

Mindi Rhoades & Vittoria S. Daiello

# losing + founding poetry:

**Sub/versive Academic  
Love Letters**

# losting + founding poetry: sub/versive academic love letters

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## accidental poesis

pretty happy poets pawing through pop culture  
petty trash heap sculptors  
crashing Duchamp's bicycles into Warhol's soup  
cans  
doubling back to do it again  
and again, then  
riding the silvery wind  
in A.V. Janssens'  
exhibit  
riveting  
chrome cycles revolving in infinite circles cross-  
ing  
cruising  
like queers used to do  
slicing through the light and air around us, you  
delightful skimming through golden scraps and  
diamond chaff  
collaging jetsam flotsam crap  
nothing borrowed nothing gained  
nothing doubled, no remains  
fragments decontextualized  
to meaninglessness, chiasma lies  
so close to chiaroscuro  
so far from Dillard's polar duos  
so ignorant of craft  
inattentive maybe daft  
uninformed rank novices  
don't understand in media res  
should start at the beginning  
a very fine place to start  
an article  
or at least conclude  
to answer someone else's questions (without  
being rude)  
so much missing misses missed  
so subversive, since we insist  
we'd be remiss not to revisit

to ask ourselves what is and isn't  
beyond and below and between the words  
unseen unruly and unheard  
wobbling bobbling wandering verbs  
disturb us  
but we do not ask what is it  
we just go and make our visits  
our plundering processes disguised unclarified  
searching for graceful shimmering  
unhinged unremembering  
meaning doubled, unraveling  
pretty happy poets, plowing,  
plagiarizing  
babbling, yapping  
in this article that's all that happens

This is an unconventional introduction. This is an unconventional undertaking. This is an experiment. This is unfinished. This is *in media res*.

Found(ing) poetry is a sub/versive artmaking-writing process. Found(ing) poetry, as we are using it, is about mining other people's texts, or verses, looking for meaning beyond and below and between the words on the page, then sharing and responding to these texts in an ongoing dialogue. These are poietic endeavors, ontological entanglements (Rosiek, 2017); these are love letters that validate a different kind of making and knowing in academe. What follows is a brief explanation of our collaborative *artmaking-writing* process (so far), a process that engages with key concepts we are beginning to imagine and explore, theories we are using to guide our exploration, several sub/versive poems we have created, and speculations on further directions for this work.

We are interested in *losting and founding*, and we see it as a poetic, reflective, dialogic, curatorial practice emerging around the edges and in the interstices of our ongoing arts practices, research collaborations, and conversations about what it means to teach others about art and education these days. What can you learn when educational objectives are unclear or unknown? What happens when you just explore? As artist-writer-researchers and university educators, we've engaged in arts-based research writing processes (Daiello, Bruner, & Casey, 2017; Stout & Daiello, 2017), pedagogical exploration of texts through dramatic inquiry (Rhoades & Daiello, 2016), and poetry as research method (Rhoades, 2016, 2018). We acknowledge this method also has roots in Richardson's (2003) writing as inquiry, Goldsmith's (2011) writing as conceptual artistry, Iser's (1978) reader response theory, Perloff's (1991, 2005) writings on post-modern poetics, and Retallack's (2003) study of Cage and poethics. In essence, *losting and founding* is an exercise in patient attunement and empathic wandering; sustained by belief in a language of feeling and association.

Currently, our *losting and founding* centers on creating poetic dialogues from academic texts. We have each separately selected and shared articles and chapters and books and poems by other authors. Using these texts (Berlant, 2008; Stein, 1914; Winterson, 1995) as raw material, we have distilled the words and work of others, sending the emergent free verse poetry back and forth to one another in a call and response conversation to see what results. We are engaging in found(ing) poetry as a sub/versive artmaking/writing process, opening texts and thoughts to more intimate and interactive encounters.

There is something undeniably pleasurable, and subversive, about playing around with others' words, wondering our way through the reso-

nance that some texts have for one or both of us, or wandering for no reason at all other than to experience the jolt of joy that springs forth when a particularly graceful phrase shimmers its way out of a thick layer of language. There is inspiration to be found in the spaces between signifier and signified; interesting questions to be explored outside/against the rules of a disciplinary practice; and there is a distinctive kind of energy that grows from making room for the "waifs and strays" (Gross, 2010, p. 33) that linger around what we think of as our focal work.

There is also something political about making these things matter in academic scholarship—about finding the poetry in the theory and exploring it, about examining the margins and subtexts. What might we learn from wandering and speculating, not seeking familiar forms, but tuning our senses to respond to (and create from) the resonance of the work?

