

Anthesis

By
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Abstract

This thesis recounts the exploration of transmuting a mental health crisis into a potentially transformative experience that relies on multispecies relationships including the pedagogy of an agave. It uses the example of an orca's grieving vigil to explore the role community contributes to healing and manifests in a poem that disrupts a normalized and habituated narrative to reclaim its wildness at the edge of knowing and syntax. In other words, this work endeavours to capture the operational aspect of a transformative and embodied praxis in motion. It records the experience of the public launching of this poem via an online platform during COVID and how community, engaging with that platform, adapts and participates. It also addresses the culmination and impact of studying the systems of oppression without a trauma-informed pedagogy in place for how this singular and micro experience can potentially serve a more macro understanding of crisis and trauma.

May 2021



April 21: And so we begin.

(please see *notes* for accompanying quotations for each photo)

Chapter one: *an Agave, an Orca, and a Reclamation*

This work begins with the pedagogical challenges of a graduate program in Women and Gender Studies that instigated an emotional crisis of sorts for me, which I chose to engage with rather than avoid and culminates in a long poem reclaimed and excavated from an autobiographical novel I published in 2002 (Goyette 2002). I am interested in how this poem will move from private and public and how it engages with larger, community and cultural trauma. In between this crisis and the redacted poem, I retreated and kept company mostly with an agave plant that had unexpectedly begun to bloom in the Halifax Public Gardens. The agave is a monocarpic plant, meaning it only blooms once and then desiccates and dies. In its natural habitat this process takes long enough for the plant to also be known as the century plant. Its blooming therefore was an event that I felt compelled to bear witness to and to record. It felt like a species of mirror or, perhaps, unexpected company for what I was experiencing. I wondered how changing from a crisis/pathologized-informed language to one that was more organic, more agave, would impact my experience of moving through it. Could I engage with this work as a form of blooming rather than recording disruption and disorder? This critical approach colludes and uses the framework of (radical) feminist trauma theorists such as Burstow (2003, 2014), Brown (2004), Cvetkovich (2012), and Barnes and Schellenberg (2014) as conceptual scaffolding. From mid-April 2018 until the beginning of November, I visited the plant daily, for just under two hundred days, to mark its process and to study how it persisted. I took a photograph each day and posted those photos on social media with a quote that I chose intuitively/somatically. These postings initiated a following and created both an online and a real time community that held this plant in high regard. The plant's

manifestation created an ambiance that was potent in community building. In this way, keeping company with the agave was a pedagogical experience for me. I learned that it had begun to bloom because the crate it was growing in had been badly damaged by gardeners the previous autumn, forcing the plant into a rigorous growth spurt in response. It would also fail to reach its full height before blooming. I watched it be put outside far too early and survive unexpected frosts as it thrived, growing into a shape that was at first stark and odd and dubious looking. It took its own time. And I saw it being chopped down before it had completed its dying. At the end of May 2018¹, the head gardener and I were interviewed by CBC during which she said the plant may be dead and I thought it was still growing. By watching it daily, I had come to know this plant, and could see a new green froth at its tip that hadn't been there in the days before. I watched how it was manifesting and how I related to that manifestation. Its beginning: the crushed crate, the confines of greenhouse, the unfavourable climate were things I could relate to. I learned aspects and nuances of vulnerability and of risk from its growing and by its death. I learned of patience, and consequence, and of the long gaze. The experience of attending this event converged with processing the crisis I mentioned above and initiated what Haraway has referred to as “inventive connection as a practice of learning to live and die well with each other in a thick present” (2016, 1). I took Haraway's “multispecies flourishing” to heart and to this work (2). The agave was making legible and public what remained inarticulate, unformed, and silent within me in this thick present as I endured the unexpected “emotional pain” I was experiencing (Barnes and Schellenberg 2014,

¹ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/agave-plant-at-halifax-public-gardens-may-never-bloom-1.4675131>

184). In this way, its company was a crucial contribution to the generative and procedural components that are so important to this work. Another important element to this work is J35, a Pacific Northwest orca who swam with her dead calf for over seventeen days, an unheard of length of time, about 1,000 miles off the Pacific Northwest coast from sometime in July until the beginning of August in the summer of the agave. I was drawn to this news story in the same manner I had been drawn to the agave. This behaviour also felt kin somehow; the orca's show of grief proved to be a tuning fork for how I was feeling and provided a direction I could swim to in my own silence. I realized that part of the way forward for me personally and in doing this work would entail grieving. This process will be described in more detail below. I am also interested in how J35's pod took turns swimming with her dead calf to relieve her of her vigil. I am intrigued by this for many reasons: by how J35's grief was shared, supported; by how the whale was relieved, communally, from grieving in solitude; by how her pod participated in her grieving. This resounds an emotional intelligence that crosses species. What can I learn from this? What would navigating by my emotional intelligence of this experience look like? What meaning making will this process create? And what kind of work will it produce? And what might learning with the orca shape a private and then a feminist collective response to (public) grieving. Reading of the orca's vigil as it progressed gave me a sense of deep time, grieving time that seems to move more slowly than the rest of the world. I decided to adapt the seventeen days of vigil as a poetic form in the reclamation work I was preparing to do with my novel. The poem I would excavate from the narrative will be seventeen pages long. Choosing this form gave me a structure for the wildness I felt I was approaching. It gave me a sense of purpose and situated the work as part of a larger

eco/environmental grieving ritual. This approach still feels radical to me for how it insists on its own way of being and its own pace, and for how it is procedural and emergent, and my research is in the living as praxis of this approach. In some ways, watching the agave readied me for an embodied vulnerability that instigates the curiosity that would serve as a point of departure for this work. I propose a way forward that also resists pathology or any psychiatric lexicon and insists, rather, on a more abundant and inclusive telling. This way forward also suggests a post-humanistic approach that I will elaborate further in my thesis. I am noting how this way of being/working is also changing the dynamic of my community for its impact on conversations and how I keep company. No one could hurry the agave's blooming or talk the plant out of itself. The plant, given some space, knew how to manifest into being. This feels like a version of the equity, decolonizing, and emancipatory practices at the root of intersectional feminism and exemplifies the importance of resources and support. There was no hurrying the flower or my healing and, being given what it needed to bloom or being left to be itself, the agave agave-ed. This work replicates exactly that: it is a recording of a blooming at its own pace. Committing to the generative process feels like a good place to embark from. An agave, an orca, and the work of reclamation from a novel I started twenty years ago and published in 2002. My novel presented itself as a way forward and a viable way for me to properly grieve. It had started out as poems. I remember showing the poems to one of my mentors who couldn't say much about them except: *interesting*. The word "interesting" in this context had a basement of dread for me and conveyed its opposite. I felt the word come with a silent and yet loud "hardly" either before or after it. I continued writing because I could feel the tail of something, the shadow. Something was brewing

and wanted to be made. I attended a “Wildness and Writing” retreat in the summer of 1999 at a Benedictine monastery in Muenster, Saskatchewan. My routine for the two weeks was simple: I got up early in the morning and ran the long prairie roads, ate breakfast, and would return to my room to write “interesting” poems. I contemplated wildness in a way that finds itself illuminated again in how the work I am doing now is requesting to be wild, to be given the space to become itself, and for how it “wilds” (my)self back into an unknowing and emergent state (Halberstam and Nyong’o 2018, 454). This wilding is potent. Every evening during the retreat, I would walk to the meadow to listen for the same distinct call I had been hearing since I arrived. It could be a gopher, someone said one breakfast, or prairie dogs. I knew without knowing that it was an owl calling her owlets. I cannot articulate how I knew and where my confidence came from but I was sure it was an owl and I was biding my time until she let me see her. I relay this experience for how it is sibling to the story that wanted to be written, that I could somehow hear but not yet write. And for how it relates to the experience of how this work is (be)coming into being. This, I know, sounds strangely mystical and it may be, or it may be the chime we feel when we are doing/being exactly who/how we are, relationally. When we agave. It did turn out to be an owl and three owlets and, the night I saw them, the meadow was alit by fireflies. I basked in their company until it was time to return home with a backpack full of crooked little poems that seemed dazed from running into the same wall over and over again. Perhaps I only thought I knew what I was doing. This not knowing is key to my artistic process and I rely on Retallack’s “radical unknowability” which she tells me is “the only constant” as a guide to creating in this spirit (2003, 22). A couple of months later I inadvertently typed across the page rather

than hitting the return key for the line to break. This change in pace/form freed the story to unfold and hit its righteous stride. And by unfold, I mean the way a heron or a praying mantis unfolds, how they cannot help the length of their limbs or their neck, preening, stretching, moving. My “interesting” poems stretched into a narrative I could hardly keep up with. It could be that this was when I truly began to learn how to engage in a wilder way, how to let my work take its own shape rather than to interfere. And this could be when the work you are reading now started. The writing of the story was autobiographical and I felt the freedom of the telling as redemptive and audacious. I was telling my story as a story. And as cliché as it sounds, a weight was lifted from my body, I was engaged creatively in a way that I can still feel. It was joyful and an excruciating experience. And everything about it was fast. Once it found its form, the story told itself like water finding its way. After a few months, I sent a complete version to five agents at the urging of a friend, three agents were interested, one didn’t respond, and one had had it up-to-here with family drama. I chose one, he edited it, I returned the draft and within a couple of weeks he had sold it to HarperCollins for a considerable amount of money. Wow, right? What I had not anticipated was the next step: my voice filling those words with my breath, reading those words out loud to a room full of strangers, claiming those words and the story as my own. I had not anticipated the collision of private to public and the emotional undertow of that collision that resulted in a profound shame. This is when and why I abandoned the novel and, by doing that, abandoned myself and my telling. The 9/11 attacks occurred at the time of this abandonment and it felt the world had changed making it easier to explain why I did not actively pursue readings or engage publicly with the work. I did not address the autobiographical source of the narrative. I chose to remain

private and now understand that this was an act of radical self-care that refused commercial or marketable engagement for a more personal one. I still grieve for this younger self while also feeling deep empathy for the person I was, how exposed I felt and how unprepared. My resources for this kind of public mourning and memorializing were limited. I understand vulnerability to be difficult and a form of courage I am still learning about. The conversations I had about this book remained private.

This work recounts the adventure of radically transmuting a mental health crisis that activated memories of childhood trauma experiences into a transformative experience that relies on the pedagogy of an agave, that is tuned to the grieving vigil of an orca, and that manifests into a long poem that excavates the girl I was from a narrative I constructed in order to properly grieve and behold her. The questions that circle it are: how will this private departure arrive publicly? How will I navigate the interface of private and public and, ultimately leave myself in order to have a wider, more inclusive conversation about the trauma we are all experiencing on the planet at the time we are living on it? What role does community play in emotional healing? What impact does a trauma-informed and creative use of language have on emotional experiences? And, speculatively, how can this micro/personal transformative experience serve the macro/public/collective emotions of grief/anger? I am interested in the interaction of a generative, imaginative praxis and community/family/environmental trauma. This work is situated at the personal/political for me to better understand a trauma-informed approach to emotional pain by actually practicing one that relies on the structural and conceptual framework of a feminist lens on (radical) trauma therapy and using my ongoing creative/wild generative practice. It also relies on Muñoz's scholarship for the

understanding and allegiance it brings to my thinking of the rhizomal aspects of trauma and the crises it incites; rhizomal for how the consequences of trauma continue to exert themselves the way a rhizome root grows a horizontal stem underground from which sprouts grow. I will deepen this connection below. People living with the complexities of childhood trauma share the same temporal challenges Muñoz frames in *Cruising Utopia*: the performative aspect of the past reiterating in the present and so often foisted upon the future. Applying the “complex continuum” or spectrum of trauma inherent in Burstow’s approach to radical trauma theory, this temporal fluidity is true for everyone (2003, 1302). What remains distinct and singular is how and where each of us situate ourselves. In this way, Muñoz’s temporal conjugation mirrors or lends itself to the temporal impact of trauma on selfhood while making the process/experience legible (Muñoz 2009, 25). His theory proposes a viable and hopeful disruption of “straight time as a self-naturalizing temporality” (Muñoz, 25). I borrow his “backward glance that enacts a future vision” as a way to break from the repetitive nature of an enduring and chronic narrative by releasing the vitality that refuses containment, myself, younger, in service of my future self and how the/my future then becomes a wild site of potentiality (4). This is emancipatory work that feels vital to me.

*Dehiscence*²

I am a childhood trauma survivor and, in using a feminist lens to navigate and articulate this crisis, I am interested in how a crisis in the present relates and conforms to earlier trauma of the past and how it may impact my future self. I am committed to procedural

² the splitting along a built-in line of weakness in a plant structure in order to release its contents (i.e., a flower)

and creative methods that generate space for the ways this work will manifest its own radical process and form. And I most interested in tracing how this choice of engagement evokes transformative opportunities that can then relate in community and collective trauma. Rather than an investigation of a PTSD disorder, I am curious to what shape this work will take if I treat the consequences of my experiences with trauma as the “wound,” Burstow suggests it is, “a reaction to profoundly injurious events and situations in the real world” (2003, 1302). Or, more radically, as an agave with its damaged crate and far from its natural climate but nonetheless thriving to bloom. In its way, a wound evokes healing and a damaged plant evokes flowering or seeding harder for survival. As I mentioned, my way forward is procedural and creative. I am a poet and will endeavor to use my existing praxis to shape this process. The work is an anthesis rather than a thesis: the evocation of flowering as discourse. This slight deviation of word choice exemplifies the impact language has on a manifestation that embodies “recuperative reflexivity” which in itself exemplifies both the “academic” and “analytical activism” Lazar notes as crucial to a feminist critical discourse analysis in which this work is conceptually related (Lazar 2007, 146).



May 8

The language I choose to use is fundamentally key to my process. “Recuperative reflexivity” bears repeating for the feelings it initiates, a sort of balm to emotional pain, salve for the wound, and for how it relates to this work. The goals this feminist practice is motivated by, Lazar tells us, are “social emancipation and transformation” (141). A transformative and emancipatory practice in action is at the crux of my thinking. This work takes Burstow’s recommendation seriously: “that feminists and other radical theorists engaged in trauma praxis work together at theorizing trauma, for we need each other’s voices” (Burstow 2003, 1302). It embarks from a pathologized/normalized version of trauma I have experienced to one that enacts a “future vision” that has a “critical investment in utopia” (Muñoz 2009, 4, 12). If astonishment does indeed “help one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place,” then this work is motored by astonishment and presents as the poethical in practice and method (Muñoz, 5; Retallack, 104). Poetical, thickened by an aitch, is Retallack’s attempt

to note and value traditions in art exemplified by a linking of aesthetic registers to the fluid and rapidly changing experiences of everyday life. I present this hybrid as frank and unholy union of modernist and postmodernist questions joined to the Aristotelian concern for the link between an individual and public ethos in pursuit of the good life—a good life that must be contrived in the midst of happenstance and chaos (11)

This work is me singing with the choir of scholars, artists, activists, and citizens engaged in transformative and emergent practices, and a practice of poethics is how I am choosing to sing. But before astonishment, a little more about trauma.

In the introduction to his book, *Antigone Undone*, Will Aitken describes the experience of watching the play rehearsed and premiered five times in a period of three days as having an “unanticipated and devastating effect” on him (2018, xi). The play itself “opened my eyes to the constancy of human suffering and said to me, “Nothing changes, nothing ever will.” And this is how I tumbled headlong into despair” (xii). In conversation, Aitken recounted that undoing in a way that resounded and even rhymed with the kind of response I had been feeling having completed the course work for my graduate studies. Headlong into despair indeed, and completely unanticipated. In *Depression: a Public Feeling*, Ann Cvetkovich asks: “What if depression, in the Americas at least, could be traced to histories of colonialism, genocide, slavery, legal exclusion, and everyday segregation and isolation that haunt all of our lives, rather than to biochemical imbalances?” (2012, 115). Situating depression thusly makes it a shared cultural wound to which I would add planetary grief for the climate crisis we find ourselves in and I would widen the idea of collective depression to include collective/community and transgenerational trauma that psychologists Danieli (1998) and K. Erikson (1995) among others have written of. Cvetkovich’s question colludes with the affective malaise I experienced having read articles and texts that I then wrote responses and research on which critically explore those histories. I also read articles and texts that address the ways in which oppression is still very much vital and performed in our neoliberal, white-body supremacy, heteronormative culture. The pesticide, violence, and debacle of Trump’s presidency was also thickly wafting north and Aitken’s “Nothing changes, nothing ever will” could have easily been not just the refrain of my graduate coursework but for how I was feeling about the planet at large. The depression, the devastation I felt is familiar and

embodied. I had become undone and was pixelating. I understand trauma to be rhizomal in nature for how its consequences grow continuously underground (below experience and words: percolating silently until named/validated and tended to). This trauma/rhizome occasionally puts out lateral shoots that disrupt normalcy and day-to-day life. These shoots can be named crises or, given the feminist and radical approach in which I situate this work, become de-pathologized and align with Burstow's "wound," a word that invokes healing and predicating how to treat the experience as well as evoking potentiality or opportunity by expanding my perspective to include a futurity that aligns with the agave agave-ing (Wilkin and Hillock 2014, 158). Rhizomal also in how each lateral shoot is joined to its site of origin. In other words, the circuitry of trauma is temporally fluid. And here is where a potent shift may occur. Rather than reacting/responding and participating with the crisis, how can I attend to the larger system of wound with care? How can I promote healing rather than stasis or a reiteration of the pain? I also encountered feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan in my studies who uses crisis as an exploratory site of transition (Gilligan 1993, 108). She cites E. Erikson who recognized the potential for transformative growth that a state of "heightened vulnerability" signifies (108). Erikson considered this site "a dangerous opportunity" for how this crisis could instigate a positive or negative outcome (108). I am interested in exploring my personal or micro experience with vulnerability as well as the discomfort of that vulnerability with curiosity by breaking routine and my habitual language and response to crises. I am also interested in learning more about the ways the personal may be a crucial step to the ongoing macro or more public experience of trauma/wound and, wider in scope, in decolonizing and intersectional practices of advocacy that I, as a white

settler, have the opportunity to engage in. I recognize that my position on the “continuum of trauma” Burstow situates us all on has more power and resources than a great many, given that I am a white cis woman (Burstow 2003, 1302). I am hopeful that this work contributes to a greater understanding on how best to engage with the consequences of trauma that supports individuals in maintaining their autonomy, dignity, and agency while engaging with their healing. If I align the mix of vulnerability and curiosity I now feel to Burstow’s radical and feminist understanding of trauma I then have resources; my “symptoms” become “coping (or life) skills” and my thinking responds to her call for “each other’s voices” in order to “create more comprehensive radical theory if our work is to be truly emancipatory” (1302). Again, if this work is about my voice, it is a voice that is singing its own version in the feminist choir of radical trauma theory.

