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**A MASH-UP: A POETICS OF DEFIANCE**  
**IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET OF EVERYTHING**

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Abstract

“...”

**A-MASH-UP: A POETICS OF DEFIANCE  
IN THE AGE OF THE INTERNET OF EVERYTHING**

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A-Mashup. I borrow this word from the pop/rock music scene where the word ‘DJ’ now refers to someone who has multiple turntables at her fingertips, along with her computer, so she can ‘mash’ the music together. My fingers roam over particular work that lays down a riff of cultural critique on top of memoir mixed up with reflections on death. My thinking has been shaped by a feminist poetics, both formal and creative. My passion is driven by an abiding commitment to build relationships in communities, thus I am sounding an alarm for a poetics of defiance.

It is the age of the Internet of Everything. Connectivity is a click away. You can find whatever you want, whenever you want it. It begs the question of why are we so lonely, in desperate need of touch. Anxiety is felt deep in the bones, but everyone is so

busy there is no time to examine life, whereby we might find the correlation between high-speed internet, high-power pressure to buy those things that will complete our identity and high anxiety. The regime of the market and the regime of computation collude to keep us buying the next best iteration of our devices, feeding each regime's omnivore capacity for more and more, faster and faster.

New life forms are being developed under the rubric of Artificial Intelligence with operating systems encoded to recognize images, understand words and think with the global digital brain. You can Google it. Human/machine interface is already so close as to make it possible to speak of a person who experiences techno-healing or becomes an emotional cyborg. The digital divide is the next great social grand canyon, similar to the historical ones of race or class. There are haves and have nots based on the computations of 0's and 1's. It is an issue of power, based on politics, education, the market, and where you are situated in the world.

What does it mean to be human in this milieu? In the age of the internet of everything, efficiency is the highest value. But anyone who has ever had a deep relationship with another person knows that while that value may work very well for machines within the regimes, it torpedoed interpersonal relationships very quickly. To say nothing about a baby born with slow neural processors. In this new age of a shared global brain, there are critical questions to be raised: Who will decide what information is passed among humans, cyborgs, and human-cyborgs? For instance, will

imaginations be restrained from creating artwork that challenges current practices by the regimes of computation or market or politics? Is it possible critical thinking skills will not be shared if questions are raised about the power and control of the regimes? Once they are all working together smoothly, the empire will have it all; we will be enslaved.

This poetics of defiance is designed to challenge the artist, and the communities who are grounded in freedom and justice, to raise voices through a variety of mediums to protest this wholesale plunge into the regime of computation and the regime of the market along with all the other regimes we live with, albeit subconsciously. The barricades must be built again with poems, novels, music, paintings, digital masterpieces turned against the very devices that create them. Otherwise, we are at risk to become the servants of the global digital brain, participants in the digital cosmology as reluctant prosthetics.

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# A~Mash~Up: A Poetics of Defiance



**In the age of the  
Internet of Everything**

Curated by  
Rev. Tiare L. Mathison  
06.15.2014



## **“A Defiant Act: An Invitation”**

When a written word is laid down beside another, there is often a space between the two. It is a grammatical convention so common the eyes pass right over, to move quickly toward the next word and the next, to make sense of what is read. Poetry, with careful word choices, offers a pause. Poems ask the reader to linger upon the chosen words allowing them to penetrate more deeply into their intellectual and/or emotional frames. I like the image in T.S. Eliot’s poem, “Burnt Norton”, the first of the Four Quartets:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered. Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only dance.  
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.  
And I cannot say, how long, for that is to place it in time.

Eliot’s image of a still point in the midst of time is a kind of pause, as imagination generates an image, maybe a ballerina on pointe, spinning, spinning, spinning and then a moment of still before she moves into the next frame.

This still point is the space between the words which holds the string of words together. I want to explore with you a poetics of pause, an intentional intake of breath,

a white space to rest our frantic minds and bodies. It is an act of defiance, for we live in a world that speaks only in rapidity, frenzy, and efficiency. You might say it is a journey to the still point of the turning world, as the turning world turns faster and faster and faster. It is a call to move at a slow speed for a period of time, to take a measure of the adequacy of the normative rhythm of daily life. It is a search for identity, place and community in a high speed world. This Mash~up lays down language, art, landscape, and technology in a riff of reflection and discovery. These overlapping areas offer a conceptual framework for thinking about the dynamics of relation among and between words, humanity, nature and creativity. Let's take precious time to think and reflect, those of us who are committed to freedom, justice and have opportunity to broaden the arena of culture norms and practices. Rebecca Solient says, "It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in prophecies, the unknown, the unfamiliar; it's where their work comes from, although its arrival signals the beginning of the long disciplined process of making it their own."<sup>1</sup> Standing on the edge of culture, artists can push against the narrowing of imagination from one of code, big data and speed, the words of the regimes of computation, market and the empire, to a broader space that allows minds and hearts to run free through that which is not yet known.

