

Writing Courageously

Chantelle E. Caissie

Submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for
Master of Education in Adult Education
Faculty of Education, Yorkville University
Fredericton, New Brunswick



Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Ellyn Lyle

November 13, 2020

The author and supervisor have granted permission for this document to be used as an example of a MAR. Copying content for your own use is prohibited.

Abstract

Having immersed myself in the scholarship and practice of teaching and learning, I am coming to understand that education is a profoundly human affair. Despite this reality, I have observed that the unique and deeply intimate aspects of self are often bracketed by the conventional limits of academic writing. Drawing support from scholars who advocate for the inclusion of self in academic writing (Badley, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Lyle, 2018; St. Pierre, 2017; and Yoo, 2019), I hope to challenge the dominant academic discourse that favours objectivity and advocate post-academic or *dangerous writing* as a pathway to transformative education. Being critically awake to the inescapable tendency to teach who we are, I take up writing as a way of knowing (Richardson, 2002; St. Pierre, 2018) to explore academic resistance towards non-conventional (accessible) writing styles. As a learner and educator, I am also interested in understanding how writing from this place of exploratory freedom might promote human solidarity and community (Badley, 2020a). Resisting the pressure to write academically, I access poetry as an entry point to experiment with new ways of reflecting on the human experience (Wiebe, 2015). I hope that, through this research, I can become an academic ally, advocating for meaningful and relevant learning that does not do violence to learners by denying their lived experiences and creative voices. Our humanity is integral to teaching and learning (Lyle, 2020), therefore, I hope to add my voice to the growing scholarship that seeks to re/humanise the landscape of education.

Keywords: post-qualitative inquiry; post-academic writing; writing as a way of knowing; and poetic inquiry.

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend a warm thanks to Ellyn Lyle, Dean (Faculty of Education) at Yorkville University for her patience and ongoing support. Dr. Lyle nurtured a creative space that allowed me to explore and re-assemble the fragments of my experiences. Through her academic guidance and scholarship, she gracefully guided me towards an undivided way of knowing that breeds connection and honours the integral pieces of my humanity. Most importantly, I thank my wonderful partner who supported me throughout my graduate program, offering his brave heart and empathic ear during times of emotional duress and uncertainty. Finally, I thank the artist becoming, the internal and evolving voice within me that continuously dares me to write courageously.

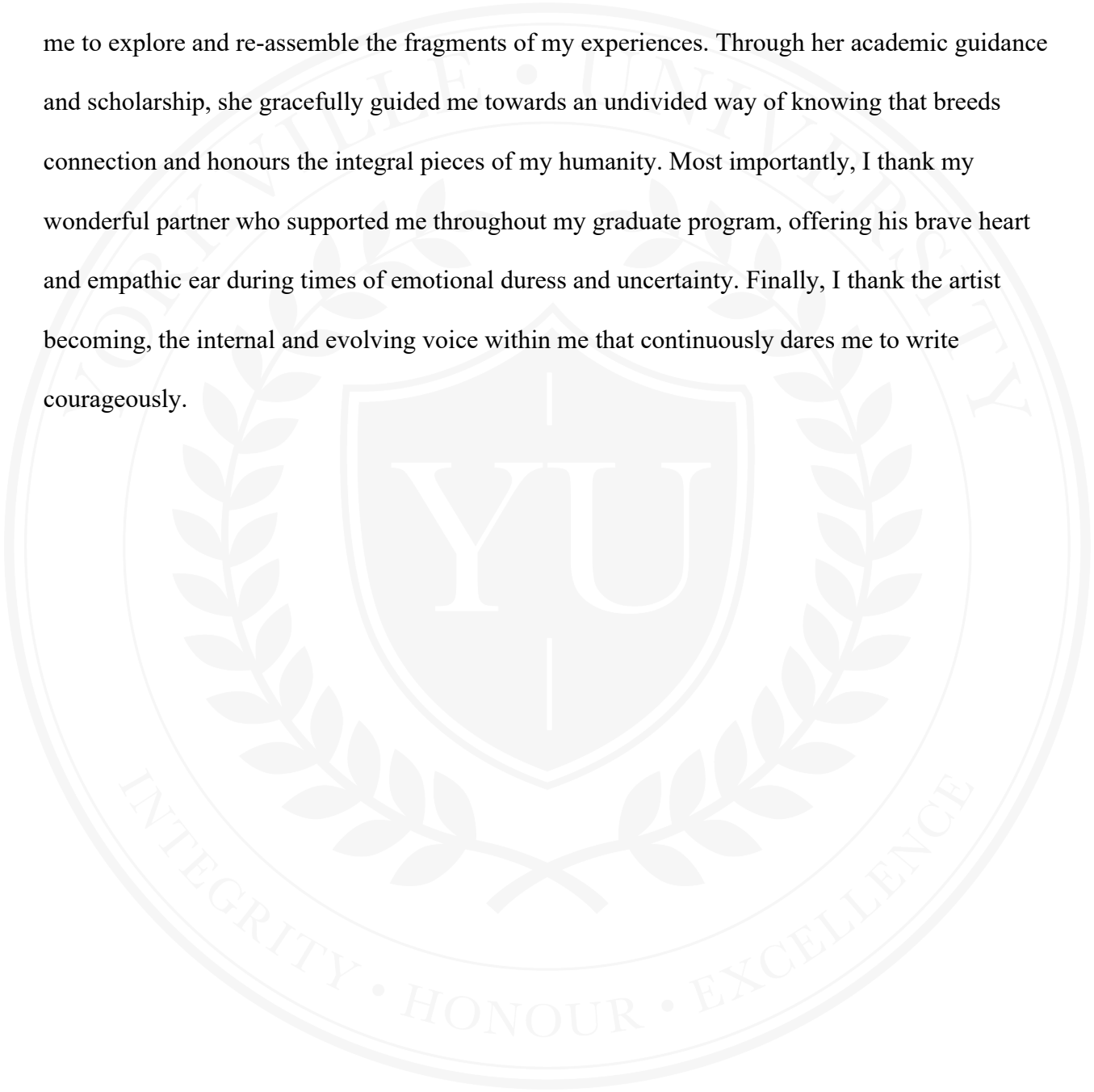


Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Introduction	5
Context of Study	6
Aims of Inquiry	8
Epistemological and Ontological Undergirding (Theoretical Framework)	9
An Experimental Encounter (Methods)	11
An Encounter with the Literature	12
A Poetic Approach	12
Emerging Conversations with the Text (Preliminary Literature Review)	13
Vulnerability in Academic Writing	13
Relationality	16
Restor(y)ing Other	19
Ending a Courageous Beginning	24
Afterword	27
References	29
Not an Appendix: Unrestricted Writing	33

