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## ARTICLE

**Coming into Presence: The Unfolding of a Moment**

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We are always, always being swept along in a moment of becoming. Let us for once hold such a moment, brimming again with precious fragile life. (Dragland, 2008)

My husband teaches science in a junior high school (grades 8-10) and, every year, he co-directs a musical with his students. In a school of ninety students, sixty eager teenagers sign up for auditions. He and the English teacher assign roles for three casts because, as he insists, “anyone who shows up should be allowed to participate.” This practice of communal inclusion stems from his own experience of early disappointment in grade nine when he was cut from the Junior Boy’s basketball team during fall try-outs. (Four decades later, the memory still rankles.) “We’re doing *West Side Story* this year,” he announces, as yet undaunted by this year’s task of marshalling pubescent youths into stardom. “The three Marias look promising...”

Each year I tell him that he is theatrically overextending himself: “No professional in the theatre would attempt to direct three casts simultaneously. What secondary theatre arts teacher would even think of it? You’re dealing with teenagers! How will you do it?” As you can imagine, there’s never enough time to rehearse everyone fully, the coordination of props, costumes, and stage cues is inevitably chaotic. But still he and his colleague persist, arguing that the pedagogical invitation and achievements of this annual venture outweigh their moments of aggravation. And as I watch each year’s multiple casts perform, and listen to his narratives, it is clear to me that these students learn a great deal in their journey from audition jitters to productions’ end.

And so, every year, right on cue, I am present, front row centre. Two years ago, I applauded *Grease* three consecutive evenings. Last year, I cheered wildly as three *High School Musical* casts bowed to standing ovations. Tonight, for the second of three nights in a row, I am attending a performance of *West Side Story*. But my presence here is suspect. I am not simply an audience member who happens to be married to the musical theatre co-director.

Here is a confession. I am an assistant professor in arts education in a faculty of education, yet I disguise myself in this gathering as a teacher’s spouse, disclaiming any allusions by others to expertise. In doing so, I sidestep responsibility by association. And yet, I have accumulated just enough formal theatrical training to be one of those alarming front-row critics. I do try not to be overly judgmental, but inevitably, on our drive home after each show, I relapse.

Arriving early to accommodate my husband’s schedule, I wait distractedly for the performance to begin (a conference paper is due, a grant application requires signatures). Finally, the theatre lights dim, the whispering audience is shhhed to attention, cell phones are properly disciplined.

**A Moment of Arrival Unfolds**

As the curtains slowly rise, I glance at my watch; I am already calculating the time of my departure at their closing. I sink low into my chair, settling in with just enough grace to give the appearance of enjoyment of what I presume will be a theatrically challenging temporal engagement. In my somnolent mood, I pay little heed to Thoreau’s admonition,

To be awake is to be alive... We must learn to reawaken and keep ourselves awake, not by mechanical aids, but by an infinite expectation of the dawn, which does not forsake us in our soundest sleep. (as quoted by Greene, 1978, p. 42)

And then, a moment occurs that disturbs me into “wide-awakeness”<sup>11</sup>... (Greene, 1978, p. 42)

A grade-nine student—in the role of the male lead character Tony—embodies that which has not yet arrived in the moment of its arrival. Standing alone on the stage, he sings, “Something’s coming, something good, don’t know when, but it should be coming real soon...” (Sondheim, 1957), sailing through the first stanza like a novice camper in a wobbly canoe, gangly body tenuously positioned, paddle in hand, over-stretching his reach. At first, his voice is that of a typical fifteen-year-old, a pubescent voice full of cracks and squawks, desperately seeking footing on an unsettled lake. Marginally off-key, he struggles through the first verse. Then, launching into the second stanza,

...the teenager’s voice tumbles

into the deep rich tones of

the young man he is yet to be

yet already is in our presence.

Compassion, tenderness, enthusiasm shape his voice as he performatively embodies this something new at the edge of arrival. His voice holds all the possibilities of a young man's promise, the nuances and meaning of the words he is singing, "something's coming....," awakening the witness that I am in his presence. As I listen, what philosopher David Appelbaum (1995) might identify as a *stop, a moment of risk, a moment of opportunity*, presents itself in my presence, and I am called to mindful attention.

He stands singing before us,

unaware of his miraculous arrival as young man

born within this moment of

"unbearable lightness." (Kundera, 1984)

And coming awake, I realize that I am witnessing a moment of natality<sup>[2]</sup> (Arendt, 1958).

But then, alas, like an enchanted prince caught in a time warp, this grade-nine boy stumbles backwards into the awkward register of his teen-age voice, and the young man who had appeared before us, vanishes. Ah, but we have met him, for a moment, we have been awakened by his presence.

### **In our moment of awakening, what response becomes possible?**

As the *West Side Story* cast swings into a dance routine, I struggle to catch my breath. I am in this moment unsettled by this temporal apparition. In recognizing the arrival of a young man in our midst, I realize that I have witnessed Hannah Arendt's notion of natality, a rebirthing of the possibilities that is humankind, an opportunity to reclaim what has been lost, to celebrate what might become, embodied in a teenage boy's debut as a young man on stage. And truly it is a debut!

This moment of encounter startles, a young man arrives in our midst. The question becomes how do I, how do we as audience, as witnesses, as educators, now respond? As Gordon (2001) reminds us,

Natality stands for those moments in our lives when we take responsibility for ourselves in relation to others. In this way, natality initiates an active relation to the world. It signifies those moments in our lives (and there are many) in which we attempt to answer the question that Arendt argues is at the basis of all action and that is posed to every newcomer to the world: "Who are you?" (p. 21)

How will we receive him, this young man, as he arrives on stage within our midst? He is born anew in our presence, and there is no turning back now, now that we have arrived at this moment of natality; his arrival is our shared responsibility, our response and action require us to be present and wide-awake. We must be wary and aware of our own locations and complicity. This moment of a young man's arrival in our midst invites an uncomfortable shifting of the theoretical seating of my work, as well as in my physical seating here, now, in this theatre auditorium. I can no longer innocently claim that I am *merely* a member of the audience.

