Auto/ethno/graphic bricolage as embodied inter/culturalism

Dis/locating stories of becoming in encounters with the other

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My teaching identities are re-marked by geographic and ethnographic dislocations and relocations across continents – midst fragments of [lost] languages and cultures… My teaching life as an academic writes and is written by words and worlds of difference.

<div align="right">(Palulis in Morawski & Palulis, p. 6, 2009)</div>

Unsettling knowledge are those ideas that disturb the convenient truths through which we organize our thoughts and make meaning out of our experience in the world. These are the theories that creep up on educators and disturb them with difficult thoughts: that education is not synonymous with rationality and control, but also that one might become unreasonable, irrational, and intractable that the persistent crises in the field… will exceed all reason and discompose all prior efforts at advancement. Unsettling knowledge invokes skepticism.

<div align="right">(Malewski & Sharma, 2010, p. 369)</div>

#1: The Zagros Mountains

I ALWAYS INSIST on a window seat when I fly because I love to peer out at the landscapes that come into view over the course of a flight. On a recent trip home from the Emirates and Qatar, the flight path took us over the Persian Gulf and Iraq. Besides a trip to Baku in 2008 to attend a UNESCO/IESCO conference on expanding the role of women in cross-cultural dialogue, this was the first time I had been back to this region since moving home to Ottawa from Tehran, in 1999.

The sunny weather guarantees a clear view from the plane window. Shifting my gaze back and forth between the live flight tracker on the back of the seat in front of me and the

unfolding topographies below, I scan the scene outside to identify physical features and signs of human activity.

Soon after reaching altitude I feel unexpected joy at the sight of the distant peaks of the Zagros Mountains across the Persian Gulf. Although I have forgotten most of the Farsi I struggled to learn during the three years I lived in Iran with my family, I find myself silently repeating, *kuh* – the Persian word for *mountain* – which I hadn't heard or spoken in years. Public histories and personal stories associated with the territory below swirl in my imagination to demand a hearing. Leggo (2010) writes:

> Our storied lives are never only unique and idiosyncratic accounts of individual and isolate
> experiences. Instead, our stories are always part of a network of communal and collaborative stories, a network that knows no beginning and no ending (p. 53).

Complexly caught up in-between language from the past, the present, and the future, the sight of the Zagros peaks triggers a flood of memories of lived experiences in Iran and other countries in this region. I stare hard and purposefully out the window to imprint upon my frail, unreliable memory as much detail as possible, as if to ward off the pangs of regret I strangely feel. By the time we are over Al Basrah an intense tangle of thought and emotion has me firmly in its grip. Flying over Iraq in this commercial airliner becomes an unsettling provocation.

Malewski (2010c) asks us to consider what difference curriculum theorizing makes to education and the world "in terms of lessening violence toward our selves and others" (p. 535). He points out that "texts that function as a political intervention have the capacity to spur people to think in excess of common thoughts and practices" (p. 535). With this in mind, I feel compelled to share my stories (Watt, 2007, 2011a, 2011b). As Leggo (2010) reminds us, our stories are personal, but they also extend beyond the personal. It is impossible to know what mine might open up, if anything, but silence is not an option. We urgently need discourses that trouble the world (Denzin, 2010). Working with auto/ethno/graphy (Morawski & Palulis, 2009) and bricolage (Kincheloe, 2001, 2005; Watt, 2011a, 2011b), I inquire into the im/possibilities of a curriculum of hope in difficult times.

Troubling Discourses

The week before this flight I had been following world events on TV from my hotel room in Doha. Was the news more distressing than usual, or did it only seem that way because I was physically present in the region again? Flipping through the channels – CNN, Al Jazeera, the BBC, RT – the news is dominated by war talk. Pundits discuss Armageddon scenarios if Israel were to attack Iran. Images of an angry mob of anonymous Iranians breaching the walls of the British Embassy in Tehran are replayed over and over again. Diplomats are withdrawn and others expelled. Meanwhile, the nightmare in Syria continues, and Afghanistan and Iraq struggle to recover after years and years and years of war. Overwhelmed by it all, I increasingly question my ability as a scholar and educator to make a meaningful difference in the world.

Back in North America, similar images and stories continue to circulate in the news media. Narratives related to the war on terror, fear of the other, and the so-called "clash of civilizations" (Huntington, 1996) stubbornly persist in the discursive spaces of the mass media, reinforcing familiar binaries such as us/them, here/there, peace/war that help to frame how we see ourselves and others. As the first nation to adopt an official policy of multiculturalism in 1971, Canada has been held up to the world as an example of how different peoples and cultures might live together. Although the situation has always been a work in progress, I am disturbed by

a series of polls marking the tenth anniversary of the tragic terrorist attacks in New York. Ipsos Reid (Sept. 8, 2011) finds 74% of Canadians agree that "our society has become less tolerant of others" since September 11, 2001. Six out of ten people think Muslims in Canada "are discriminated against more than before" the terrorist attacks. Perhaps most worrisome is another poll (Leger Marketing, Sept. 12, 2011) suggesting 56% of Canadians believe conflict between the so-called "west" and "Muslim world" is "irreconcilable." How did it come to this, and how are we to respond?