Writing Courageously

In education, we are too often cajoled or bullied into denying the unique and deeply intimate aspects of self that offer important context and credibility to human *being*.

Marginalizing the critical aspects of our personal humanity prevents us from exploring deep and relational understandings not hemmed in by academic conventions that bracket self, subject, and other (Badley, 2019, 2020a, 2020b; Lyle, 2016; Palmer, 2017). In traditional academic writing, we fail to write our humanity, often fearful that exploring beyond conventional practices will risk academic status, credibility, and publishing opportunities. As a result, academics often adopt a needlessly complex, impersonal, and sterile writing style that perpetuates a narrative of privilege and exclusion (Badley, 2017, 2020a). However, writing can be adventurous, exploratory, even bold. Joanne Yoo (2019) and Graham Badley (2020b) refer to this kind of writing as unapologetic or *dangerous*. Taking heart from their assurance that more is possible, I call on educators to resist the temptation to produce what Badley (2020a) refers to as, “academic bullshit” (p. 248). We must resist the temptation to write conditionally, refusing the neoliberal and corporate gatekeeper that measures our academic worth by our academic output (Latremouille, 2018; Badley, 2020a).

Situating myself in post qualitative inquiry (PQI), I resist methodological bracketing in favour of honouring and attending to the strange and deeply intimate ontological aspects of living in real time (Lyle, 2018; St. Pierre, 2018). Being critically awake to the inescapable tendency to teach who we are, I draw on writing as a way of knowing (Richardson, 2002; St. Pierre, 2005). I consciously and willfully resist the pressure to write in traditional academic prose; instead, I access poetry as an entry point to experiment with new ways of understanding and reflecting on the human experience (Wiebe, 2015). Through poetry, I invite scholarly writers

to push academic boundaries, creating space for non-conventional writing styles that honour the inclusion of self. It is my hope, through creating a brave space for lived experiences, educators are inspired to draw upon the deeply personal, unpredictable, and often forgotten experiences that have shaped or altered our perceptions of who we are and who we are yet to become.

Context of Study

My Entry Point

Cracked beneath the weight of my own conditioning.

I cautiously walk,
trembling towards the unknown
with the fragments of a broken heart
stored beneath the lid of a warped
and dusty shoe box.

I emerge,
a voiceless learner,
a wannabe scholar,
a skilfully skill less educator.

without warning,
I begin to run.

painfully vulnerable,
and stripped of my armour,
I run fearlessly,
towards the field of education

breaking free from a world of intellect,
towards a praxis of vulnerability
with only my broken heart,
and a dusty shoe box.

My individual entry point draws attention towards intentional and reflexive text that calls upon the individual to re-story the experiences that frame their teaching and learning practices.

Before entering graduate school, my experiences in formal learning encouraged me to aim low. I was 13 years old when my Grade 8 teacher shared the unsolicited *academic advice* that,

according to the Canadian grading system where my academic worth and performance was based on a numerical value, I was below average. Convinced that I was intellectually flawed, I became a chameleon, adapting to the educational climate in hopes of appeasing the majority. As I progressed through formal schooling, I began to wrestle with feeling *othered*, a discomfort that followed me to university. As an undergraduate student, eager to reassemble the pieces of my fragmented self, my disappointment grew as I encountered a lifeless curriculum that measured academic worth and intellect based on repetition and recall. The feeling of being othered began to overpower my creative and playful side, rendering me voiceless. Exhausted in my efforts to renegotiate the dead language of academia, I found myself exchanging personal scholarship for theoretical and author-vacant text (Badley, 2019).

By the time I entered my graduate program I had become an expert at hiding my humanity. In this sterile place, I was introduced to the work of Parker Palmer. Palmer (2017) argued that teaching and learning, for better or worse, is a human endeavour and that acknowledging the self that comes to these contexts is neither selfish nor narcissistic. Gathering cast aside courage, I began to write without fear of judgement. At first, writing was an emotional release and an opportunity to re/claim my voice. But, soon, Parker Palmer's work ignited something long forgotten in me, and I began to wonder more broadly how we might engage in learning that does not deny our lived experiences.

As a health professional transitioning into the education sector, I also found resonance in the work of Elizabeth St. Pierre (2018) who challenged the very concept of conventional qualitative inquiry. In her refusal to subscribe to a systematized method of quantifying how we come to know, the living theory of PQI emerged (2018, 2019, 2020). Embracing an unstructured relationship of inquiry pushes us towards the *too strange*, or *too much* of experimentation. PQI

invites the researcher to walk along the brink of the unimaginable and reinfuses humanity as an entry point for creative uncertainty (St. Pierre, 2018).

As a result of PQI's non-adherence to methodological bracketing, I draw support from Laurel Richardson (1988, 2002) and Elizabeth St. Pierre (2018, 2019, 2020) as I engage in writing as a way of knowing. Advocating that this work—work that Joanne Yoo (2019) and Graham Badley (2020b) referred to as *writing dangerously*—contains essential messages that wake us from our slumber, drawing us toward a deeper understanding and reflexive practice that can [re]affirm our humanity.