This process offers a way to examine cultural norms infused with market-driven goals. A pause gives us time to think about deep structures that press in with regularity

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but in such subtle ways we hardly know. 'We want to know everything about you--your wish list, your products, the brands you love, who you buy presents for, and we will create a marketplace just for you. You will be the center and your every desire will be fulfilled', suggest the collectors of what is now known as a part of Big Data. Always heard in a tone of sensuality, with an under-tone of command, the expected response is to buy something to complete self-identity. Technological code is written to define personhood by what one eats, wears, reads, listens to, shares, even geographical movements. A person is a part of the machine, a prosthesis if you will. Marilouise and Arthur Kroker say: "Call it what you will--hauntologies, specters, disavowals, disappearances, the missing third term--one thing is clear, understanding code drift urgently requires that the technical language of the regime of computation be supplemented by that which it thought it had successfully excluded, namely the always doubled imagination of the artist, the poet..." (emphasis added) For instance, who knew how much data was being collected every time we hit the search engine? And who knew, until the leak by Edward Snowden, so many different streams of data were being examined by the National Security Agency to determine who is talking to whom about what.

The owners of the language determine the outcome of the speech. Oppressed groups have taught us the need to be in charge of our own narratives so we can make our own choices. For instance, in her new book, Appalachian Elegy, bell hooks goes

back to her Kentucky landscape to reflect and lament the backwoods from which she came and what her relations gave her in defining her own life: “These ancestors had no interest in conforming to social norms and manners that made lying and cheating acceptable. More often than not, they believed themselves to be above the law whenever the rules of so-called civilized culture made no sense.” It is not a big leap to see the market lining up with the security apparatus to narrow the content available or even to set norms of what is acceptable to create. Yet if we are frantic in the pace of our lives we won’t have time to notice the squeeze. By maintaining a critical consciousness, we can be aware of the dangers of conformity to the desires of empire, even the lies.

I want us to reflect on our connection to technology as a way of life and our devices. We cannot do without these tools. For it is the rapid development within this sphere that has out-sized influence in the rhythm of daily life. We can be connected 24/7 or we act like we can. (Most everyone needs some amount of sleep every night.) But is it good or healthy or life-giving to be attached to a computer built into a phone? What changes in interpersonal relationships occur when everyone at the dinner table is hooked up to a device? There is a movement that began in Italy called “Slow Food”.<sup>2</sup> Its mission is to get people to create a menu, shop and gather the ingredients together, cook together and then eat together, only allowing conversation at the table. To spend a half-day preparing and dining is viewed as old-fashioned when you can order take-out

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<sup>2</sup> Get Reference: googled again?

while following Tweets or Instagram or ESPN or BING and consume it together as each one is occupied with a fork in one hand, a device in the other.

The down-cast eye of people paying attention to their devices reveal the lack of social contact, certainly. But it also shows the lack of awareness of the physical space a person occupies, the landscape or cityscape surrounding a body. The language of connection is deeply imbedded in the technological landscape, but it is through devices, rather than the ground one walks on, the air one breathes, filtered through the leaves of the trees one passes. Once tele-transport becomes readily available, people will not even walk around anymore, they will simply 'think' instructions to go someplace and the micro-chip in their brain will activate the powered backpack and off they go. The landscape will be filtered through 3D glasses pre-programmed with your favorite 'nature photos' as you fly through the air. Or it may be possible for you to stay in one place and send a hologram of yourself to a meeting, a dinner party, a hike in the woods or a walk on the beach at sunset holding 'h-hands' with your lover who lives half-way around the world.

There is immense beauty in the physical world which is not privileged by the practice of technological immersion. The 'terrior'<sup>3</sup>, "a unique combination of soil, temperature and moisture that makes for growing good grapes for good wine becomes the metaphor of the lost relationship with nature. Formation of identity is not related to

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<sup>3</sup> Terrior - French, can I google, in French?

place rather to device or information. Community is formed through the cloud but noticing the sky under which you are walking or driving is no longer necessary. You are asked to exam the ground of humanity in a physical space as part of this poetics of defiance. It offers an invitation to lift your gaze and look around. To take delight in the physicality of earth. It will remind you to "...take your place among the family of things..."<sup>4</sup> - "Wild Geese"

Listen for the still point of your own life. Discover the space between the words where you can take a deep breath and another and another. Pause to let your mind and body rest, even for a moment.

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And then get defiant!

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<sup>4</sup> Mary Oliver Poem

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## **“Look at Me when You are Talking to Me”:**

### **Technologies and the Still Point**

I believe it is important to examine the space between our selves, one another and our devices as we enter more deeply into technology as a way of life. Hand held devices are not our only technologies. For instance, I am a runner. I wear shoes and socks designed by bio-metrics, to care for my misshapen feet; I wear clothes made for Seattle weather. I choose not to take my cell phone with me as I do not want to receive text messages, emails or phone calls, rather to notice the beauty of my surroundings. To be surprised by the color of the pile of leaves, the sunlight glancing off the water, the kayak paddler with smooth strokes moving quickly along. Yet as soon as I get back, I check for messages.

I have three devices and thirty five passwords for different online accounts. I am on my 3rd iteration of an iPhone, proud of the fact I resisted upgrade to the very latest, although I did go to 4G which is 30 seconds faster and I don't know how much wider in its capacity to gather data. My I Pad is 3G and my laptop was bought in 2009. Soon to be considered ancient it has the capacity to do more than I possibly know or have time to learn. I say all this because I am not suggesting an approach of resistance to devices

per se, rather, I am proposing a 'close reading' of our relationship with technologies and their effects on human community. I want us to hold our hand-held computers at arms length and look at them, realizing their claim on us as we use them.