A young man comes into our presence, announcing his vulnerability, his newness; he arrives within an ongoing narrative that already anticipates his story; he arrives in a state of "belatedness"<sup>[3]</sup> (Levison, 2001) burdened with the expectations of future deeds and obligations that all young men are presumed to undertake in our midst. Might we, being fully awake to his presence, now hesitate in our directives, those imposed obligations (parental, educational, social, political, economic) that tell these young men what to do, how to live? Will we be able to silence ourselves and those time-worn narratives that hold us fast, to listen, as Maxine Greene (1995) advises us to do?

Will we receive with care this new arrival's willingness to engage in an emergent world, one that we have not yet imagined? Will we be willing to imagine new narratives of possible encounter and engagement? Or shall the old narratives, the ongoing narratives, and those narratives yet to be written—those that break our sons (and daughters) of their innocence—prevail? As this moment of his arrival unfolds, I feel the burden of responsibility come upon me. I shall not escape this moment easily—this moment calls me to action.

*How shall we receive you who stand before us in this moment?*

I sit on the edge of my seat, my response to this stranger's unexpected presence in precarious balance. How am I to understand this event that has appeared before me? I have been witness to all that is possible, and all that is impossible. A gap reveals itself

between what was and what may yet be—a temporal fission that holds and beholds a place of action—it is what Arendt (1961) refers to in her writings *Between Past and Future*, the possibility that is present within our midst. And I become aware of the consequence, responsibility, and unique opportunities that arise from such a witnessing.

Here we come to the central role of the teacher whose task it is to preserve natality, therefore insuring that the gap between past and future remains a space of freedom and possibility. (Levison, 2001, p. 30)

Theatre scholar Julie Salverson (2006, 2008), in her writings on witnessing, testimony, and the theatre, reminds us that as audience, witnessing is not to be lightly undertaken, that the act of witnessing an event occurs within communal, political, cultural, social, and environmental contexts, and that obligations emerge that require Dewey's "choice of action" (quoted by Greene, 1978, p. 47), an ethics of response. To recognize a situation, is to bring to it a sense of judgement, an awareness of one's social, political, cultural, environmental location, which in turn requires action (Arendt, 1958), with acute attentiveness to relationality. As Salverson (2008) cautions,

To step out from behind a mask of solidarity and engage with Others, to approach a stranger with a vulnerable availability that makes witnessing an active and transitive encounter; this is, in Levinas' terms, infinitely demanding. (p. 254)

I know this young man. This brief temporal event is a haunting, a reminder of other youths, brothers, my friends' sons, my son's male friends, an unknown street youth, a fleeting glance of a torn body moving through the crowd, other appearances in other locations, a birthing anew, and yet, there is something unique that marks this appearance. I am called to an awareness of reciprocity of responsibility here, a relationality as yet unwritten between the lines of the script that performs our presence, a recognized responsibility that I cannot ignore by drowning out my obligations with sustained applause.

*How shall we receive this young man into our presence? How will he perceive us?*

## Dwelling in Stops

I have through my work conceptualized and articulated performative inquiry (Fels, 1998; Fels, 1999) that recognizes the learning and questioning that emerge through performative processes and engagements. This way of being in inquiry attends to the "stops" (Appelbaum, 1995) that emerge through performative encounters and upon reflection that call our attention to what matters. These stops are action-sites of learning which, in turn, inform our pedagogical practices and/or ways of being in the world. The conceptual underpinnings of performative inquiry propose that it is through the interplay of performative explorations and our lived experience, past, present, and anticipated, that we come to moments of learning; moments of recognition which, in turn, illuminate our embodied experience in relationship with others. The questions I ask as a researcher are, How are we performed? Who (or what) performs us? And why?

These past few months, I have been reading texts anew, texts written by David Appelbaum, Maxine Greene, Eugenio Barba, and Hannah Arendt. Each one of these evocative scholars reminds me that I must, in my academic and pedagogical endeavors, be mindfully aware of performance embodied within my presence. Key theoretical concepts offered by these writers give me pause—Greene's wide-awakeness; Appelbaum's stop; Barba's melodies of presence (1995), and Arendt's natality—these concepts are reminders that my work dwells not only in the classroom, but in our everyday lives, beyond these classroom walls, where we are performed, where we perform. Our presence, and our absence, matter.

Not walls of cement, but...  
the melodies of your temperature.  
(Barba, 1995, p. 162)

If we are to understand the theories of complexity in education (Davis, Kieran, & Sumara, 1996; Davis, Sumara, & Simmt, 2003; Fels, 2009), in which new possible entities emerge through networks of interactions, we are all players, complicit in this performative entanglement that marks our presence. Whether audience members or spectators<sup>[4]</sup>, educators or citizens—if we are to be truly present—there is a responsibility of reciprocity, a required willingness to attend to what matters, an act of listening that creates an acoustmatic text (Daignault, 2005) that requests our engagement. What matters, I am learning to understand in this practice we call scholarship, is the action (Arendt, 1958) we bring to those theoretical concepts that resonate with our being.

In my scholarship, as a performing arts educator, I dwell in performative moments, embodied moments of recognition<sup>[5]</sup> that are stops, that shake me awake, that demand my response. These stops alert me to the risk, the opportunity that is held within each moment, performed and lived, simultaneously straddling worlds of imagination, memory, narrative, experience, and possible renewal. A stop is a calling to attention; a coming to the crossroads, in which a choice of action or direction must be taken, oft-

times blindly, as experienced by Appelbaum's (1995) blind man as he tap-taps the obstacles he encounters with his white cane—there are as yet unknown consequences of the subsequent action or decision as yet to be taken and embodied.