Aims of Inquiry

Through entering into an exploratory conversation with the literature, I challenge dominant academic discourse that favours objectivity and advocate for exploring the tender and vulnerable spaces of our interior lives. This aim is supported through post-academic, or dangerous writing, and is regarded as potentially transformative. A comprehensive review of the literature provides depth as well as a broader understanding of the academic resistance toward non-conventional writing styles. Drawing on the fear fostered within academic culture, I explore ways to bridge the personal and professional through writing that deliberately creates space for all aspects of the human self to exist together (Lyle, 2020; Palmer, 2017). Moreover, through our capacity to write vulnerably, we become more attuned to hear and see the comedic, joyful, and harrowing experiences that occupy the *in-between* spaces of our lives (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). In my encounter with the literature, I explored how teaching and writing at the site of the *in-between* breaks open critical dialogue that supports the possibilities of engaging in a more humanistic praxis that champions a pedagogy of re/humanisation. In my conversation with the text, I draw attention to writing as relational, advocating that the stories that resonate inspire

connection and contribute to transformative learning (Briscoe, 2017). I further strengthen this point, exploring writing as a space of creative freedom, supporting human solidarity and community (Badley, 2020a). I hope, through my research, I may lend my voice to those who contribute to the growing scholarship that seeks to re/humanise the landscape of education.

Epistemological and Ontological Undergirding (~~Theoretical Framework~~)

In finding resonance with Elizabeth St. Pierre's (2018, 2019, 2020) work, specifically that which challenges conventional qualitative inquiry, I eagerly engage writing as a way of knowing and becoming. St. Pierre's refusal to subscribe to a systematized method of quantifying how we come to know, she developed the living theory of post-qualitative inquiry (PQI). PQI resists methodological enclosure. In its refusal to subscribe to the "big three" of empirical social science research (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods), PQI emerges attending to the strange and deeply intimate ontological aspects of living in real time (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019). PQI is always becoming. It does not arrive with step-by-step instructions or guidelines, and it cannot be measured (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019). The experimental inquiry evades the structured and conceptual order of conventional research, enabling the inquirer to follow a changing pathway towards a world of living that draws focus "not on things already made, but on things in the making" (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 604). During her dissertation, Elizabeth St. Pierre (2018) shared her exploration of *the aside*, a writing space engaged as her field of play — poetic and spirited release, it seemed free from academic jargon and parenthetical references. Shifting between the landscapes of conventional academic writing and *the aside*, she learned to trust the unpredictable and seemingly organic spirit of writing, advocating that writing was, undeniably, thinking (St. Pierre, 2018).

Drawing on the unpredictable encounters with the real and strange forces of PQI, Elizabeth St. Pierre's (2019) advocacy for the unapologetic movement of writing as a method of inquiry led me to the scholarship of Graham Badley (2017, 2019, 2020a, 2020b) who champions post-academic writing. He maintained, "people write well when they have something to say" (2017, p. 181). Often, as academic writers, we fail to extend ourselves beyond objectivity and, as a result, we litter our pages with academic jargon that no one understands, pulled from a place that no one can relate to, and where the author has simply disappeared (Badley, 2019). As self-expressive beings, writing carves a new pathway that dares us to take a risk, to welcome a new adventure in thought (Badley, 2020a).

During the 18th century, exploring an adventurous style of writing, such as poetry, assaulted the pure and singular voice of science (Richardson, 1988). Nonetheless, Laurel Richardson (1988) argued that the fabric of our lives and the sociological categories designed to oppress and silence our inquiries *is* our jumping off point. Resisting the voice of our lived experiences separates our humanity and contributes to a self-constructed condition of alienation (Richardson, 1988). However, operating beyond linguistic borders creates a space to playfully [re]negotiate with text, extending our voices to the ears of the majority, demanding they listen to what we have to say (Thomas, 2018).

As a framework, PQI begins wherever we find ourselves to be, free from methodology, and the conditions of its emergence enable the opportunity to re-connect and re-construct a new pathway of knowing (St. Pierre, 2019). The fluid and evolving nature of PQI provides a strong foundation to explore the raw and vulnerable spaces of what it means to be human. Writing as a method of inquiry invites experimentation, encouraging us to drive aimlessly down an open road without a road map or destination. It is through experimentation that we encounter our authentic

voice. Our capacity to engage in difficult writing, creating meaning out of chaos, challenges the complex and dead language of academia (Badley, 2020a).

An Experimental Encounter (~~Methods~~)

The academic guidelines for the exit research component require a methods section. The purpose of this section guides the researcher, offering an objective lens, to review and critique the information gathered. My previous academic background in research has provided me with the academic writing tools to complete this section with ease. However, as I progress in my writing, I find myself resisting the methods section, painfully lulled into a state of boredom by author-vacant text, claiming instead that lived experiences are central to understanding (St. Pierre, 2018).

The post qualitative inquirer does not begin at step 1, and there is no recipe to follow. PQI resists the methodological trap, asking the inquirer to engage in a process of trust that cannot be repeated or predicted. A person simply cannot measure or duplicate a model that emerges anew, created from different worlds of living and becoming (St. Pierre, 2018, 2019). Therefore, cognizant that the steps I take to meaningfully engage with the literature cannot serve as a model for others, I engage here instead in *an experimental encounter*.

In my experimentation with the literature, I have explored alternate avenues of knowing and lived experiences that challenge traditional academic practices. I have refrained from attempting to control or formalize the text, allowing it to exist free from structure and scientific labels (St. Pierre, 2019). Resisting the pressure to write in academic prose, I access poetry as an entry point to experiment with new ways of understanding and reflecting on the human experience (Wiebe, 2015).

An Encounter with the Literature

In this experimental encounter with the literature, I have included both foundational and emerging scholarship. Exploring a wide range of published literature has reinforced my understanding and appreciation of how concepts began and evolved throughout the periods of academic writing (St. Pierre, 2020). As a result of the *always becoming* nature of PQI, my creative window will be limited as a result of word count. Therefore, I have offered an appendix where additional writing can exist free from academic penalty.

