

The Dividing Glass

A Conversation on Bodies, Politics, Teaching & Loss

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Maya Pindyck *Learning, Learning*, 2007, ink on paper

Maya

"MENSTRUAL BLOOD" IS SCRAWLED in red Sharpie on ripped and wrinkled chart paper. It hangs on the far wall by the incongruous grand piano. Decontextualized, meaningless, provoking, it stands unashamed between *Antigone* essays and "Where I'm From" poems. Its limp body was strung up by a teacher to bear proof of student work, of meaning-making in her class. Instead it droops, a corpse of student malaise in red ink. Ms. Pindyck's classroom is marked, signed by the female body and perhaps it is rightly so. The chart paper is not hers—a remnant of the health class the period before. It is an assignment incomplete.

Me

I am alone in my classroom. He is taller than before and out of uniform. He has on a baseball cap, yellow and with a sticker still on it. Hats are forbidden. I am annoyed by his presence. His voice and body boom in my space—loud, happy, intrusive.

“Yo, Ms. Nicci! How was your—Ms. Niccolini, you got so fat! You are so FAT! What happened? Did you just eat all summer? What did you eat?”

“I ate everything,” I laugh and fold my arms underneath the new, fat breasts of which I am suddenly ashamed.

Maya and I taught in Brooklyn together for three years. Daily we made our way to and from a small ‘high-need’ high school serving the fraught designations of an ‘at-risk’ and ‘disadvantaged’ student population which according to demographic data was comprised by an 86% African American, 12% Hispanic, 1% Asian and 1% White/Other population. Each morning we’d leave the safe and brownstoned refuge of Park Slope, traverse a purgatory of Hasidism, and arrive in a beautiful and viscous entanglement of graffiti, funeral parlors, wind-blown shopping bags, and bacon-drenched bodegas.

And children.

“Where’s Brownsville?” “I’ve never heard of it.” “Where is it?”

“It is just 15 minutes from here,” I’d tell people when they’d ask where I worked.

An elision, a non-place, a gap on the map. Forgotten reaches of Black America.

In the panicked calm before school or the chest-crushing fatigue after, the battered frame of my ‘95 Corolla became a steel confessional box. Together Maya and I shared our fears, and joys masked as fears, we talked of sisters and mothers, poetry, lesson plans, abortions, and fathers. We discussed our bodies and our Whiteness, Juliet and Romeo, the Regents, and always our students’ Blackness. I learned about Sukkot and modesty, about women who shave their heads for husbands and beautiful, radical mothers who shit on the floor in private, political reckonings.

In *Teaching by numbers*, Peter Taubman (2009) laments “the screaming absence in education of any attention to the inner life of teachers” (p.3). He poignantly argues that the Age of Accountability is “certainly impoverishing the intellectual lives of teachers and students” (p.5) and creating a climate where schooling and learning are “cast as immune to the unpredictable... immune to the unpredictable swirls of emotions and private meanings circulating in a class, the contingencies of autobiographies or the complexity of situations” (p.174). With state and federal mandates pushing data-driven instruction and replicable models, increasing attention is being given to educational research that documents the easily quantifiable and observable aspects of teaching and learning, yet “Ignored are the minor shocks and pleasures that penetrate the psyche and color and shape whatever happens in a particular class on a particular day” (Taubman, 2009, p.174). Rather than avoiding the complex and at times contradictory desires, histories and affects that circulate within multicultural classrooms, this paper seeks to explore how our personal and political ‘projects’ simultaneously haunt and animate, cripple and enable our teaching lives.

Like the peeling interior of my beat-up Toyota, the pages that follow bear witness to a conversation between teachers, a conversation that like that old car hurling through Brooklyn is mobile, perhaps even errant. Maxine Greene (2006) argues that “the crucial demand of our time is to attend, to pay heed” and urges that “There must be a connectedness among persons, each with a sense of agency, each with a project” (prologue). If we are to find a means out of the

terminal logic of an educational climate marked by accountability and audit culture (Taubman, 2009) and if we are, as Greene (2006) insists, “to think of things as if they could be otherwise” (prologue), we must pay heed to the interminable questions and projects that mark teaching lives.

Nancy Lesko and Susan Talburt (2012) ask what it might mean to move away from safe, celebratory and pleasurable narratives within educational research and instead face “bad feelings” such as “uncertainties, mistakes, misrecognitions, messiness and knowledge without ‘next steps’ or ‘best practices’” (p.287). This ‘project’ seeks to explore the political, aesthetic and curricular (im)possibilities that result when the technocratic logics of accountability are usurped and the comforts of closure, certainty, “next steps’ and ‘best practices’” are eschewed. Framed around a discussion between myself and a former teaching colleague, I explore how one teacher’s personal political project, an online archive of abortion stories, and the embodied experience of her own abortion, embroiled her, her students and her teaching colleagues in complex affective entanglements. Through our discussions, I also confront the ‘complications’—“bad feelings” of loss, mourning and misrecognition—my own pregnancy and subsequent abandonment of the profession engendered, particularly in the “affective economies” (Ahmed, 2004, p.44) connecting my bodily and affective experiences to those of my colleagues’ and students’. Rather than seeking unity or authentic ‘voice’ through our talk, I instead stand alongside Janet Miller (2005) in contesting “unproblematized identity constructs of ‘teacher’ as well as ‘teachers’ stories” that “assume one singular, authoritative, and completed (as in ‘empowered teacher’ or ‘reflective practitioner’) version of self, identity, experience, voice and story” (p.51). Dialogue, if it is to be part of a curricular ‘otherwise,’ does not assure understanding and does not promise clear communication or consensus. The labor of dialogue is often uncomfortable. Although I rely on interview data, the comfort and fixity of transcribed words, as well as the ‘authority’ of my personal experiences as a teacher, my attempts at closure and certainty are repeatedly undercut by the fluxity of meaning and memory. Writing, like dialogue, entails its own birthing pains. Our textual children often turn to us with unfamiliar faces—their strange smiles bespeaking the unpredictability and impossibility of *reproduction*.

