

Breaking the Singular Line of Narrative into Threads of Possibility

Brent Davis, Rebecca Luce-Kapler and Dennis Sumara ã 2002

Introduction

Our project in these papers is to render more explicit some of the beliefs about learning and identity that give shape to teaching and schooling, but that tend to be left in the tacit spaces of linguistic association and cultural habit.

Actually, our principal interest is not ‘beliefs.’ What most concerns us here is what tends to be taken-for-granted or treated-as-given. Such aspects of the collective unconscious are woven through language and are embodied in daily practices. They are, in fact, implicit in the very forms that we have to represent and examine them—the linear narrative and the logical argument.

In these papers, we attempt to use these tools—the line and logic—to reveal their limitations, especially as regards matters of learning, teaching, and schooling. Our main focus is vocabulary. As Rebecca explains in her essay,

Paying close attention to the words, we are reminded of the connotative character of language—every word is coloured by its life in other contexts. Writers know that language can be ambiguous and this can make us hesitant, certain that we will be misunderstood about those important moments we write on the page. At the same time, the ambiguity of language lets us slip and slide, hiding behind our own intentions in the creating of a text. Spending time in careful attention, casting a light with another spills the sideshadow across the page and in that moment, we can break the singular line of the narrative into threads of possibility.

Some of the metaphoric commitments that infuse the privilege and popularity of the “singular line of narrative”—and that render coherent our own efforts to break that line into “threads of possibility”—are the focus of Brent’s essay. By moving through a web of terms that are rooted in Euclidean geometry, he attempts to foreground the manners in which the mathematics of the plane is incorporated in contemporary notions of truth, justice, and righteousness. In the process, he draws on another geometry, fractal, to demonstrate how classical forms might work to limit interpretive possibilities.

Fractal geometry also presents an alternative set of images that might be used to interrupt and expand popular sensibilities. This domain of inquiry represents an elaboration of classical Euclidean geometry, not a rejection. As a discourse field, that is, fractal geometry might be described in terms of the forms that it studies: multilayered, recursively generated objects whose bumpiness of detail remains constant, whether shrunk or enlarged. In this sense, fractal forms are very much like memories. Press one, and a web of similar forms emerges. Press on an aspect of that web, and the same thing will happen again. And again and again.

Dennis draws on these qualities in an examination of human identity, through the specific example of what it might mean to learn to fall in love. Uncovering and problematizing the

assumed linearities of learning and loving, he develops the point that human consciousness is multilayered and recursive. It does not march forever forward but, rather, achieves its moments of awareness from overlapping loops of memory, present perception, and future imaginings. Cultural artifacts such as books, photographs, art, music, and letters are examples of the objects that serve to collect memory and history and, ultimately, that function to organize human identity.

These essays, then, are about the complexities of existence, about the ways the global is enfolded in and unfolds from the particular, about the hopeful possibilities of a mindful attendance to habits of speech and formal systems of knowledge. They are, that is, about learning to be who we are.

It ain't right: An adventure in shaping understandings

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I sit at my desk, pencil in hand, struggling to write about a classroom moment, to craft a description of a learner-among-learners-in-a-classroom-in-a-school-in-a-city-in-a-province-in-Canada-in-2001 ... this being-in-context-in-context-in-context-in-context ... this complex nested moment, any description of which could no more than a convenient fiction.

Perhaps, I think, I could build on something already written. I open the file drawer dedicated to this research project and, in a moment of weakness, dare to pull out the thinnest file: "Ethics Review."

But it's not much help. Only the final draft of the submission to the Ethics Committee is here ... the one that was finally approved ... when I finally caved in and listed all the things I *wasn't* doing. The committee didn't seem to understand how I could be working with teachers without videotaping, audio-recording, making transcripts, gathering student work, and inventing strategies for triangulation of these data. Somehow the effort to reframe teaching, to think differently about what we're doing when we claim to be teaching, didn't seem to fit their sense of legitimate inquiry. So I squeezed the description of my activity into the rigid molds of empirical research.

I didn't completely succeed. From their final response it was clear that the committee didn't approve of what I was doing; they simply approved of what I wasn't doing. They saw it as inoffensive, innocuous, benign.

But it's clear that they didn't think the work to be rigorous.

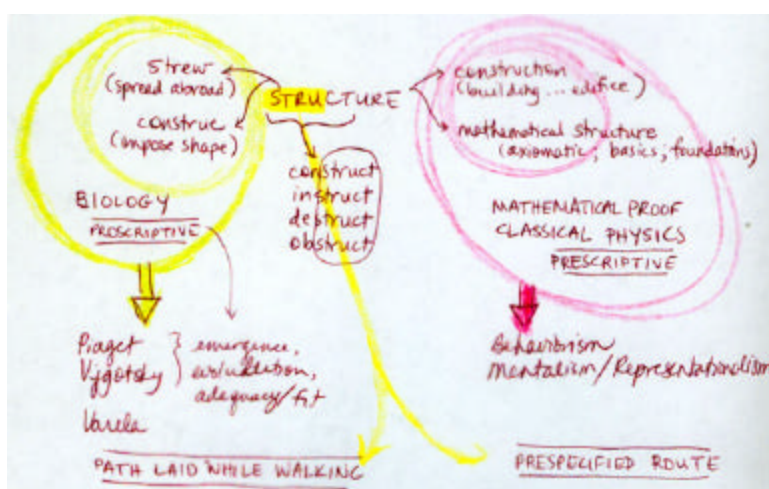
And, of that, I'm glad. Rigor -- stiffness, stillness -- is precisely what I don't want. The work needs to move, to breathe, to be aware of its complicity in the phenomenon that it seeks to understand, to be attentive to its own embeddedness.

So, it's back to the file drawer. What else is there that might help me to transform an unruly weave of experience into a tidy line of text? I pull out another thin folder: "Thoughts for papers."

In it are a few Post-its and other scraps, most with little more than a smattering of words, some circles in circles, far too many exclamation marks.

I lay one of these pages onto my desk. Perhaps, I think, one of the words on this sheet will provide direction, a way ahead. I press my gaze onto the word in the center, "structure."

But the wrong thing happens. Instead of offering an arrow forward, the word explodes into a storm of other terms and phrases -- *construct*, *instruct*, *deconstruct*, *obstruct*, *strew*, *construe* ... A few of these I scrawl onto a new page, knowing that any, if pressed, could trigger another squall.



The sheet is soon filled with terms, half thoughts, names of thinkers and texts, references to events. Some are highlighted by asterisks or circles or circles in circles.

And now it's plain to see: I'm caught between two geometries -- one, Euclid's geometry of the plane, which is about points and lines and order and tidy boundaries, and the other a geometry of the unruly that is more about interstices and complexity and hazily-defined edges.

Euclid's geometry of the plane is the normal, the plain, the regular one that most of us hated in high school, presented as it was as an unfun game of proving that segment AB does indeed bisect side CD at point M. This geometry is flattened, deliberately reductive, and certain of itself. In fact, it's one of the models embraced by Descartes in his quest of modern certainty, and it became the poster child of modern science as rationalists and empiricists alike -- flip sides of the same epistemic coin -- modeled their projects of breaking apart the universe with the wedge of formal logic.

I know I'm caught in this geometry ... complicit. I like the ordered world ... I find comfort in a conception of time as linear and easily divided among duties and interests ... I generally prefer the simplicity of thinking of personalities and events as discretely bounded regions ... I delight in straightforward accounts and causal explanations.

And that must be why I'm uncomfortable with the sprawl of memory and interpretation that has fallen in front of me. This strew of notions, I tell myself, must be structured into a linear narrative, a plausible tale of educational research, a line that any competent reader can follow. My task is not to embrace complexity, but to ignore, to prune, to straighten. I cannot reveal the meanders, follow the branches, trace out the bulges. I must make this tale fit into the right, the correct, the regular, the orthodox, the standard, the plain, the normal form. To fail to do so is to reveal a lack of understanding, muddled thought, error.

But why this urge toward -- this desire for -- the *straight*?

Maybe if I press on this familiar word, I might get somewhere. It can't get worse.

I pull out another sheet of paper, and in a straight line, write 'straight' and a few other terms that I know from my studies of geometry to be closely related: *right*, *rect*, *ortho*, *rule*, *regular*, *line*.

RIGHT	Latin, rectus (straight)	human rights; right/wrong; right angle; righteous; right of way; right wing;
RECT		rectangle, correct; direct; rectify, reactor; rectum; erect
STRAIGHT	German, strecken (stretch)	straight up; go straight; straight/guess; straight- answer; st. line; st. away
LINE	Latin, linum (flax thread)	time line; line of thought; line of reason; linear relation; sight line; to the line
RULE	Latin, regula (wooden straight edge)	rule of thumb; rule of law; ruler; rule out; break the rules
REGULAR		irregular; regulation; regulate;
ORTHO	Greek, orthos (straight)	orthodox/unorthodox; orthodontics; orthognath; orthopaedic

Beneath each, I list some of the associated words and phrases that pop to mind ... and something starts to happen. The linear argument, the straight goods, the rules and orthodoxies -- beneath the literal surface of these notions is a troubling mesh of rightness and wrongness, of correctness and incorrectness, of straightness and queerness. The desire for linearity, that is, is nested in the contested spaces of good and evil, of truth and deception.