Ir-rec-on-cil-a-ble: adj.
1. A person, especially a member of a group, who will not compromise, adjust, or submit;
2. One of two or more conflicting ideas or beliefs that cannot be brought into harmony.
(The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2009, Houghton Mifflin)

The fact that Leger Marketing (2011) is able to frame a question by dividing billions of people into a simplistic binary is testament to the ongoing power of taken-for-granted humanist categories to define inter/cultural relations. It is perhaps also telling, that a word such as "irreconcilable" so easily comes onto the scene. The first definition above suggests a refusal to engage with the other; it is a relationship beyond hope. The second definition implies faith in the humanist discourses of harmony and consensus, closely associated with a multiculturalism that erases tension as it erases difference. What do notions such as "harmony" and "consensus" produce in human terms given that we live in a world of difference? Alternatively, theories of embodied relationality assume ongoing negotiation and openness toward the other. Although there are never guarantees, possibilities are infinite. Aoki (1990) brings the generative im/possibilities of difference into education by reimagining curriculum as a tensioned occasion. This marks a shift from modern to postmodern discourses on identities and cultures that may open up spaces for hope, so "profound and embodied transformations are thinkable, even possible" (Sharma, Phillion, and Rahatzad, 2012).

Engaging the Im/possibilities of Auto/ethno/graphic Bricolage

Denzin and Giardina (2007) maintain that after the events of 9/11, we need more original and complex ways to do Cultural Studies so links between the local and the global are accentuated as scholars try to make sense of what is happening in the world. Those committed to projects of social justice might work to "create a morally centered, critically informed dialogue focused on history and politics as they unfold in front of us" (p. 3). Denzin and Giardina contend that a repositioned Cultural Studies attempts to keep pace with our complex and rapidly changing world. In a similar vein, Malewski (2010a) suggests that post-reconceptualist curriculum theorizing attempts to embrace new epistemological realities by attending to flux and change, hybrid spaces, different contexts, reading differently, understudied histories, and divergent perspectives.

I choose to work with bricolage in response to calls for new forms of research and pedagogy. Bricolage exists "out of respect for the complexity of the lived world" (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 324). It offers a means to try to account for the complex relationships between material reality and human perception. Through the juxtaposition of images, texts, theory, and narratives of lived experience I create experimental, hybrid texts designed to unsettle our habitual ways of framing the self and the other. With Trinh (1992a), I dwell "at the borderlines of several shifting

categories, stretching out to the limits of things, learning about my own limits and how to modify them" (p. 137). This boundary work focuses on "webs of relationships instead of things-in-themselves" (Kincheloe, 2005, p.323). Trinh (1991) asserts that our "experiences in life are complex, plural, and full of uncertainties and this complexity can never be reduced and fitted into the rigid corners of ready-made solutions" (p. 112). There is no stable, definitive story to tell – only fragments which never stand still.

Auto/ethno/graphic inquiry acknowledges our personal histories are implicated in larger social, cultural, and historical processes. It makes cracks in traditional ethnography's colonizing effects, for the researcher's subjectivity is brought in to the study to trouble him/her as knower. Aoki (2005) opens up ethnography by introducing the slashes to emphasize the in-between. A doubled reading gives us "ETHNO/graphy" as writing about "ethnos" (ethnic cultural identity), "an object of study already present awaiting uncovering and discovering" (p. 324). In this discourse language is understood as "a tool to represent the already present but hidden from view that precedes language" (p. 324) with language secondary to thought. Aoki contrasts this with "ethno/GRAPHY" which suggests "ethnos" is an effect of writing. He explains:

> [H]ere writing actively performs in the formulation of "ethnos." Within this discourse, language is no mere communication tool; the very "languaging" participates in creating effects. (p. 324)

In an Aokian move, Morawski and Palulis (2009) put slashes between the *auto*, the *ethno*, and the *graphy* to emphasize the doublings – the need for educators to dwell in the spaces in-between. The self is situated in culture, the cultural is in the self; the researcher writes about culture, and also re/produces culture through language.

With auto/ethno/graphy "the writing writes the writer as a complex (im)possible subject in a world where (self) knowledge can only ever be tentative, contingent, and situated" (Gannon, 2006, p. 474). The self is conceived as a text, "a project to be built … a project for bricoleurs" (Morawski & Palulis, 2009, p. 6). As Trinh (1989) contends, "[t]o write is to become" (p. 18). As I write my stories, my stories are writing me, for "[t]he to-and-fro movement between the written woman and the writing woman is an endless one" (p. 30).

