Rebraid: Repeated Narrations

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Here, in this third strand, Rebraid, Jason and I remix our original manuscript *The Daimon, The Scarebird and Haiku: Repeated Narrations*, and *Repeated Narrations*, a presentation given at the Unsettling Conversations: An Arts and Education Practice Based Research Collaborative Inquiry conference at UBC in June 2006. What follows is the rebraided script of live performance, recorded performance and audience participation. What was neither scripted nor anticipated was the provocative and un/settling conversations that followed the presentation—these voices appear as “imagined text.”
Rebraid, a textscape of image, sound, and movement becomes a project of “writing the Other.” Here we (attempt to) interrupt the binary idea of text as a mode of representation militating against artistic consideration and offer an example of writing with difference, with rawness, and with a raw aesthetic. Our textscape stands against the view of text as hegemonic, patriarchal, and instrumental. Preserving a false dichotomy, such texts reduce and disavow internal difficulties and slippage(s) in maintenance of the colonial fantasy of mastery and control. Text read in this way serves another false dichotomy, a wor(l)d of either-or. This text demands to be read at multiple levels as an engagement that reveals, releases, and recaptures the fragility of “writing the Other.” In this way we offer our work as an example of an aporia, one that asks for continual readdress in the slippages of the weaving of our texts.

Read against and through one another, this work is in part an experiment in textual disruption and derailed communication, inhabiting a liminal space teetering between recognition and the anxiety of crisis. The main body of this manuscript is haunted by multiple voices. The process of writing the main text of this manuscript is disclosed in italics, revealing in part the concepts and assumptions made by the authors prior to and during the development of this work. The notes and thoughts of the authors during the writing of this manuscript appear in bold and point toward the inner difficulties and contested spaces of this work. As a work of continued reflexive methodology, Rebraid and its two former strands, might be read as attempts at co-authoring which, while recognizing the familial, disrupts its own attempt at meaning making.

While we are aware of the difficulty this might pose for the reader, we attempt to maintain the space for interpretive possibility throughout this work. This requires a certain hospitality toward interruptions, repetition, and silence. As pedagogues, we are charged with a similar task in encouraging the voice of students to bear meaningfully upon curriculum. In this vein, we attempt to engage the reader as writer in the braiding of our experiences, and seek to co-meditate on the slippages and breaks inherent to the project of making meaning.

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Alexandra: We [three scholars] set out to braid three tales into one: “The Scarebird: A Tale of Return,” “Absenting the Tacoma Witch,” and “Haiku: Embodied Knowing” shall become “The Daimon, The Scarebird and Haiku: Repeated Narrations.” This undertaking takes each of us into unfamiliar territory although we resonate with both knowing and not-knowing about what each is trying to express. We also
anticipate that the reader and listener, too, will experience similar moments of both knowing and not-knowing, indeed, interruptions, repetition, and silence, all part of the necessary tension and thus sources for insight. As Eliot repeats in “Four Quartets:”

**Audience:** In order to arrive at what you do not know
You must go by a way of ignorance. (1944, 25)

**As this is a journey into the unknown, we cannot lay out what meaning will be found or made of this braiding other than to suggest the direction of our action.** Eliot again assists here:

**Audience:** We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploration
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time. (48)

**Alexandra:** Our second discussion found themes arising from the texts. These themes, like the plait we were attempting to braid, could not be separated as they kept overlapping and re-working themselves back into one another. We decided that as three authors coming together we, too, had to lay our thoughts and writing on top of, beside, and underneath one another… so we named the grand project of narration, the refusal to live in a space and the necessity of dismemberment as manageable strands in order to play within our wor(l)ds. In naming such themes, we omitted the naming of others. We proceeded to individually draw elements of our three texts into each of the thematic strands. This endeavour is hermeneutical in nature for the braiding of our three voices requires the ability to see life as infinitely interpretable. That is, we see our original writings as only one pattern of events leading to our concretizing of them in words, and these wor(l)ds demand constant reading and rereading to feel the events, to know these events as existing on top of, beside, and underneath one another.