So, it can get worse. It's starting to feel like one of those nightmares of getting caught in a narrow, cobwebbed passage. But I'm into it now. ... Maybe if I tug on the right strand, a hidden

door will swing open. ... maybe I should try something other than this straight path ... a sharp turn, a 90° angle.

STANDARD	Latin, stāre (stand, make right angle to ground)	standardized test; raise standards; standard error; std form; std. deviation; std. measure; std. time; std. of living
NORMAL	Latin, norma (carpenter's square)	normal curve; normal/deviant; normative; normalizing; normal folk
PLANE	Latin, planus (to room about)	Euclidean plane; airplane; planar
PLAIN		plain talk; plain truths; plain simple; plain folk
PLAN		by the plan; plan ahead; according to plan; lesson plan; plan of attack/action

A new page. This time I begin with two words that I know -- again from my studies of formal mathematics -- to have to do with 90° angles: normal and standard. 'Normal' comes from *norma*, the carpenter's square. And 'standard' is about "standing up," making a right angle between something that is vertical and its horizontal base.

But they mean more than that ... and it doesn't take much pressure to squeeze a few tell-tale associations out of them. "Normal," for example, has stretched its tendrils into the realms of the correct and the deviant, the right and the wrong -- mostly because of the collision of two forces just over a century ago: Statisticians had co-opted the term to name their 'normal curve' in the 1800s. And at the end of that century, humanities researchers with a bad case of science envy saw this normalist construction as a route to scientific legitimacy.

Actually, 'standard' is caught up in that same, strange social sciences movement. Standardized examinations that generate their standard deviations are all about locating people under the normal curve. The meaning of *standard* has shifted from "an example to admire" to "the ways things are supposed to be."

Hmm.

Okay. I clearly pressed on the wrong thing that time. Obviously, grabbing at the strands of this web only gets me into more trouble. Maybe if I try to get right to the base of things, to where these words all came from.

Another page. I start to list some of the terms that seem to be key, the ones that this geometry seem to be built around: *point*, *straight*, *line*, *angle*, *standard*, *basic*, *parallel*, *plane*, *rule*, *normal*.

To the *Oxford English Dictionary* to assemble a parallel list of these words' origins.

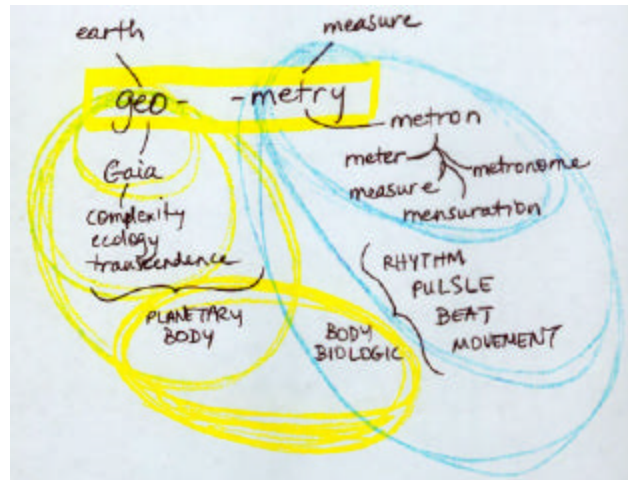
POINT	(L., <i>punctum</i>)	fist
STRAIGHT	(Gr., <i>streptos</i>)	stretch
LINE	(L., <i>linum</i>)	linen thread
ANGLE	(L., <i>angulus</i>)	ankle
STANDARD	(L., <i>stāre</i>)	stand, upright
BASIC	(Gr., <i>bainein</i>)	step, go
PARALLEL	(Gr., <i>parallelos</i>)	alongside one another
PLANE	(L., <i>planan</i>)	roam about
RULE	(L., <i>rēgula</i>)	wooden ruler
NORMAL	(L., <i>norma</i>)	carpenter's square

Fists, stretched linen threads, bent ankles, standing, stepping, walking beside, roaming, laying a piece of wood against the ground, building a wall out of that ground ...

I think that a few textbook writers got it wrong when they wrote that *geometry* originally meant 'earth measure.' Something gets lost in that translation. Somehow it forgets the body -- and, in the process, it mistakes 'a geometry' for 'the geometry.' A set of assumptions and their logical consequences that were intended to map the outer skin of the world were somehow mistaken for the skeleton. And as this geometry of the plane dissolves the skin and flesh to leave the lifeless bones of axioms and assertions, it simultaneously conceals itself in a web of associations, a tangle of literalized metaphors, a set of rules that have been imposed to determine what's right -- that is, what's right and not false, what's right and not evil ... what's straight.

But if Euclid's caricature of geometry is only *a* geometry and not *the* geometry, then what is geometry?

Back to the *OED*.

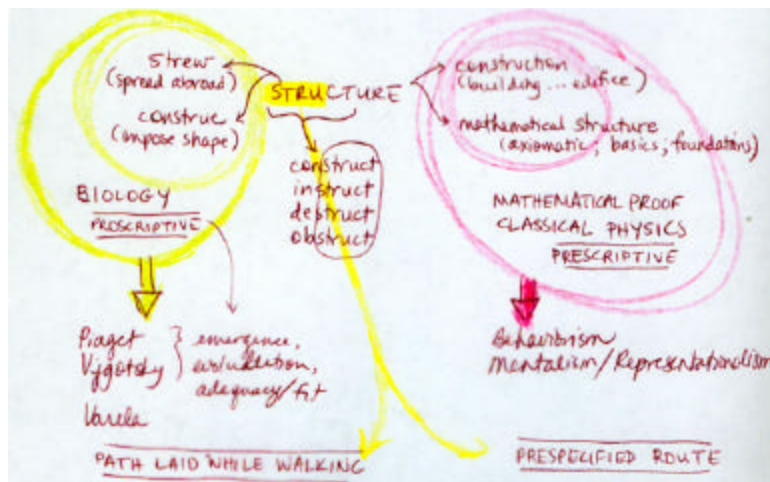


‘Geo-.’ From Gaia, goddess of earth ... a personified intuition of the ancients that now finds flesh in scientific discourse. Gaia calls us back to the ground of our being, to the complicit space of our action, to the genesis of our knowledge.

And ‘-metry.’ From the Greek *metron*, root of *meter*, *measure*, *mensuration*, *metronome*. There is a memory of the body in *metron*, still discernible in *feet* and many other units of measure, still audible in the poet’s and the musician’s meter. *Metron* is not just measure, it’s rhythm, pulse, beat, movement.

So geometry must be more than mere ‘earth measurement.’ It has something to do with pressing one’s body against the living world, of attuning oneself to the thrum of existence.

Something prompts me back to my first page, to the intuition that the term ‘structure’ holds a key. I press on it again.

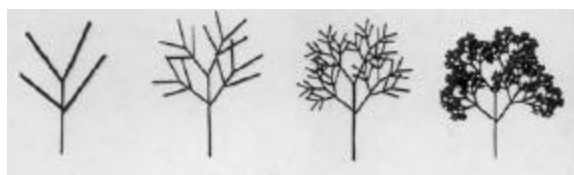


What happens if one chooses an alternative to the rigid, right sense of ‘structure’ -- that sense that’s tied up in the cultural rectal obsession to straighten up anything that seems the least bit messy? What is revealed when one rejects the right, the correct, the normal, the standard, the

orthodox, the rules? Is there an alternative vocabulary? What happens when one troubles the geometry that is implicit in popular characterizations of learning and teaching, knowing and knowledge, existence? Is it possible to reawaken perception to that invisible backdrop of modern schooling, those molds into which the unruly activity of learning are made to fit? Is it possible to escape the lines, planes, and rectangular grids used to collect and to represent learning intentions, to parse subject matters, to construct orderly progressions through fields of knowledge, to build lesson plans, to construct classrooms, to organize seating plans and daily schedules and grading rubrics?

The funny thing is that I wouldn't be able to ask such questions if I didn't already have an answer -- that is, if another, elaborated geometry hadn't already been developed to open my perceptions to an alternative.

This different geometry -- fractal geometry -- comes more as a revelation of deeply engrained assumption than as something new. It arrives like the sudden insight of the anthropologist who realizes that her years of detailed observations of the savages are not so much a reflection of the world she thought she was observing as a reflection of her own cultural biases -- the slanted lines that cut across the right-angled grain ... the things we're supposed to be straightening out in our quest for objectivity. It is a geometry that comes with a different generative dynamic and a different sort of object ... and this co-implicated process-and-product helps to illuminate -- and perhaps someday to eliminate -- the ways that Euclid's geometry are woven into modern schooling and studies of modern schooling.