The *losting and founding* process establishes a space of unruliness, where familiar, disciplined academic writing is unhinged from routinized forms of expression (Michael, 2016) and released to the potential of voluptuous validity (Lather, 1993) and pedagogical uncertainty (Britzman, 2003). Linger in the evocative spaces between knowing and not knowing, sense and nonsense, is a kind of unproductive productivity that holds no promise other than the certainty that there will be a phenomenological experience of being lost. Not knowing *when, if, or even how*, *founding* will yield meaning is the beauty of the process and the point of the endeavor. There is no end, no clear beginning. Only middle.

As a dialogic invention process, *losting and founding* differs from the practice of creating found poetry. Where poet Annie Dillard (1996) describes her found poems in *Mornings Like This* as "(e)diting to the extreme: writing without

composing" (p. x), we view *foundings* as a composition of attunements. Our process of "moving information" (Perloff, 2005, p. 85) to pursue the movement of affect through writing has more in common with Goldsmith's (2011) treatise on conceptual writing in the digital age than with the goals of found poetry or free verse, traditionally defined. With a shared reverence for witnessing (Katz, 2003) and an interest in the construction of knowledge in relational contexts (Raider-Roth, 2005), we pursue the idiosyncratic resonances that we experience in one another's words by working with a small group of source texts that we selected together based on our shared affinity for the authors, subjects, and genres. Prying open our source texts, we detach sentences from their original contexts and arrange them in new configurations. With every iteration of making, sharing, and responding to one another, a dialogic composition grows and expands as authorial primacy or artistic self-will unravels further (Richardson, 2015). This approach to composition strives for relational complexity; "a messier and baggier" (Lynch, 2012, p. 465) envelope of signification where the locus of meaning and meaning-making are dynamic intersubjective pathways, calling for an investment of time in learning to read a once-familiar text now differently familiar.

Taking the time to attend to another person's way of engaging with the world, to witness and linger with the intricate ways in which another makes sense of the world, is to cultivate an "ethos of openness" and "presumptive generosity" (McCormack, 2008, p. 8). Being witnessed while taking risks and being responded to generously, especially when one is venturing forth in an uncertain language, builds creative capacities of patience, humility, openness to otherness. Believing that one's audience will approach the experimental text with curiosity and affection contributes to a context that nurtures play and risk-taking in the construction

of meaning. For us, to engage wholeheartedly in losing and founding is to take love seriously in academia (Laura, 2013).

The articles/essays we have chosen so far are explicit about including things like love, passion, desire, sinuousness, and sensuousness within their academic analysis. They are not only demanding but constructing and occupying space for these subjective feelings and experiences and emotions, even when they are slippery and fluid. They form a kind of slow-moving, extended conversation. They open spaces. As Black & Loch (2014) note

This communion of uncertainty brings something certain – connection, resonance, authenticity, awareness. We are sharing a language, of gaps, transition, ache, hope, dread, troubling, not knowing. It is real, it is a balm. This writing space is a healing space for me. Resonance. Vulnerability. Imperfect lives connecting and inhabiting each other's stories. (p. 72)

What follows are several selected poems from our process.

~~~~~

[from Mindi to Vicki]

art objects

my heart flooded away  
what was I to do?

I have fallen in love  
I have no language  
I have nothing to say  
(but) I desperately want to speak  
of desire and despair  
make a clearing in the silence  
deceive ourselves

the sublimities indifferent to time:  
rapture, transformation, joy

the paradox of active surrender:  
a lemniscate of back and forth

art opens the heart

we are not very good at looking in deep difficult  
eyes  
the gaze too insistent

we canonize  
so what was wild is tamed  
what was objecting, reclaimed  
in reciprocal inventions we call memory

every day, you and I convince ourselves about  
ourselves  
we do still fall in love at first sight

there's no good red, with green as bad red,  
Ruheyer said  
there is what they are, what they are not  
and our hearts

a revolution  
daub(ing) bright color against bright color, un-  
graded by chiaroscuro  
a rapture of light diluted by how to make a thing  
accessible, desirable  
(reproducible)

the artist, the painting, and me  
the triangle of exchange  
fluid, subtle, unverifiable  
a living line of movement  
a wave that repercusses in my body  
coloring the new present, the future, even the  
past  
which cannot now be considered outside  
the painting changes the meaning of the  
thought  
and the past

this refusal of finality sets art apart

the universe is infinite, expanding, strangely  
complete  
the message colored through time is not lack,  
but abundance  
not silence, but many voices  
sublimity made visible

even those from whom art has been stolen be-  
gin to make it again

out of dust and mud  
filling walls with new light

(Found in Jeanette Winterson's (1995) Art Ob-  
jects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery Chapter  
1)

~~~~~

[from Vicki to Mindi]  
Berlant:

Jean-Luc Nancy's version of love:  
I may desire to break  
my own heart  
open(ing) to  
pressure in my body  
an/other way of tracking affective intensities.