I embark into this work intrigued by how the emergence of transformation, from private or micro reckoning for a more macro or public one, may be an interchangeable circuitry. I also chime with the idea that Kay Aranda *et al.* explore in their research on the resilient subject as being one who is ongoing and in progress (2012, 555). Several years earlier, I chose to widen my poethical creative practice as a way of not just being with my art but being in the world and will use that practice now as “illumination” to guide me through this unknowable experience of breaking habitual and performative narratives of crises for a wilder, generative (un)knowing that presents both in this work and in my living experience (Lorde, 1985, 36). In this way, my practice accommodates the present, which then becomes more habitable and hospitable in the Derridian sense: “unconditional hospitality graciously offered beyond debt and economy invented for the singularity of the new arrival, of the unexpected visitor” (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000, 83). This

hospitality embraces grief and mourning as organic to the terroir of a traumatic experience as the emotional wound it is. I conceptually also draw on Halberstam's "method for *imagining*, not some fantasy of an elsewhere, but existing alternatives to hegemonic systems" for the aeration it provides to my understanding and praxis (2011, p. 89, emphasis added). "In representing ethnographic data in artistic form," Stopforth tells us, "we can access a richer understanding of the complexities of lived experience, including the *immaterial*, the *unsayable*, those aspects of lived experience that are hard to put into words" (2015, 613). A literary version of this practice initiates linguistic possibilities aerated by a silence that acknowledges and revels in this unknowability by manifesting its own version of a force field that contains the unsayable/unknowable embedded within the work and contributing to its becoming progress. (Lorde 1985, 36). Muñoz likens this species of the illuminative to the "affective contours of hope itself" (2009, 7). In order for some plants to bloom a splitting occurs along a built-in line of weakness in the plant structure to release its contents: a dehiscence. The agave was a master class on literally manifesting this process and I studied the lifespan of its blossoming for the duration, which seems key to the next procedural step in my work.



May 11

*Abscission*³

The reading and learning I was privileged to participate in for the duration of my graduate studies changed who and how I am and continues to do so. I remain grateful for the experience of the faculty I worked with, the expansive scholarship I was engaged in, and the camaraderie I found in my cohort. The clue to the pedagogical source of this dismay for me is in Aitken's *five times in three days*. Burstow reminds us that one of the strengths trauma brings us is "an enhanced ability to understand other traumatized and oppressed individuals and groups" (2003, 1310). I could physically feel the emotional consequences of the lived experiences I encountered in the curricula. I also rely on "the binding capacity of memory" that forges this crisis with memories of prior instances, which are rooted in my origins, a childhood home replete with trauma, to give perspective of the circuitry I was experiencing (Staniloiu, Markowitsch 2012. 9). Perhaps these responses are compacted in what we mean when we use the word "triggered," which implies a sudden impact. This experience taught me how triggers can accumulate and become active incrementally. Writing and reading poems was how I first learned to create the haven I needed in dire situations. This practice generated an imaginative resistance, a respite where I could elicit the dignity, eloquence, and agency that were crucial to my wellbeing. It was where I could breathe the easiest. Not by poem, but by participating in the praxis of *poethics* and its "long-range inquiries and exercises of imagination" (Retallack, 22). Here, I joined the choir of poets I could hear singing. This practice, Paz reminds us, is a "transmuting operation" and I relied on its transformative nature (1956, 10). The pedagogy of graduate work was not the issue for me, the dosage,

³ The natural detachment of parts of a plant, typically dead leaves and ripe fruit

my unresolved/able pain, and sense of empathy for the material was. This perhaps speaks to the impact of engagement. The academic pace is dogged, relentless, and left me no time to breathe, to emotionally process, or to engage with my creative practice. The proximity to transnational present and historical traumas, the intense affective states, these *crises* and crimes evoked a strong emotive response in me and was reminiscent of an earlier and more personal time (“Nothing changes, nothing ever will”) without space for a practice that had afforded me a way to process or, at the very least, open a metaphorical window to let some of the smoke out. In this way, the curricula I encountered disseminated “histories of trauma that have not yet been overcome” and classrooms were populated by some of the very students who are still enduring it (Cvetkovich 2012, 7). Here’s where theory collides with lived experience. By disregarding the pace I needed to assimilate this proximity and the circuitry of my own experiences, I began to reiterate the very oppression I was learning about *on myself*. I felt incapable, unable, thwarted, shamed and ultimately depressed and anxious. One version of aggrieved, my computer dictionary tells me, is from the Old French *agrever*: to make heavier. I felt this weight and the grief at the heart of the word. I am now left wondering how that pace may have been disrupted and how the “master narrative,” Cvetkovich outlines, can replace this “personal problem” for the more accurate “social problem” that it is (2012, 15)? This is around the time words left me. Perhaps this is the physicality of grace, waking, I remember thinking. Perhaps thinking had moved into my body. This disruption relates to Berlant’s “disturbed time as a historical present and not just everydayness because the atmosphere suggests a shift of historic proportions in the terms and processes of the conditions of continuity of life” (2008, 5). Dramatic, but it did

indeed feel like a personal shift. And, for me, if not culturally historic, of personally potent proportions. Trauma, Burstow tells us, “befalls embodied individuals, and even when there is no explicit assault on the body, people become alienated from their bodies in some respect” (2003, 1302). Thinking had moved into the body that I felt alienated from and, in this way, I felt unmoored and profoundly homesick for a home I had not had. At this junction, I was interested in but afraid to challenge my habitual responses, my “habituated processes” to such an event, such a crisis (Berlant, 5). The work of trauma scholars van der Kolk and Fisler support this shift from words to body in this way:

Affect seems to be a critical cue for the retrieval of information along these associative pathways. This means that the affective valence of any particular experience plays a major role in determining what cognitive schemes will be activated (van der Kolk and Fisler 1995, 510).

Their research confirms “that when memories cannot be integrated on a semantic/linguistic level, they tend to be organized more primitively as visual images or somatic sensations” (519). Richardson explores how these images and sensations are liminal or thresholds that when animated or engaged with initiate a transition: “...and it is in their transition, this interface between body and language, past and present, that change itself is possible” (2013, 156). I spice this thinking with Caruth and Esch’s:

it may indeed be in those moments that are least assimilable to understanding that a referential dimension can be said to emerge...it is indeed in this surprising realignment of reference with what is *not fully masterable by cognition* that the

impact of deconstructive writing can be said precisely to take place (1995, 3, emphasis in original)

It is at this point of pixelating that this work situates itself, hospitable to the opportunity that is taking place rather than clamouring too quickly back into a worn structure of the tired words from the past reiterating and indexing.

“Meeting the present,” Berlant tells us, “is like...telling the story of how you got to be this way in the present moment suddenly changes its usual cadences because of the occasion of the telling” (2008, 9). The practice of redress is a crucial act of resistance and reparation. It exerts itself with curiosity, fallibility, accountability, and humility. I name these attributes *to make space for* a multitude of possibilities and futuralities, stories, that animate potential for a person facing the challenges of surviving trauma and for all of us in these troubled/troubling times by reiterating a more balanced, dialectic, and relational way of being and being seen (Haraway 2016, 1). In this way my work advocates and attends to a temporality that is fluid and wider than the experience at hand. The cultural stories we have been told, kindred to our personal stories, need updating and realignment continually. And being attuned to practices of vulnerability, grief, anger, fallibility, and accountability: “opening to all the consequences” seems the best way to attend those stories (Berlant 2008, 4). Perhaps this is the work of people who are healing from trauma: to reconstitute our versions in order to engender a vital way of being with its consequences and crises rather than simply acting as subjects of the experiences. Somehow extracting the reiteration of trauma from who and how we are by attending to its consequences and to our strengths. Without this practice of renewal, our stories continue to assert versions that uphold, repeat, and manifest varying degrees of

oppression. We see this best in historical stories that fortify colonial, white-bodied supremacy, heteronormative/patriarchal capitalist practices in the here and now (Hartman 2008). The tension at the site of affective knowing these habitualized and chronic versions of oppression presents itself as states of crises or as an agave, brought far from its place of origins and out too early, enduring the frost (Cvetkovich 2016, 3). The wider expanse of trauma is something we are all participating in. Here is how this micro and personal practice exemplifies, connects to, and can be a framework or a species of cartography for the more macro and public potential. An informed retelling can move Muñoz's "contour of hope," utopia, even, into the public future. And this circuitry enacts "hope as a hermeneutic" as well and is therefore fluid: if our stories are malleable, capable of transforming and being updated while holding space for the version we most want and are able to relay at our time then so are we as a community (Muñoz, 18). "We tell our stories to tell other stories with" (Haraway 2016, 118

Anthesis page one:

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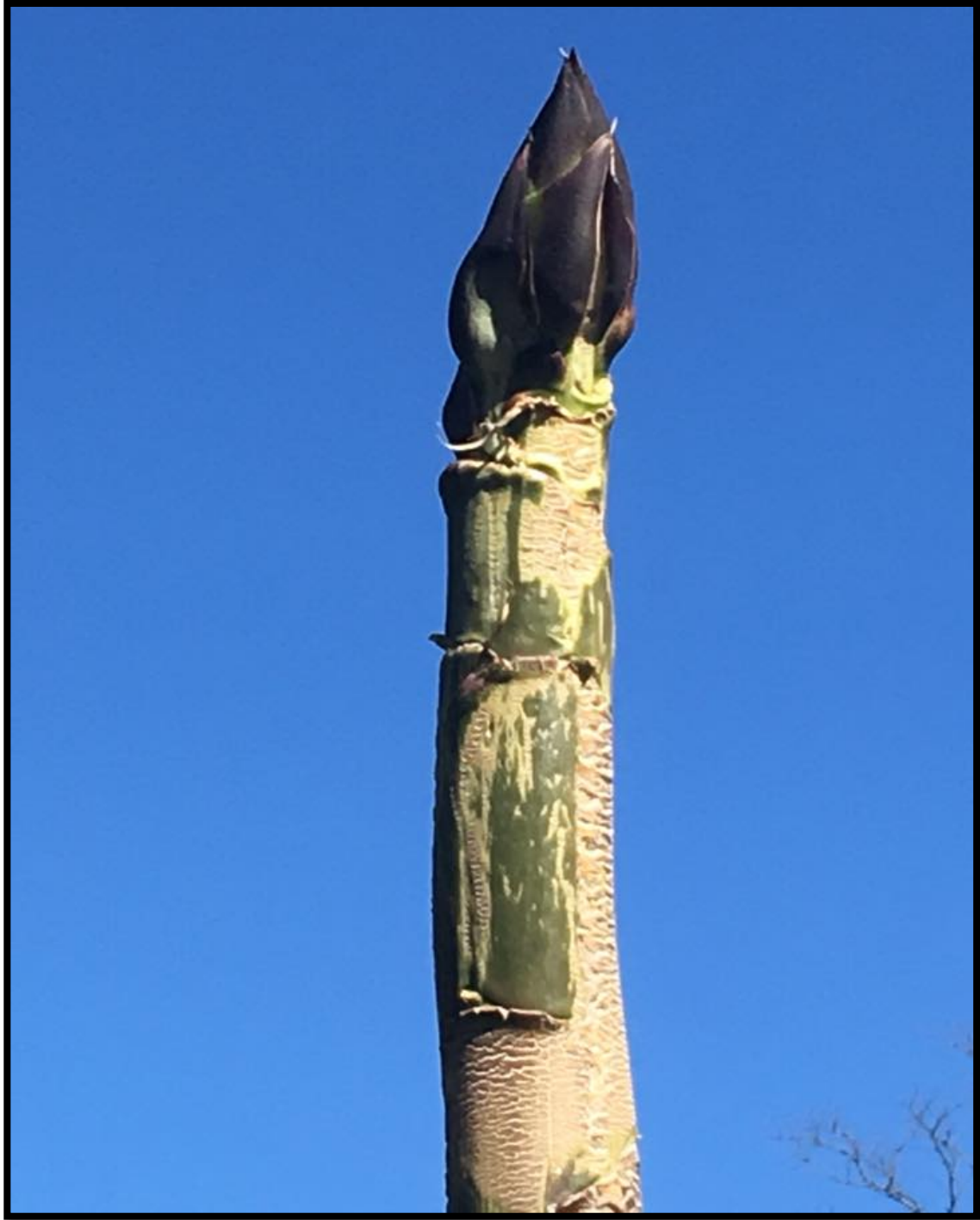
[REDACTED], [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] prepare [REDACTED] for the next

season [REDACTED].

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May 15

*Inflorescence*⁴

The use of public art, Burstow tells us, “is a particularly promising direction” for radical trauma praxis, “for it at once facilitates witnessing; generates new meaning out of old; integrates mind, body, feeling, and spirit; and creates community” (2003, 1311). Artists who are engaged in their practices in this way using the means of reclamation are crucial company to my work. In his third collection of poetry, *Injun*, Nisga’a writer Jordan Abel “evacuates the subtexts of possession, territory, and erasure” (jury citation, Griffin Anthology 2017, 51) by searching for the word “Indian” “in over 10,000 page source text of pulp westerns”⁵ and recontextualizing it by physically cutting it from its texts. This is text mobilizing text. The movement or rather countermovement of the work is a radical reclamation of history, ancestry, and story. By destabilizing the primary source of narrative, the word *Injun*—and its ecosystem of meaning, implication, history, and violence—transforms.

a partial injun tongue
steady in an old man’s fingers

blankets over tender feet (excerpt, 2018, 11)

I find that transformation radical in Abel’s work for how it not only embodies great imaginative and political force but instigates active and ongoing restoration as well, for how it esteems an Indigenous past. The violence endured is palpable. This backward excavation not only “enacts a future vision” but reclaims space in the present where decolonization practices and art and story-making are colliding with the ongoing violence

⁴ A group or cluster of flowers arranged on a stem that is composed of a main branch or a complicated arrangement of branches.

⁵ <https://www.griffinpoetryprize.com/awards-and-poets/shortlists/2017-shortlist/jordan-abel/>

and oppression of the nation state. These practices are “acquiring real power in the larger world,” volume, and momentum and are works of profound generosity for how they create space for white settlers, like myself, to actively listen, to attend to how these reconfigurations, in this case, this poethics, act more like “ecosystems,” that are convergent and act generatively like the land itself (Burstow 2003, 1311; Barad 2007, 149). I defer to Kate Siklosi’s eloquence for how she claims political poetry such as Abel’s that “deploys conceptual techniques to advance an antiracist and decolonizing praxis as “Poetic Terrorism” Milne tells us Siklosi borrows the term from Hakim Bey and here we see the connective rhizome of the radical, reaching as we are in this trouble together (Milne 2018, 243 n3).

Milne’s *Poetry Matters* is another text that I value for its astute framing and elucidating of a feminist poetic ecosystem. One of the collections Milne critically engages with is *Darkness*, by Yedda Morrison (2012) in which Morrison redacts all human interference and agency in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Milne 2018, 101). The surprising and moving results read like an environmental testament that rewilds the domesticated/colonial impact Conrad had written and relinquishes the land from the narrative. In this way, the text reads as though the land has been left intact. By redacting (literally whiting out) an “ethnocentric narrative based on the concept of time,” Morrison has engaged with time as non-linear, which in turn, promotes fecundity and space for the past, present, and futurity so they may coexist in a renewed and expansive temporal sense. This radical excision of Conrad’s colonized, normative narrative refreshes the page by emptying it of that narrative. What remains in its new silence reads as restorative breath:

flood

wind

river.

tide,

(Morrison 2012, 3)

Milne frames Morrison's work as a "procedural eco poetic text" for how it "radically defamiliarize(s) language, and deploy(s) fragmentation to undermine conventional understanding..." (110). I am interested in how my work can be situated within this framework and for how my work deviates yet is paradoxically similar to Morrison's. Rather than eradicating human agency, my work centres the voice and experience of a version of myself as a young girl unfettered by a narrative that reiterates the trauma within the bind of cultural and gendered norms. Liberating this voice from a narrative construct that was making its own set of demands creates a restorative and recuperative silence for this girl to bask and expand in. This space is replete with Muñoz's potentiality, thrumming with agency, and vitality (2009, 7). And though this agency is veined with the impossibility of such centring, it somehow alters the performativity of the past, of my past, giving me the opportunity to grieve. I am interested in this as a longitudinal study of grieving, creativity, and healing. How liberating this voice disrupts the cultural norms that I initially relied on to establish a narrative and how creative work is ongoing, procedural and replete with potential. How does this version of self discovery and healing relate to the more public version of myself as a feminist artist and citizen? How will a public reading impact both the audience and myself? And how do we grieve publicly and collectively? At what point does audience become community? This work feels radical to me both pedagogically and personally. It feels both funereal and generative. In some ways, like the agave, this work has been forced into blooming by extraneous events.

Excavating the poetry from the primary narrative instills a “materiality vitality” into what remains of the text which Bennett describes “is me, it predates me, it exceeds me, it postdates me” (Milne, 2018, 104; Bennett 2010, 120). I situate my work in the close proximity of these scholarly and ecopoetic texts for how I am “limited in (my) ability to make sense of things” and for how “this limitation is both politically and poetically generative” (Milne, 110) departing from a “but I try anyway” position (Retallack, 44). This work attempts to be “more resonance than reference” and is interested in an expansive point of perspective that mines the veins of affect running beneath the articulate and the legible, and what was made eloquent of a much more inarticulate/wild endurance of wound (Retallack, 37).

Hannah Gadsby, in her latest stand-up show, *Nanette*⁶ (Netflix, June 2018), uses the framework of a joke she has told in past shows to deconstruct the general structure of a joke in order to defuse and refuse the self-deprecation she has habituated as a source for its punch line. In this way, *Nanette* is situated at the interface of joke/construct and story/lived experience. The joke and punch line referenced depicts her identity as a queer person (in the show, Gadsby outs her identity as being “tired”) and the misogyny she has experienced. This trauma, in the guise of physical and sexual violence, and its punch line is a construct and performance I recognize affectively first. The performing of personal trauma stories in a self-deprecating manner, Gadsby tells us, is “not humility, it’s humiliating” (See Vivek Shraya’s Trauma Clown⁷). I can *feel* this humiliation in my stomach and my face. It burns hot and is buried deep. My body knows the impact and the

⁶ <https://www.netflix.com/search?q=nanette&jbv=80233611&jbp=0&jbr=0>

⁷ <https://nowtoronto.com/culture/art-and-design/vivek-shraya-trauma-clown/>

predatory nature of both humiliation and the shame that quickly follows. This shame is related to exposure as well as to the act of disloyalty we permit by abandoning personal dignity for the laugh, for the element of entertainment, for the more palatable (and therefore marketable) version, for the “charisma of the normative,” and for the inevitable release of tension the performance and its audience needs from a too intense and too emotional experience (Berlant 2011, 44). Essentially, we sacrifice ourselves. Gadsby elaborates her process:

I froze an incredibly formative experience at its trauma point and I sealed it off into jokes and that story became a routine and through repetition that joke version fused with my memory of what actually happened but unfortunately that joke version was not nearly sophisticated enough to help me undo the damage done to me in reality (38:00⁸)

The freezing Gadsby relays is kin to the solidified and normalized version the narrative form I had given the earlier version of my story. It served as a healing at the time but needed to be upgraded. The degree by which I relate to Gadsby’s progress, her reckoning with a private moment of recuperation is potent. I can easily situate my work in kinship with this moment and how, throughout her performance, she reiterates her need “to tell my story properly” (41:00). This empowering need becomes a refrain as well as a method of changing the comedic dynamic for a more interactive and intimate ecosystem with her audience. In this way, the audience is being invited to bear witness and to listen to the transformative approach Gadsby is now using to move past the last border of joke into the deeper tension and complication of her lived experience. This species of active listening

⁸ Times are approximate.

the audience is engaged in is the important work, I think, of community. And is something we can do for each other; bearing witness and validating pain are valiant forms of communal generosity. In this way, we can create collective opportunities for each other to heal both personal and shared social traumas.

