

‘SINCE FEELING IS FIRST’: POETRY AND RESEARCH SUPERVISION

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Biographies

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Esther Fitzpatrick is a lecturer at the Faculty of Education, The University of Auckland. She initially worked as a primary school teacher and now uses various arts pedagogies in her teaching with tertiary students. Her current research includes critical art-based methodologies and narrative inquiries to better understand emerging inbetween identities.

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Joe Kincheloe (2008) said:

“knowing and learning are not simply intellectual and scholarly activities

but also

practical and

sensuous

activities

infused by

the

impassioned spirit.

Critical pedagogy is

dedicated

to addressing and embodying these

affective,

emotional and

lived

dimensions of everyday life” (11)

We are spacing his words here, infusing the writing with poetic pauses, (re)making them for our own expression; keeping them alive. Writing is, indeed, ‘sensuous’, lived in the body and felt. It gives us hope, it haunts our days, and it enables a crossing of time . . . a trail of letters across the spaces. It subverts, rebels, exists. Despite the pressures we endure, despite the difficulty of laying words across the page. But it is also political, infused with hierarchies and, in academic spaces, implicated in and with relations of power.

Tom Waits (2002) said, “That’s not the road, it is only the map.”

We attempt here to be both road and map, to analyze poetry in research through research poetry (Lahman & Richard, 2014; Lahman et al., 2011).

Therefore we see/use/applaud:

- ✓ Poetry as craft
- ✓ Poetry as art
- ✓ Poetry as strategy
- ✓ Poetry as breath
- ✓ Poetry as essence
- ✓ Poetry as sensuous
- ✓ Poetry as vulnerable
- X ~~Poetry as fixed~~

And so we send (via email) pieces of ourselves. We say these things inside a poem, words that are raw, words that are full of feeling, words that are honest and vulnerable. We open spaces, disrupt dusty traditions, and forge deep and meaningful relationships. We see poetry as disruptive to established supervisory research relationships (Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick 2014) and we use it specifically to open ourselves to new ideas, to wonder in the research process (Rinehart 2010). It allows us to speak against the silences (Mazzei 2007).

We are (a list of things):

- ✓ Colleagues and academics
- ✓ Friends

- ✓ Supervisor and student
- ✓ Distant and lately discovered cousins
- ✓ Weekend wine drinkers
- ✓ Poets
- ✓ Women
- X ~~Master and Slave~~[†]

We write poems to each other (see Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick 2014), answering, conversing, building the work, the words, together. Esther is completing an arts-based thesis and Katie is her supervisor. But this is only a very small part of this (our) research story. In this expression we explore how poetry, as arts-based method, has enabled us to embrace the emotional edges of our work together (Fitzpatrick 2012; Richardson 1992; Richardson 2014), how we have used poetry to explore the things that irk us in ‘The’ university, to enable explorations of theory and to name the invisible emotions we live within the hierarchy of this supervisor-student dichotomy. We exchange pieces of writing, opening up our unsaid personal struggles.

Katie to Esther:

When you send me your thesis work, there is a minor crisis:

The moment of not knowing

1. Doing

inquiry together

(one avoids the nasty word: research)

is an exhilarating kind of drudgery

no, not dragging me down but a lift in the hard work

the 'tapping it out' kind of devotion

because it's not always the

excitement of the idea

It's also the sigh of looking at the empty page

2. The hardest part is (always) framing the feedback. Do I:

- a) track changes all over your creation, add crosses, deletions, comments over your (perhaps) carefully chosen words, create a kind of graffiti that aims to improve but might tear at the fabric of your intention, might cut holes in your skin
- b) creep carefully around the words, pick out the best parts to display in a vase on my desk
- c) focus on the syntax and thus (yes, e.e)² miss the moment when the work kisses the question
- d) read the pages with attention to my mood and consider how it seems at first brilliant and then unstructured, and then rebellious
- e) Try to feel the work and be still
- f) Tell you to read more
- g) Tell me to read more

3. It's also in the moment of not knowing

of feeling like the process is itself a poem

I begin writing

but I do not know where I will end up

or when

And we do not know

who we will then be

4. and the road, when we get there, is never what we imagined it would be

Esther to Katie: Response 1.

Ah

The

ROAD!

Well I was

Never one to take the

Highway, that well-worn track,

A vanishing point directing to a predestined ending.

Instead I choose Like John Bunyan³ the more difficult route.