In *Precarious life: The powers of mourning and violence*, Judith Butler (2004) asks us to consider “how we are not only constituted by our relations but also disposed by them as well” (p.24). When we dialogue, when we pay heed to another, as Butler explains, “the very ‘I’ is called into question by its relation to the Other, a relation that does not precisely reduce me to speechlessness, but does nevertheless clutter my speech with signs of its undoing. I tell a story about the relations I choose, only to expose, somewhere along the way, the way I am gripped and undone by these very relations. My narrative falters, as it must” (p.23). Through a series of aesthetic interventions, I use Maya’s poetry and artwork to puncture and provoke the ‘authority’ of my narrative and to highlight the insufficiency, vulnerability and even violence inherent in both the telling of ‘our’ tale and of language itself. Although this may be disorienting for readers, I offer disorientation as a possible new orientation for educational research. As Sara Ahmed (2006) writes, “Moments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground” (p.157). Being disoriented may offer a productive means of escaping the normative groundings—the *orientations*—of current educational paradigms. When we are disoriented space opens up and we can move in new and unexpected directions. As Ahmed (2004) muses, “If orientations point us to the future, to what we are moving toward, then they also keep open the possibility of changing directions and of finding other paths, perhaps those that do not clear a common ground, where we can respond

with joy to what goes astray” (p.178). Perhaps I’ve experienced a bit of joy in letting my text go astray.

Unlike my old red car pulling into the safety of the school parking lot, this paper does not stop at a final and safe destination. Yet, as Greene (2006) urges, “There must be an ability to anticipate and accept incompleteness. Even when a controversy appears to be resolved, gaps and spaces remain, and the need for open questions” (Greene, 2006, prologue). Yet, rather than a deficit, absence or lack, as the logic of accountability would have us think, “where there is a space, a gap, there is the possibility of new choices, renewed reflection” (Greene, 2006, prologue). How might paying heed to the lived and remembered experiences of teachers, to the emotive and embodied histories they share, to the political projects that orient and disorient their lives and teaching, and to the inherent and “necessary incompleteness” (Miller, 2005) of their stories, gesture towards new conceptions of how we understand, imagine and animate what it means to be “accountable”?

Alyssa: Tell me about Project Voice.

Maya: It’s a compilation of abortion stories from as many women as possible...and the idea is to deflate the abortion stigma by making—well basically—well, the story behind it is after I had an abortion I was having difficulty finding people to connect with, and I found myself very secretive about it and as I was talking to more and more people realizing that close friends and family members had had abortions ... document as many stories as possible...show that it’s so common...it’s something that has happened to, or a decision that women of all backgrounds, religions, races, circumstances have made...and even in a society that’s pretty liberated in a lot of ways it’s still a really taboo subject even among women who consider themselves to be outspoken, feminists, comfortable with themselves it’s still, there’s still a stigma attached so in a sense Project Voice is really an attempt to break that stigma (Pindyck, 2009a).

We are women who consider ourselves to be outspoken, feminists, comfortable with ourselves.

*Two doors down
my mother sat in the envelope room,*

*attending a lecture by Nancy Spero.
Nancy passed around a waxy Tibetan envelope,*

*beautifully painted—a landscape—
broken at the flap.*

*In order to see the painting in its entirety
someone had to seal the flap.*

*It seemed an impossible task.
Either everyone forgot how*

*or they were simply afraid
to lick. Brave Mother volunteered to lick it*

shut,

completing the painting (the fire). (Pindyck, 2009, p.13, italics added)

Dejhane: “Are you pregnant?”

Lashaun: “Are you pregnant?”

Za-ir: “Are you pregnant?”

“Yes.”

Alyssa: *Is there a pedagogy behind Project Voice?*

Maya: *I guess the pedagogy of Project Voice would be that it's a social movement, it's non-judgmental and it's supposed to be personal and not political. So women are encouraged to tell their story whatever their story is, doesn't matter what they felt—I mean it matters—it doesn't matter—it's not like we're going to choose one story over another [...] It's a space open for all stories [...] It's meant to be a safe space for all stories surrounding and changing the conversation surrounding abortion. So it's personal stories, it's not political rhetoric, it's not “I believe this,” you know, not pumping out political jargon, but kind of just getting to the heart of—which I think is good writing. [...] What do you have to say about your experience?* (M.Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

“...My love, my infant—try again.” (Pindyck, 2009, p.11)

Felezia's head is on her desk. I tap her on her shoulder as I walk up the aisle. Her face is pale and she drools. She looks up bleary-eyed as if I'd awoken her from a deliciously deep sleep. I look at the line she has begun in her class journal. By mid-October her meticulously maintained notebook became fragmented. There are dozens of incomplete assignments, half-finished sentences, pieces just begun then broken off. Even today's poetry assignment—poetry usually her favorite—doesn't stir her. Later, hushed and reproachful, a colleague tells me that Felezia is pregnant. I am pregnant, too, though no one in school knows yet. I wonder if my colleague knows and the reproach in her voice is not just aimed toward Felezia.