A Poetic Approach

Poetic writing offers an avenue that invites uncertainty and allows for creative exploration that fosters conscious awareness of how we come into being (MacKenzie, 2019). Poetry honours the individual by examining humanity from a holistic and fluid lens. Through poetic writing, we become more resilient when bullied by traditional methodologies that perpetuate division and order. In living and learning, we crave connection; poetry creates a space that permits multiple meanings to surface through language and fosters a sense of hope through uncertainty and vulnerability (MacKenzie, 2019).

Embracing a poetic approach allows the individual to be seen and heard as a whole. Words such as love, honesty, and trust are not often used when describing education and academic writing. However, the human experience of living and loving should be embraced in education as our vulnerability shapes our identity and transforms praxis by permitting authenticity and uncertainty within the space of learning (Finn, 2015). Poetry invites intimacy and honours bravery, recognizing that the shared encounters with our (im)perfect selves cultivates space for new ways of knowing (MacKenzie, 2019).

Emerging Conversations with the Text (~~Preliminary Literature Review~~)

My first immersion in the literature revealed two major themes: vulnerability in academic writing, and relationality for individual and collective learning. However, as I engaged in deeper dialogue with the text, a third theme emerged in the midst of my own fear and discomfort, a theme I have referred to as restor(y)ing other.

Vulnerability in Academic Writing

Vulnerability is an emotional risk that leaves us exposed and travelling beyond our comfort zone. Brené Brown (2012) explained that one of the most widely accepted myths is that vulnerability correlates with weakness. Society has weaved together a dangerous and collective denial of vulnerability, associating it with a dark emotion characterized by shame and disappointment (Brown, 2012; Finn, 2015). Teaching is an act of vulnerability; we project the condition of our soul onto our students as the complexities of who we are becomes entangled in our subject and way of being together (Palmer, 2017). Life is unpredictable, and without warning, our lives are often launched towards vulnerable encounters that awaken our conscious mind to the fragility of the human experience (Finn, 2015). However, the absorbing and raw details of our lives are often heavily sedated by food, sex, alcohol, social media and many more meaningless distractions that deter us from the vital spaces within ourselves (Bochner, 1997; Finn, 2015).

Sarah MacKenzie (2012) maintained that learning is autobiographical, situated in our experiences and central to shaping our perspective of self, others, and the world. Our experiences, though, are often regarded as unreliable and hopelessly subjective within the sphere of academia. Parker Palmer (2017) stated that, as educators hoping to minimize our vulnerability, we often conform to an objective way of knowing as a form of self-protection. The fear and

silencing discourse of academia closes the door on our reality as we compromise our experiences of [im]perfection for our field's theoretical and sterile language (Bochner, 1997; Thomas, 2018). M'Balia Thomas (2018) argued that within an "entrenched system of linguistic norms [and] unitary language" (p. 328), we never truly become acquainted with the whole being. Convinced that our silence will protect us, we often betray or alienate our vulnerability (Thomas, 2018). However, writing dangerously, challenging academic giants who have prioritized cognitive ways of knowing and conventional writing methods, is often academic suicide (Yoo, 2019). Academia's incessant need to categorize and quantify our experiences separates our humanity from our work, conditioning us to unconsciously contribute to our own fragmentation (Richardson, 1988).

Our lived experiences, when critically examined, contribute to connection and mutual recognition of one another (Brookfield, 2017). However, conditioned to separate the personal and professional, we drag the roots of our failures and traumas to the depths of our unconscious mind. The failure to explore our own humanity alienates us from ourselves and misinforms our praxis.

Vulnerability enables us to write what matters, attending to the constant and courageous emergence of who we are. Writing poetically creates room to find magic in the hurt, and compassion in the chaos (Finn, 2015). Education does not need more standardized tools or assessments—we need to learn how to be hospitable to the fragility and beauty of our vulnerability (Finn, 2015).

I've missed you.

I am so sorry,
I know I have been gone for a very long time.

I didn't know where to find you,

*I was scared,
scared that maybe, maybe you didn't want to be found.*

Do you remember me?

*Do you need me,
Want me?*

I know you're hurt,
I know you've been hurt.

I'm hurting too.

But maybe,
maybe we could hurt together?

—My inner child, I am so deeply sorry for your wounds.

I do not identify as a poet, and I often air on the side of caution as I approach learning from a creative lens. However, in the midst of my own internal chaos and fear, words find me, easing my mind and slowly lulling me into a poetic understanding of how and who my beliefs and assumptions serve. Poetry offers a space to examine our experiences through words, creating a window into our thoughts that identifies the source of our attachments and fears (Faulkner, 2012; MacKenzie, 2019). The challenge of exposing our vulnerability is often the fear that accompanies it (Kenyon, 2019).

The failure to acknowledge our own ambivalence and fear further alienates our sense of being with the world and contributes to shame and disconnectedness (Kenyon, 2019; MacKenzie, 2019). Arthur Bochner (1997) tells us that the academic life provides a web of distractions, shielding us from the invasion of fear, anxiety, and helplessness that exist outside the world of theory. Inhabiting an objective and impersonal world further segregates the experiential self (Palmer, 2017; Lyle, 2018b). As educators, we often enter the classroom with prescriptive assumptions of how we think teachers and learners should behave. However, in the

words of Stephen Brookfield (2017), “teaching is never innocent” (p. 2) as the complexities of culture, politics, and consciousness intersect the space of learning and blurs our perception of the effect we have on our students, and on ourselves.

Relationality

Celeste Snowber and Sean Wiebe (2009) refer to the body as home to living and breathing text, suggesting that the body offers authentic insight into who we are and how we teach. So much of what we encounter through life—experiences that touch us or scar us—we do not talk about (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). As educators, our teaching is prescribed, opposed to lived (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). The adventurous style of *writing dangerously* may appear provocative and reckless upon first glance; however, it enables the reader to inhabit its space, helping us see and hear the text, not from our minds, but from our hearts (Badley, 2020b; Yoo, 2019). Exploring the restricted section of self breaks open the page and invites our vulnerability to exist in the company of others, connecting and commanding a communal transformation in learning and living (MacKenzie, 2019).