The winding path hidden places *Seeking* serendipitous surprises,

Where your imagination is free

And perhaps sometimes you **have** to create a way, forge a path, a new way of being.

But (*pause here*),

Like the 'Three Princes of Serendip'⁴ I don't journey alone,

I have been trained to notice to interpret,

To analyse to *make sense of things*

I have alongside me

Caring companions

And together we make a way

Esther to Katie: Response 2.

Vulnerability or

Resilience

A tossing up of the two juggling

I choose I choose I choose (*wait for it!*)

VULNERABILITY

They ask me, the other students

'how come you can be so brave?'

I feel you in my shadow, like a rock, supporting me, shouting, "Go for it!"

"Why not?"

Did you not know?

Your graffiti is like a gift.

I trace the lines with my finger. It leads me to the place where you have made your mark.

I trace the lines with my fingers. **They lead me to the place where you have made your mark.** I devour your comments. I savour them in my mouth **and** toss them around with my tongue. Some of your words are like chocolate, they melt in my mouth and make me feel warm inside. Some of your words are difficult to digest, **they burn my lips?** bite my tongue; a sharp sensation. But I persevere. There are only a few of your words that I spit out; but they tell me I need to be more explicit (again) with what I am saying.

Comment [E1]: What do you mean here? Say what you are doing – confusing? Is it like tracing paper?
Comment [E2]: You use mouth twice. Think of another word.
Formatted: Highlight
Deleted: ;
Formatted: Highlight
Formatted: Highlight
Comment [E3]: Same as for mouth
Deleted: , they
Formatted: Highlight

I devour your comments. I savor them on my palette and toss them around with my tongue. Some of your words are like chocolate, they melt in my mouth and make me feel warm inside. Some of your words are difficult to digest, they burn my lips. But I persevere. There are only a few of your words that I spit out; but they tell me I need to be more explicit (again) with what I am saying.

When I see your graffiti I know you have spent time with me, with my thoughts, with my words. Every cross, every deletion, every suggestion, is a moment you have gifted me. I smell you then, sweating as you sit at your computer screen, I hear you breathing softly, thoughtfully, setting time aside just for me. I see you smile when you read a line that resonates. I love the way you make connections with your own work. Where you provide a thought, a speculation, and a link to one of your theory ghosts (Bourdieu is often sprinkled on my page like sugar).

‘since feeling is first’

theory must also be felt in the body, lived in. The theories that we each draw on start connecting, arguing with each other, they begin to shine their own lights⁵ across the work. Esther imagines these theorists living with us, and in our bodies, like ghosts. They haunt us⁶. Katie favor’s Bourdieu, Foucault, Bhabha; Esther has been trying to resist Bourdieu, sticking with Derrida and Barad. As we work with the theory, we express the ideas through poems. As I (Katie) am trying to understand Karen Barad, Esther sends me a found poem (cf. Prendergast 2006) summarizing her work:

Spooky connections

Identity ongoing, intra-active.

Becoming and not-becoming.

Questions remain,

Lingering like ghosts.

Time is out of joint.

Time can't be fixed.

Spooked.

Off its hinges.

Existence evolves,

Immediately reconfigured.

Before/after disrupted,

Spacetime mattering.

What spooky matter?

Quantum discontinuity,

Cutting together/apart.

Dis/closing im/possibilities.

Entangled identities.

Haunted be-comings.

Unending iterative reconfigurings.

A-count-ability.

Memories of entanglement

Survive destruction.

Leave behind telltale signs,

Empirical evidence.

Quantum entanglement

Disturbs, shifts, diffracts.

Identity reworked, enfolded,

Performed differently.

Memory of all traces,

Sedimented enfoldings.

Written into the fabric of the world.

Written into flesh.

Speak with the ghost

To respond to, to be responsible for,

To risk oneself,

To open oneself to ...

... That which we inherit.

The entangled relationalities.

Worlds ongoing intra-active,

Becoming and not-becoming.