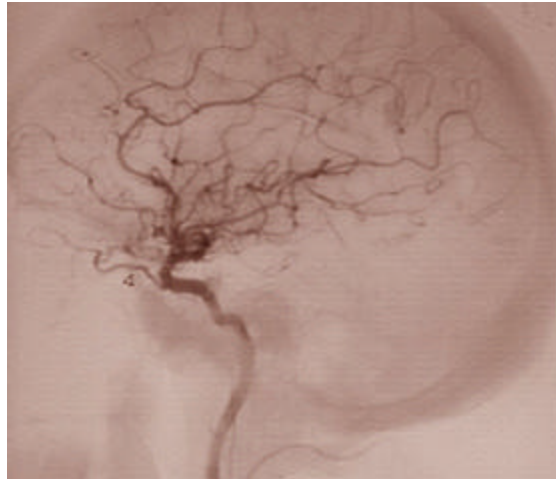
Fractal geometric figures are not built by linking points with segments or by combining parts into wholes. Rather, the generation of a fractal figure is more about recursive unfolding than about linear progress. Fractal geometry is a geometry of branching possibilities, of strange evolutions, of unexpected turns. It is a geometry in which the 'final' object is never really the final object ... merely the place where the observer steps into the endlessly elaborative process.



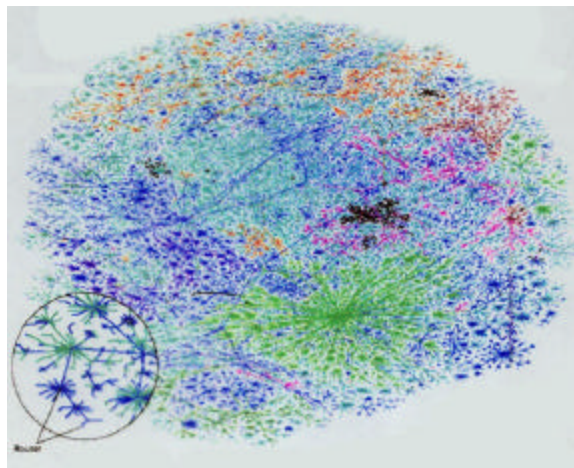
A tree, for instance, isn't a finished product. It's a continuously elaborated event, a recursive happening of branches branching into branches in a dance with the circumstances of its existence. What we see is completely familiar, yet utterly unique. And a favorite structure of nature, mimicked in rivers, streams, and washtub sludge ...



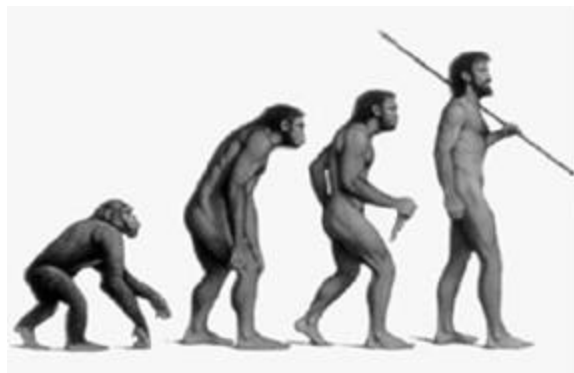
... in bones, neurons, and arteries ...



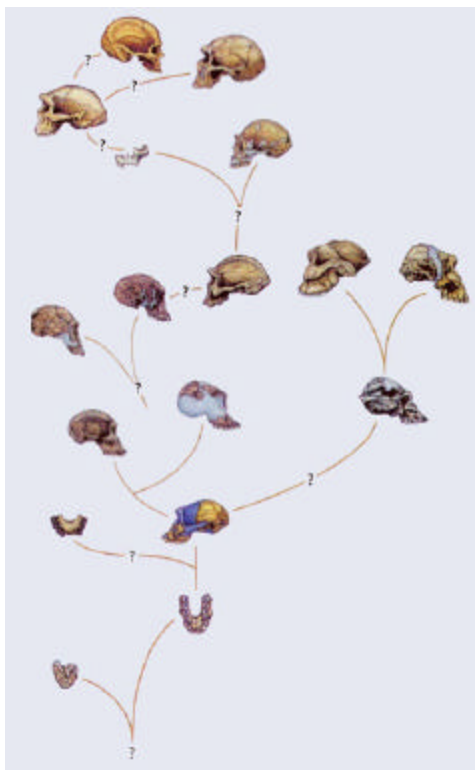
... and even deliberately copied by humans to structure and map cyberspace ...



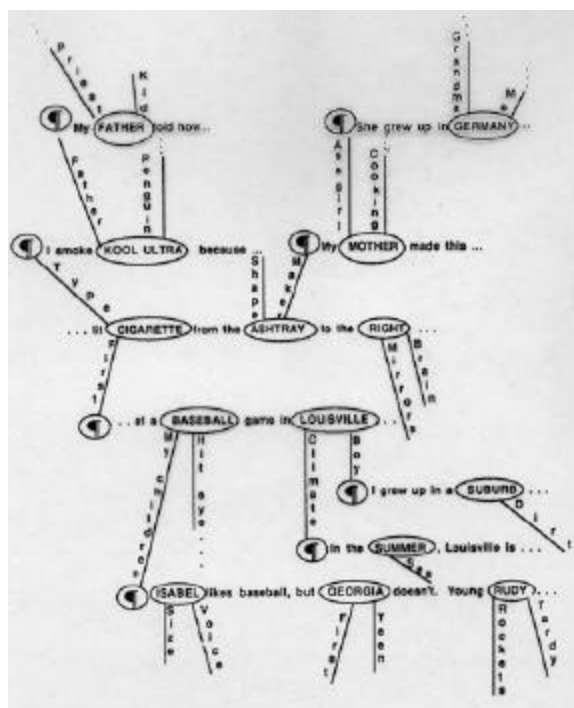
... and to replace the assumed line from scrambling simian to weapon-toting Caucasian male ...



... to a more fits-and-starts, happenstantial, accidental tracing of the emergence of our-species-among-other-species.



In fact, cognitive scientists and neurologists are even using such structures to talk about the ways that thinking happens and that memories are organized.



Press on any node of memory, and it will blossom into a similar, but volatile weave of association -- a weave that will be different for having been touched.

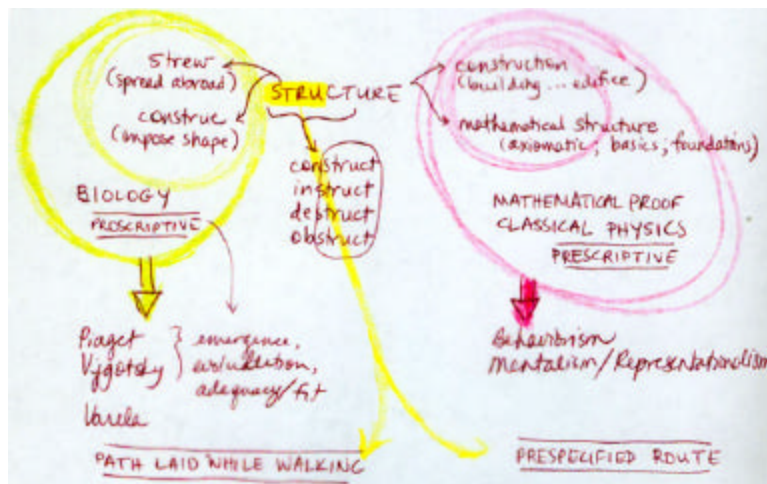
That's the hallmark of the fractal. Move in closer. Magnify it. It won't break down into fundamental components. As likely as not, in fact, it'll reveal even more intricate weaves. Its structure defies the Cartesian worldview as it refuses to reduce to basic parts.

This happens because fractals are not the product of linear chains of action, but of recursive processes. Each recursive step is an elaboration, a reiterative event that might settle into predictable routine, or that might fly off into wild gyrations. Your heart obeys a fractal rhythm. So does the stock market.

Perhaps that's why medical science and economics were among the first to embrace this new geometry.

But, for the life of me, I can't figure out why educational research is so slow on the uptake. Its enduring devotion to Euclid, its quests for linear relationships in a non-linear domain, its ready embrace of flowcharts built from boxes and arrows ...

It's all a big structural error.



Or, rather, a backing of the wrong structural horse. For some reason, educationists have chosen to work with a conception of structure that derives from Euclid: rigid, anticipated, planned ... planed, ruled, regulated, normal, logical, orthodox. And they seem to persist, even while so many other domains have revived the original sense of the term, the sense that was preserved by biologists: dynamic, emergent, co-evolutionary ... unruly, irregular, abnormal, analogical, unorthodox. This is the meaning of structure that recalls its kinship to *strew* and *construe*.

So that's what I'm after -- a geometry that provides a different structure ... that doesn't compel me to prune branches ... one that doesn't get tied up in concerns for being right/straight, but rather looks toward what's possible and what's adequate at this time in this place.

But, back to my crisis: What am I to do, now, with this mass, this mess of interpretive possibilities? What should I be doing to fulfill my responsibility to work with others in the grand project of modern schooling?

The fact that this writing has turned out to be a rather straightforward narrative is telling. And maybe that's not surprising. If the latest brain research is anywhere near the mark, then one of the most important of human capacities is logic.

But make no mistake, being capable of logical thought doesn't make us logical, any more than our being capable of flight makes us birds. Our interpretive capacities have much to do with this curious capacity -- this irrepressible tendency -- to take a tangle of experience and to impose edges, to trace out a path, to draw out a coherent tale that needs to be something more than self-indulgent poetic fancy. It has to do work in the realm of collective action.