Discomfort is inevitable in writing and, often in the wake of our vulnerability, we may feel distant from others, alone in our unveiling. However, writing communicates, resonating with the rich complexities of life (Yoo, 2019). Writing, regardless of its creative vessel, ushers us toward real encounters with life, such as illness, violence, and death—encounters we may have never explored without writing (Yoo, 2019). Through *writing dangerously*, we awaken our fears but, more importantly, we awaken our humanity. In her writing, Joanne Yoo (2019) offers reassurance as she echoes the words of her colleague, maintaining that the writer is already within us, prepared and willing to connect, if only, we create the space. Paulo Freire (2005) argues, “only dialogue truly communicates” (p. 40); writing poetically creates space for

uncertainty and utilizes words as a platform to foster connection and hope. It is through our authenticity and vulnerability that we inspire and [re]instill hope in our learners (MacKenzie, 2019).

Parker Palmer (2017) tells us that knowing is relational; it is a process that involves connecting and exchanging with realities that elude us. However, Western education and research continues to allocate immense significance to cognitive ways of knowing. Opposed to experimenting with truth, objectivism leads us towards a world of knowing that feeds into the fantasy that reality is governed by power, control, science, and technology (Palmer, 2017). The belief that subjectivity is the enemy responsible for compromising the purity of knowledge cultivates fear (Palmer, 2017). Sarah MacKenzie (2019) argues that, as educators, we often conform to teaching standards governed by institutional policies often coated in neoliberal ideologies. However, outside the demands of academic accountability and the pressures to prove ourselves to be efficient, there remains a desire to connect and transcend beyond perfection towards a praxis of imperfection (MacKenzie, 2019).

Escaping the safety of the analytical cocoon, I found myself uncovering words that aligned perfectly with what was occurring within me, words that called upon my humanity and unearthed the magic of living, even if the magic hurt. Finn (2015) reminds us that, in hopes of fostering connection, it is imperative that we engage with the intimate details of our lives. Through the details, we learn how to communicate, mastering a unique language that requires us to listen not to what has been said, but what has been implied (Yoo, 2019). Moving beyond our fears and abandoning the illusion that the practice of knowing is rooted in control invites a new pathway in teaching and learning, a pathway towards wholeness and connection (Palmer, 2017).

That connection can be found through poetry. Poetry does not reflect; it is a reflexive language that revives the empathetic heart, redirecting the onus of responsibility from *i* to *we* with the intention of fostering deeper debate and critical questioning (Brookfield, 2017; Cunliffe, 2016). As educators, creating a brave space to invite the intimate details of our lives does not alienate; rather, it connects the student and educator, enabling a communal and deeply vulnerable interchange that breathes life back into curriculum (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). Ruth Behar (2009) explains that writing from a place of vulnerability attracts vulnerable readers who seek shelter from the intellectual world. Dangerous writers become our companions—together, we grow collectively, learning and re-constructing our lives from each other's words (Yoo, 2019).

Writing is magic.

and no,
not the kind of magic you read in fantasy novels
or see in movies.

No, this magic awakens the soul.
You feel it in your bones.

Like lightening, it strikes you.

This magic had you sneaking out past curfew,
driving through vacant parking lots.
This magic was found on track 4 of your cd mixtape,
windows down,
and volume on full blast.

This magic was found in the front seat of a broken-down station wagon -
singing, laughing, and crying with your best friend.

This magic was innocent,
Fearless,
Seventeen.

Writing is magic.

This magic held your gaze,
inviting you into its warmth as it gently brushed your lips,

intoxicating you with its kiss.

This magic took you by the hand,
danced with you –
moved you to the melody of your heart.

This magic was love,
this magic was the one.

Writing is magic.

This magic screamed,
manipulated –
brought every inch of you to the brink of fear.

This magic humiliated you,
left you bruised,
naked.

This magic had you triple checking that the doors were locked,
it had you sleeping with a night light on.

This magic –
this darkness –
was drowned with a stiff drink, or 10.

Writing is magic, you are magic.

Re-stor(y)ing Other

I begin vulnerably, confessing that in my attempt to renegotiate the landscape of education, advocating for a humanistic praxis that champions connection and experiential learning, I find myself engaged in dialogue with fear. Parker Palmer (2017) tells us that fear shuts down our capacity to engage in playful dialogue, contributing to disconnection.

Conditioned to think dichotomously, we often engage in learning from a place of containment convinced that our collaboration with structures of separation offer protection against the sudden, and often, unpredictable nature of the human condition (Bochner, 1997; Palmer, 2017). In my attempt to negotiate with the text, I encountered resistance; unconsciously, I reverted back to the

familiarity of objectivity, exchanging chance for prediction/control. In the midst of my frustration, I was reminded of Laurel Richardson (2000) who shared her discomfort in writing with her left hand after years of being forced to learn with her right hand. In her inquiry, she revealed that, when prompted to draw with her left hand, her feelings and perception of self were painfully distorted: “it feels sinful to do so. Frightening, like I’ll be chopped down” (p. 472). Her words resonate, echoing my fears of navigating beyond traditional academic practices to create a space that invites the unpredictable nature of the other. Traditionally taught to master methods designed to resist the intrusions of human subjectivity, I appeared out of touch with the voice that lingers in the fragile pockets of the *in-between*, the voice of otherness (Bochner, 1997; Palmer, 2017). Parker Palmer (2017) states that, in response to fear, we often avoid a live encounter with the alien other. As human beings, reducing the probability of a sudden or unanticipated outcome fosters a sense of control and minimizes the threat of engaging in a truth we may not be ready to hear.