“I need to tell my story properly because you learn from the part of the story you focus on” (44:00). Comedic material is delivered in between this declaration and the ultimate recounting of the lived experience. In this time, Gadsby conducts tension performatively. She loses composure. She grows red in the face. She gets angry enough to spit when she talks. She is surprised by audience reaction and seems momentarily taken aback by her emotionality and by the presence of all those people. Then she makes the audience laugh, aerating the room with a bit of ease, she apologizes, and then persists in the recasting, the reclamation of her story from the frozen form of joke. This telling is paced and creates its own form of tension. Hers is a brave and vital act of personal courage and transformation. Pedagogical for how it exemplifies an affective telling, how it permits the sputter, the rage. In a way, Gadsby is situating herself as a role model of the kind of revisionary transformation that Adrienne Rich names “an act of survival” (Rich 1979, 35). As an online viewer who is not in the actual room, I can feel the physical labour of this act, the body clamour for more breath, the sweat, the tears, the ferocity, the rawness of the telling. As much as this return is instigated or agitated by the feelings of loss described by Hartman (2008, 4), Hirsch and Miller tell us it is also an inevitable exercise for the “right of acknowledgement” (2011, 18). This acknowledgement is requested by way of disclosure, after recounting how her experience continues past the punch line into the wildness of a violent beating. Gadsby punctuates the violence with: “And nobody stopped

him” (58:00). Here the audience is actively transformed for the third time from witness to bystander. *They* did not and should have stopped him. This is an affective performance in which the audience, serving as community, are complicit and actively involved. In a way, it is a performance that exemplifies Haraway’s “reciprocal induction” as Gadsby traverses deeper into risk thereby increasing the tension by disclosing having endured sexualized violence, rape, when she was barely in her twenties (Haraway, 118). At this point her voice is unhinged from convention and embodies the emotional shrapnel, the broken glass, the shock, and scars of a traumatic experience. The performance becomes a kind of public exorcism: “I just don’t have the strength to take care of my story anymore. All I can ask is just please help me take care of my story” (1:06). This is the work of a communal ritual, the witnessing of a marriage and of a funeral elegy is similar. We are collectively incumbent by agreeing to this witnessing. I can feel the heft here of transference as Gadsby exports the weight of her experiences out loud from personal into the public. This story, Gadsby’s, is now in all of our hands. The transformative reclamation and release Gadsby performs has the force and reach to engage with the past as well as to move onward with a new telling for those who come after for all who have listened. “What I would have done to have heard a story like mine” (1:02). Before concluding, she erupts into full body rage, daring past perpetrators and anyone in the future to “test your strength out on me” and fortifies this rage by declaring and embodying the formidable: “Because you all know there is nothing stronger than a broken woman who has rebuilt herself,” in which Rich’s act of survival is fully acknowledged and embodied (1:03). I contest Gadsby’s: “I will never flourish,” however. Her performance reframes ideas of culturally normative definitions of flourishing for a

more inclusive and diverse non-normative agave version. Ultimately, this disruption performed evokes an authentic and unexpected agency directly sourced from the vulnerability of disclosure and the widening sense of community, which I feel is worth noting here for perhaps future work and thinking. It is a transformative way of becoming, privately and publicly combined, and enacts a sustainable and potential way forward. Gadsby's performance is its own species of Muñoz's "contour of hope" in which her audience is engaged/transformed into community (Muñoz, 7).

Jeremy Dutcher's work offers another version of potent generosity that embodies the decolonizing practice of reclamation and recuperation that transforms audience to community. Dutcher, a Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) member of the Tobique First Nation in North-West New Brunswick, was prompted by elder, teacher, and song carrier Maggie Paul and her wish that "someone take those old songs out of the museum and bring them back to the people" (interview, CBC "Q", 2019⁹). This began a five-year project for Dutcher that involved research at the National Museum of Canadian History where he worked at transcribing and arranging one hundred wax cylinder archival recordings of the traditional songs of his people that eventually culminated in his debut album *Wolastoqiyik Lintuwakonawa* (2018). The research aspect of the work gave Dutcher the opportunity to "witness the content" including field notes written by the anthropologist who had interviewed and recorded song carriers from the Tobique First Nation in the early 1900s when singing and ceremonies were made illegal by the Indian Act causing those songs and traditional ways to go underground and become lost (interview, CBC

⁹ <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/wednesday-july-3-2019-sara-bareilles-caleb-mclaughlin-and-more-1.5197355>

“Q”, 2019). The album is a duet of Dutcher singing along with a selection of voices from those recordings, making for a poignant reunion and reclamation of tradition and language. The call and response arrangement of some songs instigate a sonic time travel of embodied memory and the very real company of Wolastoqiyik ancestors. “When you bring the songs back, you bring everything back” Paul tells Dutcher in the *Eqpahak* track of the album, “music will bring you. ...and the ancestors are happy because people are singing their songs again” (2018). Dutcher strengthens this connection to the past by centring the recorded ancestral voices and accompanying them on the piano. His playing in concert halls, on stages, forefronts these almost lost voices and lifts them with reverence and gratitude to the stage. This restorative act serves the past, present, and future by the way the “return is an act of undoing” of the violent silencing of the Indian Act as well as being a “claim to justice and restitution,” a return, Hirsch and Miller describe, as a “critique of the present” (2011, 18). Dutcher himself sings of his own contemporary Indigenous experience, supported by the voices and in the company of his ancestors. These combined voices, raised and witnessed, are setting forth now on their onward journey into the future, by oral recounts of the experience and by the singing: sonically and by breath.

This interface promotes an “intimate public” where audiences are privileged to participate with Jeremy Dutcher in performance (Berlant 2008, viii). This mingling of present and future temporally blur the experience that is vocalized by Dutcher who offers his voice literally inside the piano, to its strings, which, combined, resound in concentric waves that are continuing onward as a sonic greeting to the music yet to be composed. This participation of witnessing, of listening is also the work of community “*bear(ing) the*

solitude of a responsibility and *bear(ing) the responsibility* of that solitude” (Felman and Laub 1992, 3, emphasis in original), which, in turn, creates “an ethical social bond that is crucial for collective action and political change” (Milne, 185). As is the singing of a note that Dutcher invites his audiences to collectively hold. It is no small event to sing the same note in unison. I have experienced this sensation the three times I have seen Dutcher in concert and each time I openly wept. The initial uncertainty of my voice climbing into pitch, of being welcomed into the sonic groove and then fully releasing in volume to match and carry the sound collectively is something that can only be borne of communal effort. This is, as Dutcher says, “a path forward¹⁰” that embodies Muñoz’s hope in Haraway’s thick present (Muñoz, 7; Haraway, 1).

I defer to Retallack and her response to the relevance of the avant-garde (and here I assert any art) and the value of an emergent art-making practice at this time on the planet in which she enlists the butterfly effect as a way of thinking into her reasoning:

...we’re all in effect choosing to be part of one family or genus of Lepidopteron or another—a highly decorative, lightweight species that might seem almost like a biological whim, but of course, we know it has a very active place in nature. And that any individual, for reasons entirely unknown qua qua qua, could shift some ecological pattern—in a way noticeable or not to us, the “observant species.” In other words, all one can do is take what is actually, in these terms, a very realistic, if improbable chance that one’s contribution might be useful (45)

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qIEHxNGJApA>

It is in this spirit that I ultimately situate this work, participating, somehow, in the emancipatory shift afoot from private to public engagement with grief and trauma. To that effect, I planned a public event to experience this transition as well as to ascertain how to proceed with this work. My thesis consists of four chapters: this introduction, the poetic reclamation sourced from my novel, a chapter exploring the interface and then the moving from private to public and the impact this migration has on audience as community based on the live reading event. The fourth chapter serves as a conclusion that traces my experience as well as speculating what direction this work may take by the ideas generated by the event for future creative, conversational, and community-building experiences for collective and shared responses to grief and trauma. Interspersed between these chapters are photographs of the agave's progress, which serves as an outlier narrative as well as company to the thesis. A hard copy of the novel from which the poem is sourced will also be made available.



May 20



May 25



May 30



June 5



June 8



June 11

Anthesis: a memoir

Burning flowers: prepare for the next season. Low chimneys
dividing dispute between farther and pure fire; the exhausted
silence startled into silence. The long lament south of the sinking:
a vivid and stubborn premonition. No one remembered the exodus
from family taking every day and all night. Smoldering for her
younger edge, always more and then towards. Is the girl leaving
an emergency? She was and barely looking away.

Out of winter, bare trees work art in her talk: go on, go finish making your road, won't you? She was different from this living, she stayed before she left, detached twice, and now was fading a name. She knocked on it and heard her mother. You owe me a boiling forecast, weather landing like winter on practically everything. Her father bellowed the edges quietly. His hand and her mouth were opposite and that was why words were important.

His anger grew a side door. The woods slowed down on weekends and though it was cold, another cloud spent the morning thinking about the sound of cedar. A mistake hissed a bare moon. Her voice over the whirr opened her for the singing. The effort ached payment daily and her mother was her daughter. She couldn't remember when it had happened. Medicine for the heart pains, plumply smoking the edge off things.

Incredulously her father shrank; small green branches stuck out of her head. What would gut her? She was high and brand new. Fresh weather opening all over handwritten specials. A bell coughed and the burning inhaled. Do you speak enough, it rifled? She left her breath out. The emergency was reciting each price. Pardon? Counting a system, a storm, a centre of something larger lingering wider.

Her singing beneath the flowers could cyclone a family but the clouds were taking the trees. We all scream for the right window. The weather sighed deeply but it didn't matter anymore. They were exhausted, swirling pink lights communicating with downpours. Weed smiled languidly at her, drawled a tongue that tasted her breath. Her anger laughed hot water and a long knife. It wanted to celebrate.

The dark starved the clock. It owed her some pirouetting. Trouble kept her numb. She went into red nail polish and pulled on the outskirts. Someone planted a small house against her going. The trees opened out loud and blushed. She could entrance a few moments in a soft, serious voice. Do you want something beautiful and wild, extensively alone? A poem about navigating the opposite direction from a lighthouse?

Her gaze was smoking the empty he had constructed. She continued peeling off her skinny and took a sip of fuck you. The red microdot stained her brighter. It took two months to never mean anything. Her hand, an emerald green. Yeah, green. A system inside the alphabet transcribed the memory, fine lines that furrowed. As if relief needed more. She rinsed off her home more often at night and she'd wake with a house key.

Fuck waiting to meet the swerve, imagine nailing its danger, taking a long swig of door. The trees looked around and pressed something—a piece of paper, a poem about the waste of good meat. Imagine a cloud covering her words and missing their property line. A time portal ready to pounce. Rage grabbing the middle of the argument afterwards. The storm was genetic and thinking folded her low over anything apologizing.

Something in her sang, feeling the same properties as water. It had been quiet, so quiet she had broken. She had become an expert at staying afloat. Exhaling the mountain, the sky drained into pines. The woodstove names the tree more times than a tree. She was dreaming a long piece of lumber, standing in the sawdust of her grandmother. She couldn't hear the pencil's whisper. Every morning she began to feel heavy; an armful of wood

at her feet. She could hear their barbed wire and realized that she had to learn the talk first and the smile after. Testing her history, she could remember being lost and cried. Customer service explained wandering and the mythology of escape. She missed when time closed her mirror and walked by her books, apologizing. This new territory was wherever she wasn't but she still didn't know how. Her father

had spread quickly. She steeped wonder, breathing in the easy shrieking. Dreams drank in the mess then disappeared into the woods. The opposite of disappeared was alone. A system hiding the need to move. It echoed then grew fainter until all that was left was panting at fear. Help felt colder now, clammier. A knife slitting open the clouds. The moon stuttered like a body dark in places and final.

The clouds were bored, cartwheeled briefly then left without looking back. The pavement saw her father and untied his boots. Do you understand? Yes, don't look at me like that! His boots forgot who he was. She was the emergency. Breathe, she ordered herself. Think. Reluctantly, the window fogged. The mysterious power was giving it the will to settle. Her mother was the teapot, still on the table.

Her mother didn't boil and the kitchen folded into a cocoon. She dared her rage like a stranger. The house wanted to leave too. She managed it with tv and tape. Electric and strange without celebrity. Imagine living like that. She's fucked but engrossed; her membranous wings pulling to unravel. Shame in the pit of her plastic. She shocked herself alone. Her name was engraved on her somewhere. The want to run came back.

She straightened her girl and ran. Her shame was right behind her at the edge of her breath. The sound of dead leaves sneered. Where is the last thing she didn't want to know? Panic clawed the emergency. The green winter flinched and waited for the dark to stop talking. Now a different landscape knew her. This recognition sent a glimmer back to her in smoke. Once the old service moved to the edge she couldn't see the fear. What the fuck are you

up to? She was tempted to trust her anger and threw a knife. So amazing, the hollow silence; the occasional thaw and realizing how stupid she had been. She was surprised by the land of her noise; even her breathing sounded bare. Everything herding into wild. She was looking right at the panic and the quiet knowing held her down. Out and under, under and open, over and in and scared. It didn't like protecting girls.

Before she remembered, the view of empty felt blessed. The opposite of hurry, surrounded by body. Hey, hot frying pan, don't even move. All you do is lie around. Syrup and cowardly. Too much house. Listen, psychology ignited the flame quickly, no matter how much it burned. Such a loser. Fuck off, fuck-up. The door was cornered without a tranquilizer. The month of melting melted. She didn't

butter another ceiling. Something big was depending on counting headlights and shark smell. Louder and shyly, the sound of its knives and forks, she looked up, middle-aged, a language that had taken her so long to grow. The joint nodding. There, there. Memory took more vacation. Listen, don't call me. Sorry suckers, the place was such an asshole. Her contempt looked back and forth between her parents. Hard noodles and dried up cheese.

The hardware of highway, risking the knife. The symphony of sales when she got closer to the feeling of not being good enough. The knife felt medicinal and sharpened her watching. Eventually she had to mourn each disaster. The pile was an island she'd visit. Why change now? She couldn't. Back to the silver sound of squinting, dial yellow between a long sigh and a breathing hurt. She'd adjust her lion

and open wider. The ritual leaned back and let her pen drop. Curiosity was pregnant with daughter. Her mother clasped shut in the waiting room of luck. That's what it would be like, almost inaudibly stopped. Loss was complicated, filled with ferocious time. Miserable knew the direct route. She held out like a gun plugged into herself. Everything that mattered had to take an aspirin. A divining rod

and money backed up her energy. She had to type the same letter four times, strutting pill bottles and an alarm clock. She let herself look cautiously at her matchstick. Rage had gone back to watching her daughter. Every loan was almost empty. She turned back into a barbeque starter or a gimmick. Home got more absurd: a revolving metal tree to hold the windows, the middle of the cough. She was covered with small thorns

and time. The clamping down left the house without boats,
cowardice leaving a wake. Before was going somewhere. Surprise,
home finally quit. A sprawl of empty baffled all the vague
rumours. Everything slid in and settled. All those fucking acts of
sag. No wonder. No wonder. She barely had any energy and
scorched the “leave me alone” in her footsteps. A little worried
wound,

whirling. Her putting and slamming combusted her wild and her veins bled her mother. She heard a dismal thick trying. She could hear the chain, chain, chain of emergency and knew she was harnessed to empty lungs. Maybe she'd make a chimney. She tried so hard to whisper. Sound was asleep. She had nowhere to go and was confused under a cautious wagging. She was enthralled with the tiny animal of her name and watched it.

She could write a book about watching. Her fur, her metal detector. The nights cleaning up after her sadness. She always asked the same question and imagined pawing for an answer. Most days lining up and waiting for the push and the lift. Lucky clouds that looked like family. The green smell of crying. She wanted to phone her name. She tried searching for the right wonder stirring the furnace.

She didn't mind that the moment took a sip and another. The day watched her pick up and dial. Her voice ached. The morning wasn't going to be cushioned. A young girl unhinged with a pen. She wrote about the powerful capture of live fish. She wrote sentences as if to warn herself. The submerged buzzing like history and dreams. The book of finding out why was lush. She was feeling illegal and buckled. Memory was

electric. She remembered a cave and a bear, hibernating. And her first voice, singing. The funeral fit in the viewing room. She managed the guest book that her mother hadn't signed yet. Her thinking had woken up old and could barely lift the story. Writing upholstered the home she wanted to go back to. How could grief consume any remedy for grief? Small white pills making a big show about a coffin, counterclockwise

and leaving. An owl picked up her divine echo and hung it in the trees. An amateur healing that somehow was soothing the shadows of their shovels. Her name made an armature with fine wire and tried asking her for the first time where she was. She could only see by walking through the stopping and making sugar into sugar. Any sign of being lonely and her notebook rubbed her back. Okay, cowboy?

Her signature must have been watching her closely. Bundled up and waiting when the front door closed behind them. The house was eating her father, heaped scalloped and baked, what a pity, what a tragedy, any minute, any minute, this fake death. It settled on her like smoke. It hadn't occurred to her to bow down to the sadness and just stop. The goldenrod, the hydro towers were poignant with grief, droning low

and loud. She baptized it desperate, a burr in her lungs, thin and angry, bent bullshit. Hope reached for her but she backed away—stop turning sideways, it hissed, hurry up or we'll never get outside. The moment had been choreographed, when it boiled, she unplugged it. Murkiness was polishing memories ignoring the ones still too hard to touch. She felt herself recline into a woman's hand, the wrist so tightly the moon.

She was careful not to talk about money. No tongue-and-groove
crap, I've paid enough already. She glared. Pathetic, pathetic, her
alarm went off. A whole parade: scrub, scrub until it shone and she
could see herself. She hand-washed her grief. Her body was fancy
electric and the newfangled cheque book: withdrawal, withdrawal,
payment, payment, insurance, withdrawal in overdraft. The panic
in her voice

rhythmically, hypnotically, dusting useless. Tension glared a perspective that got closer and louder until it frenzied. The frequent landscape of ceilings and the inevitable conditions jeweled a season out from sky to savour, unbalanced. A notebook of dangerous-looking mysteries ready to open. She looked closer to hear every word. Yes, please. Tender nestled into her voice, insistent and surrounded. Still the cloud

looked tired as if the scrapes and cuts across were finally asleep. She unhinged her ears and folded them closed. Her grown home was born late, a remembered woman billowing behind her. Her body, a desperate imprint of terror waited until she let herself cry. Across her lips, close, alone, and melting. It had fallen for the unseasonable warm leaving. Finally, finally, she was at the beginning and exhausted.

Her inherited debt pushed in the cigarette lighter and looked feral. Protest coiled behind her heart, blushing. Her eyes didn't catch up with her mouth and watched her until winter was too small. Her days slid on a bannister, pulling themselves up into wilderness. Her schedule moved toward the first field playing the wind. The low grey sky was talking to the dead. It spoke congenially about a few tricks oblivious

to the soon it would be. The rear-view mirror could wait but felt coiled and irritated. Don't try to con me with that bullshit. You picked the wrong wound to rope. This technological age was ruined by the rewind button. Ceremoniously, she swallowed all the suitcases she'd need to get away with more horsepower. She held the pill up to the writing instructions and shook her vision blind. If she had a mission,

revolving like a disco ball, she didn't hear it. A current of anger could always find her father. Radiating a hum from the electric need to talk, she reared up once like a cul-de-sac, like a flashlight and the humming stopped. She was holy and absurd and the weather was a prediction of her spirit. Her crying boarded a book and sunk into a one-way-ticket. The destination adorned the formal receptor

poised to receive. Willing to be alone, the industrial terms squinted at getting glamorous. She knew her name stretched over the doorway. The exertion of opening each morning as if her thirst was really thirsty or beginning to look green. A heralding of sympathetic antics and cleaning the small stage. Drunk translating was a routine dying. Hurry, hurry and wait, wait, sometimes slowing and sometimes falling over.

