

Reweavings: Engaging With Life Writing Across Knowledge Traditions

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“History”

Even Eve, the only soul in all of time
to never have to wait for love,
must have leaned some sleepless nights
alone against the garden wall
and wailed, cold, stupefied, and wild
and wished to trade-in all of Eden
to have but been a child.

In fact, I gather that is why she leapt and fell from grace,
that she might have a story of herself to tell
in some other place.

—Jennifer Michael Hecht, from *The Next Ancient World*

Life, according to Richard Rorty (1989), ought to be viewed as a “web of relations to be rewoven, a web which time lengthens each day” (pp. 42-43).

As I read and re-read the conjoined essays presented here, I was drawn back into the very conference room at the 2009 AERA symposium where I first heard these life writings and viewed images that Vicki Kelly, Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Carl Leggo, Nané Jordan, Anita Sinner, and Cynthia Chambers projected with their presentations. The moments of silence that followed their performances of *métissage* still hang suspended in my memory, and I again feel the visceral force and power of their collective work. I believe that “we,” as members of that temporary assemblage known as an AERA audience, remained quiet for some moments following the words of the final speaker in order to allow ourselves to feel, to connect. Not the ordinary AERA experience, that’s for certain. I further imagine that we “as audience” had no immediate words, no impulsive responses, because, to borrow an idea from Anita’s braid, we were “still going through it.”

And as I read and re-read the essays for this particular iteration of their work, I was moved anew by this assemblage of teachers/researchers/writers/colleagues and their obvious commitments to a conceptualization of *métissage* as both a research approach



and a literary praxis wherein writers/researchers braid strands of their own writing and image-work with those of others. I thus am hesitant here, just as I was then as the official Discussant for the AERA symposium, to attempt to “respond” in any detached and supposedly “objective” way to the courageous and aesthetically embodied performances of a complex, messy and intricate “web of relations” that constitute these individuals’ academic collaborations as well as approaches to curriculum theory and research. Therefore, as I re-visited these papers in their current forms, I have allowed myself the leisure of time and contemplation, wanting to create enough space for myself to enable that connective tissue of readings to revive my sense of “still going through it.”

On one hand, then, my extended engagement with the work presented in these revised and expanded versions of those symposium papers has granted me the gift of again entering into the braid of these writers’ interwoven and yet distinct areas of intellectual pursuit as well as their interpretations of their lived educational experiences. But, for me, there also is a somewhat scary aspect in so doing. For, I do not presume in any way to attempt to reweave this group’s long-term web of relations in ways that might snag or catch on complicated entanglements, commitments and engagements with one another’s lives and intellectual work. Rather, I gratefully add some small strands into the authors’ existing braid, hoping at the same time that perhaps some of my disparate social, cultural, autobiographical and theoretical locations generate new warps in the weave, or perhaps produce new threads that may spin fresh configurations onto that web that time continues to lengthen.

Primarily, as I engage recursively with these texts, I wish to emphasize that these writings *must not* be read as simply a proliferation of self-serving representations of individualistic memory or ideological position or theoretical commitment, especially in relation to issues of teaching, researching, and curriculum theorizing or to “what counts” as “wisdom” within these contexts. Nor should the authors’ use of *métissage* be read as resulting in a composite view, a unified and completed “web of relations,” a perfectly braided entity in and of itself. Nor should their conceptualization of *métissage* become a reified prescription for narrative, autobiographical, life-writing or life-story research “method.” Rather, I believe that the theory and practices of *métissage*, as conceptualized and intricately entwined with/in these researchers’ word- and image-braidings, instead highlight paradoxes, contradictions, muddles, surprises and messy complexities of life writing as a form of educational research and practice.

Indeed, one of the major contributions that these authors make to research, writ large, is their insistence on the necessity of a form of connect-ness that demonstrates life writing as educational inquiry that is at once social *and* productive of possible new and unanticipated constructions of selves and histories. Such work, I believe, serves as one way of working toward the forging of ethical and just educational relationships across difference as well as through varying research, pedagogical and wisdom traditions and practices.

Vicki, Erika, Carl, Nané, Anita and Cynthia, through their textual, pedagogical and research artistry, indeed have woven filaments of historically, socially and culturally situated representations of lived experience. By utilizing juxtaposition as a textual braiding technique, these life writers have inter-connected, interrupted, and interrogated complexities, differences, and concomitant possibilities in attempting to represent their

beliefs in life writing as a primary way of actually constructing new knowledges, including ways of “getting a heart of wisdom,” if you will.