Of course

(We) may reinvent the ordinariness of  
quodidian intensities-  
a situation  
that provokes  
the need to think  
and adjust  
slow things down  
gather things up  
find things out and  
wonder  
and ponder.

(Yet, I always wonder):

What the fuck is going on?  
(I can't form the sounds. But I am certain that) -

To think is not especially joyful or rational here –  
(instead, there is):  
skimming, browsing, distraction, apathy, cool-  
ness, counter-absorption,  
and so on. (This) lower case drama.

Pulsations  
habituated patterning  
make possible getting through  
the day (the relationships, the job, the life)  
(As) the brain chatters on  
assessing things  
in focused and unfocused procedures  
(This is) living?

Not thinking  
in the precise sense  
not just thinking, but -  
a stream of  
perceptions, flaneurlike collections, an  
idiomatic shift.

But when I think about  
Stopping to think -  
stopping to think about fucking and war and the  
world (and) kisses and kinship  
and political everything,  
including  
the “the waning of affect,”  
there is  
grief -  
the lost ordinary; the default.

(Found in Lauren Berlant's 2008 article "Think-  
ing about feeling historical" in *Emotion, Space  
and Society*, 1, pp. 4–9.)

~~~~~

[from Mimi to Vicki]

artists + writers are liars + sooths

Stein had the personality for success  
she loved it  
and it loved her  
she packed halls wherever she went  
she was not on the map  
she was the topography of her own country

Plato called the artist a liar  
Matisse called Stein a liar  
after she  
redefined reality, breaking autobiography  
from  
a rigid mold  
into which facts must be poured

the word  
the word that is both form and substance  
the moving word uncaught  
smuggled across the borders of complacency  
smuggled alive past the checkpoints of propri-  
ety

Stein made all the people around her into char-  
acters  
in her own fiction  
a splendid blow  
to verisimo

nothing sacred except the word

poor Matisse  
made into a fiction  
determined to behave like a fact

the riskiness of art  
is not the riskiness of its subject matter  
Stein trespassed  
made fiction masquerade as memoir

I prefer myself as a character in my own fiction

the most important thing  
not wit nor warmth  
but a new way with words  
a writer is a raider  
the past gathered up  
melted down  
re-formed  
becoming  
a stepping stone (between) what will follow  
and  
the past we claim to love  
the circuit between past, present, and future  
energies we call art

an eighteenth-century robustness and raciness  
kaleidoscopic fragmentation  
to give precisely  
the giddy out-of-focus feel  
enlarging what is small, reducing what is large  
twisting and turning material  
to misrepresent it  
the truth of fiction (is) not the truth of railway  
timetables  
undermining  
our usual way of seeing  
the author remains in complete control  
making the characters completely plausible  
until the end  
a bridge with the past  
both conscious and liminal  
the link we need

Wordsworth was his own epic hero  
disrespecting a well-worn form  
charming the reader  
bringing back to us  
an emotional rapture  
at once fire and distant  
the shock of memory after concussion  
the emotions returned  
recharged  
re-drawn  
the balance of an ordinary day overturned

art alters consciousness

Stein  
more flagrant less apologetic  
no attempt to clothe herself in a thin veil of  
fiction  
she became the fiction

poetic emotion  
raised up out of the best we are  
passion, love, sex, ecstasy  
compassion, grief, death  
an operatic largeness  
art is cellular  
art releases to us  
realities otherwise hidden  
recalls us to possible sublimity  
art finds (us)

it is necessary to have a story  
an alibi  
that gets us through the day  
but  
what happens when the story becomes a scrip-  
ture  
conflicting storylines dismissed, diluted

struggling  
against the limitations we place ourselves  
an inner life  
often at odds  
with external figurings

what Wordsworth called 'the real solid world of  
images'  
to understand ourselves as fictions  
is to understand ourselves as fully as we can

(Found in Jeanette Winterson's (1995) Art Ob-  
jects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery Chapter  
3)

~~~~~

[from Vicki to Mindi]

what Wordsworth called 'the real solid world of images'  
to understand ourselves as fictions  
is to understand ourselves as fully as we can,"  
a welcome dislocation:  
a truer fiction wherein we play along,  
act so that there is no use in a centre,  
knowing all, along,  
that a wide action is not a width.  
Nor a with.  
Struggling against the limitations,  
we play "and,"  
locating an inner life,  
oddly askew against our external figurings.

This preparation is given to the ones preparing  
(t)here:  
an occupation,  
and then the spreading;  
that was not accomplishing that needed stand-  
ing  
and yet the time was not so difficult  
as they were not all in place.