Between closing and beginning lives a gap, a caesura, a discontinuity.  
The betweenness is a hinge that belongs to neither one nor the other.  
It is neither poised nor unpoised, yet moves both ways . . .  
It is the stop. (Appelbaum, 1995, pp. 15-16)

A stop is a moment that tugs on our sleeve, a moment that arrests our habits of engagement, a moment within which horizons shift, and we experience our situation anew. A stop occurs when we come to see or experience things, events, or relationships from a different perspective or understanding; a stop is a moment that calls us to mindful awareness of Arendt's appeal for renewal through action in the gap between past and future.

How we choose to respond and how that choice of action or non-action impacts on our lives and on the lives of those around us speaks to the risk, the opportunity, to the possibility of action. As media philosophers Taylor and Saarinen (1994) remind us, in spaces as familiar as the London tube, or as unmapped as cyberspace, we must "mind the gap" (p. 5). Appelbaum's moments of stop are moments that call our attention to the gap; moments that interrupt, that provoke new questioning, that evoke response, reflection, and hopefully, lead to meaningful and moral action.

As an arts educator, I have often experienced Appelbaum's stop while engaging in role drama and playbuilding with my students.<sup>[6]</sup> I have, for example, been humbled by the lively wit and sense of social justice embodied in the eight-year-old boy who rejected my original suggestion for the ending of our play, *Jack & Jill & the Beanstalk*, when I proposed,

Okay, everyone, listen up. Jack chops down the beanstalk. The giant falls to the ground and lies on the floor dead. Now here's what we'll do. Everyone will hold hands and dance around the giant, singing, "Hurray, hurray, the giant's dead, now we all can go home to bed."

Tugging at my sleeve, this boy—whose teacher had instructed me to "just send him back to me if he gives you any trouble,"—announced that he had a better idea. "What is it?" I asked impatiently, eager to get on with our rehearsal. I am stopped by his response. "I'll be the police officer who arrests Jack and Jill and their mother for killing the giant!" His suggestion was immediately adopted by his classmates and welcomed with enthusiastic applause and laughter by parents and siblings crowded into a school auditorium during our performance.

*How is it that a child sees anew what I have not in this retelling of a fairy tale?*

*What would have been lost, if I had not stopped to listen?*

In a role play designed and led by student teachers, I found myself in role as a miserable tinsmith living in a medieval kingdom beset by political unrest. The king, who had been disguised amongst us, suddenly stepped forward out of a crowd in the midst of a protest march. As if in one breath, we all simultaneously kneeled, a hapless number of us bearing signs reading, "Down with the Monarchy!" As he sought out the traitors, I offered my life in exchange for that of the accused leader of our fledging democratic party, my friend.

"It is I you want, my liege," I said, stepping forth.

And in that fleeting moment, a child of duration<sup>[7]</sup> (Milloy, 2007), I suddenly understood the actions of Nelson Mandela who suffered 27 years in a cramped prison cell. And in that moment I recognized the action of the man who stepped forward, hand raised, to stop a convoy of tanks en route to Tiananmen Square—both actions of courageous men living in resistance and hope of a new possible world not yet imagined.

*Stone walls do not a prison make* (Lovelace, 1642).

Following the role drama, two of the student teachers came to me, asking, "Why didn't we also step forward with you? Why, when the king announced his presence, did we all kneel? Will we in our real lives be afraid to question others' authority?"<sup>[8]</sup> In the cropped photo in newspapers that celebrate the anniversary of Tiananmen Square, we often see only one tank, not the line of tanks waiting outside of the picture, attending this moment.

*How do we respond to those in our midst who dare to challenge what is,  
who invite us to imagine anew?*

I have come wide-awake, in these moments of the stop, and experienced agency and voice, loss and empowerment,

responsibility and complicity.<sup>[9]</sup> This learning that emerges through performative encounters is the gift of “releasing the imagination” that Maxine Greene (1995) invites us to contemplate, so that we might come to new ways of attending to and being in action in the world:

...the role of imagination is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected. (Greene, 1995, p. 28)

### A Question of Hospitality

As witness, I am—we are—simultaneously responsible, hopeful, and culpable in our reception of those who newly arrive within our midst. Even as we ask, *who are you*, we must in turn, ask, *who am I?*<sup>[10]</sup> (Meyer, 2008). Our desire and longing, engagement and commitment to political, economic, cultural, communal, personal, environmental, and historical narratives that shape us may betray us, and in turn betray this young man’s arrival in our midst. Our welcome may be false or self-serving, indifferent or negligent, even treacherous in its well-meaning. Our proffering of love we must also tender with suspicion, asking, “What or to whom have I given my heart?” (Leggo, 2008).

Or we may, as Derrida encourages, offer hospitality.

Pure and unconditional hospitality, hospitality itself, opens or is in advance open to someone who is neither expected nor invited, to whomever arrives as an absolutely foreign visitor, as a new arrival, nonidentifiable and unforeseeable, in short, wholly, other. (Derrida, as quoted in Borradori, 2003, pp. 128–9)

Derrida advises that we must learn to be willing to offer others the gift of unconditional hospitality, a welcoming that does not expect nor anticipate another’s arrival, but awaits the stranger who has not yet been imagined. Derrida’s words caution us not to impose expectations, nor seek to shape the other into something or someone recognizable, nor to make presumptions, nor to seize authority, and in doing so, demand reproduction of that which already is.

We must seek to choose, as Arendt (1961) advises, to share all that we know, yet to resist the temptation to tell those newly arrived what to do; we must be willing to acknowledge that which we cannot yet imagine. If we are to be truly open and vulnerable, and thus available to new imaginings, we must be fully committed to becoming not that which we have been or anticipate we will be, but that which we already are in innocence, in witness of and active response to the marking and remarking by others.

In these cautionary times, I hesitate to open the door of my abode to persistent knocking by strangers, fearing unwelcome responsibility, fearing the not yet known, fearing my own disappearance in the appearance of others. And yet entangled within that fear, communally, spiritually, politically, individually, is a desire, a hunger, a curiosity for new openings, for as yet unimagined journeys and intimacies that take me beyond my current horizon of familiar places. “Forget your perfect offering,” advises poet Leonard Cohen. “There is a crack in everything/ that’s how the light gets in” (1993, p. 373).