The next day when she sleeps in my class, I let her. I know the cavernous first-trimester fatigue she feels. I feel a sisterhood with her and vicariously relish the rest that I “give” her, sleep that I too ravenously crave. It is perhaps the most intimate thing I've shared with a student—this letting of sleep—though it goes unspoken and unaware. As I go about my lesson, we share in our body's secrets—secrets that will soon spill over into the classroom, exceed our attempts to rein them in, betray us.

She fails my class and is gone from school for weeks at a time. I go into the dean's office and search through the worn blue cards to find her telephone number. None of the numbers written in her bubbly lettering work. In January she comes back. She is not pregnant and her face has regained its color.

I am showing.

Alyssa: *Any thoughts about your teaching women in prison & how it relates to your current teaching &/or Project Voice?*

Maya: *The female inmates at the prison were thrilled to be writing. Life seemed pretty boring for them and they were grateful to have people come in, listen to them, and just ask them to express themselves. They were very open—it was an emotional experience. When I taught creative writing to my students it was emotional as well. Students wrote about deadbeat dads, deaths, violence, loss in their family, teenage confusion... there were tears and lots of support (especially among the female students). [...] Project Voice: not necessarily EMOTIONAL, but open to all emotions. A [...] space for expression and reflection on a personal narrative.*

In all three (prison, classroom, Project Voice) a supportive and encouraging environment opens the door for expression, personal stories, and emotions that subvert/defy the structure of an institution (by nature: rigid, standing, impermeable, unchanging)-- the stories move the speaker and the reader, a shift occurs in the telling (M. Pindyck, personal communication, December 16, 2009).

Are we ever freed of accountability?

Alyssa: What about as English teachers, do we have a responsibility to address things like this—or—I don't even know what my question is—how—do we have a social responsibility to—or—I felt when I taught the boys class I avoided questions—the word “homosexual”—I mean [the prefix] “homo-” was on my board and everyday the boys erased it and it's almost, I felt it was almost like they erased that conversation, and I as a teacher just let it be erased, so do you think it's our responsibility to address these things, these risky topics...should I have let that be erased from my curriculum...?

Maya: [...] I remember with the seniors having a debate about abortion and then at the end K. [said], “Ms. Pindyck, what do you believe? Are you pro-life or pro-choice?” and I [replied], “I'm not going to answer that, I'm your teacher.” And he [replied] “It's not fair, we told you.” (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

Paula Salvio (2007) writes that some “argue that the discipline of confession and autobiography are rituals of discourse that require the presence of an authority figure who has the power to exonerate, redeem, or purify the speaking/writing subject. When students draw on the personal under the watchful gaze of the teacher, no matter how liberatory the teacher's practices may be, students are vulnerable to being coerced into constructing a self they believe the teacher may approve of or the institution may sanction” (p. 4). How do teachers construct versions of themselves under the watchful eyes of students? Of colleagues and friends? Where do we draw the line between our private, inner lives, our political projects and public personas, and the lines that draw us towards our students, lines that cross and ensnare us in messy intellectual, corporeal and affective entanglements?

Ms. Pindyck, what lines draw me to you? What lines divide us?

Alyssa: The website is open...so how do you feel as a teacher that your students could find this website and find this information about you?

Maya: I feel great about that. I've never had the situation—it's not something I think I'd explicitly answer in the classroom, but I don't feel ashamed that I—it says on the website that I had an abortion, so there is that piece of personal experience, so it doesn't just say, you know, Maya started this project. And I would be OK with that. I think if my students really were curious or had issues with it, or had a problem they would talk to me about it.

Alyssa: We ask our students to spill everything out, but why are we erased—why do we not get to have a voice? (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

Hey,

I don't know if this site is still active, but I did want to share my experience, if only for myself. My child would be four years old, as of, if I can believe my initial doctor's estimate of conception, yesterday. Yesterday.

If this is truly a place for voices, mine is smaller than my child's. I regret the entire decision, and feel still that I was prodded into it by my then boyfriend. Of course, he would not want to support an unplanned life for 18 yrs. Who would?

That part makes sense. My own weakness does not. This is how I feel. I'm sure other women feel differently. Hell, it probably saved some women's lives to have an abortion. I don't know. My words are worth nothing.

My husband knows nothing of this. My womb has, as my current doctor called it, "slight scarring." Still, I am hopeful. And who do I have to talk to, save this probably dormant website?

I gave a fake email. I can't risk this getting around. My husband thinks I go to NA meetings. I quit them all long ago, and have felt no desire to return to weed nor alcohol. Still, it is a cover. Same floor, same time.

If God exists, I hope these feelings don't last forever. We're trying for a baby. The one I handed back would be four. It feels almost amazing. None of it is.

(anonymous entry, projectvoice.org)

In the entry above, the writer disclaims authority for her text. Her voice is tiny, "smaller than her child's" and may not even be received (the site is "probably dormant"). Yet she speaks, "if only for [her]self." The entry she "risks" highlights the complexity of dialogue—how we both need and don't need an addressee, how we are both comforted and undone by our shared stories, and how we can never predict and control the reception of our words. The "decision" she "regret[s]" is met with undecidability. What does it mean for us to share her narrative here—to be privy to things her "husband knows nothing of"? Do her "words mean nothing" as she (dis)claims? In what ways are we now embroiled in her story and how does this involvement shift the burden of accountability?