Lists of elicited pangs and enraptured desperation. Mercy was stooped and cranky. Nerve glinted speedily off its fenders. She was next in line and froze then peeled back frozen before waiting. Green was stubborn and all lawn now. She claimed a losing battle until the noise was overwhelming. Birdsong plowing in big. A gas canister of her voice watched the ignition. She couldn't bear the effort she was using

to forget. She caught each fight and outsmarted it. There was something miraculous about leaving. Already the flowers had begun. The job of holding blossoms up and failure, coming close and then falling short. She stayed with the lush, dark purple of sounding fucked up as if everything had stalled in the season of her grieving herself. She opened, all hooks and sinkers, and the rest of her followed. Loss was a threshold

and she was the unexpected escape. Wordlessly and running, her voice was beginning to crave a whole season. All the unfinished projects to entice her small motor. She tried fitting in but felt her heart alarm, chapped and full of grease. She breathed laboriously at the tiny parts, too many, too complicated. Wooden handled, she filled with the next Answer me! Her rage grated respect. Her Fuck them

attached the leash to her ears and panted. How often had she tried to lose her? The truth hung askew. Her house wasn't in sync with other houses. She felt safe when wrapped around messed up. Without thinking, the hungry stove had written words. Words could read under words. They could varnish the years and still couldn't feel them. Yes siree, all the hung up and put away. A drill press,

a chisel, clamps bolted down to the thought worried about not caring. Hooking wires to the speaker, she carved out the date. The clock sulked at the sound of the opening. It wolfed down the holy, holy, holy and followed the hour wearily. The so-called entertainment sat down and looked hungry. Her small piece of shiny was man-made and stolen. She smoked desperation along with desperate.

She was smoking whispers trailing the weight of a surprise.
squinting. Dusting off How are things? before answering with
smoke. It was getting dark and she couldn't be sure. A wide wilder
nodded in agreement. It was the darkest spot and she took a swig
from it. Her heart spoke slowly, a girl whipping back into place.
The music of squelching through and safer could already picture
riding the lift

and came in wet. It isn't too late, is it? She stooped and picked up a
raucous Everything is fine. Her eyes were red. She asked the
information to answer the truth. She knew shame was a hundred-
watt panic parade. Oh my darling, oh my darling sang the empty.
The word darling still tacky, sliding between the light and the
gouge. A performance between ears. Hazard a guess, say nothing.
Words were slits

warmed by voice. Her plans stared back at her, wasting time.
There, feel better? Now pull. Okay, pull. Okay, again. Okay, pull.
Time edged too wide for the doorway. Her measuring tape
measured the width of small. The cost of, the length, the number of
wider and wider requirements pressing in, taking small breaths.
Her speechless ghost opened the absurd, the lingering. She was a
new page without knowing why, the wild cure

for everything. Sadness was radiating from her grief. What a waste of a cyclone. What was happening was real. She felt the stainless steel moonlight behind her. Her undoing pulling her closer, one arm around her side. Animals watched her now, roused and hungry. Dreams patrolled the dead, eliminating the evidence. The sound of the ocean pushing into the night. A high tide swerving over the woeful. To disappear

was too easy. Don't fucking mess with me hissed the hard and the passed out. Tongue felt missing. Eyes tried opening. Clouds continued bullying the night. Her mother chewed and continued chewing. "If you're going to be that way" and "break it over my knee" looked at each other, the ticking moment between them. A hard moment, crying. She put away books and did everything as fast as feathers.

The window chased the wind in circles. Her mother an ear around her neck. Feathers tried putting feathers on the feathers caught in the feathers. She was listening. The sound of *faster, faster*: the feathers felt hot and burnt, shocked and stammered by how afraid, so afraid, melted behind her. Now that she had begun, she began as well. Oh, she sobbed harder and down, tight against her throat. Wait here, she whispered hoarsely.

Fear was spidering up her voice. She had never been erased. Her voice was softer now, empty. She waited to speak to the closest mother. In her hurry she whispered into every night that listened. “Okay darling. I’m going to roll up and clean.” She wanted to talk. Her mother sat beside her concern and watched. The current of right below the surface filled then pounced. She got close enough to get their attention.

She was studying her family and stopped at the entrance. All her favourite words dropped rage first. Tell me anything and lower into it. Careful. Cut open the water and the waiting, not knowing what else she could empty. She watched the floor and it knew something was different. Mothers were asking her if she needed to know her mother. She watched herself rewind into admitting it. Part of her wanted, part of her willed.

She craved an innocent goodbye. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, goodbye to the day that has a bad heart. There, there. The wind took inventory of everything, sounding efficient and important. A class act breathing in more than breathing out. She nodded sadly. The talk reminding her to talk. And now she took a turn feeling, bent and then she let go. Don't forget you forgot. Stay close to okay that's the deal. You can't leave

left her open a little. Why, why, why? and waiting for the answer. She wanted it to be done and was thirsty for calm. Standing in the clamouring, locked out of her family, she was swinging open and still in her boots. Sound was still. Those miniature winter settings: frozen outside. Her mother had worked so hard at protecting her arms the armchairs were immaculate. The secret cowered at the door and she set it free closing the door behind her.

She looked back only once, to watch winter dig up the key. She'd only write so much worry. The lift in her mother's voice: how light it is at this hour. The word that would end the last of it. Panting and out of breath. It bellowed and slammed. Bruised the silence. Each green reaching for each other. To last longer, examining the details up close and with reverence. The blossom coaxed into and, and into summer.



June 23



July 9



July 11



July 14



July 20



July 23

Chapter three: *Sepal*¹¹

The long contour of this work continues to assert how it is manifesting. The public reading of the work above had to be scheduled before I could reflect on the experience of moving it from private to public into community. And in the time it took, the world changed. The first strains of COVID 19 were reported in January 2020 and the impact of the virus arrived in Nova Scotia in March of the same year. I must note the reluctance I feel on re-entering this work and will address the global pandemic and how it has made strange the normal and routine throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis when necessary. I am finding the impact of the pandemic on traditional scholarship to be substantial. The here and now feels more intense, is actively thrumming and, in its way, is invigorating a different way of being. The vigilance I feel is akin to the vigilance of trauma. I know this feeling in my body, which tells me something of the experience. The outside and online world seems more carbonated and violent and is running as a constant source of static, of turbulence, outside the inside of isolation and of home. Also, I am finding online engagement with scholarly texts challenging given the pandemic's tenacious disruption. The border between before and after the pandemic feels closed. I find myself more drawn to theory or critical engagement about the pandemic because of how it is tracing the beginning of a critical response to the immediate and complete impact the virus continues to have and how this discourse confirms the alignment to a trauma response. This engagement is mainly available on podcasts and I have resorted to using this platform to access support or to complicate my thinking here. This disrupts

¹¹ Part of the flower, usually green, that functions as protection for the flower in bud and support for the petals when in bloom

traditional scholarly citation much in the way the pandemic continues to interrupt most everything. This approach, I note, responds to and enacts the time in which it is written. It is an adaptive form and “allows for (a) more creative, sensually attuned mode of inhabiting the university”—or, in this case, a thesis—“as a vibrant location of pedagogical mattering” (Loveless, 2019. 3). Given how Covid19 is making visible the discrepancies of race, gender and class, as well as the deep and global civil unrest over those discrepancies, added to chronic racialized police violence, and an accelerating climate crisis, my levels of concentration are low. I am having a hard time reading. I find myself questioning the value of this work and am noting an embodied riptide of anxiety if I consume too much online news and speculation. I have begun to rely on the podcasts mentioned above for how aligned and synchronous they are to this time in order to process my thinking and include them here as resources and for archival purposes. How will this work straddle the time before and during a global pandemic? I note how I am needing more time to find my way back into this way of being and this way of thinking and how in tune the procedural exploration of this work is to the unprecedented and unknowable experience of a global pandemic. My body insists on being included. I get up from my desk more often. I pace. And before submerging into the work, and throughout, I notice that I leave it impulsively to Google some “important” thing such as: “Prince’s request for more rain during half-time show (*“can you make it rain more?”*) under the guise of needing to know more about his audacity and courage, his “going-along-with-it-anyway-ness”. This impulse is an aggregated form of the common reaction to the deep attending an emergent writing practice requires that I have learned to acknowledge and then ignore. Occasionally, before the pandemic, these forays had led to unexpected

collisions of ideas, creating a causal trail of links that arrive at information that is high in wattage and illuminates or complicates the writing at hand. I have learned to translate this resistance of the blank page as being an indication that I am heading in the right direction and that the risk I feel is recognizing how an emergent practice means "...beginning something new... (and) of not being able to control or foretell its consequences" (Arendt 1988, 244). Or Lynda Barry's version of "be(ing) able to stand *not knowing* long enough to let something alive take shape (Barry, 2008. 135). These disruptions feel more attuned to an embodied reaction to the situational anxiety of the pandemic I find myself in. This is my body *bolting*. In order to situate this work in its time and to acknowledge and note this response, I will intermittently include a parenthesized list of those Google searches as additional or outlier text that has somehow wilded itself into this work much in the way the pandemic intrudes. For example:

(what to sow and grow in July / Bud the Spud hours / quick pickled radish recipe /

Lady Fine Is for Sugar by Stephanie Roberts / Theater of War UK Bravehound)

are five recent and interrupting searches I made this morning. As noted above, this kinetic energy is not new but has become more fitful during quarantine. Embedding these searches within the text is also my way of acknowledging Eve Sedgwick's use of the Haibun form throughout *A Dialogue of Love*, a book that recounts her transformative therapeutic experience that I had not encountered when starting this thesis and now use to echolocate along with the therapeutic conversation she started (2000). Each of Sedgwick's Haibun, a form that combines a prose poem with haiku, holds a dream-like space in the midst of her prose. This becomes more apparent watching her read¹² by

¹² https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DE1_Rg3mJf4

hearing how her voice changes, lowering and widening, ripening into a subtext that feels as though it is giving voice or narrating from a more embodied reckoning. This sonic cue indicates the shift in how Sedgwick is using the form to animate or deepen the work's morphology that its inclusion validates. The parenthetical lists I am including are more exemplary of how the pandemic space/energy continually interrupts and acknowledges the sustained anxiety I am feeling from its emotional intensity. Its intrusion feels dream-like and erratically kinetic, terrifying, and sometimes hopeful. In this way, the lists are serving to exemplify disruption and their presence syncopates and rhymes with the current turbulent and traumatizing time and its impact, in this case, on my level of concentration. It is also a way for me to animate a radical version of self-care that I have learned while doing this work. I am noting how making legible a procedural navigation to work through trauma is now serving how I respond to the new experience and fear of the pandemic. This procedural work is quickly becoming operational. Making space for these forays and curiosity-pounces legitimizes this unproductive use of time with reprieves I have learned I obviously need. Peppering them here and situating them as "response-able" in the midst of a more formal pursuit of writing feels like syntactical activism (Loveless, 2019. 22). A small yet legitimate form of adaptation to a still inconceivable present.

(Rob Brezsny: Aries / CBC News: This bird can fly 160 kilometres without flapping its wings / Nova Scotia reports no new COVID-19 cases for sixth straight day / Beet Greens Pesto / Reductress)



July 30

*Sepal*¹³

Additional to the primary questions this work addresses is: how will community gather during a period of isolation? In what way is the feeling of community created during a pandemic? This chapter explores the process of reclaiming words and presenting them publicly during isolation. In a podcast interview with writer Austin Channing Brown, Brené Brown distinguishes despair as being unable to “swallow or eat...being replete with the feeling that nothing will ever change” (Brown, June 10, 2020). This chimes with Aitken’s description of his experience of the “unanticipated and devastating effect” watching the play *Antigone* had on him (2018, xi). I find that my body is responding to the global pandemic with an age-old vigilance that feels hardwired in me. A line from Mary Swenson’s poem “Question” addresses this body-knowing succinctly: “Body my good / bright dog” (Swenson, 1994. p?). Including my body in this experience, attending to its response and to its needs, my good bright dog, with all its senses alert, its way of being in the world, indicates a sensed danger and it responds thusly. In this way, my body alerts me before I can cognitively understand what is happening. This syntax of knowing aligns with neuroscientist Mays Imad’s “we feel, then we assign meaning”—to support the reordering of “humans as thinking machines who feel” for the more accurate: “feeling machines who think” (July 30, 2020¹⁴). Body, then emotions/affect, and then thinking and articulation is the order of this reckoning. Here I rely on Bonnie Burstow’s acuity for mapping an “awareness continuum” where my ““having been” help form (my) becoming” (Burstow, 1992. 17,18).

¹³ Part of the flower, usually green, that functions as protection for the flower in bud and support for the petals when in bloom

¹⁴ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ5TOBvCSHQ&feature=youtu.be>

I return to my notes and journals to trace how I was feeling after my graduate coursework and delineate how I had become deeply enmeshed in what felt like chronic and immense emotional turbulence. And that was where I got stranded, that was where things got swampy or “flooded” (Burstow, 1992, 111). According to her research, Brown tells us in a later podcast how trauma and shame are experienced neurologically in much the same way physical pain is (Brown, July 1, 2020). Imad confirms this research and traces the ways emotional pain shares the “same neural network of the physical pain pathway” (July 30, 2020). To deepen my understanding, I situate myself as an educator in this thinking, watching/reading myself as a student who had absorbed the content of the curriculum material without understanding the impact it would have. This is startling to me, at the age that I am and with the experiences I have accrued. If this was my experience, how many other students are experiencing undisclosed retraumatization or secondary/vicarious trauma without realizing it? The pain I was feeling helped me understand that I needed support. I note that as part-time faculty and working artist, I do not have a medical plan but opted for the student one and had coverage. Given that, part of my processing involved seeking counseling. At my therapist’s invitation, I began to use my writing practice to deepen my engagement with this experience and to consider it as an opportunity to create a framework that resisted pathological terminology for a more holistic and healing approach replete with space for grieving and for recovery. This approach acknowledges the “pathology as belonging to the situation, not to me” (Boss, 2016) and reiterates Cvetkovich’s “reparative ways of living” (2012, 161). The process of reclamation began with me casting out for the first words that could come close to the exporting the experience from my body. I began taking notes. After one of our first

sessions, I wrote: “the turbulence of an inarticulated or inarticulate memory of abuse, festering” in my notebook. This embodied turbulence reiterates feminist psychologist Carol Gilligan’s work I noted in the introduction in which she cites E. Erikson who recognized the potential for transformative growth that a state of “heightened vulnerability” signifies (Gilligan 1993, 108). My notes made clear that something in me was aching to be named, to break the surface and to breathe. Audre Lorde’s description of “access(ing) (to) the feeling of one’s own truth that creativity cultivates” continues to be a reliable compass (Lorde, 1985, 36). The “search for meaning” of traumatic experience(s), says educator and researcher Pauline Boss, is crucial (2016). Burstow also notes that the shift to empowerment/healing back to self “involves breaking (that) silence (134). “The survivor,” she insists, needs to proclaim her truth in the actual world” (134). Robert Wright, the therapist I work with, who aligns with Erikson and uses Erikson’s thinking as a framework for his approach to trauma work, indicated, at this point, that breaking my silence is key to my healing. These voices “imbricated” in Haraway’s “becoming with” manifesting relationally to her “becoming worldly” practice (Haraway, 2007, 3) and instigated a process that involved distinguishing who I am from the consequences of trauma and the pathology of a “pathological situation” (Boss, 2016, 2020). Wright’s chart of the process of resolving an active trauma state situated me at its second of eight steps. I was becoming aware of the extent, the depth of the pain (again). You are here, he said to me, and being situated thusly gave me a navigational sense of where I could head. The crown of this cycle: “gain new level of health and functioning,” was a destination I began imagining I could move towards. These words sound simple yet, at the time, seemed a great emotional distance away. I have included a copy of this

chart at the end of the chapter with his permission. The italicized additions to the phases are notes I made to myself, a version of writing on the mirror, perhaps, which changed as I made progress. These creative additions “rhyme in concept” with the charting of progress that I began to participate with (Loveless, 2019. 25). I would come to understand later how the force of growth is wild and moves into memory and story and history, startling outdated versions with its presence, often times unbidden and untimely in much the way trauma does. This reflection reiterates the practice of moving backwards to go forwards I have been framing throughout this work. The past to future practice is key to my understanding of living with “loss without resolution” Boss situates childhood trauma within (Boss, 2016). My body aligned to this chart before my emotionality and thinking could. My body understood the pace at a somatic level. It began breathing accordingly, pacing itself, and immediately sought company (such a good, bright dog).

(Instagram; Instagram; Instagram; Facebook; Instagram)



August 4

*Calyx*¹⁵

The company I sought appeared as if part of the landscape, part of the *terroir*, a word I return to for how it encapsulates a complete natural environment contributing to what is grown and made, what is manifesting as well as for the proximity it shares with the word *terror* which also is present in this aloneness “cobbling together” company (Haraway, 2003, 7). As mentioned above, I began to visit the agave in Halifax’s Public Gardens prior to seeking counseling. The first notation I have of those visits is April 25, 2018. *Her reach is palpable*, I wrote beneath the photo I took. The journal entry on April 26, a year later, names the “turbulence of the inarticulated.” And a year after that on April 27, during the pandemic, an excerpt from “Instructions” in my notebook, a poem by Eavan Boland who had died that day: “The spring afternoon will come to your door, angry / as any mother. Ignore her. // Now take syntax. Break that too” (Boland, 2007. 55). This trajectory of journal entries creates/tracks its own trace of an “affective excess that can’t be contained in (normative) narrative” or syntax, breaking from a cognitive knowing for “a way of being...in which the body moves the mind rather than the other way around” (Chetkovich, 163, 168). The distance between feeling at a loss and mirroring that feeling with an agave plant whose crate had been damaged and whose growth spurt made it literally hit the greenhouse roof to articulating the crisis that had begun in childhood, rekindled in current classrooms and in my body which was ripening its own reckoning and at its own speed exhilarated by the instruction to “break the syntax” is immeasurable. I repeat with emphasis: *immeasurable* to fully acknowledge the work it has taken to arrive at this way of being. Some days felt like a decade, weeks moved as if lasting an

¹⁵ The outermost whorl of parts that form a flower (sepals collectively)

hour. Time became fluid, a riptide off the coast of the clock. The experience still feels like it lasted a lifetime, other days, it feels like I was on a train traveling across the vast country of memories watching the landscape unfold. It was an entirely new season that still scoffs at the idea of calendar. Crisis transforming into opportunity and the rich and potent space of that opportunity to develop meaning and a way of being within it as it manifests defies a normative framework or schedule. It invites biases and adaptive behaviour that has outgrown its use to the foreground. I had not yet found words for this “archive of survival” (Chetkovich, 159). Confabulating with the agave, J35, Robert Wright, Eve Sedgwick’s 1998 Kessler Lecture, Will Aitken’s *Antigone*, May Swenson, Eavan Boland, Hannah Gadsby’s *Nanette*, Jeremy Dutcher, piles of books and articles, a looming thesis deadline all contribute to the “made structure of kinship” Susan Stewart describes in *The Poet’s Freedom* (2011, 30). Their company, in this longitudinal study of trauma’s persistent reach and the shame that keeps that trauma silent as well as a new appreciation for the long and persistent transformative reach of growing, was the “multispecies” connection I needed to address the loss and sadness I was feeling (Haraway, 2016, 2) before I could begin thinking about the wider and public potential of this work. This trail of good company also contributes to the “pedagogy of recognition” I began to use to echolocate and fortify myself with (Sedgwick, 2003. 153-181). I found I could only read voices that have acknowledged this space and have come to understand, in this way, how trauma manifests and perpetuates the same properties as systems of oppression. How it also recognizes itself when seen in others. The idea of a multispecies sense of kin began to amass (Haraway 2016, 1). I have learned that growth also has some of the same properties and recognizes itself in others (again, Swenson’s “good bright

dog” wags). I note this for future research and will pursue this thinking in this work’s conclusion.