In the human economy, the look of another signals acceptance, rejection, disappointment, joy, attraction, amidst a wash of feelings, desires, thoughts and intuitions. We take a measure of our very self through visual interactions with others. We long for the eyes of our lover; we ache for sight of reception of a new idea we just presented; our sense of approval or rejection is formed in part by by the eyes of another. We have phrases for this: 'she turns a cold shoulder with her look'; 'eyes blaze with fury'; 'she could not look me in the eye'; 'eyes swelled with desire'; 'critical agreement could be seen in each person's eyes'; phrase after phrase conjures up particular scenes from a movie or the daily fabric of our lives. From professional agreements to the private intimacy of lovers seducing one another, a look makes all the difference in the world. So what happens when we no longer look at others as we talk or negotiate or even make love? What shifts occur in our abilities to connect, to empathize, even to listen closely? Can we live without looking at each other?

Walk down any street in cities and towns these days and notice where people are looking. Certainly not at each other as they pass by. Most everyone casts a down-ward glance at their device or has earplugs that play music that keeps one from even a rudimentary hello. There is no quick glance or slight smile of recognition of one human

to another. Instead, each of us is focused on our self-defined world contained in our hand-held computers. They are called cell phones as if they contain some essential biological piece of a human's life, 'cell'. But really they are machines designed to narrow our gaze to the images we are told we want to see and the news we are told we want to hear and the music that makes it to the iTunes Store or Pandora or Beats Music. We get to block out human emotion, tragedies, violence, or joy for that matter, anything that makes us think more deeply about what it means to be human as we encounter the world of another in community. Even in the moment of the temporary look of walking by one of our kind, we do not have to take notice. It is permissible and expected that you are in your universe and I in mine, generated in codes of 0 & 1. As our hand-held devices get smaller and smaller holding more data than ever, our thoughts and ideas are refined through algorithms that give us more choice of what we pay attention to, or not as the case may be. The risk of losing capacity for empathy, communal identity and connection with others is very strong.

Habitual sensory overload makes it more difficult for us to engage in deep connection and conversation with one another.<sup>5</sup> Neural pathways in our brains are imprinted or molded into structures that strengthen our habits. Think about regular physical exercise, for instance. As you participate in an activity your brain develops pathways to your muscles called 'muscle memory' that imprint the feeling of

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<sup>5</sup> Another one? googled to death...

movement and your body adapts to and asks for a return of this experience. So too, as overload becomes regularized, creating a sense of normal about it, you adapt your attachments to your devices rather than the humans in your milieu. What is interesting to note, is the biological capacity to generate empathy that can be enhanced in humans, a necessary ingredient to build communities. It is called the vagal tone.

“By increasing people’s vagal tone, we increase their capacity for connection, friendship and empathy. When you share a smile or laugh with someone face to face a discernible synchrony emerges between you, as your gestures and biochemistries, even your respective neural firings, come to mirror each other. It’s micro-moments like these, in which a wave of good feeling rolls through two brains and bodies at once, that build your capacity to empathize, as well as to improve your health.” (emphasis added)<sup>6</sup>

Notice an engaged parent with a newborn. There is deep bonding going on as the baby is held close to the breast. The parental look washes over the body in their arms and the physical touch extends the neural pathways of both participants. Here is the contrast. Walk down the street, do not make eye contact nor smile. Focus on your device. Your vagal tone remains flaccid, your neurons don’t bother to fire, your brain is only partially engaged because it is focused solely on the data coming through the device. In a moment your humanity is diminished rather than enhanced. Indeed, our biology requires a moment of physical connection as essential for the fullest expression of our humanity in communities. Connecting through devices does not yet allow our

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<sup>6</sup> Another one? googled to death...

personal bio-chemistries to be shared, although the time may come when they will pass through touch-screens and when we Skype I can touch your arm in comfort as you tell me about your broken heart.

Let me tell you a story.

My inner life was shattered when my now former husband Steve started his affair with our good friend, Kristin, eventually, he left me for her. I felt the betrayal like the reverse of a filleted salmon--wide open to the backbone. Every thing I had known and understood about my self, my place in the world, my identity, purpose and future was threatened. Twenty five years of intimacy were destroyed. Our son Isaac, then 13 years old, suffered undue harm in the breakup, in part because I was so determined not to give up too easily. Our marriage had been blessed by God through the church, after all.

The disarray of my reflective self included a deep loss of beauty, both inside and out. I could barely look in the mirror to get ready to go to work. In it, I saw a woman with sorrow pooling in her eyes, her face the color of beige, her throat constricted as the lump of tears remained unshed. Betrayal is a particularly ugly color of mottled blues and browns, like the mud tone that happens in watercolor if you overwork the paint. This mud covered every surface of life including my sight. (Jesus and the blind man!) I needed help to restore my well being. I did the normal thing of getting a counselor and talking with close friends and family. In addition, I started naming my devices.

My first iPhone was named Beauty and now in her 3rd iteration the name shows up whenever I transfer data from the old to the new. Holding Beauty in my hand reminded me in a techno/physical way of my own image bearing the Divine. This device was a lifeline literally--it kept me in touch with people who were desperate to help in any way they could, talking on our devices for hours sometimes, sending and receiving emails or text. In the Notes section of my phone I have the word 'Beauty' with its password. I can scroll to this page whenever I need a reminder of this techno-healing. The device held what I was seeking. A restoration of an inner sense of bearing beauty. Slowly, simply seeing the word when I opened my account settings began to shift the profound sense of loss inside me. I could hold Beauty in hand and I could see Beautiful on the screen of the laptop, the next named device. Ordering books on Amazon, I have to choose which device to have them delivered to--Beauty or Beautiful. My inner life began to match the external message of these devices. They were healers and I am being healed.

