledge that the notion of transcendence is limited “not only [to] the mystical realm . . . but also secular experiences of the extraordinary in the arts, athletics, academics” (Kessler, 2010, p. 65). *And how can we create more spaces and places in education for a contemplative connection, for a purposeful slowing down?*

Many years later I returned to the writing of poetry, to know and experience poetry as the keen “articulation of contemplative perception” (Laude, 2004, p. 11). My life has been a lyrical one, dedicated to a deeper understanding of the poetic I/eye. In my (re)search I have reflected, documented, and analyzed my own embodied experiencing through the art of poetry as a way to understand a phenomenon, both material and spiritual. I am writing towards feeling concepts that are mysterious and elusive, at times, but mystical, meaningful, and moving. In

getting closer to the very flesh of understanding poetry as a poet, researcher, and teacher, I am committed to holistic educational practices in response to the mechanistic paradigms of learning—focused mainly on knowledge acquisition and achievement—that were part of my own educational history. As I reflect on being a young student who was lost in her sense of self, I see many missed opportunities where I could have developed my passions, where learning could have been inspired, where schooling could have brought hope for the future. And I felt that my education had failed *me*. It failed to nurture and nourish me as a whole person: intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.

But I am being nourished now.

What is guiding and underlying my own questing in this multilayered inquiry is the need for a mystical and poetic vision to release the potential for/of spirit in our secular society (Tacey, 2004). I am learning to be in the poetics of teaching in ways that allow for a broader fuller inclusive vision of life that embraces all peoples and works towards pluralistic understandings. In the poetics of teaching comes a keen sense of intuition such as in the writing of my poetry, this knowing of *where* we should go now. *Intuition is the heart of the intellect. All parts of me engaged so fully with the rhythms of a keen attention(ing) coupled with a purposing towards the learning at/in hand. There is music here, too.*

Miller (2005) writes that “addressing spirituality in the curriculum can mean reawakening students to a sense of awe and wonder . . . a deepening sense of connection to the cosmos” (p. 2). In this context (re)awakening is to give students a sense of permission to reclaim what they already have while preserving one’s own

being, and there is a strengthening here. As teacher, I seek out the ways to invoke, evoke, and provoke the very *heart* of inquiry. In teaching with wings is a (re)calling to a soul space that can be life affirming. In the diverse ways that this inner silence or communion can be cultivated in a teaching moment, I affirm that poetry can imaginably revive a spiritual vision (Lakhani, 2010) of life and create a transitional space of learning. In transition, I ask: *What does it mean to teach in the in-between?*

My own poetic practice has deepened the relations to the world(s) I inhabit and, in turn, I see poetry in pedagogy as creative, critical, connecting, and contemplative. I echo Kates (2005) who writes of aesthetic expression that “creative activity attunes us to the soul’s rhythms as a pathway of meaning, mystery and wonder” (p. 203), and I add that the creative then opens the pathways into the critical eye/I. Koch (1999) poignantly writes that “the power to see the world in strong, fresh and beautiful ways is a possession of all students and the desire to express that vision is a strong educational force” (p. 45).

What do you see?

On Teaching a Poem

“I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a colour slide”⁶²
And if the poem were a hue
what shade would it be
Scarlet red, teal blue, steel grey or white, pure and pristine
or any other colour in-between

And if the poem took a shape

⁶² Billy Collins (2001) opening lines in his poem about teaching poetry titled “Introduction to Poetry” (p. 16).

what would you draw
a circle, a triangle, a diamond, square, or hexagon
or maybe just a crisscross of lines
or a tree
or a heart beating bold
and freely

And if the poem were a melody
what tune does it carry
a soft subtle humming sound,
a steady rhythmic drum pronounced and loud
a symphony, lively
that crescendo's
and bellows of strings and of cellos
or perhaps a Gregorian chant
or electric guitar
an alto saxophone
or maybe it just has an
echo

What is IT that echoes?

And if the poem were a creature
would it "hoot hoot" like an owl
or creep up like a steely panther on a prey
or buzz like a diligent worker bee
Roar fierce like a lion on the open vast plains
or float sublime like a white swan in a crisp blue lake
Perhaps it stands proud like a peacock's feathers

Well, here I AM.

Or does it slither like a snake in and out and around
or fly like a hummingbird flapping baby wings
or "caw caw" like a plume crow
raw and unrelenting

If the poem were Nature
would it be a tumultuous ocean
or the placid calm summer seas

And what does lie beneath?

Or wild wondrous waves you are riding

coming home then with the tide
or lost inside
a whirlpool swirling
suddenly
dropping down like a
 water
 fall

Oh, here I go...