As educators and in our daily lives, how might we learn to welcome new encounters in unfamiliar “landscapes of learning” (Greene, 1978)? Might we, as educators, be willing to risk coming to know the as yet unknown that exists beyond and, perhaps more dangerously, within, our known locations? To do so—by giving ourselves permission to welcome the as yet not known —“enlarges the space of the possible” (Sumara & Davis, 1997, p. 299): New possibilities, new opportunities, new relationships emerge—spaces of potent encounter and engagement.

Yet I am wary. I shift uncomfortably in my seat, in this unexpected moment of arrival by a stranger. What new openings could possibly occur in a high-school production of *West Side Story* if we, as audience, as educators, as individuals, as a community, are wide-awake? What new possible recognitions might come into play between those who perform (both on and off the stage), and those who perceive/receive their performance which is also our own? Becoming wide-awake, will we recognize that we are not merely spectators but simultaneously complicit and responsible in this emergent performance of encounter? What confessions might be illuminated by the embodied presence of that which has not yet arrived? How dangerous is this welcoming of new arrivals? We may do well to ask of ourselves, “To what or to whom do I offer my heart?” (Leggo, 2008).<sup>[11]</sup>

### You Lay Down a Path in Walking...

*and when turning around  
you see the road you'll  
never stop on again.  
wanderer, path there is none,*



*only tracks on ocean foam.*

(Machado, 1930; F. Varela, Trans., 1987)

Francisco Varela (1987), in quoting poet Antonio Machado, reminds us of our temporal presence. He draws our attention to the “possible worlds” that unfold in our presence, willing us to be aware of how our journeys are shaped by who we are in relationship to our environment, to our contexts, to others who are also in motion, a shifting landscape of interlacing and emergent relationships. “What we do,” Varela says, “is what we know, and ours is but one of many possible worlds. It is not a mirroring of the world, but the laying down of a world...” (1987, p. 62).

We are always in a moment of departure, a moment of arrival; these ruptures<sup>[12]</sup> (Ricketts, 2007) are moments of potential beginnings, possible illuminations, moments of shared learning in which we recognize our responsibilities and our possibilities anew. We are human beings in constant fluidity, revealing even as we conceal who we are, our desires, our longings, our betrayals, our vulnerabilities. We speak longingly of roads not yet travelled, seeking destinations that we imagine we already know, moving somewhere away from who we were, in search of who we might become.

Travelling becomes our escape, our reconnaissance with lost selves, a child abandoned in the haste to seek adulthood, ever aware of a haunting in our midst, this child desiring to breathe as if for the first time. And yet, in each turning, with each new encounter, within the gap, we come face to face with ourselves, newly realized, newly recognized, if we are but wide-awake.

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.  
(Eliot, 1942)

Those of us who are present in the moment of your arrival in our midst are taxed with a great responsibility. What is the nature of our encounter—social, cultural, political, technological, gendered? What narratives unfold as you step mid-sentence amongst us? How will you perceive us? How will we, in the temporal haste and elusiveness of this moment, receive you? Who are you in our presence? Who might you become? Who do we seek to become in the presence of others?

As I contemplate this young man’s temporal presence, I realize that whoever he seeks to be is already embodied within my presence. In this joyous moment of his arrival, anything and everything is possible.

He knows, lying as he is inside this huge contentment, unalloyed for the delicate, threatened, inviolable moment, that he can do—anything. He knows or will know all the forces and impulses in the world, all the elements, the people and places and the animals and rocks and trees, the very spiders and snakes and chickadees and especially the rose-breasted grosbeak, all the music and stories and dancing, and the liquid diamond water of the creek—everything attached to him by invisible lines of force. He could reel it all in. He won’t, but he could. If he did, he would *be* Everything. Every single thing. At once. He could do anything and be anything. (Dragland, 2008, p. 328)

In this moment of recognition, we come to understand that each moment encapsulates who we once were, who we are, and who we may yet become. What matters, upon these moments of encounter between those who newly arrive amongst us and those who welcome, is that we recognize that what exists between us is a reciprocal possibility of newness and renewal as we lay down a path in walking. What matters is the witness who perceives and receives us within this moment of encounter, who attends with care, with integrity, with compassion, with respect, with patience, awaiting the moment of our coming awake to ourselves and to each other. Our wide-awakeness is a condition that calls us from the brink of lost ourselves, shakes us by the shoulders, and says, *be present to this moment, here, now.*

### **To Engage in the World’s Renewal**

To be awake is to think, to be mindful to those moments that call us to attention, to engage in meaningful action. In her book, *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958) invites us to consider three categories of engagement: labour, work, and action, the latter of these being the most critical to the world’s survival. It is not good enough, she argues, that we busy ourselves with time-consuming, repetitive tasks, or engage in work that while productive only maintains what already is. She calls for thoughtful action that requires that we look again at that which occupies us, and consider the consequences of such action. How can we, she asks, unthinkingly engage in tasks of labour and work that support bureaucracies, governments or industries without considering the consequences of our engagement; why do we engage in tasks that dull our senses or sense of responsibility to the wounding of others and ourselves, to our community (global and local), to our environment? Arendt asks of us critical and insightful acts of imagination that attend to the consequences of our actions in relationship with and in the presence of others.

To take action is to be responsible to that which we may have not yet imagined.