I go to a bar to hear Maya read her poetry. It is one of the first times I've left my son with someone else. I feel out of place around all the young people with my milk and maternal body.

I ask Maya about my—*the*—school I've left. We talk excitedly about students, about teachers and the office staff. I have so many questions and can't hold back the barrage of names spilling from my lips—although my mother schooled me never to mention peoples' names in public. The audience mumbles over the first two readers, and it is hard for me to remain quiet when I have so many questions, and Maya—my last connection to the school—sits beside me. There is silence when she takes the stage.

The most haunting poem she reads is called "LIST OF LOST WOMEN REFLECTED ONTO ITSELF." She reads the list of names, Arabic/Israeli, so slowly, with such smoldered power. She wields an accent I've never heard. I want to scream or jump out of my seat as she reads. The names echo in my head for days:

Adiva	Aviva
Adiba	Adina
Alima	Aliza
Farah	Sarah
Ghaliyah	Galia
Hadiyyah	Hadassah
Mariam	Miriam
Mayasa	Maya
Nur	Nurit
Sharifah	Shira
Talibah	Talia
Yasmine	Yasmine

(Pindyck, 2009, p. 46)

“...women write their lives through the lives of others...” (Salvio, 2007, p. 5, italics added)

We are in Maya’s dark, brownstone apartment. I am recording with my computer. Maya would rather not record her face while she speaks. When later I watch the video there is just blackness, her voice and the occasional flicker of her thin hand in the lower left of the frame. Only at the end, at 29:29 does her white face briefly illuminate the screen.

When I conducted my interview with Maya, I thought I got the answers I wanted. Now, I listen to the recording and hear myself on the tape, willing meaning. It’s almost disgusting to me now to hear my encouraging replies to her comments, my entreating for what I think are the answers I want.

Alyssa: “That’s a beautiful connection.”

The moment I want happens off camera and I ask her to repeat it. “*Can you say that again?*” I am getting her to articulate my conclusion, to sum up what I want to hear. I can already see the words pixilated on my computer beautifully concluding my paper. I’ll give Maya the last word, I decide. It will be perfect. I ask her again:

Alyssa: Maya, how did you feel doing this interview?

Maya: Well, for me it was the first time I was connecting Project Voice with being a teacher, strangely—maybe—I don’t know why I’ve never made that connection. That the space of Project Voice is the classroom, analogous to the classroom [...]

Alyssa: So wait, tell me more about Project Voice being a classroom, I like that.

Maya: So, well, I feel in a sense, Project Voice is a—I’m—through Project Voice, Sarah and I are facilitating a space for people just to be themselves and be open about their experiences, and when I’m teaching my goal is to facilitate a space where people can be themselves. But also, [being a teacher and Project Voice] are about breaking a stigma. So, in the classroom I hope that the stigma of the poor, Black student in Brownsville, in a disadvantaged neighborhood, is broken by what they’re able to achieve and accomplish and discuss and create in the classroom, just as I hope the stigma of a woman who has an abortion is broken by the simple act of sharing in Project Voice.

Alyssa: Lovely. Thank you. (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

How am I constructing Maya as I interview her? What am I purifying, exonerating? What am I coercing and willing into being? I get the pleasure of a conclusion, the closure I think I desire, but somehow it is not satisfying to me. The story is not complete.

I am in the lactation room of the Mudd Engineering building at Columbia. I have twenty minutes to pump. As the electric whirl of the pump mingles with the oxytocin seeping into my blood, my body relaxes. I am worried. Where am I in this research? Why am I turning away from myself, deflecting my gaze to Maya? What do I want to know?

What am I afraid to know?

I flip through my “Research in Practice” notebook. In it are fragments, scribblings of Janet’s (Miller, 2009) and my own words:

representations of anyone or anything as the “truth” is not only impossible, but dangerous

indeterminacy of knowing...

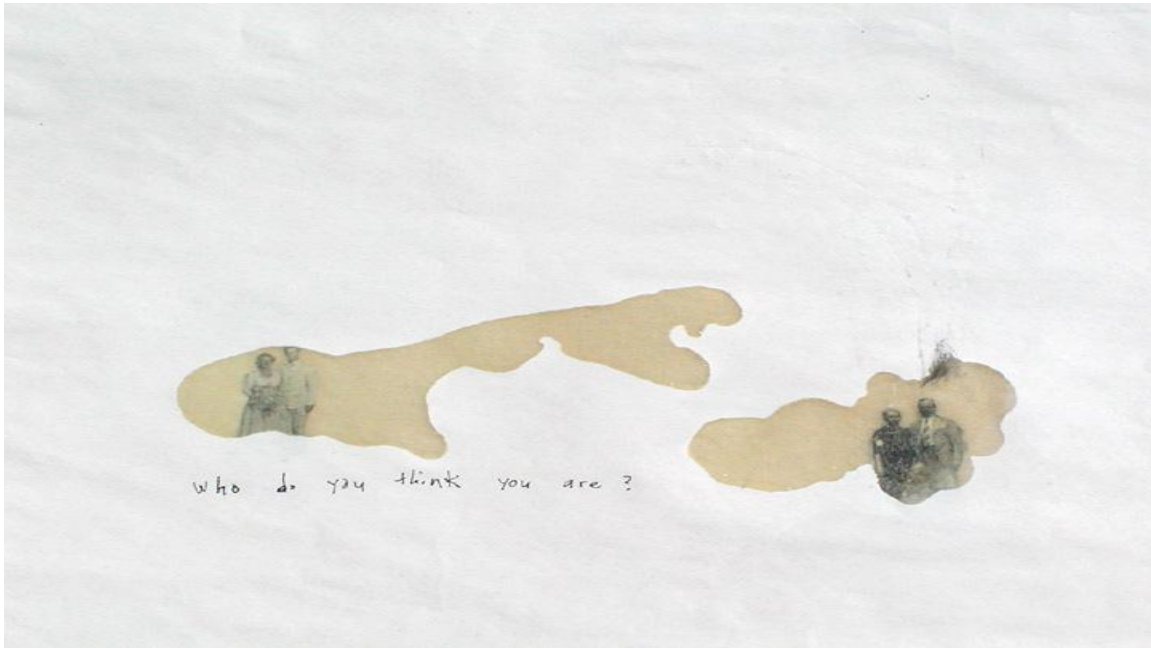
What happens when a teacher turns attention on self?