Or a dense forest prickly path dark and unknown
Is there heat exuding like the soaring August sun
burning bright in the cloudless sky
or tulips reaching up and up
petals then falling around the green
One
 by
 one

Does it feel like a timid wind in Spring
or like a distant fading star
you have to stretch to see

Oh, there it is...

or like rain driving hard
against the pavement
pitter

 patter
 pitter

 patter

against the car window shield
wipers on
blurry now
clear

And imagine if the poem had hands
does it reach out to caress you on the cheek
or grab you unexpectedly

Listen to me

or resting hands on your shoulders
or on your heart then giving
to you a firm handshake

and pointing to you the way

in some way

to feeling
to finding
to touching
to loving
to witnessing
to fearing
to revering
to needing
to seeing
to sighing
to vying
to praying
to dancing
to wanting
to wondering
to knowing
to yearning
to believing
to dreaming
to breathing—
or just
to
Being.

And many years after my “Fear” poem, I asked a young student if she would like to write a poem. She has just come to Canada from China and was quite meek and timid, but she relished literature, short stories, and poetry and was quite eager to discuss and write about them. I offer her the “I Am” prompt where she can explore her identity through objects and places that she felt most defined her. The metaphors came quite readily and she wrote with a beautiful vulnerability the ending lines that still reside in my mind:

“I am the plane that took me to Canada
Big and unforgettable—
There is a blue sign on it
Like the colour of the sky
I am a flower on the way to the new school
Yellowish flower, animated and beautiful.” (Zhang, 2012)⁶³

Oh, how I understand

Thought I.

And to write on the thresholds of being (Bachelard, 1964) is a place to discover “something new in the language, language that now belongs to the writer” (Behn & Twichell, 1992, p. xiii) while also owning a deeper sense of self, connecting and then emerging, with a purpose and with hope. I have found this in my own poetry where there is a duality of experience in a single line that gives the layers of rich meanings. *Poetry is a life force coursing through the veins bringing wisdom from within.*

I (re)turn to a Rumi quote often, “There are hundreds of ways of kneeling and kissing the ground” (Barks, 2003, p. 123). This speaks to me as a teacher, in the plurality of ways in which one can engage in a space of contemplation and connection.

And a search can take many forms.

Greene (1967) calls the aesthetic experience as one that honours the multiplicity of visions. In turn, in this context of pluralism, poets speak of their own being and

⁶³ You can find an evocative collection of student poets on my teaching site: <http://pearllearning.com>

seeing while witnessing the living humanity of a shared world. In this sharing of humanity, reading poetry can aid us towards understanding the Other.

I have hands and a heart too.

To be listening, hearing, reading, and writing poetry is to attune to the “soul’s language at home in poetic imagery and mystery” (Moore, 2005, p. 10). I put forth, then, that to engage in poetry is also to find one’s way *back* home. Creating spaces and places for “witnessing the contents of our consciousness” (Hart, 2004, p. 28) is to (re)turn to the innate human desire and ability to know through silences and to listen to what is echoing within. I resonate with Parini’s (2008) definition of the *sublime*: “noble and grand, generous and affecting . . . which continues to aspire over time across culture and languages” (p. 7). In this context, I refer to poetry as the pedagogy of the sublime in its potential to open these silent wings.

I am called to ask how to listen to others
breathing
inspired by Aoki’s (1990/2005) plea to a curriculum language
that resounds in the body
hearkening to the very musicality of a pedagogy
hearing echoes of one’s soul
calling
where
teaching is *whirling*
setting the soul spinning in learning
wearing
the colours of Spirit
a poetic phenomenological pledge
full of promise and possibility
in pedagogy, in pluralism

And
in poetry, where Hafiz⁶⁴ writes:
An awake heart is like a sky that pours light
and where I write:
of encountering
And
opening
silent
wings
on
the
inside.

Moore (2005) asks of the rich array of experiences that can nourish spirit in a teaching space: *How can we have students take that step into eternity?* And in the multiplicity of ways in which spirit may be manifest, that is, through experiences with/in the natural world, stillness, silence, deep reflection, aesthetic connection, I am motivated by the motion of poetry and how it kneels (in Rumi's way), kisses and takes that step into eternity. Kates (2010) writes that to embrace soul in education is to allow for students to cross a transformational threshold in the human journey towards recognizing the truth and the interconnectedness of our humanness. In entering the thresholds of a pedagogical encounter, I ask: *What is eternity in teaching?* It is to create a moment that endures, that is generative, that gives and that lifts us into a fuller space of becoming learning. To be lifted is to be with hope and as Moore (2005) states, the soul is only through in/sight. To teach aesthetically and poetically and lyrically is to offer the soul what it needs in beauty and in

⁶⁴ Hafiz, n.d., par. 1.

pleasure and in learning that becomes, then, a deeper sense of knowing. In this space, I am learning, is empowerment. *Yes, I know, now and yes, I can do, now.*

As I reflect upon what lies between the student and me, in this horizontal exchange, what is in the in-between? I refer to the third thing that exists between us as the “thing” that bridges us, the soul in-between that touches, inspires and rises together in the Aokian moment of knowing. I see a light that shines in a moment that is only really a moment in the life of a person, but yet has potential for flight. In the spirit of contemplative pedagogy, I claim that to stir the soul is to stir the intellect. These are not separate entities, but nourish each other into heightened ways of seeing the world before us and *in* us. To actualize spirit is to shift consciousness where both cognitive and emotional responses are stimulated to a place where teaching transcends itself and, then, leaves its resonances beyond the classroom. *I remember.* The potential of seeing spirituality in education is to embrace the notion of a journeying in/through/out where there is an evocation and validation, a questioning and an answering, where learning meanders to eventually a coming home. In (re)calling to the soul of learning, there is no wrong then, only a moving towards.