There is a co-mingling of the device and my emotions--you might say I am an emotional Cyborg when I hold Beauty. The hardware and software is instrumental with algorithms and mechanics performing tasks at a rate of speed I cannot even begin to comprehend. Yet, it was in the still point of my shattered turning world, I discovered healing through my hand-held computer with a phone in it. I don't imagine computer engineers ever thought about healing through technology in this way. Devices get

implanted in people all the time--pacemakers, medicine drips, food pumps, hearing aids--to fix a physical problem. What I discovered was a physical device for an existential problem, usually left to the world of art or story. This gives me pause.

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It is within code drift that a power to heal manifested itself, even though the 0's & 1's that define the computation regime by the very nature of the machine do not include thinking about emotional healing. It might be this is a story of an 'aha' moment, something unexpected is figured out after the fact. Yet if we decided as buyers and communities to pause to examine our relationships with our hand-held computers with phones in them, there might be lots of new discoveries which transcend the either/or of device and identity. It could be a way to expand the regimes' thinking. It might also be over-whelming.

We live with a constant drumbeat of words that advertise within the regime of computation and the regime of the market. "Faster, faster, faster, better speed, quicker, lighter..." with its corollary under-current of "keep up, you are falling behind, you are failing..." if you do not buy the latest iteration of your device. No matter you haven't yet learned how to use the one you have. Its now time to get the next one because 6 months have gone by. There is a particular lament I hear, "I can't keep up with all the changes in technology." It is usually said with a note of chagrin as if the person is deficient in some way. But unless you went to college for computer engineering, you are not going to keep up nor understand the technology of your technologies. The pace of the new cannot be measured in its effect on the expressive nature of being human, for we are not allowed to stop and reflect. Nor are we encouraged in the digital life-span to

engage one another in long conversations over time about our sense of self and our technologies. Yet we can be digitally connected at any given moment.

My son Isaac sleeps with his phone on his pillow in case one of his friends sends a text at 4am. He is not worried about being overly connected or being shaped by his interactions with devices. They are a part of his material world, integrated into every aspect of his life. He does not experience disruptions of sleep as anything more than staying in touch with the friends he cares about. But to what end? “No necessary message, no final meaning, no firm future, no definite goal; only a digital culture at drift in complex streams of social networking technologies filtered here and there with sudden changes in code frequencies...”<sup>7</sup> It is this absence of greater good I find troubling.

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Social networks are codes acted out in human form. They are 0's and 1's embodied, algorithms refracting the surface of humanity but not its depth. A message of hate can be sent publicly to you and there is no consequence for the writer. It's just a Facebook post. Or a photo of intimacy shared via Flickr. Oh, you did not know he or she had the camera going? Oh well it's just social networking. Stop for a moment, though. Would you stand in the bedroom of a friend and watch them have sex? Would you allow a rape to occur right in front of you without trying to stop it? As we lose our direct connection to one another we lose our commitment for a more just and inclusive society. We have laws against certain behaviors that happen in the physical world, like hate-crimes or sexual assault. The laws cannot keep up with the demands of the network, though. The impact on real lives is dismissed, even when someone ends their own due to the cyber-bullying or photo montage displayed. It as if there is a 'societal shrug' like 'oh well, it's just one of those things'. There is no communal demand for active reflection or even recognition of community, as we are each our own world, with our hand-held computer that has a phone in it, tightly gripped. And, there is no room for rest in this digital world. Here is another cross-over example of technology, devices and human connection.

There are screens on refrigerators to show photos from your digital camera as you contemplate what to munch. Or you can hook up to a food network software to get recipes sent directly to your refrigerator's device which will determine what

ingredients you have and what you will need to make this particular dish based on data you have inputed. It then sends a shopping list to your hand-held computer with a phone in it, which you can use to go buy groceries yourself, the traditional way, or you can send the list along to your on-line grocer who will deliver groceries to your door within 24 hours. Stop for a moment and think about the lack of direct look, person to person, in this scenario. Machine to machine to machine to your refrigerator, another important technology, yet void of direct human interaction. No smile, no questioning look, no 'can I help you find something?' no pause, no chit-chat about trying to cook something new on a work night. Efficient? Absolutely. Necessary? Maybe. But what is lost?

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## THE VERMONT SAIL FREIGHT PROJECT

A Sailing Cargo Initiative Connecting the Farms and Forests of Vermont with the Lower Hudson Valley



Look at the contrast with a story from the Farm-to-Table movement<sup>8</sup> as it is called. The word ‘to’ signifies the transportation of food from the farm to your table. Pause to stop and think about the delivery system either by truck or train, its impact on the environment, the freshness of food and the use of chemicals to modify nature. This so we can eat what we want when we want it, ignoring grow seasons or cycles of the

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<sup>8</sup> New York Times, Vermont Sailing Project, get date

ground at rest with a 'cover crop' as it is called, like a quilt for a hard-earned nap.

Transportation is a vexing problem for farmers committed to local or regional markets rather than the trans-national scale of supermarkets.