#2: Esfahan

The flight map now indicates that *Esfahan* – a city famous for its covered bridges, palaces, minarets, and spectacular blue-tiled mosques – is located to the northeast. Years earlier my husband and I drove the 350 kilometers from Tehran to Esfahan with our two young children, during the No Ruz (New Year) holiday. I remember an unplanned stop at an ancient, ruined fort that wasn't on any tourist map, and a bumpy drive along the edges of a farmer's field in search of the famed pigeon towers dating from Safavid times. (For some inexplicable reason, I found those towers fascinating). Pigeon dung was used to fertilize melon and cucumber crops. I also recall our children running wildly around the vast and wonderful courtyard of the Naqsh-e Jahan Square as we adults admired the impressive Islamic architecture. During the afternoon we walked along the banks of the Zayanderud River amidst picnickers and kite-flyers. Later, we sipped hot, spiced tea at a tiny, crowded, café under the arches of an elegant 16th century covered bridge. Thinking back, it all seems like a dream...

These days
I am filled with absolute horror
with renewed threats of war in news

Decolonizing Our Inter/cultural Relations

During the years we lived in Iran I traveled a great deal, absorbing the extraordinary and fascinating sites into the very fibers of my becoming. An intrepid traveler, I could never get enough (Watt, 2011a): the wind towers of Yazd; the walled city of Bam; the once-thriving caravanserai; the gardens of Kashan; waves crashing in on the beaches of Kish; the carpet shops of Tabriz; the ruins of Persepolis; the bazaars of Kerman; the strange, rugged mountain landscapes of Lorestan. Like other female travelers who had passed this way before – such as Gertrude Bell and Freya Stark – I loved the thrill of "discovering" these places. Years later, the image I had of myself as fearless adventurer is seriously disrupted when I begin to read postcolonial theory. Some consider contemporary tourism the modern extension of colonial notions of possession by exploration (Ashcroft et al., 2007).

Beyond the stunning natural and man-made magnificence of Iran, it is my memories of face-to-face encounters with Iranian people that have left the strongest impression on me. I travelled to every corner of that country and the same stories kept repeating:

> *At the Yazd airport, a Canadian friend and I hail a cab to take us to our hotel. We are excited about our visit to this ancient desert city. I exchange pleasantries with the taxi driver in my basic Farsi and by the time we arrive at the hotel he is on his cell phone with his wife. Before we know it, we are sitting in this stranger's home eating lunch with his family and watching wedding videos. This becomes a highlight of the trip ... The following day, wandering through the twisting lanes of the old city, we are greeted by a friendly, elderly woman. Without hesitation she invites us into her home (located behind the mud wall in front of us) for tea. My friend is wary and refuses to accept her hospitality in spite of my pleas. I wonder what this Iranian stranger thinks about this refusal of generosity. For the rest of the afternoon I am annoyed with myself for not insisting we accept the invitation. Derrida (2002) cautions that hospitality offers both risk and possibility. What does it mean to risk the self in our inter/cultural relations with the other?*

Numerous face-to-face encounters with Iranians shattered many assumptions I had before I went to live in Tehran. I can't recall learning anything about Iran at school. However, I do recall shouting mobs on television during the American hostage crisis in 1980 and suspect this may be where I learned much of what I thought I knew about Iran. Edward Said (1981) writes that even though the Iranian individual had finally gained his or her freedom from an oppressive Shah and interference from outside powers, they still appeared on North American television screens, "as part of a large, anonymous mob, deindividualized, dehumanized" (p. 95).

Postcolonial curriculum theorist Nina Asher (2002) calls on educators to deconstruct processes of othering in relation to curriculum and teaching. She suggests a need to decolonize our thinking and relation to others by revisiting our encounters with difference. I would extend this to include our encounters with difference in the mass media. Asher critiques multicultural education for its exclusive focus on the marginalized other with little examination of the self. Western, Eurocentric knowledge and perspectives are therefore privileged and the binary split

between self and other, margins and center, are normalized. Asher suggests a need to consider the other in relation to – rather than apart from – oneself. She describes a "hybrid consciousness" as "the awareness that emerges out of the struggle to situate oneself in relation to multiple borders at the dynamic intersections of race, culture, gender/sexuality, class, and nationality, in specific historical and geographic contexts" (p. 85).

In-between Multiculturalism and Inter/culturalism

Bhabha (1988, 1990) draws on Derrida's (1968) conceptualization of différance – displacement within the linguistic sign – to critique the notion of cultural diversity that is the bedrock of multicultural education. Although cultural diversity may be celebrated, it must also be contained. Bhabha (1990) contends that a "transparent norm is constituted, a norm given by the host society or dominant culture, which says that 'these other cultures are fine, but we must be able to locate them within our own grid'" (p. 208). He points out that in societies where multiculturalism is encouraged, racism is still rampant in various forms because, "the universalism that paradoxically permits diversity masks ethnocentric norms, values and interests" (p. 208). Drawing on the notion of différance, he deconstructs claims to the inherent originality or "purity" of cultures. Bhabha (1988) maintains that it is "the in-between, the space of the *entre* that Derrida opened up in writing itself – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture" (p. 209). He refers to this as the "third space of enunciation," arguing that it is the precondition for the articulation of cultural difference. Although the third space is unrepresentable in itself, it constitutes "the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized, and read anew" (208). Therefore, all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity. This is not about tracing two original positions from which a third emerges. Rather, for Bhabha (1990), it is this third space "which enables other positions to emerge" (p. 211). The process of cultural hybridity "gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation" (p. 211). It is the productive capacities of Bhabha's third space I attempt to engage in my curriculum theorizing and classroom pedagogies.

