
what if all this made sense?

a caffeinated inquiry in 5 parts, 9 installments

gw rasberry
the old school house
yarker ontario

writing matters 1, shards of anne sexton

The business of words keeps me awake.
I am drinking brown cocoa,
That warm brown mama.

I would like a simple life
Yet all night I am laying
Poems away in a long box …

All night dark wings
Flopping in my heart.
Each an ambition bird.

writing matters 2, goldberg variations

I think the secret
yearning here is, how do we
encounter our own minds? We are searching for the core of our lives; our culture intuits that writing, that ancient activity, might be a pathway.

writing matters 3, to the motion ...

Stay awake, keep moving. Clinging to the raft won’t help.

writing matters 4, difficulty and ease

Why does it have to be so difficult?

Writing is thinking out loud on paper. The more we write the more we are asked to consider our thoughts and our thoughtmaking processes. This is not necessarily a comfortable process, nor is it necessarily an uncomfortable process. It simply is: a process.

We create our own invitation, an invitation into ourselves: within/without with others with careful consideration and a certain recklessness.

So, what are we: thinking? These thoughts: vapour trails that make for curious fascinating skywriting. Write them down: we become what we pay attention to. Write them down. Always and forever learning to trust our own thoughts, learning to trust our own minds, hearts.

The bodies that house the beating hearts. All this time, all this way, always returning, always starting
again, starting

over. There is no shame
in ink given over to make such thought visible.

What appears in the guise of intimacy
and reveals us as persons negotiating

the personal also becomes
the collective building itself with

and without us. The signposts can throw us off
the trail. Pointing the way, pointing

the way. Distracting us with the obvious:
_You are here._

Learning to trust
our own minds. Learning

simply, to trust. Ever and always,
intrigue involved, a maze, perhaps,

or a labyrinthe thrown
in for good measure. Beginnings

that imagine
endings. Endings that don't.

Writing is thinking out.
Loud. Writing is a form of

inquiry. Writing is
inquiry. Writing is

inquiry. Writing inquiry.
Writing is.

*Why does it have to be so difficult?*
*Why would we want it any easier?*

**writing matters, 5**

*...this is my research, my act of fiction, an act of passion.*

**what matters, installation #1**

So you want to write
a Song but the tune emerges
as a business memo, the lyrics faxed

one day late.
It's the same. It's the Same
for everything: Everything.

You want this Thing.
What is it?
Why must you have it?

Who is it for?
[And who recalls beauty as the crumpled note in your back pocket?] So much
to remember that is worth forgetting. Why? Why now?
Language can't touch without one of us
getting hurt. This doesn't mean Stop.
No, it means go. Accept translation as your first language. Architecture will invite itself
between the covers and under your skin and into your veins.
Milk and honey. Love or Money. Form
and function. Parallel park enough times and your poems will fit into the tiniest spaces. [Your dissertation proposal will receive its own approval.]

The mixed metaphor promises revelation. Committee members eventually come to recognize movement as that which takes place below the surface.


Change your strings— for rehearsals, even. Bend sideways. Stand
tall. Place all anger in the margins, then change your cartridge. Make only enough copies.

Footnote regrets. Work from the inside out while skating backwards. Watch for Openings. Offer invitation(s).

Write the word 'defense' on a pink slip. Try not to think of your children at times like this. The urgency of idle love.

Whole days spent kissing the backs of their necks and whispering their hair into poems. Try not to use the word 'precious' in your talk of Methodology.

The rain can fall harder and it will. Don't confuse feelings of hope and clarity with songs sung
just out of your range.
Nurture cliché: work with it, make it
your own best friend.

Count on nothing, depend
on others. Stand on shoulders for different
perspectives. Love tallness for the view.

How willing are you
to be hurt?
Follow the least likely
plot line but do not under any circumstance
tug on the thread that seems most likely
to give way.

Having Faith and being Faithful
are two completely different
epistemologies.

The first chapter may in fact be your last.
Writing words down and asking them to stay
will surely tire you out.

[Make good use of exhaustion.]

Liner notes are fine but don't expect
we'll use them
wisely.

I really am trying to talk about why
it's important for you to record
your First Album. It certainly can't be

about the diploma or
having your picture on the dust
cover.

What matters? Can you
finish the task without
knowing?

**what else matters, installation #2**

What happens if you don't
write it down? [And if you do,
do you expect to get it right
the first time?]

Might crayons better serve
your purpose? Imagine irony
moving across the skyline, cynicism
moving after it, both receding.

Playful: the sun
not only being able to afford
but also enjoy the drop
below the horizon.
[What else matters.]

How alone are you
in pursuing what solitude might expect?
This is for you, after all, and yet as one begins
to recognize this face of writing it has moved beyond

the one: ah, lower case transcendence ...
What words to choose? There are so many, so many, so many, so many. What principle, what
theory, religion, archetype, conceptualization?