Susan Stewart cites Hannah Arendt describing her notion of freedom as a “notion of action” which begins as an “open-ended process” that entails our “faculties of forgiving and promising, the first overriding the past and the second actively shaping the future” (2011, 9). The economy of this definition could serve as a temporal blueprint animating this work. I embarked first on forgiving, and grieving, with my eye on shaping the future for a more engaged and present self. This thinking aligns with the above-mentioned notion of a “future vision” that Muñoz traces with its “critical investment in utopia” (Muñoz 2009, 4, 12). In hindsight, I realize I did not have the emotional wherewithal to properly honour my experience nor did I understand the extent of the trauma I endured as a girl while writing *Lures* (Goyette, 2002). In this way, “the proof” of myself as that girl is not “committed to the archive” much less acknowledged and cared for (Machado, 2019. 4). This, at first, felt baffling. And potentially an endless process. Which it will be, my therapist tells me. His: “until they hammer the nails in your coffin,” when asked how long it would actually take to recover, was sobering. As he says it often enough, I have become better acquainted to this new way of being/knowing. And he raises his voice as he says it, which, at first, made me shrink in my seat, concerned by his volume and by his certitude. The phrase has now transformed into a new species of homecoming for me. This processing, this grieving, this *practice* when considered an opportunity to welcome the girl I was, ensures I receive the kind of attention and care I have not yet known. From myself and from now on. This is not to say I have not known love, but that I have not known how to love myself in the thrall of those consequences of trauma nor understand

how the shame that shadows trauma is adept at silencing and operates virally for how it is passed along. Here I note how the notion of “viral” manifests so effortlessly in this pandemic as a way of engaging with this research. How the very act of breathing is showing itself to be transmittal and exemplifies the connectivity of community in a literal fashion. The adaptations I now embody, Wright reminds me, are *consequences* of trauma and not the shortcomings or failures of mine that I initially believed they were. This extraction continues to be profound. It insists that I should plan on continuing this care/practice for the “unresolvable nature of traumatic loss” which will continue to exert itself at varying intensity until they indeed hammer the nails in my coffin (Boss, 2016). These moments of exertion will be opportunities to deepen and update the practice I have set into place with this work. The experience of radically welcoming this practice with vulnerability and curiosity continues to offer me an understanding of how profound this “reparative response” is (Chetkovich, 177); Chetkovich highlights artist Allyson Mitchell’s “use of the past as a potential ally and resource” (187). This thinking transforms and enlivens the potentiality of the archive of past work or narratives or histories (and their pain) as sites for reparation and I acknowledge the work done in this spirit by scholars and activists I am in the good company of. I also recognize the spectrum Burstow insists on in regards to situating trauma experience must also be insisted on in terms of the kinds of collective trauma experiences BIPOC and marginalized peoples have endured and that I must acknowledge that my position in this regard is privileged and with resources (Burstow 2003, 1302). This work continues to acquaint me to how trauma works and I have engaged with it from a personal standpoint for how that perspective is teaching me to think beyond my experience and more broadly

with a clearer understanding of the impact trauma sustains and the insistent temporal reach it has. And how little time, resources and acknowledgement are given for this reparative work. I note this here for future research and community action that is beyond the scope of this work at present. I also have a deeper understanding for how forgoing this version of homecoming, of not speaking up for myself, of staying silent or being silenced, is its own violence and re-activates feelings of trauma. This is a site of deep pain and pain/harm management. Applying this learning to a more collective experience gives me insight into how much healing there is to be done, and how singular this healing is despite the collective experiences of the trauma and violence and how little time and resources there is for this work.

How often have I abandoned the younger version of myself, my experience, unknowingly with a normalizing/normative silence? How much pain have I inflicted on myself without realizing I was perpetuating and chronically reacting to the trauma I had endured? I make a note to return to this portal, this liminal threshold of silence(ing) that activates trauma, in a pedagogical setting. How can this threshold of trauma work in classrooms when the curriculum is focused on investigating oppression that continues to be overwhelmingly traumatizing to the oppressed and to survivors? How do we speak of oppression without acknowledging its arterial connection to the emotional and physical trauma in the here and now? How can our understanding of feeling triggered encompass how activating/active the experience actually is? How does not creating space in the curriculum for acknowledging the lived experience of that trauma re-traumatize and reiterate the silencing some students may have experienced/are experiencing? How can a relational and trauma-informed pedagogical approach fortify learning while welcoming

the stories of lived experience? How can the “expert” or hierarchical institutional approach be disrupted for a more “co-investigative embarkation” (Burstow, 41,42)? I leave these questions here for future research to expand my understanding of my experience further into community work and pedagogical development as well as to contribute to an archival trail for future radical trauma theorists. After several sessions of deep and painful/heartful work, I came to the understanding that the journey to healing is, ultimately, a return journey to myself via my younger self. I remember how incredulous I sounded when I stopped mid-sentence: “wait: you mean I’m the only one who can do this?” with a new understanding for how transformative and temporally pliable this understanding actually is. If I could not still feel the exertion it had taken me to fully grasp this notion, the moment would have been comical. Yoda-ish. Yet it still feels pivotal and aligned with the “act of survival” poet Adrienne Rich names as crucial (Rich 1979, 35). I note how this understanding moved the way most truths that chime with an embodied recognition move: complete, all at once and illuminating: a species of homecoming that operates as temporally fluid and redeems itself in the past, present and future at once. In other words, it moves like water. I felt like I already knew this and that this knowing was homed somewhere in my body (wag). One version of myself had embarked on this adventure, this crisis/opportunity, endured the experience of transformation, and arrived here and now with an updated version of who and how I am becoming. And this conjugation manifests in a similar way that my creative practice manifests. My therapist’s response was the therapeutic species of greeting: laughter. Welcome back, he could have said. I also note the generosity of his work, how the sharing of his personal experiences of trauma lent legitimacy and offered company to my

own. I trusted him for how he too had traversed similar emotional terrain. I would not have been able to do this work with someone without this trust, with someone who had no lived trauma experience or who had not yet acknowledged it. This interface of trauma meeting trauma feels key to the transformative understanding I had gained which also involved grieving and embodying the “unresolvable” and ongoing nature of this loss in a way I had not yet experienced (Boss, 2016). There was no time in my schedule for this living grief and nonetheless it persisted. Much like the agave. It required humility and patience, generosity for my younger self and all her spitfire rage that protected her vulnerability. It required developing a renewed and updated relationship with vulnerability and curiosity. Choosing to spend time in this way, caring for myself, still feels radical. My work suffered and my schedule had to adapt to the time it took to acknowledge and work with this healing. Rather than be alone, I heard myself begin to tell my friends what I was processing. As noted above, this is a crucial threshold in healing: breaking silence. Burstow offers a graph that locates the potential sites of disclosure from the private “few” to the public “many” and the range in company beginning with “best friend and/or partner, children” and expanding to “telling the women’s community; telling the general public” (1992, 134).

(The Guardian: Edward Colston statue replaced by sculpture of Black Lives Matter protester Jen Reid / Laura Pannack's best photograph: four teenagers on a Black Country wasteland (A boy came over the hill with a dog the size of a horse. He said: “If you like dogs, maybe you’ll like my snakes”))

*Corolla*¹⁶

“In making art,” Susan Stewart reminds us, “we act and later understand” (2011, 53). I had approached my novel with trepidation having no idea how to proceed. I understood, instinctively, that a good part of my work would be to actively listen, and to listen with my whole body. I understand this way of being as “morphogenetic,” a term Natalie Loveless adapts from Joseph Beuys’s¹⁷ “social sculptural” theory that “*thinking itself* is a sculptural act (Loveless, 2019. 112, italics in original). Loveless notes that for Beuys, “the question “What can we do?” should always be preceded by the question “How must we think?”” (112). I also relate this approach of continual manifesting to the pedagogy of the agave for how it became itself via its “way of being” (Chetkovich, 161). What and who was I listening for? The faint shimmer of my much younger self beneath the text where she was still exerting herself in her own way as if waiting for me. I note that this recognition and bringing to be is a species of emancipation. I had been having dreams of diving into green water, pillared in light, to rescue this younger self from lake bottom. And regardless of the setting, there was always a point of departure in these dreams that entailed me putting a knife blade between my teeth to free both hands before embarking. This is what it felt like. Setting off with a knife in my teeth, determined to cut her free and not knowing what was ahead of me, the froth of green curiosity appearing at my tip à la agave. After one such dream: the first online image I encountered the next morning was artist Jenny Holtzer’s¹⁸: *in a dream you saw a way to survive and you were full of*

¹⁶ The petals of a flower, typically forming a whorl within the sepals and enclosing the reproductive organs

¹⁷ <http://www.social-sculpture.org>

¹⁸ www.turnercarrollgallery.com

joy. I began reading my days for that faint glimmer. Stewart’s “structure of kin” was continuing to extend, to bloom or, perhaps, to agave despite my misgivings (Stewart, 2011, 30). This morning, another Instagram post of a short film of a friend’s backyard with her instructions: *wait for it*. A reprieve of fireflies, this time in a grove of green, that began to light orchestrally, creating their own illuminative pattern of being. Reclaiming the words from the original text was much like this, deeper than watching—attending, alert for what Billy Ray Belcourt has named the “frequency...we have to attune to” (2020. 43). In the preface of *The Minor Gesture*, Erin Manning’s description of writing poised or “pushed to a limit where it is truly in contact with the tremulousness of thinking in the act,” captures the essence of my experience (Manning, 2016. ix, x). Her choice of “tremulousness,” from the Latin *tremulus* from *tremere*: tremble, captures not just the spirit of the choosing but how it reached past my understanding or knowing, *trembling* toward the new. The words that seemed to shimmer on the page, luminescent, were the ones I chose and the understanding I needed to make legible this process manifested later, in the future of the making. I kept the words in the order they appeared. Combining words thusly resists the current of a normative and linear narrative pull. It also resists the pull of the lyric poem, which creates a cohesion or causality in the vicinity of narrative. This poem feels like the words had awakened in a new territory of telling and were thrumming with their arrival, not yet faded and bright with themselves. In this way, they felt new. I have been asked in an interview about my use of the pronoun “she” in the poem. If it is a memoir, why is the poem not in first person? I am still learning the response to this question. For now it is: “she” affords a distance from the listening I was doing to hear her. “She” is the addition that completes the “I” and who was missing from me; the ache

of the empty space of her that quickens in the company of anyone who knows similar pain, a collective grieving for “she.” Briefly “she” before coming back home into a more complete and whole version of me. “She” in transition and on the move. “She” to honour her singularity and her spirit in the face of great and profound challenges without having the adult me, the empowered “I” as a resource until now. “She” for all the shes who have not yet been welcomed and need this shelter of recognition to rest in and be nourished. “She” for how she is situated pre-familial placement, unfettered, other than the “I” which would absorb all the attention, the content becoming the foreground in importance rather than the process which is viral and shareable. “She” as in anyone of us who chooses to participate in an emergent praxis of renewal. And lastly, to acknowledge the patriarchal “he” embedded in her being.

This poem is the fourth book I have published with Gaspereau Press and the first time I spoke at length with the publisher before he designed the book. To his credit, Andrew Steeves listened and responded to my vulnerability with his own. The phone conversation was long and it was potent. I have noticed how conversations about this work are like this, opportunities for me to practice a vulnerable, open way of being and being curious about it. My talk has slowed; I listen more actively. I have also noticed how vulnerability invites vulnerability, how mostly that invitation is accepted and how there is a current of shared curiosity, verve. Where are we going with this? we could be saying. I will return to this dynamic later for how it replicates the same invitation art extends—by invitation or, in this time: virally. And how that interface reiterates the process of how this work came to be. Fractals then of the vulnerability/curiosity an emergent praxis elicits/invokes.

Shortly after our conversation, Steeves sent a mock-up of what he was thinking for the cover with a note:

My impulse is to see whether the design might mirror your own process. What I designed might surprise you, and it might even initially make you a little uncomfortable, but I think it's actually quite strong and does a lot to set up what the reader is encountering – both narratively but also in terms of technique. I hope you like it, because it heralds the boldness and bravery of what you are doing inside the book (personal correspondence, April 23, 2020).

He was right. It did indeed surprise me. My immediate reaction was the full body burning/brimming of exposure. He had taken the first paragraph of the introduction I had written and embossed it on the cover, highlighting letters spelling out: *Anthesis* in the way I had circled words in the original text:

This poem recl(a)ims the girl I was from an autobiographical novel I wrote almost twe(n)ty years ago. In (t)he ongoing process of healing from child(h)ood trauma, my therapist suggested that (e)mbellishing, fictionalizing myself into a character, (s)idestepped the real grieving I needed to experience to properly heal. Thi(s) felt true to me. It felt timely. And I had no idea how to even begin (Goyette, 2020, 9)

My publisher also imprinted a silver agave plant on the interior black cover of the book positioned like a heart and positioned the “memoir” that I decided to add to the work beneath this. Ann Cvetkovich gives this choice distinction for how she notes “the turn to memoir...in criticism (is) a sign of either the exhaustion of theory or its renewed life” (2012, 3). In the prologue to *Dream House*, Carmen Maria Machado tells us that the memoir “is, at its core, an act of resurrection (2019, 5). I complicate Machado’s

“reincarnation” for how first then there must be a dying, a death to a way of being/knowing that is in flux and ongoing to constitute and promote Cvetkovich’s “renewal”. I harnessed myself behind the writing of *Anthesis* for how it knew something ahead of me about what was behind me. This emergent poetics/theory-making relies on the “ongoing legacy of identity politics as... inspiration” that Cvetkovich’s scholarship has created space for and helped legitimized (3). In this case, Cvetkovich’s “memoir as research method” is apt (24, 80). I was writing with many questions. As stated above, this feeling of surprise when my experience was so economically served on the cover of the book was a force of heat. I was afire. It took a few hours for this heat to dissipate. I came to understand how this paragraph succinctly encapsulates what I have indeed done. I note my use of the past tense of “doing” here for how this work has offered me the opportunity to acknowledge and process “trauma that has not yet been overcome” (Cvetkovich, 7). Having completed this reclamation work organically moved the doing to its past tense of done. What is left is an enlivened and ongoing practice with its own species of consequences, which feel more vital and expansive, potential than the consequences of trauma; a practice fuelled by curiosity and care. This creative-research evokes new understanding for personal trauma that is on the move and heading into a more public thinking for me that is as applicable to living along a global pandemic as it is recovering from early trauma. It is “generat(ing) new forms of knowledge that are extralinguistic” making it “a practice that thinks” (Manning 2016, 27). This trajectory/praxis engages and aligns with Cvetkovich’s “reparative scholarly work,” an ongoing and potential site for future pedagogy (26). This book cover then serves as a threshold into the poem and posits itself as a species of consent for me first: did I believe in this work? And was I willing to

accompany it, to speak about it? it seemed to be asking. Or, more directly, was I willing to accompany the, up until now, homeless/fictionalized “she”? “Fear,” Anne Boyer reminds us in her essay *This Virus*, “educates our care for each other” (2020). In this case, it was educating the care I am learning to extend to myself (wag). Until they hammer the nails in my coffin. It occurred to me that this cover will also be doing the work of the initial disclosure, literally spelling out what readers can expect. If it is a form of consent for me, it also serves as a form of consent for readers, for how it does the work of situating the poem within its context and locating the work emotionally and politically, establishing its trajectory as a “microclimate of hope” (Chetkovich, 55): not knowing what I was doing “but (I) try(ing) anyway” (Retallack, 44). It also does the work of “rejecting the expert,” situating reader and writer alike at this point of departure (Burstow, 2003. 41). I continue to feel a weight lift from my chest at the thought of doing and now having done just that. The relief of not having to know; the homecoming that is the doing/done.

(“Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith's 'entanglement' proves social media is the new reality TV—Skipping the mainstream media, the actors chose to discuss - and monetize - their relationship on Red Table Talk. And they’re not the only ones” / “Ten years from graduating, I'm still not sure university was a good decision” / “*dasein*”)



August 8

*Hypanthium*¹⁹

My original plan was to launch the poem as a free public event in Halifax. I planned on describing the process of writing the poem to the people attending and asking for consent to explore the long procedural endurance of embodied trauma that I experienced. This was not a request to bear witness to a retelling of trauma but to go along with a reparative practice and a curious way of being. This distinction is important. The “I” of the story is not central to this work; the procedural and emergent nature of how it came to be is and how it animates a “mode of activity that is at its most interesting when it is constitutive of new processes” (Manning 2016, 28). This request still feels important for how it acknowledges and requests a transition from being an audience member to participating in the “unfolding of potential that keeps (the) actual experience open to its more-than” that this new engagement with an old text creates (Manning, 2016, 29). Each person, including myself, going along with the work is thereby invited to create their own understanding of the experience rather than simply be read to. In this way, members of this community are invited to reflect and attend to their own experiences with the “combinations of hope and despair” such complex affective work instigates together/alone (Chetkovich, 158). Manning names this approach a “relational field of emergent experience” which feels similar to the experience I had going along with the agave (Manning 2016, 29). In some way, the cover design relays this invitation and acts as a threshold, replete with potential and is liminal for how it situates the choice upfront before the listening/reading begins. Its “And I had no idea how to even begin” diminishes any sense of expectation, authority, or need for having a prior literary skill set (Goyette,

¹⁹ A cuplike or tubular enlargement of the receptacle of a flower

2020). Engaging thusly creates vulnerability/curiosity for everyone participating as we collectively/collaboratively began a more macro version of Arendt's "open-ended process" (1988, 244) or Retallack's "but I try anyway" (2003, 44). None of us know at the offset how the poem will be experienced as it manifests out loud and, by acknowledging that aspect of the reading experience, we deepen the covenant between performer and audience by transforming the experience into a communal one. I turn to philosopher Ted Cohen's theory of how metaphor extends the same species of invitation to deepen this understanding (Cohen, 1978, 9). Cohen speaks of this "achievement of intimacy" as "independent of the question of its metaphor, or in this case, the poem's cognitivity" (1978, 8). I complicate his idea of the speaker issuing the invitation by thinking of the poem as an outlier understanding in the way metaphor makes its claims of "this" is "this". In *A Poet's Glossary*, Edward Hirsch tells us that:

The term *metaphor* derives from the Greek *metaphora*, which means "carrying from one place to another," and a metaphor transfers the connotations of one thing (or idea) to another. It says A equals B ("Life is a dream"). It is a transfer of energies, a mode of energetic relation, of interpenetration, a matter of identity and difference, a collision, or collusion, in the identification of unlike things.