**Jason:** In each of the three papers that are layered in this repetition of phenomenon, there is a remembrance of “unknown backgrounds,”—an opening in the portal through which we are drawn into the chaos of possibility. This draw into the portal is not merely “possible but inevitable” (Dreyfus, 1992, 274). In “Absenting the Tacoma Witch,” the phenomenon of “fixing” and disclosure are taken up via a grade four writing assignment in which students attempt to reread traditional fairy tales differently—playing upon the notion of deconstructive difference. Ultimately, the students “forget” the initial attempt to write “other-than,” falling back upon traditional hegemonic models of disclosure. At the onset of this project, however, a conversation occurred which opened a hitherto closed portal into “unknown backgrounds,” and into the possibility of perceiving our being differently. “The Scarebird: A Tale of Return” marks, according to my interpretation, a dismemberment by way of recognition and attention to an opportunistic opening predicated upon radical doubt, which leads its author, Enid, into the woods and into uncertainty (Miller, 2001). “Haiku: Embodied Knowing” locates this reoccurring portal in the form and reading of haiku itself through a pedagogy of mindfulness or embodied awareness. Alex writes “Poetry permits, in its simplicity and directness … Disrupting/disrupted” (Fidyk, 2001, 2). This repeating portal functions in each text to destabilize being, to draw it deeper, to draw it away from the light of disclosed existence toward the chaos of possible being(ness); “There is no lasting security to be had in this flow of impermanence” (2). “Absenting the Tacoma Witch” attends to a similar destabilization, opened up as it is through the opportunity of conversation—through the dismemberment of the “surface simplicity of things” (Wallin, 2001).

**Audience:** The skeptics are happier in their singleness and in their simplicity, happy that they do not, will not, realize the monstrous things that lie only just beneath the surface of our cracking civilization.

Demonologist and Catholic priest Montague Summers (1880 - 1948)

I thought I had chased [the] demons out from under my bed and out of my closet long ago, but they seem to have crept back into the nook and crannies of
my practice, reactivating my anxiety and stealing my peace of mind. (Miller, 2001, 3)

Jason: The monster emerges in ruptures where the “surface simplicity” of things gets caught up in being, in the mess of existence, in the life that goes on despite our most calculated plans and earnest intentions. The daimon interferes with “our best laid plans,” and, as I will attempt to make a case for, calls us to reconsider the ways in which we are written into existence as well as the historicity of the structures that write us. The marginalization of the daimon is as much a part of the vision of Modernity as is order, certainty, and globalization.

Alexandra: As Mary Catherine Bateson (1994) suggests in Peripheral Vision, women traditionally have had to learn to be attentive to multiple demands, to tolerate frequent interruptions, and to think about more than one thing at a time. In fact, it was characteristic of women’s work to do tasks simultaneously, in a single braid. Bateson writes that this is a pattern of attention that leads to a kind of peripheral vision which, may not exist if you limit roles to separate contexts. Although this multiplicity can be confusing and even painful, it can also become a source of insight. To attend means to direct one’s mind or energies, to be present, sometimes with companionship, sometimes with patience. It means to take care of, to tend, to guard. The writing and reading; rewriting and rereading of our texts require a kind of peripheral vision because at times a narrative that seems to fit into one theme morphs into another.

Bateson writes that we are “privileged to enter, if only peripherally,” into a diversity of visions, and beyond that to include them in the range of responsible caring (12). The best care is founded in observation and contemplation. Writing narrative, like wo(men)’s work, is ongoing and requires care. Where an event has been transformed into the wor(l)d, we have engaged in multiple layers of vision, where the retelling exemplifies the making of a connection from one pattern to another. So we move in ignorance yet with attention, “a humility in waiting upon the emergence of pattern from experience” (Bateson, 1994, 10). In our (Enid, Jason, and I) ability
to attend to something new or to see the familiar in a new way, we engage in a creative act. And so our repeated narrations create a pattern across time with ongoing themes and variations, different movements all integrated into the whole. This is the kind of combining, arranging, and braiding we do in our lives, in our teaching, learning, and narrating. Narrative emplotment, then, appears to yield a form of understanding of human experience, both individual and collective, an experience that is paradigmatically a temporal and hence historical reality. It is in and through various forms of narrative that our lives, our selves, attain meaning.