I am always moving towards.

Mills writes that “we do not just reflect on something, we merge with the object of contemplation” (Mills, 2010, p. 17). Thus, contemplative activity can be transformative in learning that reveals itself through us and then becomes bone deep.

And on a night flight, I/eye imaginally see words as falling pearls, luminescent in the dark sky like fire flies. How they merge with the crest of the waves riding the syncopated rhythm of a tide coming home with hope and conviction. In poetry I become the ocean, rippling lines of love and devotion.

Night Flight

The plane pushes
Into the nebulous night
Soaring over the placid Pacific
Ocean
Moving with conviction
To the promise of the known
And the unknown
Between earth and sky
Between dark and light
The humming of the engine
I feel in the center of my chest
This is the closest to heaven I have felt
In a long while
Sublime
And
I begin to write poetry
As the steady breathing of others
Sleeping surround
My own sense of being
In this space where dreams inhabit
The milky white residue
Of promise
And
I imagine my words
One
by
One
by
One
Dropping into the ocean
Below

Foaming into the frothy crest of the waves
Lingering there for a moment before
Riding the rhythm of the tide
Onto the shores
Of my mind—

One more small pearl of knowing
Into this great illimitable
Abyss

There are certain texts that lead to experiencing an aesthetic reading, a moment to moment keenness of being in a poem that is burned through our own life journey, a hermeneutic whirling of giving and taking. In this ebb and flow, there is movement, a silent communion with text shaping us as we are shaping the text, moving forwards with meaning and motivation. I ask: *How can we set the soul spinning in learning?* The potential of poetry in pedagogy is held in its common essential human value of contemplation as an act that we all desire and need, to be and breathe in Bachelard's (1969) "intimate immensity." I also propose that in contemplation comes a spiritual strengthening, a literacy that affords a certain seeing and being in-understanding of some aspect of the world, moving beyond the mundane.

How do we teach one to read, to notice the presence of the Sacred in our daily lives?

How do we slow down to see?

How do we think imaginally?

How do we sharpen our perceptions?

And I see a leaf falling from the tree

I see the petals reaching up to the teal sky...

In these texts that can lead to aesthetic contemplation, the capaciousness and musicality of experiencing poets, such as Rumi, are ripe to commune with the capacity of language, life, and light. I do understand that not all students will have these heightened experiences, but I believe my role as a teacher is to create the spaces and places where one may enter and encounter mystery. To understand poetry as a pluralistic endeavour is to acknowledge the diversity of meanings a poem may hold for an individual; this reading transaction being one that is formed by our “gender, ethnic and social background and cultural environment” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. viii). In Rosenblatt’s reader response theories that have informed my English teaching, we evoke poetry through our very being(s). Engaging in the dialogic of self and text becomes a process that is revelatory—evoking meaning out of mystery in words that are somehow unfamiliar and, then, become familiar.

In my teaching practice, I do bring “adult” poetry to students of all ages where I don’t underestimate their own level of understanding but allow them to journey through the walls of poetry, making meaning as they will. I resonate with Koch (1990) who states that children’s capacity to engage and experience adult poetry should not be underestimated and they should not be limited to “sweetness” themes. I hope poems will bridge new interpretations as they grow as readers, writers, and individuals. For me, poetry holds memories and pedagogical moments that can instil life-long connections. As I bring in poetry from diverse times and places and cultures, from Emily Dickinson to Louise

Erdrich to Li Bai to Mary Oliver, my own affinity and passion for mystical poetry inspires my teaching.

Teacher does what teacher is.

And Rumi saved Me.

However, I don't particularly view this as a bias or as a possible hindrance to teacher expectations but, rather, a positive force providing impetus for lively authentic inquiry in the classroom. As Koch (1990) understands, teachers of language bring in works that they like the most and infuse this excitement and energy in the text. My own life journey brought me to Rumi as I refer to him as a "discovery poet." Rumi invites readers to discover the power of language to foster a way for living through interconnectedness, love for humanity and the natural world.

He is the one who Sees.

The silent communion that I have experienced while reading Rumi informs my pedagogical practices in promoting aesthetic teaching where there are certain conditions in which to allow this flow between reader and text to permeate. Moreover, there is an understanding of a process(ing), of a journeying in and through, as readers become "energetic and imaginative performers of text" (Leggo, 1997, p. 37). Learning environments and spaces should be created which allow for full and slow engagement with poetic inquiry that includes reflection, contemplation, communion and conversation, fuelling the transaction between reader and text.