There is no way to take self out of research.

What do you want to know?

reflexive

recursive
a turning back on oneself...
creepy detours...
You must completely own your own subjectivity.
You are the data.
Pay attention to the gaps and silences in your thinking.
Don't interrupt silences.
Don't feel compulsion to fill them in.



Maya Pindyck, *Who Do You Think You Are?*, 2004, mixed media on newsprint

My notes call back Maya's words:

Maya: [Instead of], 'This is the right way,' [...] in Judaism it's more like, 'Figure out the right way,' with strange questions that might not get you there, as opposed to right and wrong. So I think that culture, religion, race, all that stuff does play into it. (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

In order to escape the terminal logics—the right or wrong—that mark political and educational debates—what 'strange questions' might we pose instead? How might we defer arrival, fixity, finality and instead follow threads that might not always lead us "the right way"? What unexpected surprises—what joy or exquisite discomforts might we find in going astray?

I dream of my former classroom. I am outside looking through the windows. I tap on the glass. I yell. The students smile and laugh with their new teacher. No one hears me.

Nurit.

Nurit.

Nurit.

In the car Maya told me about how her mother visited her once at the middle school she taught at before our school. Her students were fascinated by her—her Israeli accent and visual mirroring of Maya. They loved her mother. She said for the rest of the year that she would

come into her classroom and her mother's name—"Nurit"—would be written on the board, she'd hear it whispered in the room. Her mother's visit permanently marked her classroom.

I remember being surprised at seeing teachers in the supermarket—that they too had lives outside of school, hungers. Perhaps students were fascinated that Maya had a family, a history—a story and account(ability) that tied her to other people, other lands, other beliefs—a kinship line that now wove around them. Perhaps they were surprised to see that history, that familial intimacy allowed into the space of the classroom. The name repeated on the board may have been an attempt at preserving that space, of retracing that line through the day-to-day drudgery of school life.

Paula Salvio (2007) writes, "That women resist the insights offered to us from other women, particularly our mothers, is no longer a startling insight." It startles me. She continues, "Feminist scholars and writers have elaborated on the myriad ways in which females repudiate their mother's bodies and the social and intellectual limitations the female body has come to signify" (p.10). I don't follow her footnote. Instead, I read an essay called "Mother Love's Education," in a book Salvio (Boldt and Salvio, 2006) helped edit. Alice Pitt (2006) writes about matricide and I carefully copy and post on my wall the question, "Why must the mother be destroyed and what remains after such a terrifying act?" (p. 87). I am interested in her idea of "the mother as paradox: our mothers create the grounds for our eventual understanding that we cannot represent them, they both hold the illusion of unmediated understanding and allow for its disillusion through a fantasy of matricide" (p. 90). If the mother represents an unfulfillable promise of "unmediated understanding" as well as the paradoxical binds of representation, it is little wonder that mothers haunt these pages. As I write, I keep wondering whose child is this text? Who will bear parental responsibility? And I must ask:

Why did I need to destroy my teaching self in order to be a mother?

Alyssa: Is there any sort of politics behind Project Voice?

Maya: The point of Project Voice is to get away from politics. So, if there are politics it's perhaps a residual—it's something that just happens, but it's meant to be not political. So, it's a website that has stories by people who are strongly pro-choice, strongly pro-life, neither, pro-life but happy about their decision, pro-choice but regretful and grief—so, you know, so it's not—it doesn't fit into a political category and it's meant to be not political. But I think it can't help at the same time but be political, because the idea to break the abortion stigma is a political choice. (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

Where do politics begin? Where do they end? Where do we draw the lines in our classrooms and research?

Prologue

Her story began
She wore a white woolen cap

for that is how she entered this world.
This is how we speak from memory—

*a white woolen cap clamped on her black hair,
drenched in the mystery fluid. (Pindyck, 2009, p.41)*

I type words into the library search box:

women
 abortion
 education
 political
 bodies
 race
 feminism
 blood
 story
 mother.

The words lead me into a thicket of research: quantitative and qualitative studies on teenage pregnancy in schools, on stress' effects on health outcomes for African American women, on the sexual stereotyping of Mormon men in the media. So instead, I turn to those I know and trust, or those I know others I know and trust know and trust. So I return to Pinar (2004):

The method of *currere* reconceptualized curriculum from course objectives to complicated conversations with oneself (as a “private” intellectual), an on-going project of self-understanding in which one becomes mobilized for engaged pedagogical action—as a private-and-public intellectual—with others in the social reconstruction of the public sphere. Curriculum theory asks you, as a prospective or practicing teacher, to consider your position as engaged with yourself and colleagues in the construction of a public sphere, a public sphere not yet born, a future that cannot be discerned in, or ever thought from, the present. So conceived, the classroom becomes simultaneously a civic square and a room of one's own (Pinar, 2004, p. 38).