Alexandra (recorded): Another gathering with Enid and Jason, and the rhythms and patterns of concealment, revealment re-appear. I continue in the lure of the eros of writing by working through ideas that call to be explored, excavated, exposed…. Jason offered a lengthy piece interwriting elements of Enid’s work within his text … but mostly it was his text. I offered my writing with skepticism and it was met with approval. Strange that co-writing requires approval, acceptance, attending-to before one can move on. I slide back into that warm yet troubled place of reworking others’ words. We have decided to email—to rewrite, reword, reweave our narratives in present time. So we begin another phase of the braiding—reflective e-texts in cyberspace. The braid becomes something in-between verbal and written as it blips in and off our page … sometimes losing itself completely.

Enid mentioned her struggle with “writing herself in”—she writes beautifully, sensually, so attentive to the questions or issues at hand, always attuned—critically cautious of/to the unfolding comments and process.

We proceed with our individual monsters … and word/eds.
Jason (recorded): The revealment of my own work to my co-authors is effusive. Enid reads my writing with concerned and worried expressions: “You are writing your own paper here, Jason—this is your own work.” My co-author cum mirror broadcasts my hijacking in hi-fi, and akin to the smooth talking body snatchers that play across shadowed urban streets, I pimp the experience of my co-authors to ease/confirm the difficulty of my own. In this anxiety, the methodological intent of reflexive writing has become, perhaps for the first time, a question to me. My research not only plays spin doctor, but is doctored in advance, with secret (and partially revealed) intentions to ease and complete my difficulty by confirming it through the appropriation of (muted) bodies. How can writing elude ontological/metaphysical presumptions at work behind its back?

Jason: In each narrative, there is attention toward an opportunistic opening in experience that troubles and mystifies self. Alex refers to this attentiveness as mindfulness, that which we are “privileged to enter,” and that which calls us back to a perception of an “under” world (Fidyk, 2002, 11). Alex attends to the portal, “recollecting and recognizing the chain of events leading to, or the situation presently under consideration … the wake up call, for example, What am I doing Here?” (Carolan, 2000, 51-2; cited in Fidyk, 2001, 1). The undecidable serves as catalyst for the portal, and as the term catalyst connotes, undecidability is not exhausted in the process, but sustains its refusal to be categorically named. The “underworld,” invites us—or consumes us—requiring a re-negotiation of being; “freeing ourselves from the tenacious grip of the abstract, disembodying conceptual mind (intellect) and recovering embodied awareness” (Fidyk, 2001, 2).

In “Absenting the Tacoma Witch,” a conversation erupts which observes the hegemonic disclosure of character in fairy tales. The conversation skewers our notions of categorical certainty and draws us toward the portal, toward a life that had hitherto been ignored (Wallin, 2001). The daimon lies within each text, dormant—to be activated by, or more accurately, revealed by/in crisis. Heidegger notes: “Entities look as if… That is, they have a certain way, been discovered already, and yet they are still disguised … Truth (discoveredness) is something that must always first be wrestled from entities” (cited in Dreyfus, 1992, 275). Following, our sense of the world is radicalized by descent into the underworld, our being-in-the-world becomes felt in moments of crisis wherein our perception becomes attuned. Yet, in the possibility of total consumption and total loss there is also renewal; “Occasionally … someone, by living in anxiety and thus facing his or her…condition, comes up with a new insight, a new way of looking at the world” (275).
Alexandra: What might be offered as a remedy or antidote for our collective forgetting, forsaking is simply, attentiveness or mindfulness. Mindfulness practice is about freeing ourselves from the tenacious grip of the abstract, disembodied conceptual mind (intellect) and recovering embodied awareness. As mentioned earlier, peripheral vision extends from attentiveness to multiple demands, to frequent interruptions, and to monsters and scarebirds. There is nothing smooth, linear or fearful about a diversity of visions. In fact, as Bateson elucidates, we are “privileged to enter” this space that yearns for care of the accompanying visions as does the writing and reading of this project. Such care is continuous, even in the flux. One cannot become aware and then abandon that awareness if one indeed wants to transform, transcend the will to certainty, for this is an act of betrayal, betrayal of self and other.