The Lessons of Insight

Rebecca Luce-Kapler
Queen's University

"Why call this manuscript Hundreds and Thousands?" Emily Carr asks in her book, Hundreds and Thousands: The Journals of an Artist (1966). "Because," she continues, "it is made up of scraps of nothing which, put together, made the trimming and furnished the sweetness for what might have been a drab life sucked away without crunch. Hundreds and Thousands are minute candies made in England—round sweetnesses, all colours and so small that separately they are not worth eating . . . It was those tiny things that, collectively, taught me how to live. Too insignificant to have been considered individually, but like the Hundreds and Thousands lapped up and sticking to our moist tongues, the little scraps and nothingnesses of my life have made a definite pattern" (1966, p. v).

This quotation by Emily Carr draws me because it describes the way that my own work as a poet evolves. I read and examine many stories, pictures, journal entries and anecdotes as I think and work through a series of poems, such as the ones I wrote about Emily and her work, and this kind of practice further brings insight to my teaching and research. Reading Emily Carr's journal, I can enter the West Coast rainforest with her as she engages in interpretative practices to understand her strong emotional connection to and spiritual fulfillment in this Canadian landscape. Her processes unfold in journal entries where she questions, challenges and explores the possibilities of aesthetic creation as a way of knowing.

I am using my reading of this work to explore the relationship between interpretation and understanding, and, in turn, suggest what insights the work of art can bring to my involvement in research and learning about writing.

Emily Carr and the Group of Seven

In 1927, Emily Carr received an invitation from Eric Brown of the National Gallery in Ottawa to send some of her work for an exhibition and to come east herself for the opening. He

also suggested that she stop in Toronto to meet some landscape painters called the Group of Seven—a meeting that proved to be propitious for Emily because she saw in their canvases the kind of intensity that she had been struggling to represent. “I’m way behind them in drawing and in composition and rhythm and planes,” she wrote, “but I know inside me what they’re after and I feel that perhaps, given a chance, I could get it too. Ah, how I have wasted the years! But there are still a few left” (1966, p. 6). Later, she expressed more fully the impact their work and insights had had on her:

Oh, God, what have I seen? Where have I been? . . . Chords way down in my being have been touched . . . Something has called out of somewhere. Something in me is trying to answer. . . . Oh, these men, this Group of Seven, what have they created? . . . What language do they speak, those silent, awe-filled spaces? I do not know. Wait and listen; you shall hear by and by . . . (pp. 6-7)

During her time with them, she asked the group, particularly Lawren Harris, to explain their philosophy of art, their techniques, and their way of working. She compared their experience to her own struggles and to her ongoing search to reveal on canvas a deep connection to nature. She realized that such an exchange of ideas and techniques had been missing in her solitary practice, but seeing the Group of Seven’s work sharpened her understanding of her own process and made her eager to return to her studio, clearer now about what she wished to achieve. “When will I start to work?” she asked. “Lawren Harris’s pictures are still in my brain. They have got there to stay. I don’t believe anything will oust them. I hope not because they make my thoughts and life better” (p. 19).

Over the next few years, Emily worked intensely and decisively to realize her vision, including journaling as a regular and important part of this process:

Yesterday I went to town and bought this book to enter scraps in, not a diary of statistics and dates and decency of spelling and happenings but just to jot down in, unvarnished me, old me at fifty-eight—old, old, old, in most ways and in others just a baby with so much to learn and not much time left . . . it helps to write things and thoughts down . . . I want my thoughts clear and straight for my work. (p. 20)

And later she writes: “Trying to find equivalents for things in words helps me find equivalents in painting. That is the reason for this journal. Everything is all connected up” (p. 22). Her process is much larger than simply going into the woods with a sketchpad and some paints. Rather this work is multifaceted and encompasses her whole life, even its daily events. She walks her dogs and considers how she would paint the seaside; she reads a book and draws connections between the ideas she has read and her art. She finds that she even dreams her painting:

Last night I dreamed that I came face to face with a picture I had done and forgotten, a forest done in simple movement, just forms of trees moving in space. That is the third time I have seen pictures in my dreams, a glint of what I am striving to attain. (p. 25)

She continues her correspondence with Lawren Harris, discussing issues about their work. "They were the first real exchanges of thought in regard to work I had ever experienced," she notes. "They helped wonderfully. He made many things clear, and the unaccustomed putting down of my own thoughts in black and white helped me to clarify them and to find out my own aims and beliefs" (p. 21). Using her journal, she maintains a dialogue with herself as well, questioning what she is trying to understand and represent: "I'm always asking myself the question, What is it you are struggling for? What is that vital thing the woods contain, possess, that you want? Why do you go back and back to the woods unsatisfied, longing to express something that is there and not able to find it?" (pp. 28-29). Sometimes, she seems to speak directly to the work that engages her:

It is D'Sonoqua on the housepost up in the burnt part, strangled round by undergrowth. I want the pole vague and the tangle of growth strenuous. I want the ferocious, strangled lonesomeness of that place, creepy, nervy, forsaken, dank, dirty, dilapidated, the rank smell of nettles and rotting wood, the lush green of the rank sea grass and the overgrown bushes, and the great dense forest behind full of unseen things and great silence, and on the sea the sun beating down, and on the sand, everywhere, circling me, that army of cats, purring and rubbing, following my every footstep. (p. 26)

In these journal pages, she directs her efforts to the interpretation of the spirit of creation through painting. For Emily, as for many successful artists, the drive was to create a moment of being fully present in life. She reminds herself:

Do not try to do extraordinary things but do ordinary things with intensity. Push your idea to the limit, distorting if necessary to drive the point home and intensify it, but stick to the one central idea, getting it across at all costs. Have a central idea in any picture and let all else in the picture lead up to that one thought or idea. Find the leading rhythm and the dominant style or predominating form. (p. 32)

Her aesthetic practice intertwined with the other aspects of her life—daily work, friends and family, and engagement with other art forms and the work of others—to create a rich emotional landscape. Emily Carr understood how careful attention to the interpretive work of living enriched the interpretive work of her art.

I begin to see that everything is perfectly balanced so that what one borrows one must pay back in some form or another, that everything has its own place but is interdependent on the rest, that a picture, like life, must also have perfect balance. Every part of it also is dependent on the whole and the whole is dependent on every part. (p. 61)

Emily Carr searched for what she had not yet seen and sought out what she did not know to challenge what she had accomplished and to help her move closer to what she envisaged painting. She juxtaposed many different experiences with her work so that she could understand more deeply and imagine more sharply the art she was creating. To see more clearly, how the

interpretive work of the artist can bring insights to research and pedagogy, I return to a specific time in Carr's aesthetic practice that became a focus for my own work—her explorations of the D'Sonoqua.

The D'Sonoqua Works

Before Emily travelled to meet the Group of Seven, she had lived through fifteen years where she claimed not to have painted anything at all—at least, she thought, nothing of significance. She had been in France where she learned techniques of modern French painting, but had also spent much of that time in ill health. Back in Victoria, she opened a boarding house to make ends meet and the need to earn a living consumed her. For Emily, those were dark and bitter years with very little time for painting and art.

Her trip to Toronto, however, interrupted her isolation and her stifling self-pity. Entirely new possibilities opened up for her in the conversations with the other artists and these began to shape her conception of what she had been struggling to paint. She heard for the first time about theosophy, a philosophy that draws on spiritual traditions of both the East and West, emphasizing the spiritual richness of the environment and the role of the artist in expressing an inner life. She had not considered ideas of the spirit outside Christianity, and she was astonished to see their manifestation in the paintings, particularly in Lawren Harris' work. Much of his art "could be thought of as expressions fulfilling theosophic principles. Their emphasis on light as a primary means of expression related to the clear white light of theosophic symbolism representing eternal truth prior to its splitting into self-asserting colours" (Shadbolt, 1990, p. 69).

As well as the philosophic and spiritual principles that guided him, Harris also told Emily about the painting techniques that helped him achieve the energy of such life force in his landscapes. She noted in her journal: "Mr. Harris showed me the different qualities he put in his paint to give vibration. He often rubs raw linseed oil on to the canvas and paints into that, and he oils out his darks, when they sink in, with retouching varnish" (p. 16).

At last Emily had an opportunity to speak about her deep spiritual connection to nature and to learn how she could translate such an understanding through painting. As Doris Shadbolt notes in her exploration of the themes in Emily's work, this innate religious trait was a guiding force in the decisions that led to her artistic expression even though the link may not have been consciously made until she met the Group of Seven circle. "The Group," Shadbolt writes, "in providing her with the basic philosophical-spiritual construct in which her mature painting would be grounded, was crucial to her resurgence" (p. 66).

The juxtaposition of these experiences and conversations enabled Emily to reinterpret her work and to realize how she could resymbolize these understandings onto canvas. Such work for her was a deeply sensual engagement of memory, emotion, and insight.

Do not forget life, artists. A picture is not a collection of portrayed objects nor is it a certain effect of light and shade nor is it a souvenir of a place nor a sentimental reminder, nor is it a show of colour nor a magnificence of form, nor yet is it anything seeable or sayable. It is a glimpse of God interpreted by the soul. It is

life to some degree expressed. (p. 57)

In the three years or so following this meeting, one can see the shift in Emily's work beginning. While she had long painted West Coast Aboriginal themes and subjects, her early work in this area seems anthropological, more a faithful reproduction of what Carr saw as a rapidly disappearing way of life. Her paintings during the early years of the 1930s, however, begin to show an intermingling of her understanding of Aboriginal mythology and her feeling about nature. For example, in her 1931 painting *Vanquished*, one can see the signs of a disappearing race of Zuoqua but also the expressiveness of the landscape with its heavy hanging clouds and vertical bursts of light upon a land seemingly in upheaval. She worked to express the play of light, shadow, colour, and form in the forest, trying to create an emotional landscape exuding energy and spirit.