In the heart of poetry lies the soul of human language.

As pluralism is a strength, poetry can speak out about Other ways of seeing and being in the world. These “Other” ways have a rich capacity for not only self-transformation but for creating inclusiveness, understandings, and appreciation of what our differences have to offer to our lives as a people. This becomes so much *more* than tolerance. We are a plurality of minds striving to each live authentically and freely. *How do we learn the beauty of difference?* As poets speak freely and their language becomes this freedom of expression, how do we inspire students to make “themselves vulnerable, to put their emotional and intellectual thumbprint on their work for all to see” (Bintz & Henning-Shannon, 2005, p. 35)

And there is beauty to be seen.

Rumi’s own spiritual connection to his teacher, Shams of Tabriz, was the passion fuelling his 70,000 verses and if we are to offer our selves and honour our students while being in the pursuit of learning, the potential may be boundless. Ultimately, the beauty of the aesthetic approach is to see the spirit and soul having a place in education towards teaching as a pathway to knowing one’s self. Teaching may then be revelatory.

This is ALL in Me.

And there is a space where the inner and the outer fall away. There is a space where horizontal and vertical meet and I teach—as I write—in the cross of both horizontal and vertical intentions where knowledge always somehow meets here and then rises. *Up.*

As I poetically play in a found poem with students’ responses and poetry inspired by Rumi, I have come to know, that “Wisdom can arise in recognizing [the]

Rumi is someone
who believes in
Love
understanding
the true nature
of nature he knows
peace
He seems mysterious
having thoughts
that we
don't
have
but
should.

And Maya Angelou brought me to Terence (n. d., par. 1) who once declared, "I am a human being; nothing human can be alien to me." In this call to the common cloth that weaves us, I reflect upon one of her poems that I have brought to my teaching on numerous occasions: "Still I Rise."⁶⁶ Angelou (1994) writes:

I am black ocean, leaping and wide
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave
I am the hope and the dream of the slave. (p. 163)

In the power of her metaphoric imagery, she perceives herself like the vast deep waters ebbing and flowing to eventually this homecoming. In these potent lines is where I see the newness of poetry, bringing a washing over and over with a power as in the mighty ocean she speaks of. In the to and fro of the tide are the rhythms of her own calling where the bearing she speaks of shows the inner strength of her

⁶⁶ I particularly love this video clip of Angelou reciting "Still I Rise" and this has been a powerful teaching resource in capturing the spirit of the poet and her poetry:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqOqo50LSZ0>

own being. And then: *I have the ocean of understanding in ME*. In the flow and resiliency of nature, she truly can see her own power. In the gifts of this homecoming in/with the tide, there is always hope and a desire to dream. *Nature is a reflection*. What is most poignant to me is that there is renewal and newness here, a washing over. In her vulnerable and vibrating imagery, I have understood the humanness of this experience, and how it somehow transcends the context of slavery and becomes one where “in the resonance we hear the poem, in the reverberation we speak it, it is our own...as if the poets being were our own being” (Bachelard, 1964, p. xxii).

I have been so beaten down.

But, I can rise too.

In her own rising, in the emphatic lines, “I rise, I rise, I rise” (1994, p. 163), I see “rising” as a poetic process itself. Poetry elevates us to a place where we can contemplate the communal condition of expressing the vulnerable state of human experience. In this place is a vulnerability and a resiliency. To experience “rising” as an emotion that poetic encountering can bring forth is where there is a synergy between words and reader. I affirm the Perennial Philosophy (Huxley, 1945), a metaphysic that recognizes one divine reality that unifies us all and in this underlying unity in the in-between of us, a place where our diversity converges in the soul of being human.

In the pedagogy of poetry, there is the capacity for imparting a literacy of living in/with text that speaks of our own individual and communal calling(s) to the world.

And I recall this student who once shared with me: “This poem gives a sense of inspiration whenever I read over its lines, almost as if the poetry is awakening me into a bitter, yet bright and hopeful world and perhaps it is a mind full of hope that makes one rise.”

And I think, these are those silent wings on the inside.

I ruminate now on one poignant pedagogical encounter. I was teaching essay writing and was referring to the stars and the constellations. I asked my young student to envision the “big dipper” and let us start to trace the stars. I wanted her to bring forth this visual as a springboard for a lesson I was teaching on making vital connections in writing and how we can bring ideas together. I was hoping she would resonate with image.

But, she then said to me, “I don’t know what the big dipper is, I never look up.” I asked her, why not? She continued on to say, “Most of us don’t, really. I am sure many of us will not know the constellations at all. We are just too busy for that.” In the silence that ensued after our conversation, what occurred for me was a deeper understanding of the predicament, condition, and way of being of our students living in the digital world. I posed a question that has continued to guide my teacher inquiry and practice: *How do we teach students to text to the soul? To create and activate what Hart (2004) refers to as an inner technology? How can we impart a way of living that allows for full engagement with the natural world and in finding our place within it?* In turn, offering spaces that can be giving in meaning, in contentment, in connecting to moments that we look up to the vastness of our lives.