Shanaz Khan (2002) draws upon Bhabha's (1988, 1990, 1994) notion of hybridization in a third space to disrupt the notion of a monolithic Muslim identity. She explains that within this third space, "Muslim subjectivity is no longer about an identity politics making claims about absolute knowledge boxed in rigid boundaries, an identity that a few can control (such as Islamists) and others can vilify (such as Orientalists)" (p. xvi). Khan contends "the unstable, hybridized Muslim identity is no longer a trait to be transcended but a productive tension filled with possibility" (p. xvi). She argues for rethinking how Muslims are positioned in a pluralist society, by producing "supplementary discourses as sites of resistance and negotiation" (p. 114), for a third space exceeds binaries to move us away from dichotomous thinking.

Aoki (1990) brings Trinh, Derrida, and Bhabha's notions of in-between spaces into education by inciting us to rethink curriculum so as to sink more often into "the lived space of between—in the midst of many cultures, into the inter of interculturalism"(p. 382). Meditating on the word cross-cultural, Aoki (1996) disrupts the notion of "crossing" from one nation to another, from one culture to another. He describes the usual meaning of "bridge" as something that helps us "move from one place to another, the speedier the better, the less time wasted the better" (p. 316). In contrast, the bridge one might find in an Oriental garden invites us "to linger" (p. 319). Aoki moves away from the identity-centered "east and west" into the space between

east and west, undoing the instrumental sense of "bridge" and of curriculum. Although the multicultural curriculum emphasizes "many-ness" and diversity, opening up the "closed-ness" of monocultural and bicultural worlds, Aoki (1990) points out that the museum approach to distinct cultures, "assumes the structure of the viewer-viewed, of subject-object separation. As such, it is reductive – reducing others to objects, allowing a study *about*" (p. 381).

#3: Shiraz

The in-flight map indicates Shiraz just below Esfahan, which brings back memories of trips we made to that ancient city. During one visit we took photographs of my daughter and I dressed in chador. Feminist scholarship links photography with cultural memory (Kuhn, 2007; Kuhn & Emiko McAllister, 2006; Onyx & Small, 2001; Radstone, 2000). As an artifact from the past, what could our photos tell me about my processes of othering? Looking at a particular image prompts us to recall particular events, and the way we reconstruct these events plays an important role in the construction of the self (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992). Photographs permit us to return to a moment and a place in the past, and thus offers an opportunity to intervene in "the relations of looking through which we locate ourselves" (p. 2). Rereading these images can unsettle the "forgotten histories that shape our social landscape" (Kuhn and Emiko McAllister p. 2) to interrupt the colonial gaze that positions us in the social world.

> *The photo below of my daughter in chador was taken at one of the shrines we visited in Shiraz. Men and women are required to dress conservatively when they enter holy sites such as this. As I awkwardly wrapped myself in the chador I was given by the female attendants who greeted us, I noticed a group of women fawning over Kathleen. She was not required to cover at her age, but the women made a big fuss over her and asked if she would like her own child-sized chador to wear into the shrine. When she nodded shyly they produced the small garment and helped her to put it on. Kathleen –who loved to play dress up – was thrilled. We recorded our visit by taking some souvenir photos, as any tourist might do.*

Years later, this family photograph takes on more complex and contradictory meanings as I reread it from decolonizing, postcolonial perspectives. In binary logic, to view the other as exotic implies viewing the self as "normal" or "ordinary". Dressing up was fun and at the time I didn't possess the critical language needed to deconstruct the processes of othering we were caught up in, including our complicity in humanist binary thought. This encounter at the shrine was memorable for the warm hospitality we received. Throughout Iran we were greeted with kindness and generosity. We were always made to feel welcome. These experiences continue to constitute my sense of self and other.

Kathleen Watt in Shiraz, Iran
Photo by Diane Watt (1997)
Reprinted with Kathleen's permission

Steet (2000) analyzes the appearance of images of Westerners dressed like Arabs in *National Geographic Magazine*, suggesting "this colonialist cross-dressing produced and an interesting, if not ridiculous image" (p. 105). She draws on the work of Kabbani, who writes, "shedding European clothes for Oriental garb became a pleasant pastime for the traveler . . . making a journey East more exotic, and it seemed to allow the traveler a deeper access to a cloistered world" (p. 105). On that day in Shiraz, I was complexly caught up in processes of othering and complicit in broader colonizing relations. The self was at the center and the exotic other existed on the margins.