(E. Fitzpatrick October 2014)

We talk more and I begin to see the connections, how notions of time are caught in the body and I remember, my own theoretical ghost, Pierre Bourdieu, also knew that time was encased as culture in the body, as embodied histories:

Katie to Esther:

Hey, am waist deep in Bourdieu and have just come across this gem in his work which talks about how history is written into our bodies (via habitus) and so overcomes or transcends time. Maybe there's a theory piece here we could write on Bourdieu and Barad? Bourdieu argues that “because practice is the product of a habitus [disposition] that is itself a product of the em-bodiment of the...world, it contains within itself an anticipation of these tendencies and regularities, that is, a...reference to a future inscribed in the immediacy of the present”. What I think he means here is that our bodies anticipate the future in that they know what to ‘do’, what to ‘be’ in various social contexts. They know this because they have lived in those contexts and so are immersed in the expected practices. So, bodily movements are an expression of the past and a prediction of the future. Bourdieu calls this “an act of temporalisation”, a “practical anticipation of the future”. (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 138)

And so

We extend our theoretical thinking, we start to think and feel the theory together. The theories swim around our bodies, making us move and breathe and see differently. Esther imagines Karen Barad thinking about embodiment and her articulation of it:

Esther to Katie

So I pause wonder and imagine.

I check out a few facts, just enough, and create a fictional scene with a young Barad, Derrida and Bourdieu:

Young eager post Doc student,
First conference in Paris, France.
She gazes up at balcony.
He is there smoking on his pipe,
Talking to his ghosts.
The other approaches him,
And the conversation goes deeper.
Entanglements, ghosts and the body,
Habitus, history, anticipation of the future.
The post Doc student considers,
Flips through her physics paper,
And begins to see ghosts.

As we research and work together, we draw circles around our work, around ourselves.

The circles become larger and larger,

like the ones we used to draw in the sand when we were children.

The circles enclose us momentarily, they define us but are easily escaped,

Abandoned and widened.

These sand circles help us to define but they do not limit us.

We can draw new roads, out and away and in different directions.

This is only possible in the ways that we work together. The production and reproduction are a result of the work we do and which would not be possible alone. The poetry gives voice to how we are feeling and imagining, it helps express our ideas in language that is emotive, evocative, creative and more human (Faulkner, 2007).

The end of the road; *if there is such a thing.*

Esther

I wonder, but only for a breath, did you know? But no, I hear you say ‘and the road, when we get there, is never what we imagined it would be’. And this is true. I am still not exactly sure how this will end –this road we are on together. There have been patches along the way, rugged and torturous, where I was afraid. Remember when Stephen Ball’s BEAST blocked my path? His breath stunk of all the lives he had destroyed in the academy with his neo-liberal wiles (Ball, 2012). He waved his list at me and my name was on it! But my true companions gathered around and sang my praises into the night. He slunk off while we have continued on our way.

Katie

And the thing is the think is, well,

 this writing together

Is making me write differently

Giving me permission (like the piece you wrote about Laurel Richardson)

 To be creative

You are an artist and it makes me recall
hunt for
uncover
deep down and
hidden under the layers of academic
conformity
my own creative voice my un-remembered poetry
and I want to paint again,

This thing we are doing together, this work and play
is so much more than is usually framed by the supervision [research] relationship

This is possible because of:

Trust

Vulnerability

Openness to risk

Artistic license

Arts-based methodologies

Embracing the aesthetic

Deep connection

A willingness to wonder

While Esther has progressed her PhD, we have progressed our poetry and the research relationship
we have formed around this arts-based method. We didn't intend to make our hastily-written poems

into a part of the research at all; we began writing poems to each other as a form of aesthetic and emotional conversation (see Fitzpatrick & Fitzpatrick, 2014). Including poetry, among the other writing voices we used, gave us permission to play and to undermine the hierarchy inherent in any research supervision relationship. But the poetry also opened up space for us to connect emotionally and personally. While this was pleasurable for us, it also impacted the research. The poetry gave us permission to experiment, to build on our creative ideas and to make connections between the theories we were using. While this may have happened without using an arts-based method like poetry, the vulnerability and openness required by this writing genre directly enabled this process.

We finish here with another aspect of Esther's arts-based methods, sculpture. In her thesis she employs, not only poetry, but also visual art, textiles and sculpture as research method.

Esther: I made a picture of us!

I made it out of wire and plasticine. I sketched it on paper first and then started to manipulate wire. I imagined us dancing, this complicated entangled dance we do. Our arms are outstretched across and through time, ghostly connections haunting our becoming (Derrida, 1994). I remember our hesitant moves, our uncertain moments, and our openness to vulnerability, our willingness to be alive. You have expanded my world.



A complicated dance:

Quantum entanglement⁷.

The infinite circle,

Life – death – life – death.

My past/present/future,

Forever spooked,

Entangled, haunted by you.

Entangled relationships:

Fitzpatrick and Fitzpatrick,

Poninghaus and Poninghaus⁸,

Supervisor and student,

Friend and colleague.