By doing this, we can access the full potential of the human experience that thrives in/with mystery, imagination, and wonder.

Looking up to look in.

*And I grew up
Looking up*

*Anar, let's go see the moon
It is so full and luminous,
Dad would say*

*In poetry now I am feeling
the luminous moon in me.*

And I want to emphasize that spirituality can be living with and without God. I resonate with Tacey (2004) who states that the life of the spirit as being existential rather than creedal and emanating from each human being. As Pelias (2006) eloquently writes: "Living without God, however, didn't mean living without the spiritual. I found the spiritual in the natural world, in art, in interaction with others...in the natural world, I found such intricacy that I was stunned into wonder" (p. 26). I profoundly resonate with the notion of being "stunned into wonder" and to open spaces in pedagogy for these sublime places to "wander for wonder" (Leggo, 2003, p. 12), lost in the awe of wonder itself. In this wonder imparts a sense of renewal, a washing over. Morrison (2009) writes about certain poetry as providing an experience called the "divine heightened" (p. 89). I interpret this experience of transcending self in the silence of a soul's learning to listen to its own capacity to seek a kind of truth. In turn, that expands and lifts our human consciousness to the full breadth of not only an understanding, but to be feeling the presence of *some thing else. This, to me, is intimacy.* In this feeling of a feeling, what is it that does wash

over us? Grace? Beauty? Comfort? Poetry always gives. And how do we write critically about poetry? *How does the poem do what it does, I often ask? And what does IT do? Let's write about that.*

And now how does this poet do what she does?

This IS my (re)search.

Pedagogically and personally, I know poetry as the life-blood of language. To feel the warmth of poetic revelation is where aesthetic space is a place to tend spirit in bringing us to the edge of the existential questions where 'it' may never arrive.

Poetry exists on the edges of things.

It is the promise and beauty of the very searching that keeps one moving.

The moth is held by the flame giving of its own light.

In existentially expressive language, the material and the spiritual are not separate entities, but nourishing each other in a giving and receiving that not only keeps me as poet-in-remembrance, but also reorients, reintegrates, and reclaims my light. This is where poetry as entering the edges of an experience brings me back to the centre.

I have reflected, ruminated, revisited, and relived my experiences with poetry in making the claim that poetic expression and spiritual expression share the same line. In doing so, I not only provoke curriculum but evoke its capacity in perhaps what I can call a "hermeneutics of humanness," where aesthetic teaching approaches can promote our own inner capacity to contemplate and interpret learning. *And I see the whirling here too.* My teacher inquiry has inspired me to perpetually ask questions. I do so in the spirit of the poet Rilke (1984) as I live towards the answers.

One needs to ask to receive.

This is intention.

In teaching, I follow Rilke's advice and in (re)living my own pedagogical memories, I understand that this (re)living is what I do as an artist, researcher, and teacher, where through questing—in this whirling—I am perpetually heightened to my own humanity, *(re)turning*. In this summit of awareness, which I know as exercising my own spiritual literacy and in my teaching of the English language, I am finding the openings to foster peak experiences that will endure. In this transcending, teaching becomes so much *more* than a horizontal transaction and opens to the verticality of a human *experiencing*. In the teaching of poetry with a poetic I/eye, I embark on the poetics of my own students' becoming in literacy, in ways that foster creativity and interconnections with self and others and world while moving purposefully in and through the frontiers of language.

And as I ruminate on one lasting soulful encounter, I (re)turn to my poem "Promise" and the last line becomes a pedagogical pondering: *What is the role that we will play in each others' veritable becomings?*

Mondays at 4

She leaves a card for me. It has been four years that we have spent together. Almost every Monday at 4 p.m., we traveled through the English Language and read and conversed and analyzed and wrote essays and narratives and paragraphs, always striving to be more creative and more critical and more...

My young student had faith in me as I journeyed through developing my own methodologies of teaching writing and we quested on together through these years, leaning towards her goals as I always tried to inspire and aspire.

And it was in our mutual passion for poetry where we connected profoundly, and where I would see the flickers of light on her face. And I would know that some thing is happening. And we would take time to linger and to rest and to play with the words, and eventually I might ask a question such as: How does the poet use imagery to convey or strengthen the notion of?...and so it went and it went.

On our last day together, she visited me after her final English provincial exam. She excitedly exclaimed:

“It felt easy and I was so prepared, I eased into it and actually enjoyed it. As I was writing I thought, I have this!”

I am happy for her and momentarily, I know now the goodbye is ensuing as she prepares for the next stages of her life and university and...

After some laughter and lively conversation, I gift to her an illustrated version of Attar’s “The Conference of the Birds”⁶⁷ and we hug deeply.

Go gently, little bird.

And I want to tell her how much she has done for me. What her faith in me has also allowed for me to become. But I don’t.

⁶⁷ Peter Sis’ (2012) richly illustrated version of Persian poet Attar’s (12th century) lyrical and mystical tale of the journey of birds who embark in the search of the Simurgh, the King, and journey through the seven valleys of questing.