Trust, faith, patience. Each mean nothing but:
trust, faith, patience. Someone else's offerings.
Careful, we move now into knowing ...
Better yet: The Art of Not Knowing.
Making good use of what is just beyond
our knowing. Working the wheel
until there is some sense
of edgy comfort that begets more knowing

knowing knowing knowing knowing
knowingknowingknowingknowing.
Knowing there is so much
more just beyond

our knowing. A moment arm. A playground
slide or swing: close, far, close, far. Close.
But is it necessary to be so cryptic at times
like this? Why not just come right out

and say it? A bridge. The water's
surface. Rainfall. A flash
of colour. Dreams that dissolve and come
apart. Sometimes, there is nothing
to say. There are notes and there are spaces.
Be generous with yourself and your
writing. Place duct tape on the delete
key. Don't be afraid

to make your own
theory.
There's nothing wrong
with napping, either. Perfection is so
damaging. Read things that aren't good
for you. Resist names and naming
until you're certain
you can pull the same card out

of the deck four times
out of five. Choice without
limitation, can there
be?

what else, installation #3

Isn't it just the slightest bit troubling to you
that writing only matters after all the words have appeared?

Go behind the sun or wait for moonless nights to write. Arrive complete. Show no rough work, nor marginalia, nor unpolished thought.

Where are the writing workshops, public forums, chat group sessions? [maybe they're held underwater, in private, or else on low rooftops, poorly drained, black tar holding.] Clandestine.

Cry cry cry.
Coffee the stains. Drink if you must. Worry not. What happens when you follow yourself downstream and the meandering becomes you?

It was supposed to be the first chapter but ended in a celebration of the beauty of box scores taken from browned-out newspapers in the back shed that you should not have been burning on this particular day but the writing was tugging on no vein and the third shelf from the top of your tiny study caught your eye with a title that begged to differ with your doctoral reading list and low clouds and hints of some other season's arrival but in the end everything has been feeding your questions and the permission slip you gave yourself has given you back answers and so this is the voice that seems to work best. How did this happen?

Idleness, circumspection, detour, distraction, dangerously imaginative forays, caffeinated visions.

Is this The Art
Is this Is this this The Art
Art Is this Is this this this Is this Is this
The the Art of of Writing Inquiry?
is this Is this Is this

Doggedness, misplaced confidence, lovely naiveté, regression, open windows, wondering, concentrated diffidence, animated theory, wandering passages.

Open to this or this?

what, installation #4

Where are you listening when you write? What place finds you? Who will you know? How far, how far?

Place yourself amid distraction, then remove all spellcheck functions. How has research claimed you?

The thin skin is the first to be sloughed off. Ideas, ideas are different. Permanent: a tattoo to talk about but no one mentions the blood,
only love and the pursuit of Design
or a sentence that might last longer
than the paragraph containing it.

Look for no wisdom, now. Certainly not
here. Don't even mention voice. Not here, not
now. Courage, Vision: yes and no. (Fortitude
maybe.)

Exercise futility and then some. Maybe a cloud, maybe a group of notes played through a funnelator,
slightly delayed and some distortion for effect.

What if all this made sense? Isn't that what
we all hope for? To understand. To be
understood. Insights exchanged, passions
tested under laboratory conditions. But

all this time alone can't be good
for you. Line breaks cutting you off mid
sentence. Playing chess by yourself, no one
to even stare you down or help put away all
the pieces.

Writing researches like this
all the time, sometimes
without witness.

else, installation #5

When words are what we pay attention to, so much
can go wrong. Things fly apart.
Leave you staring at the space where
meaning wants to be. Used to be.

We never mean for this to happen but
it does. It does. Stare at the words you've gathered
together. All the work required. Meaning less
and less and less sometimes. Language demands
more and more and more. And more.

It's a landmine of clichés: one step
at a time, only. Until you don't get it enough
times that it comes around and then
asks that you repeat yourself,
differently.

Research writes itself like this all the time
sometimes. All the time all the time
all the time time time time sometimes.
Witness it and remember
to keep a back-up
copy.

more what, installation #6

Should patience be mentioned? or
perseverance strength humility
serendipity courage vulnerability
fortitude delivery fear honesty
generosity invocation. A calling?

less what, installation #7

A tentative manifesto for those pursuing graduate work:

Yes, you are willing to bend.
No, you are not willing
to be bent out of shape.

more or less what, installation #8

Some will be disappointed.

You, too, likely (I know I am).

It seems there is less and less to say just at the point where more and more is required.

Questionable fulcrums feed the constant sense of disorientation.

There are so many sources, the flow will never falter but it will always be in the finding, in the telling.

Some will be disappointed.

matters, installation #9

I wish for you, your cello slowing canyon traffic to a whisper.

Wind blowing your spring skirts open and then what we pay attention to becomes unhinged, wind moving. Whisper traffic slowing. Slowing.

Cool wind warms us. Wishing becomes whisper and then we pay attention. The cello like-day, wood-warmed cool canyon.

Interior stretches, slowing, becoming attention. Spring traffic, open and slowing. We wish we wish.

What now? When
there is nothing
but …


4 taken from Rishma Dunlop’s essay “Boundary Bay” in The art of writing inquiry.

About the Author

Gary William Rasberry is an artist and educator who lives in the old school house in Yarker, Ontario. He works as a sessional instructor at the Faculty of Education at Queen’s University, performs with the acoustic trio fireweed, the band forty foot road and with the Purple Dragon Puppet Troupe. He also writes poetry, music, and essays that explore writing and pedagogy, and promotes live music at The Old School House with his partner Rena Upitis and their two children Hayden and Zinta. His book Writing Research/Researching Writing: Through a poet's I is published by Peter Lang.

Correspondence: gary rasberry
the old school house, yarker, ontario, Canada.
E-mail: rasberry@educ.queensu.ca