Audience: The world and our selves both approach the portal, the opening between us. We reach into the threshold for each other. The world at the fringes of our awareness beckons us as much as we search for it. It calls for our participation…. (Miller, 2001, 8)

Alexandra (recorded): I am bewitched by Enid and Jason’s words. Dare I confess enchantment? Intoxication? Have I embodied the topica, the topography, the project itself? I cannot get the melody of these multiple voices out of my head. Like sirens, they beckon me toward unchartered sp(l)aces. I cannot take up any task without their words mingling within me and yet, what is strange is that I feel a familiarity with their writing, like I was born between their lines. I know these stories, students, research—it is as if I was there, am there, with them in the teaching and writing as the events come alive again and again, yet it is their topography, and I did not dwell within. Regardless, the movement beckons me.

Jason: As Derrida suggests, the undecidable is not all poison, but might be better described as a pharmakon, that is, both a cure as well as a poison (Derrida, 1981). The curative and poisoning function of the pharmakon plays across categorical surface definitions—defying relegation to the logic of binaries. In this sense, Derrida reads Heidegger’s double movement of de-struction and renewal as a radical hermeneutic suspicion against the curative features of the surface—what Derrida refers to as the metaphysics of presence (Caputo, 1987). Enid’s reflections invoke the pharmakon through the use of a metaphorical daimon. Enid writes,

Audience (x2): I thought I had chased these demons out from under my bed and out of my closet long ago, but they seem to have crept back into the nooks and crannies of my practice, reactivating my anxiety and stealing my piece of mind (Miller, 2001, 3).
Jason: In the fall of ontological certainty, the foundations upon which knowledge becomes premised falter, dispersing the objective “I” across shattered surfaces—leaving us to suffer together (and alone) in the wake of the myth of assuredness.

Alexandra (recorded): The singing has stopped. And all before me appears formless, unfamiliar, concealed.

Pause.

Alexandra: The braiding of our text illustrates that to narrate is to link, to connect. As Ricoeur says, “To make a plot is already to make the intelligible spring from the accidental, the universal from the singular, the necessary or the probable from the episodic” (Ricoeur, 1984-88, 41). The plot that we set out to write, writes itself and we have come to abide in the play of the written. As co-authors, we reside in the “between-two,” the multi-layering textuality that grows in relation to our intention and action yet with its own sense of self-making, and the subjectivity that repeatedly turns into itself.

Alexandra (recorded): Upon finishing my text, I wait. Tentatively, I re-turn to the screen to read of the others’ progress; instead, I read of Enid’s struggle to write while “being written” and I reflect on the challenges of working ‘in-between.’ Enid writes, “I cannot write my way into either piece” and withdraws from this project. What has happened in our attempt to embody our research? What has happened to our attempt to “risk disclosure,” “to leave one’s safe shelter and expose one’s self to others”? 
After much deliberation about Enid’s concern with adequation, Jason and I begin, pause and then invite the “gap of text unaccounted for” to speak for itself. Our text becomes dismembered without Enid’s braiding; yet her absence speaks itself through the strands … she remains with us, and yet, I feel a loss.

Jason (recorded): E-mail inbox chimes in real time, but serves a cold, static voice, a modern performance of relationship mediated by machine. Enid has decided to back out of our experiment in reflexive writing, but the why is lost across circuitry and the vast depth(lessness) of cold virtual space. The e-mail reads concomitantly with our first meeting: “I cannot find a way to write my way into this piece.” The portal that had once presented itself as an opportunity for three authors to discuss the phenomenon of embodiment becomes a single (bodiless) dimension. Difference, ironically played out again in this writing becomes subsumed by a code that includes alterity as a consumable “other.” Enid’s experience has become the corpse to my methodological autopsy and has been excavated in one-dimensional (screened) space. Wrung of blood and guts, what space remains to speak in which inclusion will be resisted?