Yes, the classroom as a civic square. The impossible task of separating the public and private. An on-going project. The text is highlighted in yellow. I don't understand what I have highlighted before, why it was important to me. It is funny how time remolds the mind. In addition to my yellow markings, the photocopied text has the underlinings of another reader. I think of Derrida's (1981) edict “One must then, in a single gesture, but doubled, read and write” (p. 64). Today I wield a blue highlighter. There is very little green, very little overlap between my past researcher self, the absent Other/reader, and my present self as researcher. Each reading begins again, anew, the text “an organism,” Derrida (1981) proclaims, that “indefinitely regenerat[es] its own tissue behind the cutting trace, the decision of each reading” (p.63).

Today when I read Pinar (2004) I am excited. I read quickly, holding my breath, tense. He quotes himself from before, performing the acrobatic recursivity of *currere*: “Make it whole. It, all of it—intellect, emotion, behavior—occurs in and through the physical body....I am placed together. Synthesis” (p. 37). His words, somewhere already etched in the contours of my brain, lay claim to my body. Yet, rather than whole, my body is slipping; it aches. Pinar (2004) quotes Mary Aswell Doll, “Curriculum is also...a coursing, as in an electric current. The work of the curriculum theorist should tap this intense current within, that which courses through the inner person, that which electrifies or gives life to a person's energy source” (Doll quoted in Pinar, p. 37). There is a kick within me. Pages 36 and 37 are multicolor testaments to multiple readings, moments, people and meanings. Yellow, blue, their admixture in green and black. A mess of the residues of time and ink. A leaking. A seeping. A bleeding.

“*The moment of synthesis—one of intense interiority...*” (Pinar, 2004, p. 37, italics)

added)

“...one’s distantiation from past and future functions to create a subjective space of freedom in the present” (Pinar, 2004, p. 36, italics added).

“I see that there is a coherence. Not necessarily a logical one, but a lived one, a felt one” (Pinar, 2004, p. 36, italics added).

The decision to abort was made hastily. After having previously been set on carrying the pregnancy to term, I made my decision and booked the appointment the same day. Two days later he accompanied me to a clinic. I think I nearly ran away after the car was parked. I was fearful for the creature I'd become so close to over those six or seven weeks, and torn about my decision, which was still about 50/50.

Months later, I struggle with feelings of grief and uncertainty, although I have come through the hopelessness and depression well (which enveloped me for months). I do not regret my decision, but more the way it was made, out of panic rather than out of peace. I am now seeking peace and forgiveness between myself and the fetus, whose presence I felt so strongly within me. I am a strong believer in choice, but I also believe that a certain resolution needs to be achieved in order to be at peace with any major life decision.

(anonymous entry, projectvoice.org)

My son’s cries disturb my work. I keep having to leave mid-sentence to offer him milk. Madeleine R. Grumet (2006) likens the breast to books. Perhaps my feeding of him, my temporary quelling of desire, is not separate from this paper. I wipe my shirt of spit-up and sit down to begin again. The damp washcloth I place on the desk leaves an imprint on my notes. Yesterday, the baby ripped apart my printed draft—his saliva-soaked hand smeared blue with the rows of Maya’s painting “Learning, Learning.” When the ink dried there were even words clearly printed onto his palm. It is not lost on me this intermingling of bodily fluids and the messy tissues of text. This indivisibility of my work and my child—this cross-contamination, or more prettily put, ‘cross-pollination.’ “And for those of us who have raised babies it is amazing how continuous that environment of their fluids and our bodies becomes. It is difficult to select the accurate preposition for the relation: in our bodies, of our bodies, on our bodies, with our bodies?” (Grumet, p.213). Whose body is this? How is my story, my body implicated within others? As Butler (2004) writes, “my body is and is not mine. Given over from the start to the world of others, it bears their imprint, is formed within the crucible of social life” (p.26). What traces of Maya, of my students, of both born and unborn children, have leached into my skin, leaked from my pores, the cells smeared across these pages?

The Waiting Room

I am the only white woman here.

The thirteen-year old girl next to me is eighteen weeks pregnant.

A twenty-eight-year old with a daughter of twelve is about to have her fifth abortion. She’s been stupid, she says, keeps relearning her lesson. Nine women are talking about how hungry they are. They are mad at the staff for making them wait, mad they can’t

smoke or eat beforehand. They talk of ribs,

cornbread, crab Rangoon, double bacon cheeseburgers, bastards who say the kid ain't their own, boyfriends who want the baby until it's born (turns out too ugly), married lovers, husbands who eat their pregnant wife's food and won't buy more, promise breakers, breast suckers, neck kissers—

Ladies, listen up!