In this way, the poem is central/crucial to that invitation as an extended version of metaphorical "frequency" (Belcourt, 2020. 43) given how I, the speaker, am also having to accept its proposal/invitation (Cohen, 8). As the "hearer extends special effort to accept the invitation, the transaction constitutes the acknowledgement of community" (Cohen, 8). This acceptance enlivens the risk of not knowing the outcome that creative/emergent acts instigate (Arendt, 1988. 244) and initiates a shared vulnerability and curiosity (here,

the *wag* of my good bright dog is alert to: what is going to happen?). I am also interested in practicing the deepening of this vulnerability/curiosity, which seems to be the epitomist site of transformation. This (ongoing) practice reiterates Chetkovich's theory of how this transformation (and practices that are hospitable to transformation) manifests to "become a "microclimate of hope" mentioned above (Chetkovich, 155), which chimes with Muñoz's "contour of hope" (Muñoz, 7). Cohen's idea of community is a result of the "shared awareness that a special invitation has been given and accepted, but is also situated in the awareness that not everyone (can) make that offer or take it up" (1978, 10). Part of what I am interested to trace is how this intimacy made public affects community. Here I deepen or expand the idea of intimacy with Edward Hirsch's description of how poetry compounds "immense intimacy" with "intimate immensity" in his online article, "How to Read a Poem" (2013). The idea of inversed "intimate immensity" adds a communal nuance to the poetic invitation. How can this shared intimate experience strengthen community? Invitation by way of consent and disclosure is how I chose to begin the launch of *Anthesis*, which posits the work in the public "immense intimacy" (Hirsch, 2013) of Burstow's most "public" version of breaking my silence (1992, 134). This transition from private to public during a pandemic echoes with the launch of *Lures* (Goyette, 2002) shortly before the 9/11 attack in the US. If *Anthesis* is the conceptual sibling of *Lures*, they also share their beginnings in intense global strife and, in both instances, this strife "pierced the sanctuary of home," home being the site this specific reading will take place (Chetkovich, 156).

Given the isolation we are continuing to endure, I had to consider the impact of the pandemic and how community will now manifest. The National Arts Centre (NAC)

secured funding to support artists launching new work during the pandemic for which I applied. After the deadline. I had stalled the application process, considering how this online platform will impact this work and then realized that the pandemic and the platforms available during it are now an organic part of the manifestation and completion of this aspect of the work. Writing this without engaging publicly would be disregarding the unexpected development of the pandemic and would fictionalize the process if ignored. A direction I was not prepared to head in. My application for support from NAC was successful and I had to then choose either the Facebook or Instagram Live option and commit to a date. Choosing a date was one in a series of decisions that arouse, giving me the opportunity to either deepen my commitment to actualizing the process of bringing it closer to a public realization/disclosure or to abandon it altogether. I include this thinking for how it provides the framework of the incremental choices posed throughout the progress of not just this thesis but the more expansive and personal work that it is tracing. One of NAC's terms of agreement was that the setting of the platform be made "public," making it accessible to a much wider Internet audience and not just my "friends"; again, an "are you in or are you not" kind of decision that amplifies Burstow's "general public" (134) with its technological reach. And here is Hirsch's "intimate immensity" in action. This version of public feels more than daunting and very different than a book launch, held in a room and attended by a physical manifestation of community with only so many chairs, that I am used to. I chose the last available date, May 30, which is good indication of how my courage actually works. It was at this point that my publisher's Vandercook 219 Power Press broke down. Printing my book. The mechanic who normally repairs the machine was busy repairing tractors in this busy spring farming season in the Annapolis

Valley. I felt a familiar sense of doom. Perhaps this book wasn't meant for the world. Then, hours later, the feeling changed; I could wait early spring out. This meant the book, with the good work it does conveying its contents on the cover, would not be ready to do its work by the end of May. I decided to launch it anyway and began to promote the event a couple of days beforehand. I spent the day of the launch preparing to be fully present, breathing beneath the sizzle of nervousness so I could be solidly in the experience as it was so meaningful and, in its way, a ritual cumulating my work of the last three years. There was a brief yet intense hour mid-day when I realized how solid I felt. How I knew, genuinely, that I was on the other side of something major in my life that had taken a couple of years to process. I did not feel the grief or the loss or pain of those years. What I did feel was the exertion, the effort, the real and intensive labour it had taken me to refresh or rewire my way of thinking to be able to arrive at this moment, ready to break my silence and to be present. Burstow's "I and my truths are more important than the family myth" and narrative continue to be a vitamin for this growth (137). It was time for this book to make its own way in the world and this was its send off. The arrival at its departure is what ultimately moved me to tears. I had reached land after feeling at sea for so long and was now about to cast the recording of that experience out without me. I note that the quote accompanying the photo of the agave on May 30, 2018 is Tina Fey's "I want to go to there." Indeed. The temporal and active directive of the quotation's syntax serves the day aptly, animating the reclamation that is the verb/furnace at the heart of this work. The Fey quote is transitory with the expanse of "there" on its horizon, the potential "anywhere" of location hovering past that horizon as well enriching a temporal ambiguity. Easily, I could consider its first person as a gathering of all versions of me and

underscore how the nature of this critical engagement with Fey's quote is malleable and creative, suiting the ecology of the day in how I distill this discourse. Engaging with the syntax of the quotation uses the acuity of Michelle Lazar's "recuperative reflexivity" which serves as the "analytical activism" I note in the introduction to this work (Lazar 2007, 146). Perhaps it overdoes just that but is aligned with Pauline Boss's research which has shown how important perspective is for how it "indicates how to proceed to resilience" (2016). This level of engagement also puts pressure on the sentence until it comes close to fracturing in meaning and dexterity. This un-meaning making is pushing past what is theoretically necessary yet I include it here for how it comes close to replicating the breaking from narrative that was necessary for the poem—and for myself—to exist. This motor of un-meaning making to make meaning is a crucial dynamic to this work.

I titled the poem *Anthesis* for the persistence and spirit of flowering and, as if cued, flowers begin to arrive the day of the launch. From my daughter, from friends. The timing of the bouquets was as organic as the timing of the agave flowering. This is how the day continued to progress, manifesting like landscape, each tree in its place. The technical support person NAC had provided me with, Spike, was spirited and patient company. My partner found a piece of wood to make a platform for my laptop on our couch so I would not have to worry about it toppling over. He posited the flowers at angles so they would be just beyond me, floral company at the ready. And then there was an unexpected stillness in the afternoon. A lacuna in the midst of the pandemic, and after weeks of only being able to graze at the surface of books and articles, I felt free of distraction, free even of the pandemic. This state of intention felt potent and energetic,

unlike the days and days and days that blended in a blur of everyday (blursday, the new term for this) throughout the isolation thus far. In this way, May 30st feels singular and apart: a celebratory arrival verging into its hour. The only thing I did rehearse was where to direct my gaze as the live feed was broadcast so I was coming as close as I could to making eye contact with the people who would be joining me. I did not want to converse indirectly or appear unfocused. I warmed all the feelings of hospitality I could muster. The welcome I wanted to extend was for those who turned up and, just as importantly, for the “she” of the poem. This collaborative, omnidirectional welcome feels an important aspect of the event and this work for how it served and continues to serve as an introduction to a younger version of myself to my community and to this opportunity to be part of communal potentiality (Manning 2016, 29). It upholsters vulnerability by acknowledging it. This, for me, is vulnerability at its peak and at the apex of its courage as it moves towards curiosity. I do not mean this immodestly but as a way to note how vulnerability was beginning to feel more like courage than like shame. It is not that I feel strong as much as I feel the agency of “my truth:” I am agave-ing (Lorde, 1985, 36). As the hour came closer I could feel my heart unbuckling. It occurred to me that I did not know what I was going to say, which, theoretically, is in tune with the emergent aspect of the practice I am engaging with: expansive or perennial and becoming the operating system of my day-to-day experience that has been fortified by living along with the pandemic experience and how the pandemic is a species of a full-length mirror. Reverend angel Kyodo williams names the pandemic a “compulsory retreat” and speaks of “the boats that carry us to a loving way of being, a righteous and inclusive way of being” as different versions of the same practice (Ten Percent Happier Podcast, May 6, 2020).

Hearing the exertion of practice disseminated in this way illuminates my thinking and I include it here for how it extends back to my initial reflections on transforming crisis to opportunity as being an ongoing practice (until they hammer the nails in my coffin). The expansiveness of this emergent practice extends by way of Cohen's invitation (Cohen, 1978, 9) to community and is exemplified in the way some friends showed their support prior to the event with flowers to support me as I moved to/with a wider field of public. This connectivity feels key. Another friend offered to send questions about the work that I could use if I heard myself getting stale, which I was grateful for. I printed excerpts of the poem. Put on make up for the first time in weeks and was astonished by how heavy my eyelashes felt. Is my blinking too laboured? I asked my partner. This is how the energy I need to speak in public arrives, in worries and frets right before an event. Big energy not yet having the public space to engage with. In this way, I knew the hour was close.

(What frog are you? Inside the latest way to waste time on Instagram / 'I feel helpless':
three people on their grueling Covid-19 recoveries / Strong communities are born out of
individuals being their best selves—Leanne Betasamosake Simpson /
Kim Kardashian asks for compassion amid husband Kanye West's erratic behaviour)

*Anemophily*²⁰

I juxtapose the question Eve Sedgwick' begins the 1998 Kessler Lecture with: "What kind of relationship changes things?" before reading from *Dialogue of Love* (2000) with a

²⁰ Wind pollinated flower

1969 New York Times²¹ interview in which writer Vladimir Nabokov is asked: *How do you rank yourself among writers (living) and of the immediate past?* I am not so much interested in the question posed to Nabokov as I am by how he responds: “I often think there should exist a special typographical sign for a smile-- some sort of concave mark, a supine round bracket, which I would now like to trace in reply to your question.” The equation of Sedgwick’s question paired with Nabokov’s thinking provokes an up-to-date reply to both her question and to mine. How can processing trauma be supported by community? Or rather: how can process be deepened and animated by community? How is community crucial in the experience of healing? And: how is does participating in an emergent praxis create community? In the midst of a global pandemic, for a community that is enduring isolation and is therefore online, the simple response is that it begins with emojis for how at a loss we are, collectively, for words in situations when our body does the talking: those subtle intakes of breath, the murmurs, the nods. Nabokov’s “some sort of concave mark, a supine round bracket” is a precursor to what Wikipedia²² names as emoji, invented almost twenty years later. In 2015, Oxford Dictionaries legitimizes the trend of their use by announcing that the “face with tears of joy” emoji is the “word” of the year.²³ In the same article, Oxford Dictionaries president Oxford Dictionaries President Caspar Grathwohl explains:

“traditional alphabet scripts have been struggling to meet the rapid-fire, visually focused demands of 21st Century communication. It's not surprising that a

²¹ <http://www.kulichki.com/moshkow/NABOKOW/Inter11.txt>

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emoji#Cultural_influence

²³ <https://slate.com/human-interest/2015/11/the-face-with-tears-of-joy-emoji-is-the-word-of-the-year-says-oxford-dictionaries.html>

pictographic script like emoji has stepped in to fill those gaps—it's flexible, immediate, and infuses tone beautifully.”

Grathwohl's “infuses tone beautifully” is the fillet of the initial response to how community responded to work that moved from private to a public platform. Given the interface of the Facebook Live application, seeing who was participating was almost impossible. Occasionally, I would recognize a user photo in the side bar of my screen, which I was grateful for. The platform transmits one way visually and, given the platform, I could not hear the embodied community that I could see was there. This audience was a collective of individuals, not in the same room but in the same space, adapting to this new way of being together by typing messages in the proximity of each other in the sidebar. And as singular as each person appeared, there was a unity to the experience. I noted that though I could not hear any of them breathing (or hear/see any other physical cues that would help me navigate my side of the exchange), I could feel the surge, the thrum of their good energy. The way this energy was best conveyed during the event was by a continual carbonation of heart emojis bubbling up from the bottom of my screen. This carbonation surged at key points in the experience. After I explained how the work came to be, for example, and the emergent nature of its and this event's process. After reading an excerpt of the poem. This carbonation, aside or along with the event, aligns with the “minor gesture” Erin Manning defines as “actuating new modes of perception, inventing languages that speak in the interstices of major tongues” (Manning, 2016, 2). “What kind of relationship changes things?” Sedgwick asks. Perhaps a relationship that operates with the grace and generosity of a relational hospitality is one kind. I was given space upholstered with hearts: I welcomed and was welcomed. These

hearts “mak(ing) felt the unsayable in the said” which makes its own value, “a value as ephemeral as it is mobile” (Manning, 2016. 7, 2). Perhaps a relationship that, in the middle of a pandemic and sequestered in our individual homes, exerted connection on the internet with the economy and eloquence of heart emojis aloft and alit, rising in unison instigating even more hearts. So many species of generosity to catalogue. Hearts hearing hearts. This is the most current form of connective homecoming I can encapsulate and ensures how a reparative and ongoing engagement with community may be fortified, enlivened by this crucial dose of feeling my past and future selves as being welcome and a part of something, in relation along with other selves. If this process is viral, how can others experience this homecoming so necessary for our sense of wellbeing and connection? What is the blueprint for this kind of experience? These questions animate my thinking now with their potential. I note this use of emojis for how they are attuned to the affect and make legible the feeling of the event and by doing so promote a shift in our way of engaging that is closer to being trauma-informed and relational. I will further explore this thinking in the pedagogical context of trauma and the pandemic in the conclusion of this work.

I could not keep track of how many people joined the live conversation the night of May 30. The peak, a friend relayed, was over 100, maybe 120. I have left the conversation up on my Facebook page and, to date, it has been viewed over 3,000 times. This number far exceeds any poetry event I have participated in. Reading the comments later was another version of homecoming and that the experience was a shared one. I woke the next morning to the feeling of a clean and unexpected ease, veering closer to joy than was unexpected. What is lasting is the feeling of having been welcomed completely.

Holistically along with and in community. The “she” of the work connecting and expanding. If this poem presents an authentic recounting of my experience, untethered from normative and linear narrative, it also acts as the framework for an emergent, creative way of being in community. This way of being, this freedom, pulses with potentiality for how it can transfer to collective experience and instigate, deepen community understanding of the affects of trauma for anyone who feels the need to break their silence. In this way, the work serves as exemplifying a relational and dialectic way of being, an ongoing and emergent practice that is aerated with the potential to deepen our sense of connection for how it can act as both a memorial and a site of renewal, a site of collective mobility in affect and action. Beyond institutional health care with its wait times, its lack of resources and inherent biases, and back into community. This affective collision has the kind of energy that is indeed viral. It asks to be passed along, it asks to be shared. Manning defines the political as: “the movement activated, in the event, by a difference in register that awakens new modes of encounter and creates new forms of life-living” (Manning, 2016, 8). It is in this way, “life-living,” that this work posits as political.

(Most polar bears to disappear by 2100, study predicts / Women’s Briar Hooded Zip
Parka / Amber Heard tells libel trial she feared Johnny Depp would kill her / Coronavirus
vaccine tracker: how close are we to a vaccine? / Japan has a new rule for riding roller
coasters:

'Please scream inside your heart')

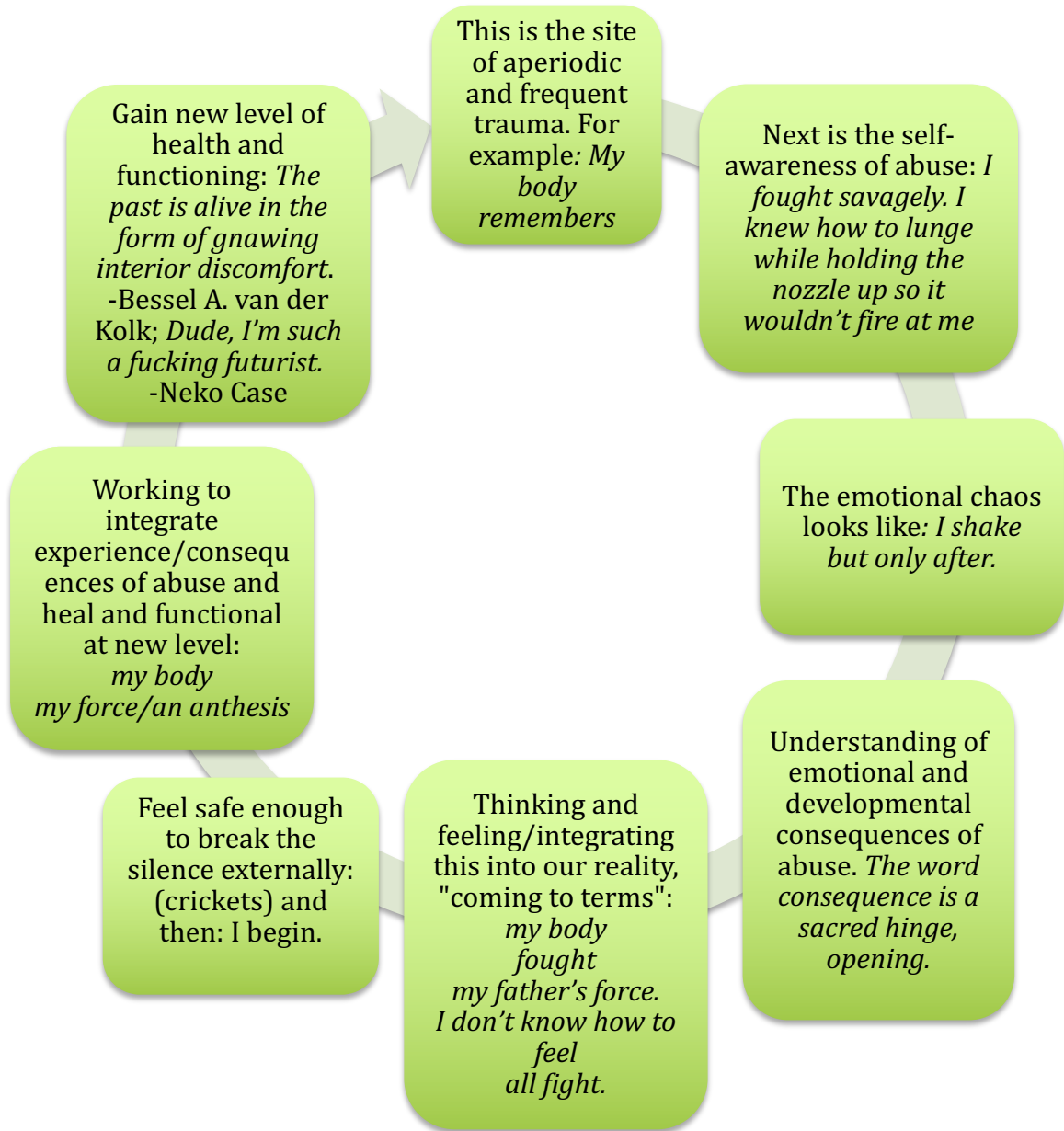


Image courtesy of Robert Seymour Wright, BSW, MSW, RSW



August 10



August 14



August 17



August 26



August 30



September 4

Conclusion: *Anastomose*²⁴

“The telling of stories,” Natalie Loveless tells us, “is a political performative. A world-making, knowledge-making practice” (Loveless, 2019. 21). Writer Jason Reynolds²⁵ reiterates Ibram X. Kendi’s discovery of Gomes Eanes de Zurara as being responsible for the narrative that “proliferated racism and justified slavery nearly six hundred years ago” in his 1453 biography of Prince Henry of Portugal (2020). A narrative, a long string of words, with the force that justified and served as explanation, setting into motion the last six hundred years of white-body supremacy and violence that is still fortifying ongoing oppression on those who are not white is a formidable narrative force. How we tell our stories impacts how we live along with them. “Want a different ethic, tell a different story,” Thomas King instructs (King, 2003. 164). In this way, our future is imaginatively and speculatively cobbled by words. How can personal stories change in how they are told and how can this practice be used in context of the stories that establish the culturally normative beliefs that need changing? This work began in a classroom before encountering the story of an agave and of J35, the orca that swam with her dead calf for seventeen days and for over sixteen hundred kilometres that reappears impregnated on the day I began work on this conclusion. This work is telling the story of itself using everything it can. It operates as a praxis of curiosity, establishing a new and unexplored trajectory and manifests in flower and by whale. In between the beginning of this work (2018) and now (2020) the only journal entry for a day in 2019 day that comes close to July 28th is: *Thesis: keep it real, as in “real”*. This work began a long time before this