Psychoanalytic Theorizing and Inter/cultural Education

Theorists working with psychoanalytic theory (e.g., Britzman, 1998; Felman, 1987, 1997; Kristeva, 1991) question disinterested discourses of knowledge on offer in schools. Such discourses fail to consider the ability of students and teachers to "rationally accept new thoughts without having to grapple with unlearning the old ones" (Britzman, 1998, p. 88). Before working with postcolonial theory and perspectives, as a member of the dominant culture I failed to understand how a vision of cultural harmony favors those at the center. The liberal strategy of "inclusion" assumes and perpetuates an unmarked normative order. Britzman observes how such

a view allows the two stingy subject positions of "the tolerant normal" and "the tolerated subaltern." Others may be welcomed into the curriculum but "not because they have anything to say to those already there" (p. 87). On closer reading, the seemingly worthy goal of "inclusion" may thus be working to exclude.

Felman (1987) argues the revolutionary pedagogy discovered by Freud "consists in showing the ways in which ignorance itself can teach us something, become itself instructive" (p.79). Felman contends that ignorance is no longer simply opposed to knowledge; it is an integral part of knowledge. It is not a passive state of absence, a simple lack of information, but the incapacity or refusal to acknowledge our own implication in the information. Teaching is thus not about the transmission of ready-made knowledge but "the creation of a new condition of knowledge, the creation of an original learning disposition" (pp. 80–81).

Freud's theorization of the unconscious is also significant for inter/cultural education in that it displaces the unitary subject. The humanist subject is assumed to contain an autonomous, unique, and fixed essence. In liberal discourse, this implies a unified, rational consciousness capable of full self-knowledge. In contrast, poststructural theories propose a subject that is precarious, contradictory, and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or talk. Our minds and bodies are thus always the site of conflicting forms of subjectivity. For Butler (1992), all identity categories are seen as "an undesignated field of differences… [as] site[s] of permanent openness and resignifiability" (p. 160). By abandoning an essentialized subject in favor of a decentered one, subjectivity is open to change. It is constituted within the society and culture in which we live, and various forms of subjectivity are continuously produced and change as discursive fields shift.

#4: Over Iraq

As we fly further over Iraq, troubling questions come to mind. I have never visited this country and before having the opportunity to live in the Middle East during the 1990's, did not know much about it beyond various Social Studies units on Mesopotamia I experienced as both teacher and student. Pre-occupied with more recent history, I look for evidence of war, realizing I have been privileged to the extent that I can't begin to imagine what is it like to live through war. I have only experienced it from the safe distance of television and computer screens. How does a lifetime of encountering otherness in the mass media – simultaneously so close and yet so far away – impact on our everyday inter/cultural relations locally and globally?

With Malewski and Sharma (2010), I ask how curriculum scholars are "helping to prepare educators to respond to the volatile situations of the real world" (p. 366). I am surprised at pre-service and practicing teachers who consider school a space of innocence that should be devoid of tension and controversy – especially given what the average young person is exposed to on a daily basis on TV, at the movie theatre, on the Internet, and in video games. What if students were routinely expected to deconstruct discourses of otherness on offer in the unofficial curriculum of the mass media (Watt, 2012)?

While media discourses tend to fix and circulate dominant meanings about the other, technology also offers unprecedented opportunities to disrupt those meanings. Teachers and students can readily seek out multiple perspectives. For example, in August of 2003 a young Iraqi blogger began reporting on her experiences in Baghdad. Calling herself *Riverbend*, she offers her personal account of what its like to live in a war zone:

Sunday, August 17, 2003

Waking Up

Waking up anywhere in Iraq these days is a trial. It happens in one of two ways: either slowly, or with a jolt. The slow process works like this: you're hanging in a place at the edge of consciousness, mentally grabbing at the fading fragments of a dream … something creeps up around, all over you – like a fog. A warm heavy fog. It's the heat … 120 F on the cooler nights. Your eyes flutter open and they search the dark in dismay – the electricity has gone off.

The ceiling fan is slowing down and you are now fully awake. Trying to sleep in the stifling heat is about as productive as trying to wish the ceiling fan into motion with your brain. Impossible.

The other way to wake up is to be jolted into reality with the sound of a gun-shot, explosion, or yelling. You sit up, horrified and panicked, any dream or nightmare shattered into oblivion. What can it be? A burglar? A gang of looters? An attack? A bomb? Or maybe it's just an American midnight raid? Posted by river @ 8:02 PM. (Riverbend, 2005, pp. 5–6)

This blog offers "a perspective too often overlooked, ignored, or suppressed" (Publisher's Weekly, in Riverbend, 2005). Hoechsmann (2008) observes that as societies become increasingly technological, new epistemologies take their place alongside more traditional forms of meaning making. Not only have our forms of communication changed dramatically, but "the relationship of author and reader has also been transformed" (p. 69), for "authorship is no longer the preserve of the educated elite" (p. 69). Digital technologies offer generative inter/cultural possibilities.

Relationality and the Un/knowability of the Other

Todd (2003) draws on Levinas to locate possibilities for ethical forms of relationality in the immediacy of one's encounter with the other. Todd argues ethics must be freed from epistemological certitude; it is something other than acting on knowledge. Levinas (1987) contends:

[T]he Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity (p. 83).