If we are to understand that “action, the ability to interrupt and begin again, bestows meaning on human existence” (Gordon, 2001, p. 43), then we must pay careful attention to the embodied concepts that intertwine our written and embodied texts as we seek to recognize our life’s engagement in all its complexities and complicities. We, wittingly or otherwise, perform those theories that choose us as we learn how to encounter the “unbearable lightness” (Kundera, 1984) of being in this moment of unfolding. We must learn to insist that there is more important business at hand than that demanded by those who would restrain and control. As the character played by Kevin Spacey, a teacher in the movie, *Pay it Forward* (Abrams & Leder, 2000), tells his grade-seven class,

...there is a world out there....best you start thinking about the world now and what it means to you...Why should we think about the world?...What does the world expect of you? ...Nothing. My God, boys and girls, he’s right. Here you are, you can’t drive, you can’t vote, you can’t even go to the bathroom, without a pass from me....you’re stuck....in the seventh grade. But not forever. Because one day you’ll be free... what if the world is just a big disappointment....unless you take the things that you don’t like about this world and you flip them right upside-down, right on their ass....

He tells his students that they can choose to remain in their current state of disempowerment or, should they wish, they can become pro-active agents in their lives and the lives of others. To this end, he reveals the year’s assignment that he had chalked on the blackboard and hidden behind the map of the world, which he now rolls up with a flourish.

“Think of an idea to change our World — and put it into action.”

To be wide-awake as an educator is to recognize that we ourselves cannot dictate what is yet to come, but we may, as Maxine Greene encourages us, be present to our responsibilities in the presence of each child. Thus, Hannah Arendt speaks of the educator’s responsibility to set aside his or her own desires of what the future might be—not as how we imagine it, but as it might become in the imaginations of our children. As I understand Arendt, she calls us to come to a place of attention and engagement that invites children to re-imagine the world in their own time and space and place of encounter.

Nativity is manifest in the world whenever individuals and groups act in relation to the world in ways that suggest that seemingly intransigent social processes can be changed. (Levison, 2001, p. 17)

Appelbaum’s stop may be thus understood as a possible gift of nativity, one of great risk, one of great responsibility—a calling for mutual respect and reciprocity. Held within the stop of nativity is vulnerability, shared freedom, release of imagination. Yet, here, too, within these moments of encounter, is complicity and possible betrayal. Arendt (1961) reminds us that there are many ways of engaging in the world, but we must remain alert to the fact that the intentions and ambitions of our engagement may be continually suspect. And, she suggests, Education as practiced is oft-times an imperfect science of human conditioning:

Basically, we are always educating for a world that is or is becoming out of joint...The problem is simply to educate in such a way that a setting right remains actually possible, even though it can, of course, never be assured. (p. 189)

And yet, it is to Education that Arendt proposes that we might come to new beginnings and thoughtful action, within recognizable moments of nativity. This is our pedagogical challenge. Ultimately, Arendt (1961) places her hope and faith in the generations that we bring forth into the world. She advises us, if we love the world, to engage our children in its renewal, not as we would have them do so, but as they will—through imagining anew:

And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world. (p. 196)

Our action then requires that we engage not as we would have children do, but that we engage with them, “wide-awake” as Greene (1978) encourages, to our own frailties, desires, and ambitious limitations, in invitation, thoughtful endeavors, and hospitality.

There are no guarantees, but wide-awakeness can play a part in the process of liberating and arousing, in helping people pose questions with regard to what is oppressive, mindless, and wrong. (p. 51).

Reading Maxine Greene, first as a doctoral student and now, years later, having witnessed the unfolding of new scholars in my midst, I carry with me a humble respect for the journey she has travelled, her words laying down a path in walking, signposts for our own journey. In Montreal in 1999, in a conference address, she speaks of the poignant role of the *flanneur*, one who slips between the cracks of the pavement, who dallies in back allies, who reads the temperatures of a city, whose presence, is that of a witness to that city’s frailties, ambitions, desires.<sup>[13]</sup> A *flanneur*, as Greene tells us, reminds us, by his or her piquant observations, that something requires careful watching, wide-awake reflection. It is time now, in this fledging 21<sup>st</sup> Century, that we set aside our roles as bystanders, spectators, observers, and/or enforcers and undertake the critical creative action that is the



relational responsibility of those who witness<sup>[14]</sup> (Salverson, 2006; Salverson, 2008).

There is a turning in our lives that holds all who we are within a single moment. In our witnessing of a youth who comes into our presence as the man he is yet to become, our moral responsibilities within the locations we co-exist remind us that all that is yet to become is what we now behold and hold within this moment. Our challenge in seeking to understand how we might be in relationship with others is simultaneously one of invitation and resistance—a recognition of relational reciprocity that extends beyond obligations and responsibilities into the realm of new imaginings of what may become possible if we listen to that which awaits us.

*not walls of cement...*

*but the melodies of your temperature.*

As a global community, in our local environments, there is a calling for restoration,<sup>[15]</sup> a need for us to come again to our origins of hope, desire, and belonging that they may be realized in new ways that honour relational reciprocity, compassion, invitation, resistance,<sup>[16]</sup> imagination. Restoration is a calling for all that we might become, not in an act of transformation, but a returning to the promise that is yet to be realized. Throughout time, individuals come to us, who invite us to rise above ourselves, and re- envision a world with the refreshing newness of recognition that first came to those astronauts who saw the planet Earth in relationship to the vastness of space and the vulnerability of humankind.

*To venture is to cause anxiety, not to venture is to lose oneself.*

—Kierkegaard (as quoted by May, 1950, n.p.)

So it is; I struggle on this journey, bearing witness to the responsibilities and consequences of my arrival, the suitcase I clutch a burden that weighs me down... what am I carrying that is so necessary? What might I leave behind? How might I travel with a lighter touch upon the earth in your presence? Who is it that awaits my arrival, from whom I have already departed? Who shall I be in the witnessing of your arrival? Who are we in this moment of encounter?

### **This Moment, “a Child of Duration”**

A child arrives. Welcoming. Challenging. Desiring. Vulnerable. Unique.

*How am I to respond? How will I be received? Who are we to be?*

This moment of your arrival is a moment that reverberates, resonates across date lines, borders that constrain, geographies that define, bodies that embrace, yield, draw apart, hold and behold each other. You arrive already marked.<sup>[17]</sup> I read your body as a text; an invitation that promises intimacy, invitation, hope, yet bearing the markings of previous encounters embodied in the fluidity of time and place and relationship that announce your arrival, as my own arrival is received. If I am true to my obligations of hospitality, your arrival requires a new thinking of what it means to welcome a child, this child, within our midst.