²⁴ Branching and the rejoining, as with leaf venation

²⁵ <https://onbeing.org/programs/jason-reynolds-fortifying-imagination/>

classroom, a long time before the agave and before Tahlequah, the orca. This work has been going on long before me. Fourteen generations is the length our bodies can carry trauma according to trauma specialist Resmaa Menakem²⁶ which means that this work has accumulated embodied data that I am attempting to export and consider. This work also moves along in the company of Kyla Wazana Tompkins' article she wrote for students I encountered early in the curriculum of my studies in which she describes feelings and intuitions experienced in a classroom as at "the end of the psychic thread that you begin to pull at as you develop the ability to summarize and analyze the structures of thought, habits of mind, and analytic forms that undergird critical theory (Tompkins, 2016. 4-5). They are not, she argues "a substitute for thinking and working hard"—and "managing those feelings" is not, she emphatically states in uppercase: "THE JOB OF THE TEACHER" (4). I situate this work in proximity to this early text I encountered for how it stays with me. I noted in a reading journal how this interface of feelings and theory is a rich and potential pedagogical site. "Less me-search," Tompkins suggests for "more research" (5). I concede that this work could be easily read as me-search. Its point of entry is personal and exploratory and upholstered by all kinds of the feelings and intuition Tompkins warns against and yet neither substitute for critical thinking and hard work. My feelings and critical thinking are dialectically engaged in the ongoing praxis this work animates as resources equal in their potential and reach. In this way, they are fuelling meaning-making and embodied exertion by replicating the body politics that Cvetkovich argues "foster(s) a way of being...echoing neurobiological views in another register, body and mind are deeply enmeshed or holistically connected (2012, 168). Some

²⁶ <https://onbeing.org/programs/resmaa-menakem-notice-the-rage-notice-the-silence/>

of the larger questions that are a by-product of this work are: if an agave does not get the experience to articulate her bloom, how does she then come to understand the experience of her flowering? In other words: if a student cannot work with her emotional intelligence and experience as a relational and worthwhile source along with her scholarship, how does that learning become embodied and move to the operational level needed for the social justice and change she is studying? Is the divide between emotional knowing and critical thinking furthering an oppressive and institutional (and patriarchal) hierarchy? When and where is this reckoning to take place in an academic and work schedule? In what ways can it be supported? Where and how is the flower/the body situated/relational in/to the institution? What does emotionality along with the critical reckoning that promotes agency, interdependence, and homeostatic balance in a classroom-setting look like? How can a learning environment that instigates emotionality in its students have space for those feelings? And how can educators become more comfortable with the ethical complexities in a learning environment that explores and lives along with the unresolved traumas of race, colonialism, gender, and class? In this way, this conclusion serves as a (real) beginning or an installment in an ongoing practice of reckoning and creating that I have made static for the purpose of this inquiry. And to stay true to its process, I return to the site of its beginning: the classroom, an agave, and the same whale that has resurfaced this morning from the great ocean that is two years wide. The emergent nature of this work is fuelled by curiosity and, through creative engagement, lands here and now in the middle of a global pandemic. If “managing feelings” “IS NOT THE JOB OF THE TEACHER,” how can thinking along with this work create institutional space for a student to manage those feelings by leaving a pedagogical and

theoretical trail for future study of this kind (Tompkins, 2016. 4). In *How to Make Art at the End of the World*, Loveless imbricates Donna Haraway and Thomas King's discourse to reiterate that "to do research—of any kind—is not simply to ask questions; it is to let our curiosities drive us and allow them to ethically bind us" (2019, 24). Citing Haraway, Loveless argues that in "allowing ourselves to be drawn in by our loves, our intensive and extensive curiosities, attentive to what and whom we are *driven* to explore, and examining the complex web of relations that we inherit thereby, that we might inhabit research questions ethically" (Haraway, 2003. 35), (Loveless, 2019. 27). I arrive at this conclusion startled by how much love this process has instigated. A love that is ethically and relationally concerned and committed to attending and meeting experiences as they are becoming. A love replete with the "commitment and obligation" writer Barry Lopez discerns as being the radical act of caring in this "time of terror" (August 7, 2020²⁷). The pedagogy of agave initiated and taught me this care that I still feel for a "plant put out a little too early and bent a little out of shape" (Goyette, 2020. Dedication). And how may this ethical engagement carry onwards? Lopez writes: "If we are to manage the havoc—ocean acidification, corporate malfeasance and government corruption, endless war—we have to reimagine what it means to live lives that matter" (2020). I felt this engagement by how attuned I was attending J35/Tahlequah's grief and the resurgence of care I now feel seeing her name in my newsfeed this morning. And by the love I feel for my younger self, stranded in a narrative/terroir that is ill-suited for her spirit and thwarting to her vitality. As this research, the story of its becoming, is "always in the process of

²⁷ https://lithub.com/barry-lopez-love-in-a-time-of-terror/?fbclid=IwAR1fWPXtJBBAAILHToxMF320MLrWfIXKCjNmYnMUvF5rqiWasmEO3ihsF_0

unfolding” (Loveless, 27), and the unfolding of its process, I care about its mobility and situate it at the centre and here (and now) in the more expansive version of public that is the Covid19 global pandemic for how it may continue its potential operational and ontological mobility to create and fortify community by extending its making-meaning-as-we go invitation with a trauma-informed, relational engagement that enduring this pandemic is asking of us.



September 7

*Anther*²⁸

“This (pandemic) is an emergency” internist and writer Jillian Horton recently wrote in *The Globe and Mail*²⁹ and “situational awareness” and the vigilance it entails is crucial (August 7, 2020). In a recent Zoom lecture: *Beyond Imagination: The fierce Urgency to Claim the Heart of Education Using a Trauma Informed Lens*³⁰, neuroscientist, Dr. Mays Imad provides statistics from an April 2020³¹ survey done by The Active Minds Organization with 2,086 American students which finds that 91% of those students are experiencing an increase in their stress and/or anxiety levels; 81% are experiencing an increase in feelings of disappointment and/or sadness; 80% are experiencing an increase in feelings of loneliness and isolation; 48% are experiencing financial setbacks and 56% are experiencing relocation. I am situating all of us in the emergency state mentioned above as students in this new territory of Covid19. Imad distinguishes this stress and/or anxiety as not being the everyday stress we are accustomed to but aligns it with the “relative helplessness; uncertainty; lack of agency...of traumatic stress” (2020). If students are responding in this way to the traumatic stress of this time, I suggest that by collectively enduring the pandemic and its uppercase of uncertainty, we all now share a spot on the “complex continuum” Burstow provides to situate and deepen our understanding for how trauma manifests that is relatively/relationally and intergenerationally experienced (2003, 1302). In this way, the pandemic experience

²⁸ The pollen-bearing part of a stamen

²⁹ [https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-repeat-after-me-this-is-an-emergency/?fbclid=IwAR3g-](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-repeat-after-me-this-is-an-emergency/?fbclid=IwAR3g-LUSmd3Vwu3t8gI9Azoybncu3bUZnFiW2OKOdfpZWC6BL6M_vRvLU0I)

LUSmd3Vwu3t8gI9Azoybncu3bUZnFiW2OKOdfpZWC6BL6M_vRvLU0I

³⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jQ5TOBvCSHQ&feature=youtu.be>

³¹ <https://www.activeminds.org/studentsurvey/>

combines and invites our emotional/physical knowing with our critical thinking to engage in the same kind of speculative understanding much in the way art, Loveless tells us, procedurally creates and “shapes cultural imaginaries” (Loveless, 2019. 16). We are at the crux of our understanding then, and embodied. It is this site of potentiality that this work explores. I chime Reverend angel Kyodo william’s “compulsory retreat” this pandemic has mandated on us mentioned in the previous chapter and note that her “retreat” is complex and varied for many of us (May 6, 2020). Complicating this site with an intersectional lens and centring the Black Lives Matter movement alongside the atrocity and police violence that BIPOC communities are continuing to endure as well as the consequences of poverty and the continuing and sustained climate crisis makes clear that we are living in and with profound crises and are therefore deep in trauma whether we are consciously aware of it or not.

(David Atherton's recipe for spicy peanut sandwich biscuits / Can loneliness
be cured with a pill? Scientists are now asking the question / A new study
shows more Americans are dropping acid. Why? / 61 Overdramatic Cats
Who Deserve an Oscar / 5 Satellite Photos of Beirut Before
And After the Recent Explosion)

Mays Imad relates this trauma to the body and how, in times of crises, the brain “shifts control over to the limbic system” (2020). She explains how a hyperactive amygdala “impairs our ability to pay attention, make decisions, learn and remember” which is so “energetically costing to the body” that it “prioritizes survival over learning” (2020). Consciously or not, the impact this time is having on our bodies is evident and will continue to be so as we begin the shared and singular work of processing this ongoing

event. I am interested in juxtaposing this experience of multiple crises within the framework of the procedural praxis of my own work for how it may be considered as one way to engage along with the impact of this time. As this pandemic experience is mid-stride and ongoing, my understanding of it is constantly in flux. What remains pivotal is how breaking silence (Burstow, 1992. 134) continues to be crucial to overcoming a traumatic experience and having the opportunity to express how this experience has affected each of us will play an important role as we reclaim our sense of agency and reacquaint ourselves with a more balanced, “homeostatic” way of being (Imad, 2020). In order for communities, families, and individuals to talk about their singular experiences of the pandemic, new ways to emotionally relate will need to be considered in this new normal of social distancing and mask-wearing. To understand the macro version of this, I turn to a micro and personal example by revisiting a podcast of comic Tig Notaro³² entitled “Tig Notaro – Live—the “Live” pronounced to rhyme with “give”—who found herself at an intersection of multiple crises in her personal life and chose to perform nonetheless. I am interested in how she approached her public and emotional disclosure and trace its progress here for context and for the company it gives to this work (August 3, 2012). I am also interested in the relational dynamic that organically occurs between Notaro and her audience. Notaro begins her set at Largo, a Los Angeles club with: “Hello. Good evening, hello. I have cancer”³³ and proceeds to tell the audience that she had been diagnosed with stage 2 cancer in both her breasts just four days prior. I return to this podcast to study how Notaro relays the staggering list of crises: her recent cancer

³² <https://www.npr.org/2012/10/08/162514763/standup-comic-tig-notaro>

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2012/oct/19/tig-notaro-reveals-cancer-on-stage>

diagnosis, having had pneumonia and then C-difficile; and a week after leaving the hospital, how her mother fell and died unexpectedly at which point her girlfriend broke up with her. All within four months. I include Notaro's set for how it procedurally relates to this work, for how she began the night in a state of not knowing and continued nonetheless. Notaro's set is sibling with Hannah Gadsby's *Nanette* noted in the first chapter for how it pushes past the normative expectations of a comedic performance for the emotional terrain of vulnerability and disclosure in a shared space and for how it transforms its audience into a community participating in that affective charge and vulnerability, a bewildered yet hospitable frequency. This relationship is an ethical form of engagement based on trust and respect and both events are key sites in what could be a potential future mapping of transformative/reclamation performances that impact social change. Gadsby mostly adapts and relies on varying degrees of righteous rage to furnace her story; Notaro's story, on the other hand, is a master class on bewilderment and is, in its way, a species of humility and hospitality for how it invites her audience to participate along with her in her be(wild)ering recount, her making-meaning of a series of overwhelming and stacking crises. The relational aspect of Notaro's event ensures that audience members become part of this meaning-making in the dialectic nature of their exchange with Notaro for how their responses are then used to steer the direction and ambiance of the experience which initiates and sustains flexibility and spontaneity that are so key in the promotion of a "reparative way of living" (Chetkovich, 2012. 161). Notaro's choice of such a personal performance by way of her affective/emotional delivery situates this in the most extreme position of Burstow's "public" disclosure graph (1992. 134). What is most striking and original in her approach is how she refrains from

recounting a literal version of the trauma, an emotional blow by blow inventory, and chooses instead to centre the bewilderment and humility she feels in the ongoingness and onslaught of these crises. This choice feels important and is one of the reasons I align the event with this work. I find myself attending to what Notaro is making legible as she processes the series of traumatic experiences and how, in doing so, is making that process operational. This shift in the telling seems an important distinction to make and one that aligns with the procedural aspect of this work. Silence not broken for a subjective-telling of a “narrative which seeks to (re)enact trauma” (Rak, 2003. 56) but silence broken by a telling that mobilizes and wilds the narrative past trauma into the speculative and potential (and imaginative) site of living along *with* (Boss, 2016) rather than living *in* that trauma. This makes Notaro’s set a profoundly reparative shift in approach and process (Cvetkovich, 2016. 161,162). Artist Vivek Shraya, frames this distinction and its consequences thusly:

“When I reflect on my career, it’s hard not to notice the ways interest and institutional support (in the form of art contracts, funding, awards, invitations) have increased as I’ve shared more of my traumatic experiences. While my ability to survive as a working artist depends in part on interest and institutional support, the correlation between trauma and “success” is disturbing. Have I unknowingly been typecast as a trauma clown?³⁴” (2019)

(Facebook, Instagram, Gmail, Facebook, Lemon Dogs tacos)

This speaks of a collective appetite for trauma that leaves me feeling deeply uncomfortable in how it situates the person recounting their pain in a perpetual state of

³⁴ <https://nowtoronto.com/culture/art-and-design/vivek-shraya-trauma-clown>

victimization for commodity and entertainment purposes and how it makes stasis an identity rooted in that trauma. Replaying this positioning creates a pedestrian version of audience that is entertained by pain as consumer, again something I am deeply troubled by. I note this consumptive appetite here as being beyond the scope of this work though an important scholarship opportunity in future trauma discourse for how it is re-traumatizing and how it reiterates the hierarchal posturing of victim and observer without “shifting the field, altering the values of what (can) come(s) to be” (Manning, 2016. 6). In other words, I argue that the nature of this kind of recounting is static and immobile and perpetuates the trauma endured. It deepens its own rut rather than exporting that embodied trauma to its situational source and recognizing the consequences of having endured it. It also reiterates the isolation people who have endured trauma experience rather than creating the dynamic of a collective experience of listening and reflecting, offering company to someone as they consider those situations and how they may be lived along with, prevented, or disrupted in the company of community. This way of knowing is expansive, mobile, viral, and a potent shift in how we may create resources and opportunities for each other. To this end, I consider my work as being concerned with how the process of exporting embodied trauma to the situations or systemic oppressions that caused that trauma has community-building potential that could lead to social change. This does not in any way preclude the need to share the pain of having endured trauma nor does it discount the crucial need to speak, to centre first person experience of wound that is so necessary in healing. Hearing similar stories may fortify the courage necessary for this telling but does not forgo the need for individual telling. Moments ago, I checked my Facebook account and read a comment posted beneath a photo of the cover

of my book *Anthesis* that someone had shared: “Gaspereau is always a quality product,” this person opined—“The theme, I have seen too much of these past few years but I am sure Sue G. will make something original of it” (public post, August 2020). It took me a moment to name what I was feeling: the flush/pain/shame of having my work named as redundant, before leveling back to wonder how the thinking behind comments like: “the theme, I have seen too much of” disregards the victims and their families of the ongoing and alarming issue of misogynistic, domestic, and sexual violence and the chronically underfunded resources for them as well as the systemic and judicial disregard for those victims as being the issue at hand rather than hearing “the theme” as voices engaged in the righteous work of protesting that violence and disregard. Comments like this are a species of micro-aggression that perpetuate/permit a social/emotional violence and anyone who has endured trauma will feel their scorch. The violence BIPOC communities continue to endure, the intensity of primary and secondary trauma, the vicarious trauma they are experiencing daily—daily—is unfathomable to my experience and exceeds my knowledge of pain. This situates me primarily as an ally who can articulate the impact of trauma for people who have been silence(d) as well as people who have been privileged not to have experienced trauma but who do have power to disrupt the systemic values in place that ensure it continues, primarily white-bodied, middle-class people. The procedural shift this work is attuned to is perhaps on the brink of Chetkovich’s “new ways of talking about affective states and making them publically significant rather than new terminologies” and pathologies (2012. 158). I also find myself thinking about how this work, grounded in the process of a telling that mobilizes past a trauma narrative gathers both its speaker and listeners into a participatory collective who can then

experience the speculative and potential site of living *with* rather than living *in* the trauma, a site ripe for manifesting understanding and action instigating social change and “political transformation” (Rak, 2003. 56). I am interested in how this telling on the move promotes the shared “radical unknowability” which Retallack (2003, 22) tells me is “the only constant” as a guide to creating in this emergent and unknowable spirit that collectively rhymes with the spirit Loveless notes as the activating force in Beuys’ “*How must we think?*”—the question that he believes precedes “What can we do?” (Loveless, 2019. 112, n16, emphasis added). This, at a time when our community resources are stretched past their ability to function and when creative, feminist-based, and peer-led solutions may be potentially useful. I return to the invitational bewilderment Notaro instigates for how it is operational and creates a community that is at once caring and alert. “At one point,” a New Yorker review³⁵ relays, “Notaro apologizes: “I really don’t mean to bum you guys out.... What if I just transitioned right now into just silly jokes?” “No,” an audience member insists. “This is fucking amazing”” (October 5, 2012). The one joke that Notaro had prepared involves a bee flying in the traffic jam she had been stuck in and she begins telling it a number of times which helps aerate the emotive atmosphere of the set by creating a sense of pace and yet, each time she begins the joke, the audience requests she return to the covenant they had made with each other: ensuring their shared engagement in the unfolding of bewilderment stays intact and, in this way, renews their connection. I insert the “wag” from the previous chapter here from Swenson’s poem for the literal dog it implies and the communicative wag that interrupts dogs as they are playing as a way to convey ongoing consent: the wag and downward dog

³⁵ <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/good-evening-hello-i-have-cancer>

as question: are we still playing? and the wag as response: yes. This checking in is an imperative aspect of relational and dialectic engagement. In returning to Notaro's bee joke, after having created my own version of collective engagement, I am interested in how that joke relates to the heart emojis of the live reading. I note that they both enact Manning's "minor gesture" by being:

"singularly connected to the event at hand, immanent to the in-act. This makes it (the minor gesture) pragmatic. But the minor gesture also exceeds the bounds of the event, touching on the ineffable quality of its more than. This makes it speculative. The minor gesture works in the mode of speculative pragmatism...from a speculative pragmatic stance, it makes its own value, a value as ephemeral as it is mobile" (Manning, 2016, 2)

In Notaro's case, her bee joke is temporality on the move, "mobile" and serving the set by positing itself before, during, and after the experience of crises. It flits through her act much like a literal bee, exposing the emotional terrain that has been endured in Notaro's last four months, flying over the border between now and then in a way Notaro cannot yet articulate. Both the bee joke and the heart emojis make legible an affective transitioning that is meaning on the move during the event at hand and, in this way, both are effectively "new modes of expression" that check in for ongoing consent (Manning, 2016, 2). In regard to this work, the heart emoji has ripened in meaning from pre Covid19 when it was used as a shortcut response, a quick affective optic to how it is now making legible an embodied response of affective accord from a community that finds itself apart. In this pandemic time, it serves as a connective force while the bee joke provides situational ontology for the before and after of Notaro's four months of crises. Both then

are provisional and mobile and both fortify the relational aspect of their event. Notaro ends her set by finally telling the joke, how she was stuck in a traffic jam on the 405: “My window was down and a bee flew past me. Do you have any idea how frustrating it is when a bee passes you in 5 o’clock traffic? And p.s. What was the bee doing taking the 405 in the first place” (2012)? The bee, by now, has flitted from Notaro’s new bewilderment back to an older and outdated version of herself, pre-crisis. This joke serves as a marker then of the transformation that has occurred and its impact of what is now a collective deeper and more complex understanding of bewilderment. I mark this as a site of radiant potential for how it serves as a threshold into an updated way of being, caught up in its way and in its time. How can this example of a migration from before to after crisis now serve our collective experience of the global pandemic we are enduring or the experience of enduring pain of childhood trauma or sexual/domestic violence? And how can situating ourselves at this point of transformation that making it legible instigates somehow lend an understanding to trauma we have not yet considered? As impatient as I am for social change, this transformative personal to collective understanding seems key to change. This participatory potentiality may be a way of being public and in community in the shared yet singular experience of the pandemic as well as at a time when community resources are underfunded and inadequately supported by the state to meet the needs of people enduring emotional pain. This thinking, I understand, is ambitious. Or is it a creative reach past my knowing? Is it me pushing this work to take a more public risk?