Thinking about the measures we invent to control and how they strip us of our humanity, I sat in my office next to a stack of performance evaluations from clients. I quickly scanned the pages discounting the positive feedback and accrediting immense significance to the negative comments. I vividly recall a single evaluation that read, “*she is really nice, but she needs more education and experience.*” My inner critic [re]surfaced, repeating self-written narratives of shame, inadequacy, and the painful sting of impostorship. I had entered my career with the hope of fostering connection and creating opportunities for marginalized populations to reclaim their voices. I was losing hope that I, too, could reclaim surrendered pieces of myself. I began to blur into the background at meetings as I struggled to maintain a relationship with my clients, and with myself.

Seated at the front of the room,
I began my lesson on boundaries.

“she is really nice, but she needs more experience”

The pit in my stomach grew,
my breathing becomes laboured –
I scan the room in desperation
begging for an exit strategy.

“she is really nice, but she needs more experience”

I stumble painfully over my words –
Despite my careful preparation,
I lose my sense of direction.

Soon,
whispers of my inadequacy surface
and my ears sting as laughter fills the room.

My eyes swell,
and my body trembles helplessly,
crying out for stability.

In this moment,
I am painfully reminded that we must fail,
again,
and again,
and quite literally, fail a few more times after that.

Because failure does not equate to fatality.

Failure offers space to
reassemble –
re-write –
re-store –
the many fragments of self.

I found myself pulled toward unhelpful binaries that impede identity and further perpetuate a culture of disconnection in teaching and learning. Recognizing that I set out to seek pathways to re-humanize the landscape of education, I admit that it is beyond the scope of this encounter to engage with the social psychology roots of identity theory. Still, it is worth creating

space to consider personal identity, a lesser-known construct that enables a unique and evolving understanding of the self, one born from the complexities of our relationships and individual experiences (Empson, 2013; Lyle, 2020b). Resisting the urgency to categorize our experiences, personal identity occupies the cavities of our interior landscape drawing attention to our light and dark, success and failure (Palmer, 2017).

Thus buoyed, I set aside professional injuries and dared to look at some long held personal ones. What I called most vividly was Miss D. She approached learning from a linear and traditional fashion. Our seats were assigned. We did not speak unless spoken to, and our academic success depended solely on repetition and recall. In the afternoon Miss D. lined us up row by row. She called on each of us individually as she challenged us with a math question. I have always hated math. I stood silent as I anticipated her summons. Miss D. had a very distinct teaching style: she never praised you for the correct answer, but she always humiliated you for the wrong one. As she called my name, I looked up through tear filled eyes. I began to fumble over my words in hopes of finding an answer to a math question I could not count on my fingers. As the class began to laugh, I stood hopelessly drowning in shame.

Drowning in the silence,
a painful reminder
that you have yet to complete your slaughter.

I can feel your eyes,
preying on your next victim
as you scanned the room.

Buried beneath my mom's oversized sweater
I plead silently that you do not see me.

I breathe slowly,
swollen and semi glossed eyes,
paralyzed by fear.

It's me, you want me.

I exhale in defeat as you strip me of my armour.

You leave me humiliated,
You leave me painfully vulnerable.

In conversation with the text, I was lifted up by the humanity found in the writing of Arthur Bochner (1997) as he confronted the wider fabric of disconnection in education that assumes the need to fragment the personal and professional. In the wake of his father's death, Bochner (1997) revealed that, as an academic, he had grown accustomed to the impersonal and sterile nature of objectivity, finding comfort in labels, data, and theoretical explanations. However, immersed in the world of theory and objectivity, he discovered that he was ill-equipped to express or engage in the complexities of grief. His words captured the very spirit of my own resistance — what if I, too, was ill-equipped to engage with the truth of my humanity? Conditioned to gloss over the details of our humanity, many educators become dependent on the wisdom of their predecessors, acclimating to the language of the academic world that remains long on analysis and short on experience (Bochner, 1989). Parker Palmer (2017) tell us, although fear plays a pivotal role in sustaining a culture of disconnection, our Western commitment to thinking in polarities further fragments our reality. In a polarizing culture, we quite literally think the world apart. As we journey towards adulthood, our ability to dissect and differentiate things is a matter of survival (Palmer, 2017). Unfortunately, this way of thinking often trains human beings to resist speaking or hearing both sides of an issue, distorting their perceptions to see things as either *this or that* and *either-or* (Palmer, 2017).

In journeying with the text, I reflect on the power of objectivity and binary logic. My intent to advocate for the re-humanization of education does not call upon text for the purpose of minimizing or discrediting the power of analysis. Parker Palmer (2017) explained that many of

the gifts of modern science and technology came to fruition as a result of binary thinking and objectivity. With that being said, existing within a culture that favours one way of thinking over another compromises our ability to see the world from a new vantage point (Badley, 2016; Palmer, 2017). Good teaching should not solely be based on what you feel, nor should it be based solely on what can be measured. In teaching and learning, profound personal truths, rather than empirical facts, can be found not by “thinking the world apart” but rather by “thinking the world together” (Palmer, 2017, p. 65).

Extending the search for knowledge beyond the realm of logic opens up space to grapple with the new and changing seasons of the human condition often marginalized in teaching and learning (Lyle, 2020b). As such, educators are not being asked to exchange their teaching techniques for a therapeutic skill set; rather, teachers and learners are being called upon to shift their perspectives to create space to embrace the hidden wholeness of the other.

The Other:

I don't know you –
yet, my heart, my mind
finds comfort in your presence.

I cannot find the words to describe you,
but yet, your words find me –
easing my heart during my sleepless nights,
mending my wounds as fate twists its knife once more.

You are always present, but never on time.
You are a stranger and, yet, remain my oldest friend.

It's funny,
You are always on my mind,
Yet, we have never truly spoken to one another.
I feel your warmth and hear your laughter -
But your name continues to escape me.

Your arrival is always brief, but your impact, profound.