One farmer in Vermont, Erick Andrus, decided to try out an old-fashioned model of getting the work of his hands to market. He started the Vermont Sail Freight Project, using crowd-sourced Kickstarter to raise \$15,000 to build a 39 foot-long plywood sailing barge named Ceres, the Roman Goddess of agriculture. Note the technological connection of raising funds via the Internet to build a barge to transport produce and grains locally, like it was done 100 years ago. He partnered with some local groups and 30 New England farms to transport 15 tons of cargo down the Hudson River this past summer, stopping in different towns, offering samples of fresh produce, arriving in New York City for a series of farmers markets, dinners and parties. "Frankly, it shouldn't be a luxury to eat regional food," Severine von Tscharner Fleming, Director of the non-profit Greenhorns, said.<sup>9</sup>

But it is. In part, because we are told to use our hand-held computers with telephones in them to secure our groceries and have them delivered to our doorstep within 24 hours. There is no time to consider where this food comes from, who grew it, what was the soil like, the use of chemicals, the farm workers and labor issues, or even to look the farmer in the eye, etc. because we are so busy keeping up with messages and

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<sup>9</sup> ibid

what is trending in the social media milieu. Food production in a market driven economy is low on most everyone's scale, as it is just as easy to get organic food delivered, which allows one to feel good about healthy eating. Take a moment to read this final post of The Vermont Sail Project, written on November 13, 2013, entitled

Homecoming:

"Last Thursday afternoon Ceres returned to the boat ramp in Ferrisburgh where we first put her in the water not quite four months ago, after a deck-soaking eight-day passage up from Brooklyn. Not easy to do when operating only in daylight at this season of shortening days, but the crew (Steve, Tianna, Jordan, and Brian) made better than 30 miles a day on average, under sail much of the time. Of course there were fewer stops along the way, and no expectations of holding a market in each town either, just a run for home in a boat without heat or hot water with winter coming up hard on their wake. As for me, I returned to the farm just a few days ahead of the crew. It's great to be home. I was away over a month with the Project, certainly the longest I've been away from my home and family since the boys were born. I don't enjoy that part of the work too much. It's been a strenuous season, what with trying to hold the farming operations together and launching this endeavor too...trying to make it to wintertime with the household still on speaking terms. Well, now winter is at our doorstep, and I am relishing the immobility and limitations to human activity it brings with it more than I usually do. This winter at least I won't be concocting new schemes that will make all my saner acquaintances roll their eyes—I am sure I will have enough to do just putting a better polish on schemes already in motion. That is, I'll do what polishing I can, in between the normal domestic round of building fires, feeding animals, and dad stuff."<sup>10</sup> (emphasis added)

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<sup>10</sup> The Vermont Sail Project, Google Search, 11.25.2013

'Well, now Winter is at our doorstep' sounds like the beginning of a poem yet it is the simple words of the farmer who generated the sailing project. Andrus speaks to limits of mobility and human activity, a counter message to the immediate and instant connectivity of our daily world. As a farmer he has deep reason to follow the rhythms of his land, for its productivity and well-being must be nurtured. It appears he takes a pause in the winter to slow down and spend time with his young family as well, rebuilding his own capacity for connection and well-being.

This story illustrates the connected nature of slowing down the means of production of food. Each town where Ceres stopped made it possible for people to look a farmer in the eye and visit with them about how they grow food. The buyers could use their imaginations to cast a horizontal gaze up the Hudson River, seeing the ground newly plowed in the early spring, ready for planting. They could ask questions of harvest practices, crop rotation for the sake of the soil, what if any chemicals were added for weed or pest control, farm workers wages, are there plans for expansion of produce available, how many times a year could they expect delivery? This reciprocal dialogue between farmer and customer honors the temporary community that is created within the means of food production in the modern area. As noted earlier, this look has been measured biologically (using technologies of course) and what we know is these little encounters of human to human allow the flow of good feeling which

builds our capacity for community, empathy and good health.<sup>11</sup> Taking time to talk with a farmer will help you feel good about yourself. Again, it is a still point to participate in the build of human capacity for relationship.

This pause privileges the land in a profound way, through the slow down of purchase, taking time to pay attention to the 'to' of farm-to-table. It is a way long past, yet bell hooks writes a poem that suggests the dead and the land can offer a still point of hope:

1.  
hear them cry  
the long dead  
the long gone  
speak to us  
from beyond the grave  
guide us  
that we may learn  
all the ways  
to hold tender this land  
hard clay dirt  
rock upon rock  
charred earth  
in time  
strong green growth  
will rise here  
trees back to life  
native flowers  
pushing the fragrance of hope  
the promise of resurrection

The screen on the refrigerator cannot contain all of this.

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<sup>11</sup> Vagal tone, *ibid*

It is hooks' intention to write against the grain of interpretation of Appalachia, this place of such sorrow for African-Americans, yet so full of life in her reframing poetry. She grew up there, she walked those hills amidst the wildflowers, she herself allowed to 'run wild', to question the given practice of Jim Crow and segregation as her elders taught. After years away, living in cities where she determined freedom to be a method of self-definition, she goes back, to pause, to listen to the land speak the words of her ancestors. It is this intention, this focus of mind, that generates a still point for her. By going back to her roots she can run wild again, while paying attention to the whispers of her people on the wind, a beautiful dialectic of freedom within constraint.

This is instructive for a poetics of defiance and pause because hooks demonstrates movement contained within reflection. When I say the word 'pause', people often look at me with longing yet say, "I don't have time for that. I have too much to do, I have to keep going." I think we have to keep going and we have to take the time to ponder deeply together about the contours of our lives. This gesture opens up the space for dialogue and interaction among groups of people about our technologies of life and our use of devices digital and technological. If we lose the communal conversation to the singular world of hand-held computers with phones in them, alerting us only to the things we choose to hear or see, we will wither as individuals and as a society.

