losting + founding
poetry:

Sub/versive Academic Love Letters
losting + founding poetry: sub/versive academic love letters

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 crossing 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 postmodern poetics, and Retallack’s (2003) study of Cage and poetics. 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 subversive artmaking 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 resonance 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). Lingering 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)dicting to the extreme: writing without
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.

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[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,
Rukeyser said
there is what they are, what they are not
and our hearts

a revolution
daub(ing) bright color against bright color, ungraded 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
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 -
stooping 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.)

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[from Mindi 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 scripture
conflicting storylines dismissed, diluted

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

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 Objects: Essays on Ecstasy and Effrontery Chapter 3)
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 standing
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 Parallel 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)contextualizing” (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). We are “mining and undermining” familiar poetry and scholarly writing methods, subverting the concept of what academic 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 affective 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 envelopment 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 learning/inquiry—finding and making poetry in these academic contexts—taking the words of others and churning turning heating them, alchemically creating something new.

When asked why we engage in losting 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 generalizable, replicable knowledge and intended learning outcomes are a prized form of academic currency, losting and founding secures a place for mundane processes and humble becomings; time for lingering within the unruly potentialities 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
University of Cincinnati
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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 “losting 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.

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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
References