Our literary ghosts,

Bourdieu, Derrida, Barad...

A habitus haunted,

Interaction intra-action,

Elusive edges e/merging.

Our body has 'tracked changes',

Like graffiti,

Marked into our flesh.

Becoming Différent/ly

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¹ Master Slave and Différent

The identities of supervisor and student are never a clear binary. Grant(2008) critiques the adoption of the metaphor of ‘Master-Slave’ to explain this relationship, which assumes a polarity, the play of a hierarchical structure between two resultant poles. Grant (Forthcoming) describes identities as always constructed via difference and, therefore, they ‘depend on what they are not’. Derrida’s notion of différance is useful to further explore this relationship. Hein (2015) explains Derrida’s différance as both a separating and joining of both poles of a binary. He notes that ‘différance contains two different meanings: differing as distinction, discernibility, or spacing, and deferring as delay, detour, or temporalizing’ (Hein, 2015, p. 4).

It is because of différance that the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called “present” element, each element appearing on the scene of presence, is related to something other than itself thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and already letting itself be vitiated by the mark of its relation to the future element, this trace being related no less to what is called the future than to what is called the past, and constituting what is called the present by means of this very relation to what it is not: what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present. (Derrida, 1982, p. 13).

² This is a reference to e.e. cummings poem ‘since feeling is first’ and, in particular, the line: “who pays any attention

to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you”

³ John Bunyan in the Pilgrim’s Progress writes about Christian’s journey to the Celestial City where he chooses the harder road, rather than the easier by-path meadow.

⁴ Serendipity

Horace Walpole read a “silly fairy tale” called the ‘Three princes of Serendip’ and later, on January 28th 1754, coined the term serendipity in a letter to Horace Mann (Merton & Barber, 2004). The term itself went unused until a series of Walpole’s letters were published in the early 1800’s (p. 8). What appealed to Walpole in the story of ‘The three princes of Serendip’ was the ‘unplanned, accidental factor in the making of the discovery, and the “sagacity” necessary to make it’ (p. 20). Walpole was not the only writer/researcher interested in the story of ‘The three princes of Serendip’. First, the story itself can be identified in several different guises (Arabic, Jewish, Turkish and Indian). It is a very old story. Second, Voltaire’s writing of ‘Zadig’ (1748) has been linked to the three princes. There Voltaire highlights the importance of skills in detection and having a general quick wittedness (p. 14).

The definition of serendipity is complex. Its evolution over the years has included the “how”, [double or single?] the “when”, and the “what” of discovery (p. 57). It is further complicated by the importance of the qualities of the discoverer. The sagacity, the wits, the skills, and intellectual training they have acquired are all essential ingredients to the serendipitous moment.

For us, working in art-based methods such as writing poetry, immersing ourselves in the experience, is aligned with Walpole’s three princes and his notion of serendipity. We like to think of ourselves awake and ready to notice with sagacity.

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman uses the metaphor of shining a light in a dark room to explain how theory illuminates (and obscures) different aspects of our work: different theories highlight different things. (Bauman, 2004)

⁶ Haunting

Derrida (1994) insists that it is at the ‘edge of life’, not through living, but through interaction with other, and with death, that we might learn to live (p. xvii). Hauntology is a methodology of deconstruction that works to problematise particular narratives, disrupt particular relationships (Harper, 2009). Originally coined by Derrida, hauntology restored speaking to ghosts as a respectable subject of enquiry (Davis, 2005; Derrida, 1994). Significantly for this chapter, it involves interrogating our relationships with our dead to ‘examine the elusive identities of the living, and to explore the boundaries between the thought and the unthought’ (Davis, 2005, p. 379).

⁷ Quantum entanglement

Employing Derrida’s (1994) notion of hauntology, Barad (2010) summoned up the ghosts of great scientists, whose ideas on physics haunt our modern understandings of the world. She uses the metaphor of ‘how electrons experience the world’ to provide a ‘way of thinking with and through dis/continuity’(Barad, 2010, p. 244). To engage the reader in a felt sense of *différance* she wrote about an imaginative, dis/jointed journey with these ghosts, where she explored the concepts of intra-activity and quantum entanglements. She described how electrons ‘jump from one level to another in a discontinuous fashion’, where they are ‘initially at one level and then ... at another without having been anywhere in between’(Barad, 2010, p. 246).

⁸ As Esther was researching her own family history as part of an autoethnography, we discovered ancestors in common: our great great Grandfathers were brothers with the name Poninghaus.