As parent, community member, educator, learner, I dwell in moments, each moment, a lingering experience that reverberates, calls me again and again to its location of encounter—I am called to ask who am I, who are you, how might we be in the presence of each other? What is it I am to learn? And it is only now as I read the work of Jana Milloy, a newly arrived scholar, that I come to a new understanding of these moments that I encounter.

In *persuasions of the wild: writing the moment, a phenomenology*, Milloy (2007) invites us to linger yet once more within each moment that calls to us. She invites us to attend to the gaps, the silences within those moments to which, in our somnolence, our haste, our cleverness, we oft-times fail to listen or attend. She helps me to understand that such a moment may not be easily translated: Each moment is simultaneously elusive and inviting, temporal and ever-lasting. And I come to understand that within each moment, dwells a lifetime of possibility, renewal, hospitality, resistance, invitation, restoration, reflection, and welcome.

*Separated by a whisper, our tongues taste the turquoise air, uninterrupted. The sound of time passing, the words, the taste of the moment of duration, cannot be deciphered. It remains a cipher, a nothing, an empty thing. It morphs around an empty centre that fills, not with language that can be translated, but with senses overcome by sounds, smells, textures, a text of a different kind, that evades translation, eludes interpretation, only reveals itself in the plenum, the fullness of the lived moment, overcome by senses, surrendered to time passing. An eternal moment of being here, now.* (Milloy, p. 152)

Milloy calls upon her readers to dwell within the moment, “each moment, a child of duration” (p. 157). And I pause, welcoming

this gift of recognizing simultaneously the fleetingness and ever-lasting presence of each awakening moment that is a child of duration, a child who will call me again and again to what matters—the tug of a sleeve, the voice of a young man who calls his future into presence. I recall again the writings of Arendt and Greene and Appelbaum, who invite us to welcome that which is not yet known within an imagining of what might come to us if we are willing to listen, willing to engage in ways that call us to attend beyond the limitations of our own imaginations. To be wide-awake, sleeves rolled up, ready for action, attending to the stop . . . each moment, a child of duration.

*The body and the text, on the edge of systemic deliverance, transmitting across time, across knowing, perhaps not fully, not full, but fulfilling, opening, crossing and returning, always slightly off the departure point. Never returning, not really.*

*I am the time passing,*

*My heart, seized by uncontrollable craving, pushes through the ends of my fingers. A delicate arousal, a painful invitation. (Milloy, p. 128)*

The challenge we face as educators is the desire to enter into meaningful conversation with our students; to respond to their presence with care and integrity, respect and compassion; to mentor, and in turn, be mentored; to understand that to dwell in each moment is to offer a lifetime of possibility, a narrative remembered, a resonance that sounds through time. How do we come to recognize that to encounter a child newly arrived is to meet ourselves again as if for the first time? To pause and say, “I see you. You exist.”<sup>[18]</sup>

And yet, how often have I heard complaints (my own included) about the demands of the curriculum, the lack of time, the requirements of the system, the obligations of evaluation—a blinding of responsibilities that marks us. We perceive ourselves as captives of an educational system constructed by others, reinforced by our own labours and tasks, as we comply with institutional demands, seemingly impotent, no matter how loud we voice our protest. Too often we fail to attend to those moments that may restore us, and our students, to who we truly are. We succumb and thus are culpable, complicit.

A child’s arrival in our midst brings “a delicate arousal, a painful invitation”; a child’s arrival is a call to action. We must be courageous in the face of our own mortality and vulnerability as foreseen within a child’s eyes in each new encounter.

*As it is, words we exchange and proximities that I endure unfinished, those last scenes, never quite concluded, dissolve not into a sunset, but a night that does not own, have or hold, command or possess, but gives. Translation in a darkened moment without a gaze of the familiar pays constant attention to the shifts of meaning, each moment adds a slight movement in flavor, sonority and flow of meaning. Collapsing of text, disturbing of contours. I am illuminated, the light penetrates the space I do not see, it is real, although coming from a faint memory of no place, it grows flesh of my experience like a king mummified for eternity, reborn. But eternity is not everlasting. Eternity is death and rebirth. (Milloy, p. 157).*

And so I come to an understanding that each moment unfolds one into the other,<sup>[19]</sup> a temporal unfolding that holds and beholds past, present, future. Our challenge is to recognize the fleetingness of each moment, and yet simultaneously, to recognize the eternity that we behold, that is held within each moment, each moment a gap that we receive in care within which action is possible.

What meaning might Milloy’s phrase “each moment, a child of duration” have for those of us who toil in the academy, as we nurture new scholars and educators into presence; as we encourage student teachers to reconsider education not as they know it, but as they may as yet imagine it might be; as we re-imagine how we might engage in thoughtful action of attendance and integrity with children who come to us anew daily? What warning does such a phrase embody? There is no erasure of moments of encounter, an embodied remembering, a reciprocity of unfolding gaps that haunt us still.

## **To Speak the Unsayable**

We encounter each other with great intentions, and yet, we are so often, as new scholars and educators, within the natality that marks our arrival, quickly inundated with a language of profession, codes of engagement, requirements of membership that instruct us how to be, how to become absorbed into our individual and professional communities. Within the tasks and labour required of our sites of education, we often fail to take action, become inarticulate in our locations, incapable of “moving outside the sayable” (Salverson, 2008, pp. 251-252).

The question that continues to trouble us, Who performs whom?—now made visible in these post-modern times—remains unanswerable. How might we move outside the sayable? How might we find the courage to bring forth ourselves anew in the

presence of others? How do we interrupt the ceaseless unfolding of known narratives that so cripple our children, our sons, our daughters, and learn how to write new narratives as guided by their presence? How might we come to mindful action so that we may co-create the as yet unimagined narratives with those who arrive in newness in our midst?