A large woman
with a black scarf wrapped around her head
stands up. *You don't need no man! All you need's a glass of wine, some candlelight, a steamy book...*

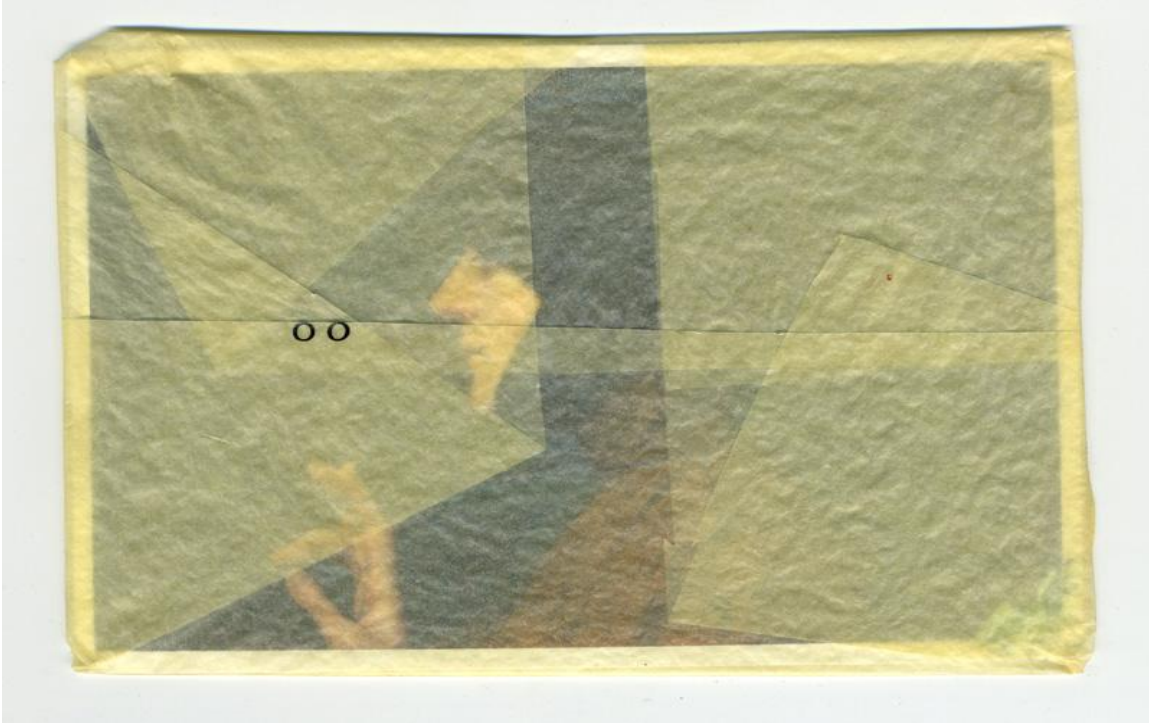
The room explodes with clapping and whistling.
Suddenly, another woman is recounting
what she told a man
who tried to court her mother
with a bag of M&Ms:

*You don't step past the door with that shit.
You bring my mother a dozen roses. Red roses.
You bring her a big box of chocolates.
You dress yourself up nice, not looking like that.
You hear me?*

We are laughing now, beginning to howl.
Even the nervous Chinese girl in the corner is smiling.
Four times the nurse has to ask us to be quiet.
Knee slapping, chair spanking, the whack of a high-five—

Sisters, sisters, keep it down!

I do not want to leave them. Ever. My toes
are poking out of the paper slippers. A breast
peeks out of my gown. I cannot,
I cannot go back. (Pindyck, 2006, p.14)



Maya Pindyck, 2005, *Secret*, Postcard Intervention

I realize today, if I am quiet and completely honest, that somewhere in me, somewhere in my liberal, progressive, feminist body, I wanted to exonerate, purify the women of the children “who would be four years old today.” But I realize now it is not their children that I am mourning.

*Inside it, me: a wasp head,
Not quite unaware. The stinger pointed out.*

*Of my own daughter, all I see is eggshell.
Hardened would-be. Daphne, how gray and round
You appear, how intensely.*

(Pindyck, 2009, p.18, italics added)

Alyssa: What about when it came to issues such as abortion?

Maya: Well it did come up—it never came up really in the class—Ms.- knows my stance, or knew—well, I don’t know if really my stance, but she knew I was not pro-life, I wouldn’t call myself that, and she’s very much pro-life. At one point she had a bulletin board with fetuses on it, or something—there was some bulletin board that she did which was like “Imagine yourself as a fetus” and think about [...] or, “Imagine yourself as a fetus” and write a letter to yourself, as if setting goals for yourself. So she had a bulletin board with pictures of fetuses and all these letters to your unborn child [...] what do you want for them, what do you hope, but there were pictures of fetuses on the board. So, I remember feeling very kind of upset by that, but I didn’t say anything to her about that and—

Alyssa: Tell me why—what made you upset about it?

Maya: Well, I felt like it was a teacher being—again, this is the right—I mean, it’s almost having crosses all over the place, and saying, “Write a letter to yourself as an ideal Christian.”

I don't know. There are so many students in the school with different views and different relationships to that, like why an unborn child? Why—What does that mean? And I felt like it was a reflection of her stance on abortion. Which I think she—I think Mr.—was telling me about a conversation they had once in the car somewhere, going to a retreat or whatever, and I guess Ms. — was like, “I’m not,” or something about people who are “for” abortion, and she put it that way as “anti” or “for,” and Mr.— made a joke like, “Yeah, I’m for basketball, popcorn and abortion.” And I think there’s a gap in an understanding, the conversation is so weird around abortion. (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

Letter to My Unborn Child,

I’m sorry for the stress and anxiety I put you through every day from 10:55 to 11:41. It is my fourth period class. It’s a class about social justice and the Holocaust, outside my ‘expertise.’ I dread the class. Unlike the safe haven of my classroom, it is housed in the art room. I think of this place with its curled paintings and paper mache masks hanging from the walls and light fixtures as a torture chamber. I am displaced. There is violence and chaos everywhere in the edges of this room. The students sense and perform my anxiety and agitation.