Some of her more interesting work from this time were her paintings of D'Sonoqua, a legendary woman from Kwakiutl myth representing the dark side of maternal instinct that was threatening instead of nurturing to children. Emily describes her first vision of this sculpture:

She seemed to be part of the tree itself, as if she had grown there at its heart, and the carver had only chipped away the outer wood so that you could see her. . . . Now I saw her face. The eyes were two rounds of black, set in wider rounds of white, and placed in deep sockets under wide, black eyebrows. Their fixed stare bored into me as if the very life of the old cedar looked out, and it seemed that the voice of the tree itself might have burst from that great round cavity, with projecting lips, that was her mouth. . . . The rain stopped, and white mist came up from the sea, gradually paling her back into the forest. It was as if she belonged there, and the mist were carrying her home. Presently the mist took the forest too, and, wrapping them both together, hid them away. (1951, p. 33)

Emily writes about her emotional response to the carving, using personal narrative to interpret the strong expression of this art form. This view of art had been "opened up for her by her contact with Harris and the other easterners. They had substantiated her interest in native art and had enabled her to identify virtues in it that related to her vision of art" (Shadbolt, p. 115). Another experience with a D'Sonoqua quoted from Emily's journal earlier in this paper, was equally as mysterious and mystical for her. She had come across a village, which was deserted except for a collection of cats that followed her and gathered at her feet for her two days of sketching. In the painting, *Zunoqua of the Cat Village*, Emily represents the eeriness through the heads and eyes of cats emerging from here and there on the canvas in a surreal and disjointed fashion. In her second painting of this D'Sonoqua, *Strangled by the Growth*, she reverts to the more fearful image of figure that "glares malevolently through the writhing, semi-abstract bands of foliage" (Blanchard, 1987, p. 226).

The emergence of this threatening female figure in the forest was a catalyst for Emily to interpret the contradictory feelings of nurturing and threat that exist in each moment. These paintings also seemed to be a transition for her, a bridge between her more realistic representation of Aboriginal life and her greater focus on the forest with its own mythic

mysticism. In the years following, this focus on the character of the land would texture Emily's interpretations.

Interpretation is a powerful, creative process and from Emily's writing at this time, we can develop some insights into this process. Emily's conversations with practicing artists brought her into a new conversation with her work. "Oh, these men, this Group of Seven, what have they created?" she writes. "What language do they speak, those silent, awe-filled spaces? I do not know. Wait and listen; you shall hear by and by" (1966, pp. 6-7). Her understanding of painting shifted when juxtaposed to a different discourse and a new technique as Lawren Harris introduced her to theosophy and showed her some of his techniques to give the paint a new vibrancy. Her aesthetic and spiritual engagements with the Group of Seven gave her a clearer understanding of her own desires for her art and of her own history, including leading her to understand that her inspiration lay not in theosophy, but rather in the deeper understanding it brought to her Christianity. The tension between her old way of working and understanding and these new ideas brought her to look more deeply at what she was representing through her art as her description of dreams and her assessments of her sketches and paintings reveal in the journal.

My interest in the potency of these aesthetic practices became a framework to structure similar conditions for writers by creating a community of practice through writing groups, by shifting forms of expression, and by creating opportunities for in depth conversations about their work with another writer all to create interesting occasions for interpretation within a research project.

Writing Groups and Shifting Forms

I formed the initial writing group with three graduate students, hoping to develop an interpretive community where we could write, talk about the work and our processes, and move towards creating other groups led by each of us individually that would further explore these issues. Another important aspect to this group was our reading of theoretical texts in relation to our discussion about writing. Like the Group of Seven and their exploration of theosophy, we read about postmodern philosophy and complexity theory as a way of conceptualizing new ways to think about writing.

To challenge the forms of writing, I shaped three writing tasks for the group where we would describe one incident through three different genres: narrative, poetry, and hypermedia. We started with narratives, bringing them to the group to share and to discuss the texts in detail, working to illustrate the event as clearly as we could. We then spent several sessions responding to and rewriting our pieces to focus on the important particulars of the event, to develop the sensory details that would involve the readers, and to write about the incident as richly as we could within a two page limit. The next step involved using the incident in the narrative to create a poem, again reworking that form with the group. Finally, we used the narrative and the poem to create a hypermedia interpretation of the incident, using such aspects as text, picture, and sound.

To give you a sense of what happened to our texts through this process, I will describe briefly some aspects of my writing in this group. My narrative described the last days of my

grandmother's life twenty years ago. As she lay dying in the hospital, my mother and I cleaned out her room at the nursing home, sorting through the final treasures and detritus of her life. During this day, my mother gave me Grandma's four needlepoint pictures:

After helping me unload the chair, my mother reaches into one of the boxes and hands me four of Vantie's needlepoint. Two are pink roses on a cream background; the other two are a boy and girl with toys—the boy with a dog and wagon, the girl with a doll and carriage—each against a grey background. They have hung in my grandmother's house ever since she finished them in the early sixties. I can remember her working on them, having them framed, hanging them. They are exactly what I want.

When I came to write the poem about this event, however, I could not include all of these details into one poem. I needed to find an emotional heart for the piece and so had to return to the narrative and think about what thread of feeling drove the story. It was the image of my grandmother in the hospital:

Memory

Curled
fetus
circle

of light
swimming
in thickness.

Parchment
fingers
touch

silver frame
imagine
playmate.

Planting
gardens
in 1950

calendar
pages
of forgetting.

Ironing
paisley
tailored

waist
green
buttons.

Reluctant
ending

Immaculate
forgetfulness.

When we turned to work with the hypermedia program, *Hyperstudio*, I was faced with the possibility of interpreting this incident using more than words—a new challenge for me. *Hyperstudio* uses what are called ‘cards’ that the author links together much as pages are linked on the Internet. Each card can contain text, picture, animation, or sound. The most that I could manage at this stage were snippets of text and clip art while some of the other participants were more adventurous and did their own drawings. For example three lines from my poem: waist/green/buttons were on a card along with a picture of a button. Clicking on one of the links could take you to a piece of the narrative: *I hold up one of Vantie’s house dresses that she has sewn. It’s crisp, carefully ironed paisley with a tiny, tailored waist. Even in her every day dresses she prepared herself carefully, her love of clothing an important part of her.* Or it could take you to a description of my grandmother’s button jar: *Since my grandmother’s death, her button jar has sat on my shelf: a two-quart sealer like the ones she used for canning dill pickles or carrots or raspberries filled with underwear buttons, leather buttons, frogs, hooks, eyes, brass buttons, hand made buttons, button string toys and memories.*

While the narrative was familiar and chronological and the poem was attentive to sensual nuance, the hypermedia piece opened up the directions and emotional depths of the story. Small details took me on a detour, images from the poem centred me for a moment in the sensation of the time, snippets of the story led into other pieces of my grandmother’s life. The event seemed to explode in possibilities. Each interpretation brought a different colour and rhythm to the event. Just as time and experience will shift our understanding of an event, so can forms of interpretation.

In Depth Conversations

Based on the structure of this first writing group, other writing groups of education students did happen led by the graduate research assistants. Besides the work through different forms, and the small group where they examined and discussed writing, I arranged to meet with each education student individually for an extended conversation about his or her writing. I structured these times so that we could specifically explore the different possibilities in their texts. What decisions had they made in writing? What other decisions could they have made? How did shifting forms help them realize some of those possibilities? I wondered. To talk about these questions, I drew from Gary Morson’s work *Narrative and Freedom* (1994). Morson explains that narratives have worked very well to create a single line out of a multiplicity of alternatives, but in doing so, we have tended to give an anachronistic sense to the past, shutting down the

more complex and plural nature of experience. He suggests approaching texts with a sense of “sideshadowing” to rediscover the multiplicity of interpretation. He writes:

Instead of casting a foreshadow from the future, it casts a shadow ‘from the side,’ that is, from the other possibilities. Along with an event, we see its alternatives; with each present, another possible present. Sideshadows conjure the ghostly presence of might-have-beens or might-bes. While we see what did happen, we also see the image of what else could have happened. In this way, the hypothetical shows through the actual and so achieves its own shadowy kind of existence in the text. (p.118)

In the sideshadowing interviews, asking participants to consider the alternatives with which they worked not only uncovered how they understood their interpretations of an event to shift from one form to another, but they also could see the implications of other choices for the text.

To prepare for a sideshadowing interview I read the work that the writer had chosen to discuss with me—at this stage it was either the narrative or the poem and many gave me both. I marked places where I wondered about words they had chosen, where I found myself thinking about what was not said, or where I saw interesting figurative devices. I marked choices of line break, places where rhythm shifted or faltered, and images that were particularly striking. I engaged in what Jane Gallop (2000) calls “close reading.”