Jason: Working in a way that challenges the legitimized practices of the institution is difficult, but when we are complicit by way of the modes of representation available, our good intentions can easily become co-opted. Perhaps this is the latent pedagogical motivation for both the revisited fairy tales as well as the format for this performance; to reflexively make inroads into our attempts at meaning making in dialogue with an(other). As Enid’s silence suggests, however, the voice of the other in my work bears the mark of a colonization. It is made familiar again, incorporated, or perhaps more aptly, installed into a narrative framework, including the biases, omissions, and unconscious adherences in my own writing; and of the process of writing itself. In schools, regimes of writing often normalize characterizations, story arcs, and conflict. This is the image of the “fairy tale genre” projected by students in the attempt to write them differently. In the Grade 4 representation, the disrupting other that initially jarred the students became domesticated in a way similar to my appropriation of Enid’s experience. Yet, amid this censuring, something of the other has continued to echo throughout this experiment in reflexive writing. In Enid’s refusal to participate, my writing took an anxious turn. In this slippage, something of the desire in language is revealed, as is my own desire as an author. “Absenting the Tacoma Witch” ‘concludes’ similarly, with the students’ recognition that they had been ‘played out’ in deference to familiar representations and narrative structure.

Maintaining the voice of the other has become a difficult and perhaps impossible project, marred by the realization that language not only evades easy control, but subverts our will to make meaning differently. It is here that Alex’s work informs a possible reorientation to difference in writing. Whereas the work of my Grade 4 students concluded as a ‘repetition of the same,’ Alex’s consideration of writing as positing the experience of the other suggests a way of making meaning without referring to the legitimized symbolic appearances that
have become commonplace in schools across North America. As Alex notes, poetic forms may have permitted the repetition of the fairy tales with difference, allowing for the destabilization of normative re(tellings). This suggests the fecund ground of symbolic radicality as a point of curricular departure, informing the ruptures inherent within this text while questioning the possibility of writing and teaching otherness.

Alexandra: Jason and I are invited, again, to explore the “Word” which “cannot be pinned down, for when we attempt to do so, the Word will rise again” (Jardine, 2000, 121). I am coming to see and feel the play of much of our inquiry into meaning and action as the inquiry into teaching and learning, into living. The attentiveness, the “calling forth,” the “inter-esse” with which we move, the “between-two” where we wrestle and rest…. The possibilities of interruptions, or struggle, of rupturing and rapture … and the un/decidability that lies inherent in these places….

As we inquire into this space of meaning and action, the unknown accompanies each movement. As Enid writes:

Audience (x3): I thought I had chased [the] demons out from under my bed and out of my closet long ago, but they seem to have crept back into the nook and crannies of my practice, reactivating my anxiety and stealing my peace of mind. (Miller, 2001, 3)

Alexandra: What happens when the demon returns “stealing [one’s] peace of mind,” stealing one’s voice? Something other certainly exists in our braiding and in ourselves that has complicated our “story of the world” of embodiment.” Enid shares in her initial text and again in our meeting last week, “I [have] lost my sense of place” (1). When faced with layering the strands offered by Jason and I, Enid’s e-writing echoes the return of the daimon, “I cannot write my way into either piece.” She is caught, lost “between-two.” She respects his return, not forcing herself to write but finds it traumatic, writing, “I feel like data, not a co-author.” Have we become
demonic? Our writing? Does the daimon reside in our process as well? Attentive to Enid’s position, we consider how to honour this space, ourselves, our journey as we rest in-between the beginning and the end. I return to Eliot’s “Four Quartets” to illuminate our strand-ed-ness.