At the same time, as I too work to collaborate, present, and represent with others as one way of embodying as well as researching relationality, I have come to realize that such interwoven work requires a stance of anticipation rather than rejection of the unknown. For indeed, throughout my own collaborative research and writing endeavors, I have learned that I cannot know, predict or control ahead of time what particular relations or representations of identities and knowledges will get enacted. So, unlike any romanticized or static and intact version of a “self” or “community” within particular weavings and interconnections, I now am committed to forms of autobiographical and narrative inquires that explore relationality as predicated on constant movement, channelings, meanderings and stoppages. Such changes, writ large, have forced me over the years of my work in academe to explore “always becoming” relations among shifting conceptions of place, mobility, difference, subjectivity and constructions of identity as crucial moments of representational challenges and (im)possibilities with/in collaborative work as well as narrative and autobiographical forms of educational research.

I do see the workings of *métissage* with which both authors and readers engage here as one powerful means by which educational researchers and teachers might *refuse* not only singular and unitary versions of what and whose knowledges are deemed of the most worth, but also manifestations of essentialized, unitary and standardized forms of curriculum, pedagogy and research with and on our disparate lives as students, teachers and researchers. The very weavings, re-weavings and un-weavings that *métissage* as both method and life practice require thus enable writers-teachers-students-researchers to be momentarily and yet relationally situated along threads of interconnections as well as (dis)locations within and among fluid and constantly shifting subjectivities.

In what clearly are my preferences in regard to notions of how and to what extent educational researchers can imagine as well as enact what I am calling temporary and contingent “communities without consensus,” I thus look forward to the possible reweavings that might be created as well as undone as this impressive group of Canadian scholars continues to explore forms of life writing that foreground their interconnections across differing cultures, ethnicities and races. Because I too am committed to working with and in forms of autobiographical and narrative research that explore relationality as a primary component of just and humane acts of teaching, researching and learning, I see the unbraiding and re-braiding of *métissage* as necessary within what might be characterized as temporary intersectional alliances, fostered by both interconnections as well as (dis)locations within and between fluid and shifting interpretations of “selves.” Such constant movement characterizes what I regard as now necessary hybrid and trans-disciplinary approaches to the still-current crisis of representation in all forms of qualitative research, writ large, but especially in forms of autobiographical life writing. That crisis of representation especially must be taken into account, not only in relation to local, institutional and individual contexts and encounters, but also in relation to the non-unitary visions of subjectivities as flows of inter-relationality that now characterize global/local contexts.

I perhaps am imposing a difficult imperative here: I would hope that the work of *métissage* as so intricately represented in these braided texts and images might help all educational researchers, teachers and students to begin to understand the intersections,



stases, weavings *and* unravelings of these processes as well as implications of such. Further work to complicate notions of both “self” and *métissage* may result in non-static enactments and conceptualizations of entangled local/global educational contexts—and their embodied persons—who have their own complex and knotted interpretations of social and cultural histories, dominant discourses that often normalize, and residues of conflicting and conflicted meanings of alterity both within and with/out their “selves.”

Obviously, within these reweavings, fluid interconnections too might simultaneously include paradoxical losses of “fully known and identified” selves, countries, nations, affiliations. Such losses often raise, interrupt, stall, enable, detour, multiple or re-route varying constructions of difference—forcing all involved to deal with forms of dis-identification—that is, with the additional loss of habits of thought and representation.

What I am interlacing throughout these braided essays, then, are questions that foreground uncertainties, shifts, ambiguities, surges, contradictions, incoherences, and the un-knowable and un-nameable that *shadow* any firm and total representations of writer/researcher/teacher subjectivities and relational inter-subjectivities. It’s difficult work that should accompany any inquiry that places our selves, or allows us to be placed in a position of speaking for others from partial, situated and densely invested positions.

The intricately braided life writings of Erika, Nané, Cynthia, Carl, Vicki, and Anita focus readers’ attentions on the unique particularities of lived lives as always contextualized within analyses and theorizing of history, politics, discourses, culture, place and subjectivity. As I have engaged not only with the nuances of their intersubjectively influenced representations through poetry, photographs, paintings, dreams, and stream-of-consciousness dialogues and monologues, but also with my own questions about the ways in which the impossibly messy details of lived lives exceed any attempts to fully represent or “understand,” I am already braiding and braided into the complex research processes that these six have conceptualized, enlarged and re-imagined. I hope that any reweavings in which I have become entangled here might only serve as further impetus—not to totally untangle the entwined braidings but rather to imagine endless braiding combinations and patterns that could contribute to a notion of how we all might “get a heart of wisdom” about responsibility in not knowing.

I thank these six colleagues for their inspiring, lyrical and innovative conceptualizations that I am convinced have already expanded notions of life writing by attending to such as a moral enterprise. I am honored to engage, disrupt, tease out and add some rewoven tendrils into this particular web of relations that clearly changes, grows, hybridizes and morphs within the contexts of life writing inquiries and practices. The authors’ braidings—their conceptualizations and enactments of *métissage*—are a remarkable achievement.

References

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