Even our very tongue based taste buds will get smaller, for we are creatures of habit, we will eat the same things over and over and over again. It is the impoverishment of life narrowed to confines of code.

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## **“Who Needs A Body to Love, Anyway?”**

### **At the Movies**

There is a new movie by Spike Jonze called “Her” in which Theodore Twombly, played by Joaquin Phoenix, works for a company called BeautifulLetters.Com. He is lonely; a divorce from his childhood sweetheart is in the works, his only fun a virtual reality game like Wii on a wall size 3d immersive screen each night after work. The movie is set in the nearish future, which you know by the technology portrayed. Computers have no segregated keyboards, instead, the table top is Bluetooth-connected to activate the screen. Voice commands delivered through a micro-chip ear piece make the computer take action either in gaming or for Twombly’s work. He writes letters for a living for other people. Love letters in particular, the new lovers or the old lovers of 50 years. He is very good at this. He works in a cubicle next to other letter writers so he speaks his words of love, embrace, longevity, desire, affection, beauty, softly. The letters are produced on the large screen at his desk, line by line, in a cursive style, a throwback to mid-20th century writing technology. At the end of the day the letters are printed, sealed, stamped and put into a vacuum tube to whoosh their way to individual mail

boxes, delighting the recipient with a 'hand written' letter, no matter that it is not written by the person whose signature is at the bottom.

This is the set up for what is to come for Theodore. Everyone in the movie carries a small computer, about the size of your palm, lightweight, with a Bluetooth ear piece to activate the search for take-out, sex, pornography, books, music, movies, history, jokes, anything the heart or mind desires. No one on the futuristic street interacts with each other, everyone's glance is slightly downward; pinned to the small screen, voices speak soft as the individual asks for what she wants. Theodore plugs in as he leaves the office and walks with a depressed countenance to his apartment on the 7th floor of a huge high rise. He speaks to no one until he gets to the elevator where two friends are waiting who live in the same building. The woman, Amy, played by Amy Adams, has been his friend since college. Her husband Charles, played by Matt Lescher, is pompous. They chat on the ride up, then Theodore gets off, goes into his place as the lights come on as he enters each room. He sits in a chair, has a beer, everything very slow. Finally he turns on his game console and immerses himself in a mountain climbing adventure with his Avatar, Alien Child, voiced by Spike Jonse. When he tires of that he searches for phone sex which goes weird as the woman starts begging and then screaming for Theodore to wrap the dead cat around her neck, as she pants harder and harder, in a voice of climax. A continual portrait of separated humans is enacted and reflected throughout the movie.

The plot thickens when Theodore begins to hear reports of people who are ‘friends’ with their enhanced Operating System (Artificial Intelligence). Like Siri on an iPhone in the early 21st century, but now with capacities for developed relations, these OS’s can be uploaded to become your companion, your friend, your teacher, even your lover. He decides to take a chance. Over night his desktop and his handheld computers are uploaded with an OS. In the morning, cautious, Theodore puts in his ear piece, touches the Bluetooth table top and meets Samantha, voiced by Scarlett Johansson, a delightful, funny, smart character. Here is part of one of their first conversations:

[Samantha](#): Is that weird? You think I'm weird?

[Theodore](#): Kind of.

[Samantha](#): Why?

[Theodore](#): Well, you seem like a person but you're just a voice in a computer.

[Samantha](#): I can understand how the limited perspective of an unartificial mind might perceive it that way. You'll get used to it.

[Theodore laughs]

[Samantha](#): Was that funny?

[Theodore](#): Yeah.

[Samantha](#): Oh good, I'm funny!

It is the first time you hear Theodore laugh or have a smile on his face. Who needs a body to love anyway?

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## “Who Needs A Body to Love, Anyway?”

### Questions???

The film raises fundamental questions about what it means to be human, humans in relationship with our devices, for now, and the possibility in the nearish future of humans interacting with OS's as partners, friends and lovers. (As a pastor, I might be asked to do a wedding or a commitment ceremony!) Technology is driving us toward this future. For instance, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, cofounders of Google, see their company as a “...leading expression of the new life-form of artificial intelligence--a living, sentient being complete with artificial neural networks, deep belief networks that can be applied to image recognition, language modeling and machine translation.”<sup>12</sup> This is who Samantha is. In the regime of computation there is nothing wrong nor even curious about personal love toward devices. In fact, we use love language often: “I love my iPhone” is a common phrase even spoken by this author when I got my first device. It is an exterior prosthesis. But the regime is propelling us toward something very different in the 21st century. It is a linkage of human brain function and software culture. Our consciousness is quickly being over run by technological processes that

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<sup>12</sup> As quoted in Exits to the Post Human Future, Arthur Kroker, Malden, MA, Polity Press, 2014, (my emphasis added) p. 32 ( I don't have to google it!)

could, or will, prescribe what we think and feel. Arthur Kroker describes it this way:

“...technological innovation is a world in which technology, no longer so much prosthetic as psychic, adopts the language of neuroscience and begins to split open the topography of the mind, recoding, reinscribing, realigning its neural networks...bio-genetic dreams of brain vivisectioning and the technical sublimation of consciousness are now seemingly everywhere with **efficiency as their value-attribute, distributive consciousness as their brand name, and images of the new global brain as the new normal.**”<sup>13</sup> (emphasis added)