And I walk home later that night slowly taking in the air. I am tinged with sadness, and not having children of my own, I think this is what it must feel like to have to let go. I will remember You...

And I come in, turn on one sole light, sink into the leather couch and open the card. I savour each and every word. The words that travel in my mind and then to my heart and help me to see that, yes, I have made a difference.

*I let out one big bold breath and sit for awhile. And I read the card again and I see the words as a found poem,
swimming in my mind,
breaststrokes open and wide,
waters moving and so*

Am

I.

Dear Sheltered Self,

(no more)

I AM capable and changed
by moments of teaching
something remarkable happened to me

(I was depressed and discouraged)

But stunned and then shocked by the whole world of words

(Is this all possible?)

coming out of my sheltered self *(little by little)*

loving all literature

and poetry *(especially)*

writing

leading me

into light

(You found me alone in the dark)

giving me a second chance to
becoming who I am now
a wall of words building strength over time
embracing me
to rise
and take a hold of my own destiny
creatively
changing
Me/You
Did.

*The moon is now high but reduced to a comma and I pause here to look at it outside
my living room window. The moon like a comma, like the pause I take where some
thing does come after. And it always does.*

Point of Light: A Poetic Rest

*And one day I wanted to write nothing more;
The earth, I thought, will go on turning without me.
Nevertheless, the poems are not the author's work—
The poet keeps silent; the words write themselves.*

(Schoun, p. xi, 2002)

I embarked on this dissertation as a pilgrim of poetry seeking to journey closer to knowing poetic discourse as a spiritual process and practice. In (re)searching spiritual expression, I have been (re)minded that within the searching exists more searching in a perpetual place of promise and potent potential. *There* are always new revolving doorways of discovery awaiting. And at each point of light, I have experienced more light. And I have seen the colours of this light like the altering subtle hues of the early morning sky.

And the sky is in I/Eye.

In my a/r/tography as whirling, I affirm I am a soul-in-learning and also, a soul-in-listening, and the yearning to know and to be known fuels my very inquiry. In enacting this a/r/tographic (re)search is where I have resonated deeply with the notion of what is *becoming*. As an Ismaili Muslim, the search is integral to my being in the world, where the act of inner searching is an expression of my faith. Hence, in this work, searching and becoming are kindred concepts and on these pages are my process and my purpose. Here is where I am most human. In the dialogic of poetry, I have conversed symbiotically with both spirit and source. The very graces of knowing have bestowed boundless rays of revelation, and in this sensuously

intimate process of getting closer to the face of poetry, I have felt the rhythms of my soul attuning to the melody of my own breathing in/out with the cosmos.

Poetry is in the very flesh of Being.

As Dillard (1989) writes, “The lines of words speed past Jupiter and its cumbrous, dizzying orbit...it will be leaving the solar system soon...rushing heaven like a soul” (p. 20). *Onwards, for the lover who wants to press her face against the moon*⁶⁸*/and paint the wisps of the clouds leaving soft lingering impressions/wanting to know the stars shining...*

And I have felt the grace of space. This is writing that is a baring boundlessness. I (re)mind the reader of the (re)search question that sparked this path of transformation: *What does it mean to dwell poetically?* And what has been strengthened in this work, I ask now?

It is ME.

Here, in this dissertation is a contemplative mind that has engaged in both the creative and the critical, each sphere mutually taking from each other in an ebbing and flowing that becomes these waves of newness. This is the space of a heightened seeing-in. In this praxis of actualizing imagination and intuition, the guiding light of this (re)search endeavouring has come into being from this in-seeing but also from in-listening. In poetry, which I have contextualized as “the articulation of

⁶⁸ I return to my poem “Rhizome in the Sky” where I seek inspiration from Rumi (n.d.-b): “At night, I open the window/ and ask the moon to come/ and press its face against mine/ Breathe into me (par. 1). <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/144073-at-night-i-open-the-window-and-ask-the-moon>

contemplative perception” (Laude, 2004, p. 11), both sensory modes culminating into the poetry and also the experiencing of the poetry, where words lead to music or spoken word, where words must lead to listening too. Herein is both an inner and an outer flow, of a seeing out and seeing in, and listening out to a listening in.

And the dervish knows when to turn

And the poet knows when each line shall fall

And the painter feels each brushstroke moving

This listening is

A turning in

And for this poetess, I ponder lyrically now:

She holds the mysteries of life in her hands

The pain she's leaving behind is in His plans

It has felt like fire and ice to her soul

Every turning bringing blood back to the whole

And in the blood I refer to is the heart that feels fully. I have written that I live at the cross of both the horizontal and vertical intentions, and this, indeed, is an ideal state for me where I can strive to achieve material-spiritual balance in my life. Poetry brings me to a state of balance, a wholeness that is a full circling into understandings.