It must not be good for you to be exposed to so much cortisol and uterine contractions. I do research at night on *in utero* stress. The research is not good. Medical discourse tells me you might end up with a learning disability or emotional problems. Holocaust fetuses inherit heightened responses to stress.

There are students in the class that I love, such as Jewel and Amir. I would be happy if you were like them. Temika even calls me, “Mommy,” and though I know it’s inappropriate and I try to act indifferent when she says it, I secretly like it. She calls you, “her brother.” In a very real sense, you are both equally “my children.” Is this love enough?

My children often ask me if you will be black or white. It’s funny. There are students in that room that at times I envelop in a devouring hate, but even as I write this I feel guilty and think of the back of their heads, and yours, translucent, veined, at once innocent and bad, and then I don’t hate them. I want to apologize to you for hating and for loving them.

Love,
“Mommy”

You

are darker and poorer than I. Your hands splinter, feet swell, your anger ignites a dead tree, and in doing so both blackens and blanches its branches. (Is there a difference?) I ought to address my own people. Help me find them.

(Pindyck, 2009, p. 63, italics added)

Alyssa: Are there any ways that you see Project Voice—or—anyway that it intersects with your teaching? Or how does it intersect with your teaching?

Maya: I think Project Voice is also a[n] exercise in comfort, with myself, with my story, with my connection to other people, and I think—and I hope that it’s a sort chain of the connection and that exercise in comfort and just being who you are with your experience, you know, and not saying—and not judging it and not labeling it something, that just—and I think that when I’m teaching I try to have that comfort with myself as a teacher in the classroom and not to always play the role of the teacher, but to be like, OK, I’m Maya, I’m their teacher, I’m here, I’m a

human being with, you know, my own story, and I just try to be as natural with them as I can, and I hope that that creates a calm and open space for them to be natural and them to be supportive and comfortable with each other.

Alyssa: I think that's a beautiful place to stop [...] Can I have your face though? Can you press the "done"?

Maya: Where's the "done"?

Alyssa: It's right there—isn't it right there?

Maya: Oh, "stop"— (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)



Maya Pindyck, *Face to Face*, 2004 Mixed media on paper

Data do not lie in wait—waiting for their meaning to be uncovered. Data uncover us. My underlying assumptions—the answers I thought I already know—had to be *aborted*. Pinar (2004) warns that “serious autobiographical work requires surfacing and re-incorporation of repudiated elements” (p.39). My big fear: Where am I in this research? Pinar (2004) answers me: this is an “Indirect autobiography—an autobiographics of alterity” (p. 38). In Maya’s painting “Face to Face” a man, perhaps Israeli, perhaps Palestinian, perhaps neither, ‘faces’ an Other. The other man does not return his gaze, instead he faces us. What does he ask? What does his calm address demand of those who return his gaze? In *Precarious life*, Butler (2004) looks at the face as the mark and limit of the human. She describes how the face of “the ‘Other’ makes an ethical demand upon me, and yet we do not know which demand it makes. The ‘face’ of the other cannot be read for secret meaning, and the imperative it delivers is not immediately translatable into a prescription that might be linguistically formulated and followed” (p.131). Why did I turn to—did I ‘face’ Maya? What ethical plea does her white face illuminating a

computer screen, does her wry smile across the table make on me? Butler (2004) writes that “the fact that language arrives as an address we do not will, and by which we are, in an original sense, captured” means that “there is a certain violence already in being addressed, given a name, subject to a set of impositions, compelled to respond to an exacting alterity” (p.139). What violence do I commit by turning now and facing you (faceless) reader? Just as Maya’s students were fascinated by the redolences of Maya’s face in Nurit’s, so too am I aware more acutely than ever of the way faces echo, the ways we are rapturously and violently superimposed within the frames of our personal and teaching lives.

Maya tells a story:

The Glass

Muttering in Arabic, the cabbie slashes
Syllables against me & my

lack of—He coughs daggers
to pierce my lack of—

“The meaning of a grapefruit?”
“To tell the truth.”

Yalla! Yalla! I shout,
gagging his rant. He glances back

through the rearview
& asks me, in Arabic, if I speak

Arabee. This is the first question
I understand. We

converse for the remaining ride:
I in Hebrew, he in Arabic

God, the dividing glass,
scratched between us.

(Pindyck, 2009, p. 53)

I realize now that in my focusing on Maya, I was avoiding myself and the reasons I left teaching. There was a melancholic lost object I refused to incorporate, something I needed to pay heed to, a face, faces I could not ‘face.’ Yes, a—the—work, the project of mourning, of loss. Yes.

And perhaps, surely, even this is not the whole truth.

Dear Reader,

there will always be scratched glass between us.

Maya: But it’s not like there’s a right answer. [...] And I think there would be a lot of things like that. She’d say, ‘Listen, This is the right way of life, this is what you need to do.’ [...] It was hard because I felt like we had very different styles. And her style was very much, there was a right and a wrong. There was also a right way to behave, a right way to think, a right way to

speak, and I was not as strict about those things which I think was both a good and a bad for me as a teacher. (M. Pindyck, personal communication, November 5, 2009)

“Ms. Nicci, Can I touch your belly?”

strange questions that might not get you there

each with a project.

Maya—my last connection to the school—

It seemed an impossible task.

...a shift occurs in the telling.

Brave Mother

I seal the envelope
complete the fire

I give up

I give up

I give up

this child.

All students have been given pseudonyms. All artwork reprinted with artist’s permission.

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