Ending a Courageous Beginning

Writing courageously is risky; it calls upon the individual to experiment and create different worlds of living and knowing that extend beyond controlled conditions (St. Pierre, 2018). Compartmentalizing self and reducing knowledge solely to an intellectual practice further perpetuates division and disheartens the credibility of the human as data source. To write unapologetically, or courageously, is a profoundly human undertaking that comes to life not in recognition but, rather, in experimentation (Yoo, 2019; Badley, 2020b). In education, it is not uncommon to acclimate to the latest educational reform, often coated in bureaucratic control and academic governance. Marginalizing the critical aspects of humanity holds us captive from exploring and renegotiating the boundaries between self, subject, and other (Lyle, 2016; Palmer, 2017). Johnson (2018) maintains that we are social beings, but we become prisoners to a natural order that contributes to a debilitating sense of hopelessness held together by a web of our own making.

In spirit with Elizabeth St. Pierre (2018), I recognize that writing is always becoming. Our inquiry does not end but, rather, courageously begins as we experiment with the emergence of who we are and who we are yet to become. As educators, we are not solely responsible for creating a safe space for our learners; we are also responsible for creating a safe space for self. As we continue to age, we continue to evolve. Our experiences, but more specifically our failures, provide a window of opportunity to become re-acquainted with the new and changing seasons of our lives. Poetic writing has provided a safe and creative space for me to begin unraveling the critical and fragile aspects of my humanity. In dialogue with the text, I discovered the beauty and daring courage in sharing the unedited version of being human. The

transformative possibilities of growth exist in the mess of our humanity opposed to the false certainty of the pretense (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009).

As an emerging educator, if I continue to build a wall between my personal experience and academic praxis, I am more susceptible to teach from a place of discomfort and division (Bochner, 1997). Nurturing a trusting relationship with students does not begin until we have come to learn how to trust ourselves more fully. With/in this space resides a gentle but unrelenting call to resist the dominant discourse that would write our stories for us. It is my hope to add my voice to those who contribute to the growing scholarship that seeks to re/humanise the landscape of education.

She can write *herstory*.
Do not touch what you see as broken
and do not rush her
to re-assemble her pieces.

Do not assume that what appears broken
requires your mending.

Because she does not need you,
she has always existed –
perhaps shattered –
left on the cold floor,
in solitude,
darkness –
where you left her.

She does not need you
or your trembling hands
coated in deceit and lies —
you are no one's hero.

shattered is but a possibility

She will write *herstory*
creating a dialogue that
shines in darkness,
and sings in chaos.

she is not broken,
she is reborn.

Afterword

Significance of the Inquiry

The prevailing culture of education often fails to acknowledge our humanity, operating from a reductionist lens that remains preoccupied with compartmentalising knowledge and relying on tokenized checklists to measure academic success (MacKenzie, 2019; Miller, 2019). Many of us have become lost; our focus has been narrowed to meet the hegemonic standards of a system that draws power from division, contributing to a culture of alienation (MacKenzie, 2019; Palmer, 2017).

Prioritizing and attending to the stories of our lives flavours our writing and learning with warmth and authenticity (Badley, 2019). I began my graduate program feeling broken, consumed by narratives that denied my worth as both student and educator. However, through experimenting with writing inquiries, I was able to explore the critical and vulnerable pieces that make me human. This liberating experience has led me to aspire toward academic allyship—advocating for meaningful and relevant learning that does not do violence to learners by denying their lived experiences and creative voice.

Researcher's Role & Ethical Considerations

In this inquiry, no consent form or ethics review was completed as I am the sole participant and writer. I am cognizant, though, that personal bias was present as I engaged with the text. I also acknowledge that actively examining past experiences inevitably evokes emotion (Yoo, 2019) and, committed to self-care, I chose to take reflective breaks throughout my inquiry process. Supporting the timing of unscheduled breaks created a space to consciously attend to the

inner landscape of my life, informing the conditions of where I live and learn (Snowber & Wiebe, 2009). Conscious of personal bias, I worked collaboratively with my supervisor, ensuring that I remained accountable and present in my writing, resisting the urge to write academically. I am also mindful of the relationality implicated in being human and that my words may be received differently by different readers. I draw on the support of Joanne Yoo (2019) as she advocated that writing dangerously should motivate and terrify the reader. Accessing words coated in emotion and rooted in our experiences invites a new pathway of knowing that we may have never recognized, or felt, without writing (Yoo, 2019). Therefore, my intention is not to do harm to the reader but, rather, evoke emotion that requires the reader to engage in active reflection and pushes towards an inquiry that begins with the too much, and the too strange (St. Pierre, 2018).

References

- Badley, G. F. (2017). Composing academic identities: Stories that matter? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 22(5), 377–385. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800415615845>
- Badley, G. F. (2019). Post-academic writing: Human writing for human readers. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(2), 180–191. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417736334>
- Badley, G. F. (2020a). Why and how academics write. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 26(3–4), 247–256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418810722>
- Badley, G. F. (2020b). We must write dangerously. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 00(0), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800420933306>
- Behar, R. (2009). Believing in anthropology as literature. In A. Waterston & M. D. Vesperi (Eds.), *Anthropology off the shelf: Anthropologists on writing*, (pp. 106–116). Wiley–Blackwell.
- Bell, J., & Waters, S. (2018). The review of the literature. In *Doing your research project: A guide for first-time researchers* (7th ed., pp. 124–136). McGraw-Hill Education Open University Press.
- Bochner, A. (1997). It's about time: Narrative and the divided self. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 3(4), 418–438. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780049700300404>
- Briscoe, R. (2017). Using a critical reflection framework and collaborative inquiry to improve teaching practice: An action research project. *Canadian Journal of Action Research*, 18(2), 43–61
- Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. Jossey-Bass.
- Brown, B. (2012). *Daring greatly: How the courage to be vulnerable transforms the way we live, love, parent, and lead*. Penguin Group, Gotham Books.