One young woman gave me a narrative about breaking up with a boyfriend. She carefully described the event with busy images of the train station and the contrasting thoughts of the woman as she prepares to tell her companion that their relationship is over. The scene feels quite innocuous until the line: “Before she could move in for the kill, she would have to ready herself.” When I asked the writer why she had chosen this metaphor, she told me that it had been a case of writing it and thinking afterwards. “It’s the rewriting that counts more than the original stream-of-consciousness,” she said.

“Is the rewriting when you question the words?” I asked.

“Yes,” she agreed. “In the rewriting you become more conscious. This draft was still unconscious.”

As we spoke further about her piece, I could see that she was somewhat shaken by her choice of words and that she was beginning to see the writing in a way she had not before. Perhaps she had much more to say about this event than the narrative or her explanations suggested. In our discussion, those words had seemed to be a glimpse of the forbidden—in this case the anger that women are discouraged from expressing. Yet in dreams, slips of the tongue, or our writing, we catch sight of the workings of the unconscious, which is aware of far more than our conscious mind recognizes.

Paying close attention to the words, we are reminded of the connotative character of language—every word is coloured by its life in other contexts. Writers know that language can be ambiguous and this can make us hesitant, certain that we will be misunderstood about those important moments we write on the page. At the same time, the ambiguity of language lets us slip and slide, hiding behind our own intentions in the creating of a text. Spending time in

careful attention, casting a light with another spills the sideshadow across the page and in that moment, we can break the singular line of the narrative into threads of possibility. Morson explains:

Sideshadowing admits, in addition to actualities and impossibilities, a *middle realm* of real possibilities that could have happened even if they did not By focusing on the middle realm of possibilities, by exploring its relation to actual events, and by attending to the fact that things could have been different, sideshadowing deepens our sense of the openness of time. It has profound implications for our understanding of history and of our own lives while affecting the ways in which we judge our present situation. It also encourages skepticism about our ability to know the future and the wisdom of projecting straight lines from current trends or values. (p. 6)

With sideshadowing, we can stay with the text for a time and consider the possibilities that unfold from what we have said and what we have not. This importance of attention to the text brings me back to Emily Carr and her understandings. Working within an interpretive milieu such as communities of practitioners where one is exposed to rich conversation, new images or ideologies, and different practices, helps artists understand what they wish to express. While such interpretive work energizes aesthetic practice, Emily Carr described another crucial aspect of interpretation. She wrote often about just sitting in the woods “waiting for things to move,” as she described it. “No good just laying the ideas there in a heap so the first puff blows them away,” she explained. “It is easy to grab the impression, to suggest, leaving half to the imagination of the other fellow. Tighten the idea into a definite plan, take it through the sketch, find the threads, loose them again perhaps and pick them up again and again till you don’t see the threads but the tightly woven fabric that forms a complete nest” (1966, p. 181).

Many things can lead us toward the center of gravity in our work, but we need time and attention to bring to fruition the power in our words, our paint or our musical notes.

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LOVE STORIES

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While waiting in line to buy my groceries, I usually scan the front covers of popular magazines. Three topics dominate: sex, love, and dieting. Of course, these topics are thematically related. As the popular narrative goes, one needs to be thin to be attractive, attractive to be considered sexy, and sexy to fall in love. If these cultural myths are to be believed, falling in love is something that occurs naturally, not something that is learned.

As is the case with most children, in my early years I internalized these myths. For me, much of this learning emerged from relations I developed with school basal readers. Weren't all families supposed to be like Dick and Jane's? Of course, as a child who attended Catholic churches and schools, I was also convinced that the quintessential family was Mary, Joseph and Jesus. That Jesus was, apparently, "immaculately conceived" was simply one of the contradictions that I ignored in order to create a seamless understanding of what the world was like. I also watched a lot of television, learning there that falling in love could be something like what I noticed on shows like "The Brady Bunch" or "Leave it to Beaver." If falling in love (and staying in love) was accurately portrayed in the books I read and the television shows I watched, then no one I knew was in love.

But of course this was not so. Whenever I visited my aunt and uncle who lived "out east" (our way, in western Canada, of referring to anything east of the province of Manitoba), I knew I was in the presence of two persons who were in love. It was not their habit of hand-holding that convinced me of this as much as it was the mutual interest they seemed to be able maintain in particular projects: the small business they owned, the music they played and sang, the meals they prepared. In my more recent visits to them I realize that in retirement they have found new projects to collect and support their affection for one another: caring for their grandchildren, gardening, maintaining their real estate investments. For my Aunt Rita and Uncle Heinz, love is not an object thrown between them that must be continually tended; rather, love exists as an inextricable quality of their shared world.

It seems to me that most of us don't really know when we're in love, but we do seem to know when we're not. We are particularly aware of times when we *were* in love. I did not know, for example, that I loved my first partner of 12 years until after we had parted. Only then did I notice how much I missed our daily contact. Realizing this has helped me to maintain my current relationship. Rather than trying to locate my emotional attachment to my partner in a large feeling that might be called "being in love," I find it by noticing the many ways in which my fondness circulates in the small details of our shared lives. Love is organized by the small stories of lived experience, not by grand narratives of romantic love.

This is true, as well, for familial love. Although I knew I loved my mother, I did not know *how* I loved her until the last weeks before her death. As I spent time with her during her final days, what Elizabeth Hay (2000) in her novel A Student of Weather calls an "apartment of emotion" was erected in my consciousness. Because I had learned, by then, that love lives in

details, I spent my last days with my mother paying attention to them. I was no longer bored or annoyed when she retold small stories from her childhood. I became interested in her new “hospital family” and learned to be attentive to the relationships that were developing. It was this understanding which, at several points during her final weeks, helped me to advocate on her behalf when doctors tried to move her from one ward of the hospital to the other. While they were primarily interested in her physical care, I knew that what mattered were her already-established relationships with people. “She does not need to make any more new friends,” I argued. In the end, my mother and I did not express our love by continually affirming to one another that we loved one another (although there was some of that). We grew in love by attending to projects of immediate importance and significance.

These lessons of love have taught me to pay attention to the details of my experience with other people, particularly those with whom I am most intimate. It seems, then, that one does not only need to learn to fall in love, one needs to learn to *recognize* when one is in love. This is not as easy as it might seem. As I have experienced it through my relations with other persons and with fictional and biographical characters, being in the middle of love usually means that the feeling of love becomes transparent, unnoticed. It is only when love is withheld or missing that one understands its boundaries.

It seems that enduring love does not happen suddenly, nor does it occur in ways suggested by overly familiar narratives about falling in love. The belief that falling in love involves nothing other than meeting the “right person” at the “right time,” positions events of love alongside lotteries and other games of chance—not an optimistic view for anyone aiming for loving attachments. This narrative suggests that falling in love is a prerequisite for ultimate bonding with a life partner. Most crucially, falling in love—if and when it happens—creates a bedrock for happiness. It is not surprising, then, that the idea of falling in love collects so much cultural worry and anxiety. Because falling in love is tied to happiness, the prospect of not finding the “right one” is frightening. How can one be complete or fully achieved without the experience of romantic love? Although it is acknowledged that most human activities must be learned, falling in love is understood as something innate, almost instinctual. As a result, falling in love has been reduced to some coincidental meeting of the biological and the experiential.

If falling in love is a learning experience, then understanding what it means to fall in love requires that some theory of learning be applied to its processes. Following Culler (1997), I define theory as something invented by humans that calls into question what most people believe to be “commonsense” understanding. Theory, of course, is intimately tied to different philosophic traditions that, while usually explicitly developed and circulated in academic settings, eventually work their ways into mainstream popular culture. All human thinking and action emerges alongside the theoretical narratives that are used to describe them. Because theory is entwined with everyday activity and language it is usually invisible and remains in the background of human experience. Although there are many contesting theories that are influential to human thought and action, there continues to be one tradition that, stubbornly, dominates.

Despite the fact that it has been contested for some years now in the academy, philosophic traditions that emerge from the work of Plato continue to organize popular beliefs about the

relationships among humans, their contexts of experience, and the making and using of knowledge. Central to these Western philosophic traditions is a belief in “Reason.” The idea of Reason has become foundational to the belief that “Truth” exists outside human experience. Human beings, it seems, are challenged to develop Reason in order to hone their capacities to seek and/or discern the world as it “really is.” This valorizing of Reason has supported the creation of conditions that have allowed humans to believe themselves to be miraculously detached from the ecological and spiritual worlds. Among other problems, this theoretical belief has supported the continued mass destruction and abuse of the planet and biosphere, and an enduring belief in the superiority of the human species. While pre-modern human beings believed themselves to be in the midst of an ecologic and cosmic system that, in large part, was out of their control, we moderns erroneously believe that we can eventually, as 17th century philosopher and scientist Francis Bacon so charmingly suggested, “torture nature’s secrets from her” for our own purposes. Just as we believe that nature’s truths can be excised by Reason so, too, do we believe that love can be found.

In order to support this grand myth of Reason and its ability to eventually learn all of nature’s secrets, we moderns have created a theory for what constitutes learning and a theory for what constitutes the self. It goes something like this: Learning means developing one’s capacities to become aware of what truths exist outside our experience so that these might become useful in our development. From this theoretical perspective, learning is preoccupied with developing innate human qualities in order to accumulate information. The more information the human subject can accumulate, the closer she or he will be to understanding the “truths” of the universe. Learning, then, is not a project of accommodating to one’s contexts; it is a project of learning to control them. It is not surprising, then, that most of us believe that love is out there somewhere and that in order to achieve it we need to find it using our developed perceptual and interpretive skills. In order to change the way falling in love is understood, these no-longer-very-useful theories about how people learn things must be abandoned in favor of a more complex understanding of learning.