[A distillation of "artists + writers are liars +  
sooths" with Tender Buttons, in Search of a Par-  
allel Universe]

~~~~~

This is a response to the call for "subversive"  
papers in art education, for scholarship that  
involves "overturning conventional knowing  
through a process of "(un)knowing and (re)con-  
textualizing" (see the Journal of Social Theory  
in Art Education's Call for Papers for Volume  
39 at [https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jstae/JSTAE\\_39\\_CFP.pdf](https://scholarscompass.vcu.edu/jstae/JSTAE_39_CFP.pdf)). We are "mining and under-  
mining" familiar poetry and scholarly writing

methods, subverting the concept of what aca-  
demic writing is and can be and what we should  
be doing with it. We are subverting traditional  
academic notions of propriety by focusing on  
our intellectual as well as our subjective and af-  
fective reactions, recognitions, and resonances  
to engage places we can find love, passion, and  
connection in these texts, or spaces, pockets,  
disruptions, margins, gaps, wobbles. We are  
dialogically curating our knowledge, exploring  
wildly and ravenously – in academic texts and  
literature and art—and sharing the poetic bits  
and intensities, trying to understand them and  
use them to propel us further. We understand  
Massumi's (1992) insistence that

A thing has as many meanings as there are  
forces capable of seizing it...The presence  
of the sign is not an identity but an envel-  
opment of difference, of a multiplicity of  
actions, materials, and levels. In a broader  
sense, meaning even includes the paths  
not taken. It is also all the forces that could  
have seized the thing but did not. It is an  
infinity of processes. (pp. 10-11)

We are creating and exploring other paths. We  
are enacting a process of wholly engaged learn-  
ing/inquiry—finding and making poetry in these  
academic contexts—taking the words of others  
and churning turning heating them, alchemical-  
ly creating something new.

When asked why we engage in losing and  
founding, we summon the sentiments of poet  
Joan Retallack (2003) who says that she writes  
"to stay warm and active and realistically  
messy" (p. 5). In an education milieu where gen-  
eralizable, replicable knowledge and intended  
learning outcomes are a prized form of academ-  
ic currency, losing and founding secures a place  
for mundane processes and humble becomings;  
time for lingering within the unruly potentiali-  
ties that are all around; and capacity for playing  
toward becomings.

We are continuing to look for ways to create spaces for knowing, not knowing, unknowing; for exploration, without any clear direction or endpoint in mind, just the love of looking and losing and founding and loving. Together. Always *in media res*.

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Vittoria Daiello  
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From: Daiello <xxxxxxx>  
Sent: Sunday, September 23, 2018 5:59:43 PM  
To: Rhoades  
Subject: Re: found academic poetry: losting as subversive reading – CFP for JSTAE

Darling,  
This losting/founding/loving topic feels so timely ... But, it's sort of sad and sort of funny, isn't it, that academic love resides in the "sub/versive?" But it's true. The kind of wanton aliveness that academic "lo스팅 and loving" evokes for me is a force of insurgent desire so fierce, so powerful that it must be muffled beneath method and procedure.  
Anyway....

A recent poem by Doug Anderson, *I Am Always in Love* (2018) appeared in my Vox Populi email feed the day I received your email about the CFP. The first line of the poem could've been lifted right from my aching heart: "I am always in love because that is what we are here to do." I connected with the idea of love as an overwhelming force that is always seeking its object ~ an unmoored abstraction in search of a landing place.

Anderson's words got me thinking about our losting and found(ing) poetry, wondering how the act of loving someone else's beautiful words into a state of unraveling and reweaving is constitutive of love? Is this process an act of loving, liberatory intimacy—a desire to undress, unwind, and unpack the beloved, setting it free? Are we, as Doug Anderson says, simply "water going downhill, pooling in rocks, overflowing, moving on beneath vines, in the gutters of cities" taking words with us as we go? I am intrigued by the potential meaning(s) of what we are doing. However, I am also wary of meanings that become tools for disciplining difference, subduing unruliness.

V  
~~~~~

From: Rhoades <xxxxxxx>  
Date: Wednesday, October 10, 2018 at 10:01 AM  
To: Daiello <xxxxxxx>  
Subject: Re: found academic poetry: losting as subversive reading – CFP for JSTAE

you, my dear, are turning up the sub/versive vocabulary and concept we need to ground this 'becoming-together' together. and we are finding ways to center people and love pedagogically through the use of words and beyond-words or more-than-words or somehow un/word/ing un/wor(l)d/ing.

i love stumbling through these complexities, roaming through other people's words and thoughts and trying to deliberately approach them poetically, in an attempt to read them for other layers of potential depth and meaning, for the aesthetic pleasure of academic interpretation into a more formalized art form. for the love and pleasure of working with the words of others as the material for finding unexpected beauty, poetic intensities. for the pure love of exchanging these ideas with someone else who loves these things terribly and fantastically too.

I'm getting back to our readings and hoping to make some progress in the next couple of weeks. I'm going to try to work through another Winterson chapter in the next few days, too.

so much love to you, my wonderful friend and adventurer!

M

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