In these understandings that this work has documented and speaks of is what I refer to as an *essencing*, coming to the essence of the experiencing as I have fully relinquished to the processes of my experiential learning-in-learning. In my keen state of dwelling lyrically, I have sought to bring out the essence of the

experience, and moreover, of what or whom I write of. *Father, mother, sisters, Karim, grandfather and Aunty Yasmine ...*

Poignantly, in the analogy of the moth entering the flame what remains is the “moth-essence” (Dillard, 1977), and as my poetry conveys the very bones of a perceptive episode that then becomes crystallized, the essence of whom I write remains, and those essences bring back what may have been lost and what is no longer, *here*.

Poetry Remains.

In the prowess of imaginative power is the chance to believe that one can hope for finding not only understanding, but love again. And in the stilling of the moments is the hope that the reader will also find anew. In the personal process of the artist who is in the fluid flow of the moment of creating, flows out to the other who enters the lines that are like rippling waters of understanding.

And my reflecting is now yours.

In the outcome of this work, I have seen myself seeing others. “It is by imagination that we cross over differences between ourselves and other beings, and thus learn compassion, forbearance, mercy, forgiveness, sympathy, and love—the virtues without which either we nor the world can live” (Berry as cited by Hayes, Sameshima & Watson, 2015, p. 43). And artists must bring beauty to this burning world.

And the world is burning,

And I will keep turning,

Allahu

And the world is burning,

My soul keeps turning,

Allahu

Please let me see only the beauty.

I want to be the I/eye that sees.

And I ask the eager question: *Where does this questing end?* In the endless beauty of the pursuit is where I affirm that the grace is found, and at every point of light, I have felt both a weeping and a wondering. I have experienced poems as my contemplative pedagogy and sole/soul purpose.

And I have seen a single leaf falling to the earth

And three birds communing on a weathered log

And words like pearls dropping in the ocean from above

And raindrops gracing the green

And...

In this work, that is, in fact, a wanting, I conceptualized the rhizome (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and its lines of flight deepening in the earth as points of light that I placed heavenward in the open seeking sky. I journey onwards now as a steward of poetry documenting moments and memories in my life. Perhaps, each of my poems is like the luminous stars in the night sky. *Here, the points of light are points of life.* As I (re)trace the lines that connect each of these poems, I see the rhizome that crosses through my very *being*.

And it is the trust in this (re)search process that has connected these points of light and moved me through. In this dissertation that became an extended meditation, the expansive sky represents a vertical worldview that has height, vision

and infinite possibility. As in a cartographer, I have mapped my own passage through this space, moving with intuition, reflection and conviction. In turn, this scholarship is faith in human potential and possibility where I have formed my own patterns of knowing—intricate and intertwined it is—where strength comes from the sheer doing of the work, of being in deep engagement, where each point gives, generates and validates in itself (Richardson, 2000). In enacting my poetic I/eye, I have come to experience generativity or what I have called (re)generativity, that is, some *thing* that continues to resonate and be a source of renewal which validates in the sheer act of being what it is and holding strong evocative power in a deepening of human understandings.

And what was not there before, now here it is.

Thus, in forming my own pattern of knowing, as conceptualized as the rhizome in the sky, there is both a moving through and a settling deeply, there is movement and a pausing. This pausing involving reflexive and reflective thought, where each point of light is both a marker of new knowledge and also a platform on which to jump off to that next point, wherever that may be. As in the stars that hold infinite light and provide navigation, I have journeyed through this writing with a keen and heightened attending to what each point is giving to me and to the (re)search. What I have encountered is that there is always a space that opens before me, another line of inquiry that I move with and move alongside with. As in my early morning meditation practice, this is a symbiotic and synergistic process of a letting in and a letting go, in one single elongated breath. And my mind has travelled through space opening up to more *space*, illuminating a terrain, a

cartographic and a/r/tobiographic path, where customary modes of perception open to the spheres of imagination and faith.

Now, this is seeing.

With each point of light, a pinnacle of feeling and with each point, full of emotion and motion, that is, a reflecting and a refracting, this *crisscrossing*. Like my poem, “In the Keeness of Seeing,” that opened my prologue, where the rain traces its own patterns of understanding on the keen green veins of the leaf, this writing is a network of my life lines, of poetic lines that descend, ascend and transcend. I have (re)shaped my own conception of the world, by projecting inwards and outwards, of this shedding and throwing light up and on. In this pattern of (re)search where there is a lighting of the path, I resonate with Richardson (2000) who proposes the crystal as a central imaginary for postmodern research texts symbolizing the many ways to see the world. In crystallization as oppose to triangulation—of three fixed points— there is no single truth, there are “an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). I stress herein that these points of light that I documented, are ones that are not traditionally fixed or rigid, they each have their own shape and pattern of being, substance, tone, hue, colour, shape and “angles of approach” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Thus, the integrity of the traditional underground rhizomatic root system is that it is messy, intertwined and entangled but holds strong, nurturing and nourishing the tree.