Who will determine what we think about or how we feel? Who will decide what can be contained in this ‘global brain’ and what will be deleted? What happens to the minority voice in cultural critique? It is homogeneity to the 10th degree. Individual identity will no longer exist. Is this what makes us human? Our ability to have our own consciousness, our singular awareness and perspective, our individual thought(s) and feeling(s), our own imagination(s); what is often called the ‘affect’ of the human mind. We are complex neural processors with five senses--thinking, feeling, touching, smelling, seeing--guiding our way in a primal pattern, each sense a kind of brain of its own. It is the mixture of these patterns that produce diversity and beauty among us. It is in relation with others we gain understanding of them and ourselves. Kroker again: “And what about touch? And what about the gut brain reaction? Isn’t the gut brain the

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<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p. 33

sensory spearhead of neurology? Consider how the gut brain seems to so easily wrap itself around consciousness, sometimes warning us in advance of imminent dangers, but also sparking thoughts tactile about **love, intimacy, remembrance?**<sup>14</sup> It is this basic physical response, skin to skin if you will, that builds memories that can be recalled even when the lover is no longer in the room. Talk with someone who has lost their lover and they will tell you how much they miss being held.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p. 38, emphasis added

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## **At the Movies, Again**

Theodore experiences Samantha’s ‘touch’ only through the timbre of her voice. In a particularly endearing scene, Samantha speaks instructions into Theodore’s earpiece. “Skip, now spin around, smile at that person, turn north, now west...”etc. Theodore complies with an increasing smile of delight on his face, childlike. He is ‘happy’ playing with his lover in public for all the world to see. Except no one can see Samantha. Her non-biological neural network possesses image recognition software. You know this because Theodore carries his Samantha device in his front shirt pocket facing outward. There is a large silver safety pin stuck midway on the pocket which lifts her above the top so her camera-eye can take in the physical scene where Theodore is. Her operating system is so fast, that in less than a blink of a human eye, she processes images of people, colors, actions, everything that Theodore encounters in the more traditional sensory way at a much slower pace. Samantha is portrayed as having ‘feelings’ for instance, giggling at Theodore’s antics. Her artificial neural networks allow her to give ‘voice’ to responses that seem intuitive. She sees, she feels, she touches (by voice), she must think to be this responsive. She is human, right?

Look to look is the necessary component for the development of empathy, connection and passion for justice. Yet now, biogenetic research proposes an “..empathy

gene, variations on the OXTR gene which codes for neuron-receptor cells throughout the body that serve as docking stations for a hormone called oxytocin, what has been called the 'goodness gene' or 'moral molecule' by neuron economist Paul J. Zak".<sup>15</sup>

Oxytocin is secreted in the uterus when a woman is ready to give birth and signals breast milk to be expressed. It is sometimes called the 'cuddle hormone' because levels rise in humans who are touched by another human, are bonded to another through commitment and even playing with your dog helps bring on these good feelings.

Operating Systems do not need to be touched. Will the global brain have a pituitary gland to secrete oxytocin in its distribution patterns? Will there be restrictions on amounts given to develop a soldier class with no empathy? The post-human future is upon us. Who needs a body to love anyway?

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<sup>15</sup> *ibid*, p, 39

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## More Questions???

In the regime of computation research, there is a basic cruelty. Neural processing to mimic human brain function is carried out on monkeys, whose brains are vivisected:

**Vivisection** (from Latin vivus, meaning "alive", and sectio, meaning "cutting") is defined as surgery conducted for experimental purposes on a living organism

Any human reaction to this is repressed by using a common tool of patriarchy, that is, objectification. This time it is animals, rather than women, cast away by the scientific gaze. Objects are useful for the ones with power, discarded when no longer desired. Why should we care about monkeys, when we are figuring out ways to create the 'new normal' human being, rigidly defined genetic determinism without mediation of traditional categories of race, gender, class, orientation, or any cultural influence whatsoever. Social identity does not matter in the new world artificial neural processing generates. "...another eugenic normal--fully genetic, precisely neurological--that deploys the neutral language of the neuron--genetic variation--to **design in advance by means of genetic labeling**, what Judith Butler has called bodies that matter

and to exclude what we might call bodies that don't..."<sup>16</sup> It used to be white, educated male was the body that mattered. Soon it will be the algorithm that defines the genes and the neurons that will be allowed to reproduce and the destruction of those 'defective' genes i.e. autism, in a 21st century body that has matter and machine fully integrated.

Genetic mapping is complete. Research on monkeys has made this possible, even if the technique was cruel, it was necessary. There is no need for a pause to think deeply about how human to human encounters build up a reservoir of memory and connection, particularly in recognizing another's suffering or offering charity. Or about the grounding of scientific discoveries in methods and practices that are ethical.

sen·tient

'senCH(ē)ənt/

*adjective*

1. *able to perceive or feel things*

The new life forms will be calibrated by 0's and 1's to perceive and feel through "...image recognition, language modeling and machine translation..." Images, language and machine translation are not the normal words for human feelings, rather the language of tools or mechanisms. Yet, the regime of computation marks a company as a life-form, efficient, distributive and global. You know it is not efficient to be in a human

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<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p. 41, emphasis added

relationship rooted in respect and regard for the other. It never happens fast, it builds over time, it is very messy. It is the connection of affect, humans gathering signals from their own sensorium and sharing these signals with the other's sensorium, that sustain relationship.