This is not a simple quest. Feminist scholar Judith Butler (1988) provides an understanding of the forces that impose upon us, silencing us even as we seek to re-imagine the world:

The question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how a certain operation of censorship determines who will be a subject depending on whether the speech of such a candidate obeys certain norms governing what is speakable and what is not. To move outside the domain of speakability is to risk one's status as a subject . . . The question is not what it is I will be able to say, but what will constitute the domain of the sayable within which I begin to speak at all. (Butler, as quoted in Salverson, 208, p. 252)

Greene (1978) writes "Taking [reality] for granted, we do not realize that reality, like all others, is an interpreted one. It presents itself to us as it does because we have learned to understand it in standard ways" (p. 44). We must continually remind ourselves that the so-called reality in which we dwell is a socially, politically, environmentally, culturally constructed reality. To understand that we come to our relationships within a system already enacting on how we engage is to begin to give language to that which is inarticulate.

And, if we are to restore ourselves to articulateness, we must learn to listen with willingness for the coming of those who may help us voice our presence. Thus it falls upon us as educators that we have an obligation to engage with others and our environment with thoughtful compassion and integrity, and above all, as Greene would encourage us, a wide-awakeness full of welcoming for each child's arrival. To articulate the unsayable, we must have the courage and a willingness to release that which imprisons us still, to forsake the script, so that the new might be imagined.

I would not, I hurry to explain, suggest that we abandon all for the sake of newness. As Gordon (2001) explains, in speaking of Arendt's call for conservatism within education, "[tradition] for her...should be conceived as a series of innovations, itself full of breaks and fissures and the kinds of reinventions Arendt wants the young to make" (p. 49). As Greene (1978) proposes, **We must learn to** be as aware as humanly and humanely as possible of the consequences that are embodied within our relationships and actions with each other and with those who come into our presence. The challenge for each of us, as educators, then, if we are to remain hopeful and engaged, is to not lose our unique voice as individuals; we must remain true to the curiosity of each moment unfolding that brings us to the threshold of our journey, that invites us to imagine us anew. To pause in our rush into the future and respond to Arendt's question, "Who are you?"

Our challenge then is to hold fast to who we have yet to imagine we may become. This is our responsibility to ourselves and to those who await us, and who we have yet to encounter. Greene (1978), in the wisdom of her presence, advises that we must be wide-awake, to seek to learn who *we are*, to articulate our moral positioning, so that we might attend with integrity and care and imagination, those who come amongst us. As bell hooks (1994) reminds us, in her quoting of Jane Ellen Wilson's words in *Strangers in Paradise* (1955)—

Only by coming to terms with my own past, my own background, and seeing that in the context of the world at large, have I begun to find my true voice and to understand that, since it is my own voice, that no pre-cut niche exists for it; that part of the work to be done is making a place, with others, where my and our voices can stand clear of the background noise and voice our concerns as part of a larger song.  
(p. 177)

Thus it is our presence that matters as educators, as individuals, as humans in the moment of each *new* encounter; for in receiving newness, we behold and hold a place of renewal, restoration, and possibility both for ourselves and for those who come to sing within our presence. As educators we are called to wide-awakeness: Our obligation is to attend to moments of stop offered to us by our students; to be mindfully aware of the tug on the sleeve that calls us to attention, each presence, each moment a gift, a child of duration.

To be wide-awake is to recognize the stop that is in the moment of a child's presence, and to listen, and know that you are meeting this child for the very first time. How you choose to welcome a child into your presence, how you attend to this child, how you witness this child's unfolding, is the measure of your own being, coming into presence. Simultaneously, an opening and closing, a crack illuminates that which is not yet imagined. It is to remember, in the busyness that is education that our responsibility as educators is to receive each child with grace. And in doing so, anticipate our own arrival at the beginning of our departure, a rupture that is our presence.

In each encounter we and those we encounter "come to the table with gifts"<sup>[20]</sup>—our experience, our narratives, who we are,

what we know, our curiosities, our longings to become visible, to be acknowledged, our desire to speak and listen to a multiplicity of languages that recognizes who we are, a willingness to welcome what we have to offer, even as what we seek to offer remains as yet unnamed. Some of us are resistant, clinging to what we know; others are open, willing to welcome that which they have not yet imagined. All of us stand at the threshold that invites new possible beginnings.

*Something's coming...* is a child of duration held within each moment of natality. It is only now, in turning around, that we may understand the journey that we have travelled, suitcase rumbling along the sidewalk, towards the bus stop, train station, airport, the computer monitor, a child's smile that in turn welcomes us to new as yet unexplored moments of possibility. And you may weep at the newness of impossibility that beholds your arrival and the distances yet to be travelled, held in the embrace of your encounter anew with those who stand before you.

And so, we come to the moment of this encounter, a young man singing on stage, in your presence, in our midst. How shall he be received? How shall he receive you? Be gentle with yourself (Ehrmann, 1927). Hold fast to this temporal moment of coming into presence—every moment, a child of duration—that is your blossoming, our beginning anew.

*In this moment, all of who we are  
unfolds within our presence.*

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## Notes

<sup>[1]</sup> Maxine Greene writes of *wide-awakeness* in her chapter, "Wide-Awakeness and the Moral Life" in *Landscapes of learning*. This article is written in response to her curiosity and exploration of how Thoreau's call for humans to be wide awake is played out in today's contemporary world of moral thought, action, and consequences. "It is of great interest to me to find out how this notion of wide-awakeness has affected contemporary thought, perhaps particularly the thought of those concerned about moral responsibility and commitment in this difficult modern age" (1978, p. 42). I am writing in response to how I have been called awake in the presence of a child on the cusp of manhood.