Cunliffe, A. L. (2016). “On becoming a critically reflexive practitioners” redux: What does it mean to be reflexive. *Journal of Management Education*, 40(6), 740–746.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562916668919>

Eisenbach, B. (2012). Teacher belief and practice in a scripted curriculum. *The Clearing House*, 85, 153–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2012.663816>

Empson, L. (2013). My affair with the “other”: Identity journeys across the research-practice divide. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 22(2), 229–248.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1056492612446068>

Faulkner, S. (2012). Frogging it: A poetic analysis of relationship dissolution. *Qualitative Research in Education*, 1(2), 202–227. <https://doi.org/10.4471/qre.2012.10>

Finn, J. (2015). An artist’s experience of exploring her creative edge. *Journal of Sustainability Education*, 9, 1–15. <http://www.jsedimensions.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Finn-JSE-March-2015-Love-Issue.pdf>

Freire, P. (2005). Education for critical consciousness. In *Education and Conscientizaco* (pp. 37–51). Continuum. (Original work published in 1974). <http://abahlali.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Paulo-Freire-Education-for-Critical-Consciousness-Continuum-Impacts-2005.pdf>

Johnson, A. G. (2017). *Power, privilege and difference*. McGraw Hill.

Kenyon, E. (2019). Negotiating fear and whiteness. In E. Lyle (Ed), *Fostering a relational pedagogy: Self-study as transformative praxis* (pp. 71–81). Brill.

Latremouille, J. (2018). Writing from the heart-mind: Cultivating not-knowing towards an “earthly pedagogy”. In J. Latremouille (Ed.), *Fostering a relational pedagogy* (pp. 211–228).

- Lyle, E. (2016). The role of counter narratives in the renegotiation of identity: A curricular perspective. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 14(2), 33–42.
<https://jcacs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jcacs/article/view/40267>
- Lyle, E. (2018a). Possible selves: Restor(y)ing wholeness through autobiographical writing. *LEARNing Landscapes*, 11(2), 257–269. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1245468>
- Lyle, E. (2018b). Untangling sel(f)ves through a/r/tography. In E. Lyle (Ed.), *The negotiated self: Employing reflexive inquiry to explore teacher identity* (pp. 1–11). Sesne Publishers.
- Lyle, E. (2020a). Contemplating how the places we dwell, dwell in us. *Identity Landscapes*, 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004425194_001
- Lyle, E. (2020b). Unprivileging dividedness: In favour of undivided ways of knowing. *Advances in Research on Teaching*, 34, 119–128. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1479-368720200000034007>
- MacKenzie, S. (2013). Poetic praxis: Engaging body, mind, and soul in the social foundations classroom. *Journal for Learning through the Arts*, 9(1), 1–27.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1018242.pdf>
- MacKenzie, S. (2019). (Re)acquaintance with praxis: A poetic inquiry into shame, sobriety, and the case for a curriculum of authenticity. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*, 34(2), 72–89. <https://journal.jctonline.org/index.php/jct/article/view/mackenziedawson.pdf>
- Miller, J. (2019). *The holistic curriculum*. University of Toronto Press.
- Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. John Wiley & Sons
- Richardson, L. (1988). The collective story: Postmodernism and the writing of sociology. *Sociological Focus*, 21(3), 199–208. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00380237.1988.10570978>

Richardson, L. (2000). My left hand: Socialization and the interrupted life. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 6(4), 467–473. <https://doi.org/10.1177/107780040000600403>

Richardson, L. (2002). Writing sociology. *Critical Methodologies*, 2(3), 414–422. <https://doi.org/10.1177/153270860200200311>

Snowber, C., & Wiebe, S. (2009). In praise of the vulnerable: A poetic and autobiographical response to Salvio's abundant Sexton. *Journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Curriculum*, 5(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.14288/jaaacs.v5i1.187675>

St. Pierre, E. A. (2018). Writing post qualitative inquiry. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 24(9), 603–608. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800417734567>

St. Pierre, E. A. (2019). Post qualitative inquiry in an ontology of immanence. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 25(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800418772634>

St. Pierre, E. A. (2020). Why post qualitative inquiry? *Qualitative Inquiry*, 00(0), 1–4. <https://doi.org/10.177/1077800420931142>

Thomas, M. (2018). The girl who lived: Exploring the liminal spaces of self-study research with textual critical partners. In D. Garbett & A. Ovens (Eds.), *Pushing boundaries and crossing borders: Self-study as a means for knowing pedagogy* (pp. 327–333). Self-Study of Teacher Education Practices (S-STEP).

Wiebe, S. (2015). Poetic inquiry: A fierce, tender, and mischievous relationship with lived experience. *Language and Literacy*, 17(3), 152–164. <https://doi.org/10.20360/G2VP4N>

Yoo, J. (2019). A year of writing 'dangerously': A narrative of hope. *New Writing*, 16(3), 353–362. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2018.1520893>

Not an Appendix: Unrestricted Writing

*Words are like musical notes,
each word represents a pitch and duration of sound.*

Words, when played together, create harmony and depth.

Our words can be happy, upbeat, and playful to the soul

Or

*Romantic and gentle,
as they tuck us in closer to their warmth on a chill September night.*

Or

*Our words can be tragic, shattering our perception of the world and scaring the inner landscape
of our innocence.*

Our words, correspond to the song playing in our hearts.

I want to explode.

*I feel lost,
yet found.*

*Crippled,
yet mobile.*

*My words are on the tip of my tongue,
but I remain guarded,
refusing to allow an ounce of creativity
to come out.*

What if they find out?

*What if they know that I am no one,
no one worth betting on*

and certainly,

no one worth taking seriously.

*What do you do for a living?
Who do you aspire to be?
Are you married yet?
How many kids do you want?
What can you do with that degree?
Is this a good use of your time?*

Questions, so many questions.

So, here's my answer.

*I am becoming,
I exist in the non-existent.*

I am not a yes, or a no.

*Do not categorize me,
label or define me,
you simply can't.*

*I am a puzzle,
But to your dismay,
none of my pieces fit –
I cannot be assembled.*

*I am becoming,
evolving.*

*My arrival in untimed,
who I was yesterday is gone -
who I am today is unraveling -
and who I will become tomorrow remains unknown.*