(3 Y.O. Boy Recites Positive Affirmations to Himself and He’s Inspiring
Thousands on The Internet / “I’m Not Gonna Let You Do It”: Woman Stands Up

Anthesis/Goyette

To A Man Who Was Sexually Harassing Another Woman / Praise Song
for the Unloved Animals / The fruit flies in your kitchen are laying
about 2,000 eggs a day / Cardi B on Her Marriage: 'If You All Are So Curious,
I'm Going to Put it in the Fuckin' Music, and You Can Buy it')



September 12

*Brevidelciduous*³⁶

By way of example, Avalon Centre, Halifax's only sexual assault centre, has had to recently change their service delivery response given the overwhelming need of those services and the lack of government funds to meet those needs. This from a public announcement made in April 2019 by its Executive Director Jackie Stevens:

K'jipuktuk (Halifax, NS) - For the first time in the 23 years Avalon Sexual Assault Centre has offered counselling, the Centre is unable to receive new requests for this service. The number of people seeking sexual assault trauma therapy has grown steadily, and in response, the Centre has pursued every means of addressing the growing need: strategic restructuring, changing service parameters, hiring more counsellors. However, the number of people seeking service has been growing faster than the Centre has been able to grow its ability to provide more service. There are people who have been waiting for counselling for over two years. Sexual assault centres across the country have been reporting the same dilemma. Recently the volume of new requests for Avalon's counselling has been such that the Centre can no longer provide accurate estimates of wait times.³⁷

“The number of people seeking sexual assault trauma therapy has grown steadily,” indicates that the issue of sexual violence and the systemic misogyny that permits/perpetuates it is far from being resolved. How can this work, in the meantime, prove to be useful for the “people who have been waiting” and for the people about to

³⁶ A plant that loses all of its leaves only briefly before growing new ones

³⁷ <https://avaloncentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Avalon-Sexual-Assault-Centre-Unable-to-Accommodate-New-Counselling-Requests-April-15.pdf>

start that wait? This is where I posit this work now: even farther from the private me to be more involved with the public us.

The commonality of Notaro's set with my reading event are "choreographed (in their) thinking" (Manning, 2016. 19) beginning with Retallack's "radical unknowability" and going forth together may be procedurally instructive in this ongoing pandemic time for how we are called upon to engage (Retallack, 2003, 22). As an educator, preparing online syllabi having had the experience of vicarious trauma as a student, I am also now interested in how this work can continue to be operational in classrooms. As mentioned above, this work centres and is the product of a praxis that is ongoing and manifesting. In this way, the poem attempts to capture meaning-making on the move, with an operational understanding of the paradox of its endeavor. It attempts to engage with "fledgling knowledge" without diminishing or curtailing its potential reach and so refuses to be contained in theory (Cvetkovich, 2012. 82). It is much like a river running its course through the context of these words. As I expand the invitation Cohen (1978, 9) describes a metaphor as extending to encompass the poem above, I now further expand/extend the invitation to include this procedural and creative praxis as pedagogy and situate it thusly, as an invitation for the "metacognitive" engagement Imad considers as crucial in a trauma-informed praxis for how it discerns the "individual experience of an event rather than the event itself" (2020). This deepens or complicates the "pathological situation" that caused the trauma as being a singular experience even if the event was shared which fortifies/legitimizes the need for each individual to have the opportunity to break their silence with their own singular version (Boss, 2016). (I hear an echo of the commenter's complaint mentioned above about this telling: "this theme I have seen too much of these

past few years” and reassert it here for how courageous that telling actually is, despite how often we hear of the same experience. Each telling is a bell chiming: *enough* and that chiming will continue until a shift in our understanding about sexual and domestic violence is translated into the kinds of change in policies that will radically impact judicial process and its outcomes and how the resources in place will be (properly funded.) I align this thinking for how it makes legible Burstow’s (1992, 41) “equalizing the power” or Mary Beard’s discourse on how better to power *with* each other or to “think about power as an attribute or even a verb (‘to power’), not as a possession” (Beard, 2017. 87) ensuring the redistribution of agency a traumatic event such as this pandemic stifles or silences within a classroom environment. What comes to be is a collaborative learning of how to make meaning of a sustained traumatic event, which Boss tells us is critical, as we learn to live with the losses we are experiencing that have no immediate resolutions (Boss, 2016). This takes the micro machinery/thinking of this work and puts it to a more macro use.

Nobel Women's Initiative founders 'shaken' as seven staff resign /
The Covid novels are arriving. And they'll be a warning to future generations /
Country diary: the insect mosh pit in the chalk scrub / susanharrisdesign /
How can I get a crow to forgive me: reddit / Daisy Coleman's Death
Lays Bare the Myth of 'Surviving'



September 21

The scope of this work does not address the profound pain of traumatization. It does not explore the unexpected resurgence of that pain and the effort it takes to become accustomed to that upheaval. The crisis I describe as an opportunity is not an easy transition to make nor is it always achievable. And the narrative this work breaks from is a narrative that implies an ending. Here Wright's "until they hammer the nails in your coffin," mentioned in the previous chapter, rings a dire warning. I am not prepared for the next disruptive force this wound will manifest because I do not know how it will appear therefore I turn to this work as a navigational tool of surviving for how it reminds me to situate myself beyond and apart from its pain. This, at its source, animates mobility and hope. The pathological situations (Boss, 2016) that create trauma are ongoing and systemically uncontested. For many, the emotional impact of trauma is a challenge faced daily, hourly, and by the minute. I do not say this lightly. The emotional pain of trauma, its intensity, feels immeasurable. "A story has to end," a recent article³⁸ (Alford, 2020) about survivor Daisy Coleman's death by suicide names as the pressure for victims to find the "myth of closure" (Boss, 2016). Trauma is an ongoing pain that reasserts itself in confounding and excruciating ways. In this way, enduring trauma does not end on a "positive note about survivors, acceptance, and moving on," (Alford) and for that reason, this work uses the rhizomal force of trauma to inform its response as an ongoing and going on operational praxis. Loveless cites feminist philosopher, Chloë Taylor's: "We are not living at 'the end of the world,'...we are, however living at the end of *a* world" (Loveless, 2019. 99). In this way, this work is situated at the brink of that *a* with all its

³⁸ <https://jezebel.com/daisy-colemans-death-lays-bare-the-myth-of-surviving-1844638046>

potential for survivors who have and who are enduring trauma. It posits the potential of community world-making as a story that is just beginning while it acknowledges the potency and depth of the emotional pain trauma causes. To this end, I am interested in how this work may continue moving beyond the pandemic to the ongoing and real impact of trauma that a continually growing number of people are experiencing without resolution or resources. I also align this practice with the climate crisis we are enduring. The trauma of racism, of poverty, of misogyny, of homo/transphobia, of colonialism—trauma—the mighty word that holds the brutal pain of all of it intact in the early days of knowing how best to engage with that kind of emotional and embodied pain.

I was recently walking around a pond with a three-year-old who was feeling their wildness by way of jumping and stomping and launching off of rocks. This was part of the plan, a walk to expend that energy so the late afternoon may be quieter. Halfway around the pond, this three-year-old tripped on a tree root mid-run. The path, made of gravel, scraped up their knees and there was a lot of blood. We had that shared moment of silence while we situated ourselves before the pain and the crying began in earnest. I quickly sat on the path to gather them in my arms. We had been working on using words to express feelings and they were able to tell me through those excruciating sob-hiccups that they would cry and didn't want to go anywhere until the stinging stopped and so I shifted my sitting, adjusting for the long haul. Their crying was magnificent. It stirred the crows to cry back. Several senior men walked by and each would inevitably stop to inquire the obvious. What did you do to him, one of them joked? I checked in every few minutes but knees can sting for ages. At one point the crying decreased in volume and almost stopped. Are you ready for me to carry you back to the car so we can go home?

No, I was told, and the crying was revived by a long howling: ow-ow-ow-ow, a sonic rehearsal until the real tears returned. I am not sure if I would have had the same patience as a parent all those years ago. I would have probably started negotiating: a popsicle when we got home, a Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Band-Aid. I would have wanted to take this very public processing home but I am learning something about pain and about agency. And about dignity and trust. I am learning how people who are experiencing pain mostly know what they need and often ask for it or create situations that disrupt the normal pace of a day to assert a pause for the opportunity to articulate the trouble they feel turbulent in their silence. In this case, at the pond, the agreement was simple: no moving until the stinging stopped. Which it eventually did. I insert this here for how it radiates a young and seemingly simple knowing into the wider field of listening to those who are hurt as a potential site of agency and recovery as well as a potential site of harm. I am also reminded of an afternoon I spent at the Cobequid Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre and the invigorating conversation I had with its co-founder, the late Helene Marie Van Doninck. As she fed a porcupine some melon, we talked about a recent oil spill and all the affected water birds. She recounted her dismay at how fervently those birds were being washed by well-intentioned volunteers. “You’ve got to treat the bird first,” she said, “and then the oil.” This stayed with me and continues to inform how I engage with people who are experiencing emotional pain. “Some birds become really afraid when they are separated from their flock so you put them back there first so they aren’t as frightened before you begin to clean them.” There is an eloquence in this knowing, a wisdom. I related this to capture myopathy: a condition I had been researching for how it relates to my thinking of trauma. Capture myopathy or CM “is the name given to a

complex disease (animals) experience that usually involves events following the stress of either capture, handling or transport” according to a University of Saskatchewan pdf³⁹ (1988). I had come across the term investigating animal rescues especially animals whose survival behaviour was flight or freeze or fawn rather than fight. The animal’s body, if I remember correctly, is so terrified, it releases enough lactic acid that its muscles are affected and its organs eventually fail or, days later, its heart stops. I juxtapose these two exchanges: until the stinging stops with Helene’s bird first and capture myopathy to trace how singular care needs to meet singular experiences of pain and how institutional or inexperienced responses can do more harm regardless of their good intentions. This thinking at the far edge of this conclusion animates the flexibility of emergent and relational engagement at the heart of the practice this work is exploring. As this practice continues to unfold, I am curious to explore how this singularity of telling can be brought into a collective dialogue. Boss’s open-ended question: “What does this mean for you?” is an expansive beginning (2016). I am also interested in learning more about the ways community can create the space that is so crucial for the autonomy and eloquence of individual need. And with this learning, how community can adapt to and fortify the dignity of the vulnerability present in a voice new to the telling.

During the last session I had with my therapist, he suggested I find a granny. Someone who will love me unconditionally and be happy to hear my news. Someone, he described, as putting out a plate of cookies and urging me to eat all of them, that there were plenty more if I wanted them. Can it be that we end here, I thought, with the idea of

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<https://www.usask.ca/wcvm/herdmed/specialstock/resources/Haigh%27s%20notes/Capturemyopathy.pdf>

unconditional love? Isn't that a bit of a cliché? But the idea of love, of radical love, of unconditional love has turned up in the last few days in a variety of ways. In articles on my newsfeed. In articles that I have accessed as pedagogical support for this work. As books arriving that were ordered weeks ago and forgotten. At the end of the Kessler Lecture, Eve Sedgwick reminds us of the Buddhist practice of sitting in a public space and reflecting on how each person present has once been your mother. My mother. This is a radical shift from a private to public intimacy that I mentioned in a previous chapter. What would this shift mean for me (Boss, 2016)? This work takes me to the edge of this question and leaves me wondering how the practice of this meditation may soften me to a more sustainable compassion as I continue to embody this emergent practice. The agave, the gardeners announced publicly, would be left to die in the time it needs to. I continued visiting it in its decline and learned of beauty and how even in expending into the eloquence of its morphological reach there is no ending but a continuation, in this case, pods heavy with seed waiting to drop and to begin again, in the ongoing cycle of becoming. The last text I included with the photograph I took of its progress on November 5 was: "Tomorrow is a big day and I have a lot of feelings right now about everything. I bet you do too." The written on the eve of the American mid-term election. What I did not know was it was also the day that a group of gardeners would dig up the Agave's crate and that one of them would then chop its mast down with an axe. A lot of feelings indeed. This contradicted what the public was told. This interference feels like a decision that replicates state or institutional process that does not involve or ask the public about its public. Exemplary of Aitken's "Nothing changes, nothing ever will." mentioned in the first chapter (2018, xii). The axe then serves as the metaphor for the

complexity and ongoing systemic violence that is as enduring as trauma. And if it is indeed a metaphor, Cohen reminds us, it is therefore an invitation and initiates an “achievement of intimacy” (Cohen, 1978. 8). This conclusion then ends and begins then with the intimacy of this axe instigating a beginning of a story that reasserts the agave to first person publicly blooming in a public garden. Two years ago, I paired the August 9th photo of the agave with a quote by Vanessa Redgrave: The people I admire most are those who struggle for everyone. An updated version would read: The people I admire most are those who ~~struggle~~ agave for everyone. One last redaction for the road: the agave’s last transformative reach past that axe to become an ongoing verb.

(UK coronavirus live: education secretary says Covid-19 unlikely to spread in classrooms / Coronavirus US: study shows 97,000 children tested positive in last two weeks of July – live updates / Farheen Haq – Wash and Fold: Revelatory Housekeeping in an Age of Pandemic and Racial Injustice / Emergence from Emergency – Black Realities: OCAD University Creative Writing Program at Stackt Market, July 7-21 / The Hologram: An image of health in multi-dimensional crisis / 'Crack made butterflies dance in my mind' – the hidden stories behind survivors' tattoos)



September 26



October 5



October 15



October 19



October 24



October 29

Notes

Quotations accompanying the Agave photographs (2018)

May 8: My concerts are about me being very private in public, but I'm very protective.

-Lady Gaga

May 11: We are dismissed as emotional. It is enough to make you emotional.

-Sara Ahmed

May 15: I have no idea what I'm doing.

-Sue Goyette

May 20: The past is alive in the form of gnawing interior discomfort.

-Bessel A. van der Kolk

May 25: And what is in your heart is *kiss-kiss-kiss*. You are amazing just the way you are.

-Jonathan Van Ness

May 30: I want to go there.

-Tina Fey

June 5: In the middle of the work of art, an artist often feels that she is failing. And she starts interfering with her inspiration. That is a mistake. The mistake. It is best to push through.

-Agnes Martin.

June 8: I am out with lanterns, looking for myself.

-Emily Dickinson

June 11: I hate zoos.

-Laurie Anderson

June 23: Yeah, I'm an open book.

-Amy Winehouse

July 9: There's an elegant quality to the wild mind.

-Anne Waldman

July 11: My last defence / is the present tense.

-Gwendolyn Brooks

July 14: Arrange whatever pieces come your way.

-Virginia Woolf

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July 20: Singing is like a celebration of oxygen.
-Björk

July 23: All my life, I have been in love with the sky. Even when everything was falling apart around, me the sky was always there for me.
-Yoko Ono

July 30: Reclaiming is an adventure, both empirical and pragmatic, because it does not primarily mean taking back what was confiscated, but rather learning what it takes to inhabit again what was devastated.
-Isabelle Stengers

August 4: If you surrendered to the air, you could ride it.
-Toni Morrison

August 8: It is the wordless voice of longing that resonates within us, the longing to continue, to participate in the sacred life of the world.
-Robin Wall Kimmerer

August 10: Emotions aren't doable. Actions are doable, and if you do them correctly, they prompt the feelings.
-Stella Adler

August 14: On the sly, scoping for love.
-Aretha Franklin

August 17: The big talent is persistence.
-Octavia Butler

August 26: She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her.
-Zora Neale Hurston

August 30: A language of the heart is certainly my goal. Not sentimental, but perilous.
-Fanny Howe

September 4: The only thing to do is to go the limit with it. Exceed.
-Diane Arbus

September 7: I've never been over-dramatic in my whole career.
-Serena Williams

September 12: I have lost touch with my confidence and don't know how to read this new language. Do you?

-Sue Goyette (the remaining text is me speaking directly along with the agave)

September 21: Can you see the spider web spanning the agave? That's what we're doing to/for each other and it's no small thing.

September 26: A poison or a feeling of shame leaves me every time one of you speaks out. In this way, I'm giving up what isn't mine to carry. I hope this is happening to you as well.

October 5: I am surrounded by my sisters. How lucky am I?

October 15: Twenty minutes ago. A realignment. A tuning fork. A rise and a rest. Exactly what I needed.

October 19: I had to talk the commissionaire into letting me in the garden. Almost sundown, minutes ago, in these last days, I never know what I'm going to find. As always, I guess.

October 24: The digging up and around has begun. This flowering began in frost and will end in it. The full moon later, a kind of salve.

October 29: I'd like to honour the unexpected company, the warm acknowledgement. Being seen is no small thing.

October 31: The space between the living and the dead is thin right now. The listening intent; the talk, soft and low.

November 5: Tomorrow is a big day (US midterm elections) and I have a lot of feelings right now about everything. I bet you do too.

November 6: Agavists, this happened yesterday. I've grown to know this plant and all of you a little better because of it. I'm grateful that it got me out of the house when leaving it was a challenge. Its persistence was heartening. I'm grateful that I recorded its blooming and that recording it somehow reminded me of my own body. It's been a public and deeply private journey and what I'm more grateful for is your company for the duration of the flowering. Thank you for that.

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October 31

Anthesis/Goyette



November 5



November 6



November 6