<sup>[2]</sup> Philosopher Hannah Arendt introduces the concept of natality in her writings. See *The Human Condition* (1958). Natality is understood by this author as recognition of all the possibilities (and impossibilities) of creation, engagement, and action that are embodied within each unique individual in relationship with others and his/her environment. Natality is an invitation for each individual to come to thoughtful awareness and action—that is, to encounter others with a commitment to engage and create anew in mindful ways, so as to rewrite and/or re-imagine embodied narratives of immoral practices and relationships, old and new, that have or may emerge through thoughtless action and/or engagement in relationship with others.

<sup>[3]</sup> Levison (2001), in her splendid article, "The Paradox of Natality," reminds us that those who arrive newly amongst us are already marked by others by the context of their arrival—their reception predetermined by the past, their future already anticipated by what has come before. Natality then—this grace of possible renewal—is endangered as "our capacity to act emerges always in relation to the ways in which we are positioned by others" (p. 21). What matters, then, is a recognized responsibility of reciprocity in each new encounter, respectful engagement, and a shared desire and willingness to imagine anew by those who arrive and those who welcome, thus creating a space of embodied attention, mindful negotiation, and commitment to act in meaningful ways that benefit all.

<sup>[4]</sup> Theatre activist Augusto Boal chooses to differentiate between *spectators* and *spectactors* in his theatre of the oppressed. Here, spectactors call out "stop!" and intervene in the play's action whenever they see evidence of oppression. Stepping into the role of the actor they have identified as being oppressed by another, they are then challenged to try out words or actions that may change the oppressor's encounter with them, a rehearsal, for real-life encounters.

<sup>[5]</sup> Moments of recognition are understood as moments of learning that emerge through performative engagement and inquiry. See Fels & Stothers (1996); Fels, 1998; Fels, 1999.

<sup>[6]</sup> Early in my doctoral studies, my thesis supervisor, Dr. Patrick Verriour, introduced me to role drama. (See Tarlington & Verriour, 1995). I have since used role drama with students and colleagues to investigate a variety of issues such as democracy,



empowerment, communal responsibility, and performative literacy. See for example, Fels, 2002a; Fels, 2004; Fels and Belliveau (2008); Fels & McGivern (2002b); Fels & Meyer (1997); Meyer & Fels (1998).

[7] I am indebted to Jana Milloy who introduced the concept of a moment as a *child of duration* in her doctoral work. Her work, as is evident later in the article, has been greatly influential in expanding my own learning.

[8] I have written in more detail about this role drama in earlier writings. (See Fels, 2004; Fels, 2009.)

[9] I have spoken and written of these moments and others in my work and teaching of performative inquiry. (See, for example, Fels, 2002a; Fels, 2003; Fels, 2004.)

[10] I am grateful to Karen Meyer for drawing my attention to the question, “Who am I?” in our conversations and writings.

[11] I must thank Carl Leggo for his question: “What have I given my heart to?” His offering of this question encouraged me to pursue this matter of action within hospitality.

[12] I am thankful for the work of Kathryn Ricketts, whose early graduate student work introduced me to the concepts of simultaneous arrivals and departures, and the rupture(s) that may occur within performative narratives of danced improvisation.

[13] Keynote address at the American Education Researchers Association (AERA) Annual Meeting. April 11-15, 1999. Montreal, Quebec.

[14] Julie Salverson speaks to the responsibilities, challenges, impossibilities of witnessing and testimony in her work, enlarging our understanding in ways that cannot be done justice to in this essay. I highly encourage readers to consider her work on witnessing. See Salverson (2006, 2008).

[15] My thanks are to Elizabeth Lange and Barbara Bickle for their conversations with me about the concept of restorative learning or restoration in relationship to transformative learning or transformation. Lange (2004) and Bickle (2008) propose that practices of restoration are key to the wellbeing of individuals and their ability to forge new practices within communal, spiritual, and working environments. In Lange’s pivotal essay, she writes, “The participants made it clear that their ethics of ‘honesty, integrity, fairness, courage, respect, loyalty, community service, and citizen responsibility’ did not require transformation but restoration to a rightful place in their lives and in society at large...” (2004, p. 130). Restorative learning engages participants in activities that “restore an organic or radical relatedness to time, space, body and relationships...” (p. 131). Lange proposes a dialectic relationship between restorative and transformative learning: “As participants recovered suppressed values/morals and forgotten relations (restoration), they engaged in a critique of dominant cultural values and embraced new values [and practices] related to the concept of sustainability (transformation)” (p. 135). Bickle, at her June 2008 doctoral defense, called attention to two terms: yield and movement, stating that both coupled with the capacity to recognize the appropriateness of one or the other when determining action were critical components of educational or spiritual leadership.

[16] I chose to speak of resistance within the embrace of welcome, because we cannot be complacent in these troubled times that require a re-imagining of how we might engage anew to address communal, political, economic, cultural, religious, and environmental transgressions that speak to our inhumanity towards each other.

[17] I am indebted for conversations with Munir Vellani en route to our teaching assignment in Chilliwack, B.C., whose work and insights on education, narrative, Gadamer, Ricouer, and Arendt have enriched my understanding, and who first illuminated my attention to the “child-within-our-midst.”

[18] My thanks to Lois Holtzmann, Co-Founder and Director of the East Side Institute for Group and Short Term Psychotherapy (New York) who shared this insight with me on a walk along the seawall in Vancouver, November, 2009, a moment of recognition that brought tears to my eyes.

[19] It is with thanks to Jan Milloy, who in conversation reminded me that each moment is not static, but unfolds one into the next. In conversation with Jan Milloy, Spring, 2008.

[20] Dr. Karen Meyer, University of British Columbia, whose work and friendship have been pivotal in my own scholarship and understanding of what it means to be an educator, has spoken about greeting new graduate students into their doctoral programs, reminding them that they come already with experience, knowledge, valuable information and questions, offering “gifts,” as she calls them, gifts that they bring to the academy, so that we may all benefit and learn from each other. Her recognition of a reciprocity of expertise of those living in practice has been a great lesson to me, a reaffirmation of the learning that comes to us through thoughtful and meaningful experience in relationship with others.