Audience (x3): That was a way of putting it—not very satisfactory:
…Leaving one still with the intolerable wrestle
With words and meanings…

It was not (to start again) what one had expected
What was to be the value of the long looked forward to,

In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been. We are only undeceived
Of that which, deceiving, could no longer harm.
In the middle, not only in the middle of the way
But all the way, in a dark wood, in a bramble,
On the edge of a grimpen, where is no secure foothold,
And menaced by monsters… (1944, 23)

Jason (recorded): The project of writing runs the risk of teleological self-consumption, conclusion as masturbatory ecstasy—narcissistic self-embrace. In part, this experiment in reflexive writing avoids the proclamation, “I was right all along.” This is not a case of outwitting or outplaying the code, but rather, of rupture in-the-midst-of being. Enid’s departure from this work derailed the intent to braid the three narratives that run throughout this piece, forcing this work to conclude differently, partially. This writing also concludes in difficulty, acknowledging the co-opting of experience and posing this as a question for those conducting reflexive research.

Jason: A text can be a disingenuous site/cite/sight, strategized and orchestrated long before reaching the gaze of its readership. Despite this, the insights of this ‘narrative braiding’ suggest that an author’s intentions notwithstanding, a text is almost always b(а)unted by metaphysical assumptions, erasures, and traces working behind its back. Although I have intended to lay my assumptions and censorships bare, my narrative does little to evade such complicities.

In the process of editing this paper for publication, the active absention of Alex’s voice has returned amidst its repression. While colonizing the absent voice of Enid, Alex’s narrative had similarly been ‘othered’ in my braiding, unwoven and abandoned. Alex points to this
'othering’ as we prepare our manuscript for final editorial review, prompting my attempt to retrieve her narrative, and re(write) this missing strand as if it were always present.

Perhaps in the attempt to attend to Enid’s indication of foreclosure in my writing, I have monlogically focused on bridging our experiences in an attempt to remedy the profound lack introduced by the loss of her voice. Yet, Enid’s warning that this text has always borne the mark of a colonization echoes again as Alex refers to her absented strand. In the attempt to weave harmoniously my experience with that of my co-authors, I have encountered, for the second time in this experiment, a dismemberment interrupting the assumption of a complete and self-referential text. Fraught by the phantoms of “Absenting the Tacoma Witch,” this piece echoes the difficulty of writing. Appropriation as hi-jacking becomes the risk of writing others’ experience, a project that has become commonplace in an age of mass consumption. Rendering the masses bodiless, divorced of their own experience, difference turns absorption. It is in this dangerous play of appropriation that alterity is colonially entertained as a fetish.

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Alexandra: And so, we rest here, in the gap of “in-between,” the singular marked by the universal, of which Eliot writes, “In my beginning is my end” (1944, 21). What now unfolds, or does not unfold as the necessary turn springs from the episodic. To maintain the integrity of our braiding, we invite the “gap of text unaccounted for” to speak for itself. Our text returns, reshapes itself to embody the third theme, the necessity of dismemberment. Although our writing becomes dis-member-ed by the loss of Enid’s weaving, her voice, experience, and pedagogy maintain their presence in the braiding that continues. Enid, the scarebird, and her students remain real in our work. In honouring this space, this opening, we leave it as a portal to further writing, to braid through the knots that become our strands. “There is no end, but addition…” writes Eliot (1944, 32); in other wor(l)ds, there is repetition and transformation.
References


About the Authors

**Alexandra Fidyk** is an assistant professor in the Educational Foundations and Inquiry Department at National-Louis University in Chicago. Other arts-based work has appeared at CSSE, IERG and the Curriculum and Pedagogy conferences. Her work draws from imaginal thinking, Jungian and Buddhist thought and aims to address borderland and shadow spaces of the personal and collective and in-between our teaching and living practices.

**Jason Wallin** is a doctoral candidate and Killam scholar studying in the Department of Secondary Education at the University of Alberta, where he teaches courses in visual studies, media, and art education. Jason’s academic work experiments with new ways of thinking pedagogy, youth culture, and ethics in a post human (post-Oedipal, post-structural, post-phenomenological) ‘age.’ In this endeavor, Jason’s curriculum theorizing strikes a friendship with both the philosophy and ‘volcanic’ philosophical lineage mobilized by Gilles Deleuze (Spinoza, Bergson, Tarde, Nietzsche, Simondon, etc.), though which Jason attempts to think the unthought in pedagogy.