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Although many readers may not interpret it as a “love story” Martha Brooks’ (1997) novel Bone Dance shows how love emerges from the tangled relations of memory, personal and cultural history. Set in the Canadian prairie province of Manitoba, Bone Dance explores how teenagers Alexandra Sinclair and Lonny LaFreniere learn about love. Developed around each of their journeys to learn about unknown parents and family and personal secrets, this novel reminds readers that one’s experience is, in large part, structured by histories that are not of one’s own making. Primary to the argument I present in this article, is the suggestion that this loving attachment does not develop in ways represented by commonsense discourses of romantic love.

Bone Dance reminds readers that human consciousness is multilayered and recursive. It does not march forever forward but, rather, achieves its moments of awareness from overlapping loops of memory, present perception, and future imaginings. Cultural artifacts such as books, photographs, art, music, and letters are examples of the objects that serve to collect memory and history and, ultimately, that function to organize human identity. This novel shows that a sense of self is not so much enveloped by one’s skin but, rather, exists more ambiguously in the relations among memory, history, language, and objects of the human made and more-than-human world. A human being identifies her or himself and is identified by others through

involvement in intricate webs of relations. When we say “I know that person” or “I know myself” what we are really saying is “I know something about how that person is involved in the world” or “I have a coherent understanding of how I am involved in the world.”

Of course, knowing about worldly relations is often not as easy as it might seem. In Bone Dance, readers learn that Alexandra is a 17-year-old Métis woman who has never met her White father, Earl McKay. But she has a relationship with him nonetheless, one that has been developed through stories her mother tells, and from occasional letters she receives from him. Although the persona of her father is largely invented through the interpretive tasks of piecing together these narratives and letters, for Alexandra the relationship she has with Earl is not less influential than those she has with other persons.

Alexandra’s imagined relationship to her father contributes, in important ways, to the identity that she continually forges for herself. Like all human beings who engage in daily acts of inventing information to overcome gaps in their knowledge, Alexandra pieces together various narratives and other experiences that circulate around her, and from these distills an ongoing sense of self identity. Her eventual partner in love, Lonny LaFreniere, must also do some inventing to create his own identity. Not only has he never known his biological father, but also because his mother dies shortly after her marriage to his stepfather, he must rely on family and community stories to maintain connections to his biological and cultural heritage.

Through these characters, Bone Dance shows readers that identity not only emerges from what is presently known but, to a great extent, is affected by what is present, but not represented. For both Lonny and Alexandra, family and personal secrets participate in the ways in which they organize and express personal and cultural knowledge.

These secrets, of course, become strongly influential to the ways in which one organizes one’s life. For Alexandra and Lonny, the existence of secret knowledge creates a kind of emotional anesthesia, an inability to make direct and deep contact with others. In order to restore feeling, they must learn about and represent the secrets that have been structuring their experiences. However, contrary to what is commonly believed, the unveiling of secrets is not simply a matter of telling the truth. A precursor to learning about (and from) secret knowledge is the creating of conditions for the development of insight.

For Alexandra, these conditions present themselves when she makes a journey to visit the property her father left to her. It is here she learns from a letter he wrote, and which she received after his death, that he was addicted to alcohol for most of his life. With this family secret revealed, Alexandra begins to understand his absence from her life. She develops further insight by spending time alone in the cabin he built and lived in during his last years. For Alexandra this is like living in an archive. However, in order to interpret this archive, she must learn some new skills. The most important and difficult one, it seems, is to begin to notice the small details of her father’s life. This is not possible by merely relying on visual perception. It is not merely examining her father’s life objects that help her to understand him. Instead, Alexandra finds that she must incorporate these objects into her daily living practices. Wearing her father’s leather jacket that she finds hanging on a hook behind a door, using his kitchen utensils, sitting in his chair while looking at the view that was previously his, and walking the trails created by his

footsteps helps her to understand him and his contexts. As Alexandra's knowledge about her father is elaborated, she begins to develop new personal insights. Most importantly, she comes to learn that life seems small only if it is not understood as connected to dying. As Alexandra continues to interpret her place in history, she feels herself coming home.

Lonny's project of personal reconciliation is more difficult, since it requires the telling of a secret from his boyhood, one involving curiosity and the excavation of bones from the ancient burial ground located on what is now Alexandra's land. Because this act closely precedes the sudden death of his mother, Lonny comes to believe that his ancestors are punishing him for desecrating their graves. For Lonny, this secret becomes a collecting place for growing uncertainty about his position in his family and community. Adrift with secret knowledge, he moves through the world without developing deep emotional bonds with others. Although he has many sexual contacts with women, and develops a number of casual friendships with men, these skirt the surface of his consciousness, never becoming rooted in deep and committed ways.

Although there are many explanations that can be offered for Lonny's ongoing experiences of alienation, I believe that many of his difficulties emerge from the curious ways secrecy has organized his experiences. As covert knowledge, Lonny's secret remains unchanged and, therefore, so must the small stories he creates around that secret. Unlike other experiential narratives that continually shift and accommodate to current and imagined circumstances, the structures supporting secrecy remain fixed. These fixed structures of covert knowledge become foundational to Lonny's experience, continually inhibiting his ability to invent a more generous and flexible sense of self-identity. I believe it is this that prevents him from experiencing the deep satisfaction of love. Before Lonny can fall in love, he must learn that experiences of loving others depend upon learning to enlarge the boundaries of one's self to accommodate other narratives. Before love can occur, Lonny's tangle of secrecy must be dissolved.

Bone Dance helps readers to understand that because love is always influenced by history and by present circumstances, it is not really something that is carried *inside* lovers. Love is something that exists in the relationships people develop with one another. This is not, as commonly believed, a relationship that is founded upon each of the lover's already-known and represented identities but, rather, is one that emerges from some project of involvement that exceeds each of their individual selves. Whatever the project—whether it is running the family farm, writing books together, raising children, or some combination of shared activities—it is the *project* that becomes the collecting place for affection between two persons. Love needs lovers to be interested in something other than themselves or each other—something that, paradoxically, requires that conditions be created for lovers to become attentive to and caring to one another.

Of course, loving relations are also influenced by biology. While sexual attraction is strongly influenced by culture, like all species, humans are drawn to one another for reasons that exceed cultural interpretations. Whether these are opposite- or same-sex attractions, most human beings know the phenomenon of being strongly drawn to another human. Typically followed by a period of what is known as "infatuation"—a state where biological and experiential components of attraction collect into a pleasurable obsession—for many couples sexual attraction becomes one of the cornerstones of loving relationships. It is important to remember,

however, that infatuation is not love, at least not the kind of love that is experienced by Lonny and Alexandra.

For these characters, the difference between infatuation and love might be described as the difference between the experience of feeling strong attraction to another human being and one of developing an interpreted understanding of one's relationship with someone. Infatuation, as Lonny had experienced it with women before Alexandra, required the Other be continually present (either physically or psychologically) in order for the relationship to continue. What Lonny failed to understand was that love does not require sexual contact, but it does depend upon some ongoing project.

Bone Dance shows that human beings can experience love by learning how to create conditions for love to develop. Most important, Bone Dance helps its readers to understand that falling in love is always an historical and interpretive cultural act. Love collects more than just the lovers; love collects the complexity of their many worldly attachments, including those that live in memory. The strong desire human beings have to fall in love, then, is not really a selfish desire. Falling in love can be a deeply moral and ethical act. In caring for and loving each other, human beings must dissolve the boundaries of their own carefully crafted identities. This is not merely an act of attention to another person. As the characters in Bone Dance learn, it is a deeply spiritual and ecological act.

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As is common in most university settings, my colleagues and I are required to have students write evaluations of our courses and our teaching abilities. Most of us have mixed feelings about these, since, as one of my colleagues has noticed, these course evaluations are either "love letters" or "hate mail." While this may be overstating the case, it has certainly been my experience that when asked, students are usually unable to extricate the subject matter from their experienced relationship with their teacher. And, while there are certainly those evaluations that exist somewhere in between the "love letter," "hate mail" categories, I have noticed that students' remarks about courses I have taught are often polarized in this way.

These experiences of love and hate are not confined to university settings, of course. Because I teach in a Faculty of Education, I have many opportunities to notice how events of learning are organized by interpersonal attachments and emotions. Although I notice this in my work with beginning teachers and experienced teachers in schools, I become most keenly aware of it each year when I ask my teacher candidates to critically reflect on their past experience with teachers by writing descriptive narratives of events of learning that have mattered to them. While I never explicitly ask them to write about teachers, they nearly always do.

In examining some of the narratives my students have written over the years, it has become clear that common to most of them is an attention to what the teacher has asked students to learn. Favorite teachers seem to help students become interested in particular subjects: "I love math because of Mrs. Williams." "I became an artist because of what Mr. Ford taught me." "I learned to love music from Mrs. Melling." Although the students claim to love their teacher, most of their narratives do not describe teachers but, rather, describe what the teachers made significant.