Levinas considers the other as infinitely unknowable. Todd therefore suggests what is ethical or nonviolent becomes attentiveness to, and the preservation of, the alterity of the other. With this understanding, she argues that teaching becomes about staging encounters with otherness, with something outside of the self, while learning becomes receiving from the other more than the self already contains. This is in direct contrast to how curriculum typically deals with otherness, which is to learn *about*. That approach assumes that the other can be understood, and that such learning is both pedagogically and ethically desirable. However, as Derrida (1997) suggests,

justice – if it has to do with the other ... is always incalculable ... Once you relate to the other as the other, then something incalculable comes on the scene, something which cannot be reduced to the law or to the history of legal structures. (pp. 17–18)

Todd (2003) explains learning in this sense is not about understanding the other but about "a relation to otherness prior to understanding" (p. 9). We cannot know ahead of an encounter how we might respond to the other, who disrupts our sense of our selves. Todd writes:

In focusing on conditions instead of principles, codes, and rules ethics might be considered in terms of those moments of relationality that resist codification. That is, various modes of relationality create moments of nonviolence insofar as they define our ethical attention to otherness in ways that cannot be codified into prescriptions for practice. (p. 9)

If we claim to know or understand the other we are exercising our knowledge over that other; the other "becomes an object of my comprehension, my world, my narrative, reducing the Other to me" (p. 15).

Following Levinas, Todd (2003) argues when we are exposed to the other we can "listen, attend, and be surprised" (p. 15) and have the other affects us. Insofar as we can be receptive and susceptible, we can learn from the other as one who is different from the self. Aoki (2005) similarly looks at inter/cultural relations in terms of translation, suggesting that "a complete absolute translation is an impossibility … Translation as transformation is an ambivalent construction … a signification that is ever incomplete and ongoing" (p. 328). Springgay (2008b) proposes an ethics of embodiment for education, which is a process of responding to the other on exposure (see also Springgay & Freedman, 2007a, 2007b; 2009; Watt, 2007).

#6: The Mountainous Border Between Iran and Iraq (By Now I am Crying)
The sight of small villages nestled on the plains and in the mountain valleys outside the plane window strangely evokes a mixture of emotions: pleasure, despair, nostalgia, sorrow. Personal stories intertwine with the histories of these places in my imagination and manifest as affect through my body. I look east toward the distant mountains knowing that somewhere along that range is the Iran-Iraq border. At this point in the journey I am unable contain an outflow of emotion. Thankful that the seat beside me is empty and that the young man one seat over is fast asleep, tears now run uncontrollably down my face. I turn my eyes toward to the window, but am forced to close them for a moment in an effort to halt the confusing and anxious sensory messages passing from my eyes to my brain to my heart … As I recall this memory through writing these words on this page, the feelings return. What am I to do with these tears?

Behesht-e Zahra as Unsettling Curriculum
A Canadian friend and I set out one morning to visit the Holy Shrine of Imam Khomeini, located on the southern edges of Tehran. The thought does not occur to us to visit a cemetery today, but our Iranian taxi driver suggests we do so since there is apparently a famous one on our route. A seemingly unlikely tourist destination, we are highly skeptical about making this stop, but our gentle driver is insistent. I could never have predicted the impact this place would have on us. We get out of the cab and try to orientate ourselves, which is not easy. You literally need a map to find your way around. The largest section of Behesht-e Zahra is dedicated to those killed in the Iran-Iraq war, and, as Ebadi (2006) writes, "Nothing can prepare you for the sight: miles of headstones stretching into the distance, a grotesque horizon of tombs" (p. 90). Each gravestone is adorned with

photographs and mementos of the deceased person. We are overcome with emotion, standing in front of those photos, many depicting teenagers who don't look old enough to have graduated from high school, never mind gone to war. The visible and audible grief of many of visitors, even all these years later, is upsetting. I can't remember ever seeing scenes of mourners here at Behesht-e Zahra on television at any point during the eight years of conflict. What is the meaning of a death, or a war, when it's so far away from your everyday reality? Coming here forces us into direct contact with the Iran-Iraq war. The victims suddenly become actual people. Deeply disturbed and ashamed of my ignorance of the details of that war, I am thankful the wise taxi driver put us in touch with the curriculum of Behesht-e Zahra.

In 2003, Shirin Ebadi became the first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. She writes about the eight year long Iran-Iraq War in her memoir. Apart from the two world wars, it was one of the bloodiest conflicts of the twentieth century. Waves of young men were sent onto the battlefield on foot. Ebadi (2006) explains that Iraq had the advantage of access to the chemical agents and weaponry on offer from the west, while Iran, as the most populous nation in the region, "had human lives to spare" (p. 61). She recalls every night Iranian television showed footage of young recruits loading onto buses for the Iraqi battlefield, many of them barely in their teens. One of my own students – a recent immigrant to Canada – brought members of our class to tears one day when he told us about his own experiences of this war as a high school student in Tehran. His story went like this:

We all went off to school just like any other day. In the afternoon, buses drove into the school parking lot. Without being told anything, my male classmates and I were loaded onto one of the buses. We had no idea what was going on. When we did not arrive home from school that day our families were frantic with worry. Several days passed before they were told anything about our whereabouts. We were driven to the Iran-Iraq front lines, and were given guns and almost no training. They told us we were needed to defend our nation. Nobody wanted to be there. We were scared to death. I am the only one out of my group of friends who survived.