Barone and Eisner (2012) write of arts-based research as having “legs,” this ability to move and be moved to someplace *else*, as the capacity of creative scholarship is that “it does not simply reside in its own backyard forever but rather

possesses the capacity to invite you into an experience” (p. 152). In this celestial and creative vision that I have proposed is one in which I am metaphorically standing in my own yard, looking up to the night sky and imaginatively travelling through the terrains of space and time with the hope of reaching outwards to others who may journey with/in this work too. This strengthens my understanding of a *rhizome*, *always in relation*.

Thus, in the assessment of this thesis, as in Richardson’s (2000) crystal that casts light in different directions, I hope that there are many points of entry and as well, points of departure or flight. In this light theory, it is the intention of this work to illuminate what it means to be human, as I have dwelled in a most intimate, sensuous and poetic aesthetic encountering. I would like this (re)search to be assessed on its ability to evoke others’ into feeling, into seeing and into learning. I (re)turn to Cole (2004) in that “research, like art, could be accessible, evocative, empathetic, provocative” and (re)generative in that, like the crystal, there is always more to see, depending on how and where the light comes in. And thus, as in the uniqueness of my own poetic stories, what holds is the commonality of my humanness. As each point of light or discovery is lifted off the page with a poem or lyrics, “when illumination is combined within a vivid experience, the work will serve to illuminate cognitively and respond emotionally” (Barone & Eisner, 2012, p. 154), and I add here now: *spiritually*. In the art that forms my own inquiry, the art should stand in and for itself, (re)presenting scholarship that has wings as in a sentimental sweet love song that is listened to over and over again.

And, now, I visualize this search in a poetic pause, a purposeful caesura, a

place of reflective respite. In the in-between now, I ruminate on the profundity of this moment of resting in (re)search, a necessary space to feel the warmth of the light of knowing as both a giving and a gifting (Lea, 2014).

And in the sky of inquiry I let my face feel the sun of understandings.

I close my eyes,

I look UP.

Stay here a moment,

Stay

HERE.

This is a place of vertical grace where I listen to the reverberations of the searching in echoes that speak softly in sublime silences.

I know, I know, I know

Now.

I have encountered the poetic, personal, pedagogical, and philosophical, rising and colliding. I began this dissertation with exploring my woundings, and I weaved through my woundings (Denton, 2006) with writing. And I have come to experience and re(turn) to the sheer “plentitude of being” (Esmail, 1998, p. 72).

And I have weaved in-out and out-in

on the page threading words

treading emotions.

This page, as Dillard (1989) writes, is a “purity of possibilities” (p. 59). Poetry has allowed me to pass through the sadness to a sacred place where I can once again hear my own “astonished emotions living” (Rilke, 1984, p. 83), to know the very

poetics of a place of being. *And there is poetry in every place.* In turn, I have come to the graciousness of words as musical, vertical, descending, ascending and transcending in luminous lyrical light. Poetry, as a heightened state of being in elevated form, is all embracing, all encompassing, all envisioning: “And poetry. It’s this *and* [it is] that” (Belliveau, 2014, p. 142). My desire for aesthetic contemplation and communion has led me to the spiritual knowing that I (re)affirm in Rumi’s own epiphany. I (re)turn once more: “My soul is from elsewhere, I’m sure of that, and I intend to end up there” (Barks, 1997, p. 2). *Here, there must be only beauty.* In the lines of poetry, I will faithfully and fatefully follow that path: *Lightwards.*

And I will open my eyes wide

towards the light

for this,

is the most merciful place

I/eye

know.



Figure 1 *Luminous Sky*

Returning from the Okanagan on a summer afternoon, I witness this luminous sky. I capture this image through the windshield while the colours keep changing moment by moment. This is presence profound. As I marvel at the altering hues, we are driving into the horizon, steady and paced, moving with the landscape. Wheels are turning. There is movement everywhere. And while riding on this highway of light, I will just keep looking UP.

Epilogue: You Will Ask Me

And:

You will ask me
What this (re)search is
And I will tell you
That I have
Evoked desire
In a longing for lines
Caressing the inner strings
Of my soul attuning
To its own melody in the
Symphony of theophany
Remembering and (re)turning
To kneel and kiss the ground
Stepping into eternity
While spinning
Through a/r/tography
Vertically to music moving
The celestial sky
In poetry and in prayer
Sharing the same line
Of flight
Every point of light
Transcending transcendence
Echoing echoes in the
Aokian way of pedagogy
Lifting the grace of other
Souls in waiting in learning

My whirling—
Spiritual and material
Beauty and blood
Baring boundlessness
Vibrating vulnerability
Turning to face
Poetry a longing
Lamenting of separation
Seeking a song singing
Of wings silently
Singed with the burning
Of a yearning
Praying
For the light

 In my heart

 In my hands

 In my eyes

 In my breath

 In my mind

 In my flesh

In these words

Wanting

Lyrical light

Upon light

Upon light

Upon light—

You will ask me what this (re)search is?

And all I can tell you

Is that I have

Written

Into
The
Light.

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