When students read these narratives of favorite teachers in class, I ask them what they remember about the teachers. They usually respond by telling me more about what teachers asked them to do in class. I always must press them to think past these pedagogical practices. “What did you know about *them*?” In most instances, students know almost nothing about these teachers. And, of course, this is not surprising, given the fact that the world of school, for both students and teachers, is a world unto itself, one that is only loosely connected to “not school.” They do not know much about their favorite teachers, and yet they love them. Or so they say. It seems to me that they love what they and the teacher have become interested in. They loved what happened in the science lab. They loved the challenge of solving mathematical problems. They loved what they learned about history or geography. They loved being interested in something with someone else.

But, of course, there is more to it than this. Also embedded in the narratives of good teachers that students write are references to the curiosity of the teacher. This is usually first represented as an interest in the student, the writer of the narrative: “My teacher was interested in me. He took time to find out about me.” When asked to elaborate, however, most of my students cannot recall specific instances where the teacher has probed for personal details. Instead, what they describe is the teacher’s interest in what is studied and how this was made personally relevant to the student.

I have come to believe that the narratives beginning teachers write about favorite teachers are expressions of a complex loving attachment. They are narratives that represent a strong feeling of emotional and psychic attachment that students have felt (and continue to feel) for some of their teachers. We could call this feeling love. The kind of love my students are writing about is not unlike the love depicted in Bone Dance. It is a love that emerges from the hard work of making something with other people.

Although it is shocking to my students, I tell them great teachers love what they are teaching more than they love their students. This does not mean that they do not care for their students, nor does it mean that they do not develop strong feelings of attachment to them. Instead, it means that good teachers understand that if people are to become committed to one another, they need a shared project. The teacher’s most important work is to create conditions whereby students are able to enter into a world of inquiry that is new and interesting. At the same time, the good teacher understands that if this world of inquiry is to remain interesting to the teacher, its boundaries must be continually expanded to include what is not familiar to the teacher. Good teaching, then, depends upon the teacher’s ability to create conditions whereby she and her students can enter into a shared world of inquiry that while primarily organized by her, is also able to accommodate what students know and, importantly, what is generated through their shared interest. If teachers love what they are teaching and invite students into an inquiry of that subject matter, both the teacher and the students will experience love.

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In Fugitive Pieces (1996) the character Jakob Beer suggests, “if you learn to love one landscape, you can learn to love others” (p. 82). Learning to love a landscape, like learning to love anything, means learning its details and noticing the way in which one’s involvement with those details is interesting and influential. Unfortunately, familiarity obscures detail and that is

why so many people do not love the landscapes to which they have become habituated. In order to learn to love a landscape, one must pay attention to it.

This has become more apparent to me in recent years. Although I grew up in the middle of the Canadian prairies, I did not love them until I learned to walk through unfarmed grasslands with attention. I needed to try to notice what was in front of me, rather than walking for fitness or walking to appreciate the wide horizon of a prairie sky. While both of these are worthwhile, they do not challenge what is immediately present to conscious perception. In order to learn to love a prairie landscape, I needed to walk in the prairies with my friend Pat and her Labrador retriever, Sophie. Like all dogs, Sophie is only interested in details and, through her interest, I came to notice features of the prairie that had previously been invisible to me. And, because Pat has decided to become knowledgeable about native plants, through her interest I am learning a vocabulary to accompany my newfound loving attachment to a prairie landscape. As we meander up and down the prairie trails, stopping to pay attention to what Sophie is noticing, I am learning to love the prairies and, at the same time, I am deepening my affection for my long-time friend. Learning how to fall in love with a landscape means paying attention to and learning about its details. Sharing this project with someone can deepen loving attachments to other people.

These skills of attention and discernment can be honed from textual engagement practices. In her essay "The Ethics of Close Reading" Jane Gallop (2000) describes and analyzes close reading practices she teaches her university students. While she makes a number of interesting points, the one most relevant for arguments I am presenting in this article is her insistence that it is important to teach students how to attend to the marks on the page made by the writer. In asking students to notice and interpret details of the text that are usually not noticed (footnotes, repeated phrases and images, etc.), Gallop is doing what all teachers must do: pointing to aspects of the world that students might not notice. In asking students to attend to details, Gallop is asking them to learn the topography of the text. She is not asking them to fall in love with the text, or to fall in love with her. As students learn to notice and interpret the particularity of a textual topography they create the possibility for an interesting interpretive site that was not previously available to them.

Of course, learning to notice the small details of a text means that it needs to be read carefully, and usually a few times. Importantly, it needs to be read over time. These re-reading activities create conditions in which aspects of one's out-of-text lived experiences become partly structured by repeated textual involvements. Immersing oneself in the details of a textual landscape can create conditions whereby other landscapes of one's life become more interesting. In curious ways, an attention to textual details can create a deep loving attachment to that text. Following Anne Michaels, I contend that one needs to learn to love *one* landscape in order to love others. If human identities are considered topographies whose details must be first perceived in order to be deeply known, then it seems that requisite to falling in love (and staying in love) is to learn to notice and interpret the details of one's relations with another person. Like all interpretive practices, then, learning to fall in love requires some experience and some learned skills.

Literary engagement creates conditions for some of these interpretation skills to be learned. Learning to identify with literary characters means learning to notice how they are not identical

to the reader. And, because literary characters continue to be presented identically each time the text is read, they offer the reader an opportunity to notice how her or his own perceptions continue to change. However, the kind of deep learning and insight that can emerge from literary identifications usually requires the reader to enter into a committed, mindful and sustained literary engagement. Ideally, this means that readers do not skim texts but, rather, read them slowly and carefully, trying to notice how details are used to create literary effects. It also means that readers need to consider re-reading texts since, of course, the familiar features of the text cannot usually be seen on a first reading. In order for the topography of the text to be more deeply interpreted, it needs to be negotiated more than once.

These close reading practices have the potential to teach readers how to become attentive to details that shape perception. Although readers probably experience this as an attachment to literary characters, I suggest that what is experienced is actually fondness for what the relationship sponsors—an interpretive site where personal insight is generated.

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In this article, I have argued that learning to fall in love means becoming involved with someone in projects that require ongoing attention to details. Staying in love means maintaining some interpretive interest. Because familiarity obscures one's perception of details, staying in love also means deliberately interrupting what has become habitually familiar with new interpretive challenges. People often become bored or restless or fall out of love because the details that make them interesting to one another have grown invisible. Falling in love with literary characters, with landscapes, with subject matter, with other people, requires an ongoing commitment to attending to the details of how those relations are conditioned and structured. And, as I have argued, once we no longer perceive the details of our relations, it is difficult to maintain strong emotion. In order for strong emotion to be restored, it is important for familiarity to become interrupted. Sometimes this means that someone needs to point to something that we haven't noticed before: "Look at that! Isn't that interesting!"

Sometimes our attention must be directed to something that has become invisible because it is overly familiar. This, of course, has always been the work of art. Historically speaking, the art object functions to both interrupt and enlarge perception. A poem can only become a poem, for example, if it asks readers to pay attention to the vocabulary and the form in which it presents itself. "I'm a poem. And although I am made of words you know, I want you to pay attention to those words in new ways." Or, "I'm a painting. Even though this is a painting of something you know as a tree, I want you to notice details of 'tree-ness' that you had not noticed before."

As a work of art, literature asks readers to pay attention to the details that organize the experience of literary engagement. In so doing, the literary text creates possibilities for readers to become involved with the author and characters she or he has created in the ongoing project of learning something new. In order for the literary text to do its work well, the reader needs to pay attention to the details of the text, to read carefully, to think about what is read, to wonder about what this means and, probably, to re-read and think about how re-reading affects one's involvement with characters and their situations.

Many of us have forgotten that in order to love anything we must learn *how* to fall in love. In a world that has decided that having access to a lot of information is more valuable than developing committed and ongoing relationships to small amounts of subject matter, it is more

difficult to fall in love with anything or anyone. Why re-read books when I have access to new books I haven't read? Why study with one teacher when I can access unlimited information from the Internet using powerful search engines? Why learn to love one person when I can make many on-line contacts with new and exciting people?

One way to learn to fall in love with another person might be to learn to fall in love with other things. This might mean, as Jeanette Winterson (1995) has suggested in her book of essays Art Objects, learning to spend time with one painting rather than rushing through a museum looking at all the paintings. It might mean, as Sharon Butala (1994) suggests in The Perfection of the Morning learning how to love a landscape by attending to and learning about its details. It might mean, as Kathleen Norris (1993) argues in Dakota learning to understand that human perception and thinking is not only organized by human-made objects but, as well, is influenced by the non-human-made world. It might mean, as Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hahn (1991) suggests in Peace is Every Step meditating on one's own breathing, trying to calm the constant noise of the mind.

I have learned my lessons of loving by developing relationships with literary texts. In reading and re-reading and thinking about my attachments to characters and their situations, I have created focal practices that help me to better understand my own situation. I have not learned to fall in love with other people by studying them or myself directly. I am able to love them because my own unhurried and close reading practices have taught me how to notice usually unnoticed details that circumscribe my experience. In so doing, I have learned that love is not out there to be found nor is love some object that can be made. Instead, love emerges from work I share with other people.

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