Ebadi (2006) writes:
Freshly wounded by a violent revolution, we put aside our grievances and betrayal. Those images marching across the television every night inflamed our nationalism. My heart cracked for our young men, setting out for Saddam's killing fields with their shoddy weapons, no match for a dictator armed with the latest from the West's arms boutiques (p. 61).

According to Ebadi, the Iraqis had mined sections of the border, and the Iranian command used young recruits as human minesweepers, "sending them across the plains in wave after wave, to clear the battlefield for the soldiers to the rear" (p. 61). Saddam Hussein used nerve and mustard gas against the Iranian "soldiers".

Reading Ebadi's (2006) memoir I also learned that the west had provided Iraq not only with weapons and chemical agents, but also with satellite intelligence on the location of Iranian soldiers. Estimates are there were over one million killed. What did the average person in North America actually know about what happened during this war and the west's complicated roles in

it? What do our young people need to know about themselves and others in order to participate fully as global citizens? With Trinh Minh-ha (1992), "I am not really interested in judging which truth is better than the other, but rather in working with both together to open a critical space" (p. 146). A lack of critical spaces in our media, in our school curricula, and in political discourse has consequences and should be of great concern for educators and citizens in any democratic society.

Israel Loves Iran Facebook Campaign

I take a break from writing to check my email messages and find there's one from an Iranian-Canadian friend I haven't heard from recently. It seems an odd coincidence she decides to contact me today while I am working on this paper. Her email contains a YouTube link: http://www.youtube.com/user/israelovesiran

> My name is Ronny. I'm 41 years old. I'm a father, a teacher, a graphic designer. I'm an Israeli citizen and I need your help. Lately, in the news, we've been hearing about a war coming while we the common people are sitting and watching it coming like it has nothing to do with us. On March 15th [2012], I posted a poster on Facebook. The message was simple. Iranians. We love you. We will never bomb your country. Within 24 hours thousands of people shared the poster on Facebook, and I started receiving messages from Iran. The next day, we got featured on TV and newspapers, proving that the message was traveling. Fast. Please help us prevent this war by spreading this message. Make your own posters. Send this message to your friends and share it. We are raising money in order to produce more posters and keep the movement growing. Thanks to all of you for your support and love. May we prevent this war. Ronny Edry.

It is another private voice we don't hear often in the mainstream news media – a single citizen struggling to intervene in our complicated, war-torn world. His efforts and the response inspire hope.

Giroux (2011) describes how new media technologies have recently been used by protesters in Europe and the Middle East:

Young people have used the new media to mobilize mass demonstrations, pitting their bodies against the police, army, and other repressive forces. But they have also used the Internet and various social networks such as Twitter and Facebook to reach across national boundaries. In doing so, they have shared experiences; gathered information, circulated strategies for dealing with the police, and developed nonviolent modes of protest (p. 329).

For youth around the world, social media such as Facebook and Twitter have become a taken for granted part of their everyday lives. Inquiring into these cultural sites provides new possibilities for engaging difference.

Giving an Account of One's Self

The concept of "différance" (Derrida, 1968) provides a critique of the metaphysics of presence in which the speaking subject's intention guarantees meaning, but language is where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed. Given the existence of the unconscious, experience becomes an unstable construct. The perceiving, conscious self is always already molded by traces of experience in the unconscious mind. This perceiving self, that seems to perceive only in the present, is always "written" by unconscious traces. No perception, then, can

be unpolluted. All are given meaning by what might be called a pre-existing writing, by the traces of our previous experiences which are themselves influenced by traces of other experiences. Since this writing is unconscious, it can be said to be a writing that exists before speech. As Denzin (1997) points out, experience is "out of reach of language and discourse and on the borderlines of consciousness and awareness" (p. 61). However, we can represent a life or its meanings as told in narrative, for this is "the realm of lived experience that is recoverable" (p. 61) even though the original meaning of a told experience is not recoverable. "There are only retellings" (p. 61), which "become new expressions of the experience" (p. 61). Denzin explains "these tellings, told by the writer, now become the writer's versions of the subject's lived experiences. In this retold form, the subject is understood to be constantly caught up in the webs of discourses" (p. 61).

I acknowledge the personal and political importance of experience, and take seriously the voices of individuals. However, I do not subscribe to the primacy of experience alone, for this depends on a liberal-humanist assumption that subjectivity is an autonomous, coherent, authentic source of interpretation of the meaning of reality. Rather, identity is always related to what one is not – to the other. It is only conceivable in and through difference. Identification forges a unity with the other, but also poses an imaginary threat. Kristeva (1991), drawing on Lacan, contends that in order to live with others, we have to learn to see ourselves as other. For Kristeva, difference is not the gap between one individual or group and another that is foreign to it, but a relation. Making sense of oneself occurs through the construction of the other. In addition, she argues that the stranger is in us; it is the unconscious. Just as it is difficult to come to terms with what is unknown within ourselves, when we come face-to-face with the stranger we are uneasy because he/she resists definition.

A number of curriculum theorists (Low & Palulis, 2000; Todd, 2003; Springgay, 2008a; 2008b; Springgay & Freedman, 2007a, 2007b) seek embodied spaces for education that encompass ways of knowing that are not merely cognitive, but relational and intercorporeal where learning is a relation and not an object (Springgay & Freedman, 2007b). Teaching becomes a messy site of intertextuality "where the subjectivities of the characters involved collide, disperse and co-emerge as a bricolage of narratives" (Low & Palulis, 2000, p. 68). These movements "inscribe narratives that are not known in advance but are given-to-be-seen as one advances" (p. 68). Intersubjective relation is accomplished through story, and the "sheer experience of narrating or witnessing stories can transform persons in ways they often cannot control" (Newton, 1995, p. 291). Trinh (1989) describes the story as "a living thing, an organic process, a way of life. What is taken for stories, only stories, are fragments of/in life, fragments that never stop interacting while being complete in themselves" (p. 143). Newton (1995) explains "narrative situations create an immediacy and force, framing relations of provocation, call, and response that bind narrator and listener, author and character, or reader and text" (p. 13). A good story can "consolidate, compel, and challenge what is believed to be true about the world" (Sumara & Iftody, 2006, p. iii).

How might my stories affect the reader? What might shift? What might remain? Readings of the self and the other can never be simple or innocent because every reader is positioned through language, culture, history, education, ideology, and so on. Therefore, the possibility of reading is constituted in various ways prior to any individual act of reading. At the same time, "every text has a singularity for which the act of reading should be responsible and to which the act of reading should respond" (Wolfreys, Robbins, & Womack, 2002, p. 71). For these reasons, we might avoid producing a reading which is either, on the one hand, "a passive

consumption or, on the other, an active imposition of a particular meaning which suppresses or excludes other elements" (p.71). How might we open, rather than foreclose, on reading (Wolfreys, 2000), recognizing that what is read can only ever be "a momentary recognition" (p. vii)? With Wolfreys, I re/imagine curricular spaces which honor the impossibility of complete readings, while also attempting partial readings – spaces which open to patient, rigorous readings which acknowledge there is always something more.

Butler (2005) suggests that to take responsibility for oneself is "to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community"(p.83). To act ethically we accept error as constitutive of who we are. "It is not that we are only error, but it means that what conditions our doing is a constitutive limit, for which we cannot give a full account, and this condition is, paradoxically, the basis of our accountability" (p. 111). We are not simply the effects of discourses, but any discourse, any regime of intelligibility, "constitutes us at a cost" (p. 121), for our "capacity to reflect upon ourselves, to tell the truth about ourselves, is correspondingly limited by what the discourse, the regime, cannot allow into speakability" (p. 121). Ethics requires us to risk ourselves "precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human" (p. 136). For Butler, to be undone by another is a necessity, "an anguish … but also a chance—to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient 'I' as a kind of possession" (p. 136).

Curriculum-in-the-Making

Quinn (2010) contends that, "[n]ow, more than ever, curriculum studies has taken up the call to address the ethical questions central to the work of education – the heart of which is the encounter with an other" (p. 102). Malewski and Phillion (2009) suggest that in our inter/cultural encounters, rather than thinking in terms of already-existing cultures separate from the self and subjectivity, we might view these exchanges as "discursive understandings at the crossroads of embodied beings with embodied cultures" (p. 6). They describe "curriculum-in-the-making" as understanding that our ideas and practices "engender cultures just as cultures engender perceptions and experiences." Crucially, "[t]his relationality … constitutes a living curriculum" (p. 6).

These notions of "relationality" and "living curriculum" invoke the im/possibilities of a curriculum of hope – difficult, tension-filled spaces, always "in-the-making". In this era of globalization, finding meaningful ways to respond to difference and to the complexities of lived experience is daunting. As a form of curriculum inquiry, auto/ethno/graphic bricolage might be thought of as a decolonizing, inter/cultural project that potentially expands discourses related to the cultivation of the multicultural imagination. We can't predict what might emerge from seeking out these hybrid spaces, and yet such theorizing somehow inspires me to remain im/possibly hopeful …

> I have hope, not in the tangible or in what I can personally accomplish, but in the faith that battling evil, cruelty, and injustice allows us to retain our identity, a sense of meaning and ultimately our freedom. Perhaps in our lifetimes we will not succeed. Perhaps things will only get worse. But this does not invalidate our efforts (Hedges, 2010, p. xv).

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