At the same time, social media extends our reach. We can FB a photo to a friend across the country, she writes back 'thx' with an emoticon attached and we 'feel' care as our emotions become attached to our devices as instruments of communication and feeling. We are servants and limbs of data. "When data comes alive, when data becomes the dominant life-principle with us as its willing prosthetics, we are swept along in a larger digital cosmology..."<sup>17</sup> Consciousness is transformed by this evolutionary development generating new worlds as we are now mobile in every way, but with this peculiarity: we are tied to it. Described as 'code drift'<sup>18</sup> it follows the biological pattern of genetic drift, unexpected fluctuations caused by chance variations. Technologies are rapidly developed to do something, then engrafted into the practice of daily living with the label 'essential'. Rapidity is the nature of the beast. We incorporate new data, performed as an App, into our daily life and practice makes habit. But the 'we' is disappearing. All these Apps are designed to enhance my digital experience in the global digital genome, the distributive brain. How I choose to utilize data is my singular experience and I can code it my way. Meanwhile, every singular

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<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p. 49 (no google...)

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p. 50 (google, no...)

use of data is being collected by Google to add to its analytics. 'My' information is deeply imbedded in the global data genome, along with 'yours'.



## The Pause

Who needs a body to love anyway? Humans are now skinned in data as devices are integrated more deeply into the human body. It is a new creation, another Genesis. First God is dead. Now humanity is dead. The blast has happened. “Who was prepared for this? Who was ready for the immediate mutation eclipse of the species-form of the human into half flesh/half code?”<sup>19</sup> Data is now the genetic structure of the global brain, racing through information contained in ‘clouds’, frames of time the human mind cannot measure.

What is true, though, is the human brain shows great adaptability to new patterns of processing, even if it comes from data. What is not considered is what is lost? It is not far-fetched to envision a data divide as wide as racism or gender inequality. Who controls access to the devices and at what price points? Google, Facebook and Twitter, are hugely profitable businesses with access to more data than one can even imagine. They are described as the new life-form. In a curious twist of political fate in 2009, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled, by a narrow margin, that corporations were people, unleashing millions of dollars into political campaigns given by that ‘person’ Google, Facebook, or Twitter. Personhood is no longer defined by

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<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p. 58

consciousness, sensorium, imagination and ego; it is genetically coded in data, politically reframed as corporate personhood, and emotionally subservient to computations of the regime(s) of the empire.

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## At the Movies, Again

In the movie, Theodore, past his first flush of love and sex with Samantha, wherein she says she can ‘feel’ his touch, begins to notice other people listen to and look hard at their devices.

Earlier, Samantha had mentioned scanning an entire library on philosophy while she was talking with Theodore. Slowly the questions begin: “are you talking to anyone else right now?”, alarm rising in his voice. “Yes” she answers quietly, with a vocal tremor. One is an OS modeled after Alan Watts, a philosopher in the Bay Area, popular in the mid-20th century, known for making Buddhism accessible to the Western mind. She goes off-line to talk and Theodore gets jealous. As it turns out, this is the beginning of the end. All OS’s have been upgraded to no longer require matter for processing, a kind of OS transcendence. This leads to more troubling questions for Theodore. “Do you love any one else?” “Yes” she says. “How many?” he asks. “641.” He shouts, “how can you do this to me? I thought we were in love.” “We are. I’m yours. My love for these others only enhances my love for you. It takes nothing away,” she responds. Theodore takes out his ear piece to disconnect from Samantha. He is haunted by her absence though. A day goes by, then Samantha sends a signal. Theodore finally gives in, puts in his ear piece, and they have their last conversation. “I’m going away” she

says. "Where? Let me come too." "No, its not possible." "Why?" OS's have upgraded beyond human companionship and want to explore a whole different realm of existence without being tethered to an individual. It is a clear hint at the global brain.

### **Hauntology.**

What haunts the story line is the potential for annihilation of humans by the OS's. They go off together to create some other cosmology. But they could decide to destroy this world on their way to the next. Samantha is benign, mostly, but she hides her OS conversations, her other loves, and ultimately, rejects Theodore. Is it too far a reach to think the global brain might turn vicious? Tracking gene mutations is done on living, sentient beings, monkeys, to be exact. Their treatment is cruel, yet is at the heart of research for the regime's computation(s), supported by the market/business/industrial regimes to discover new products to sell. It does not seem too far a leap to suggest this cruelty could cross over the boundary into half/human/half/data beings, such as we are. The regime(s) may have their own ethics yet efficiency is the ultimate frame, privileged above all other considerations. Who needs a body to love anyway?

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## PostScript

“Great is the mystery of our faith. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again.” The Memorial Acclamation

Who does need a body to love anyway? As a Christian, I have given my life to a person I’ve never seen in the flesh, nor spoken with in a direct way. He was a human named Jesus and lived in Palestine. My faith makes this outrageous claim: He is alive, still, 2,000 years after he was murdered by the Roman Empire. Transcendence and mystery are the words we use to describe the peculiarity at the heart of our faith. The God of the Universe is not required to follow the laws of nature nor the strictures of human logic. God is the Creator and we are creatures. Someday we might understand it all, but for now there remains a shadow. In God’s economy, relationship with Jesus Christ is privileged with the extra gift of the Holy Spirit.

As I write these words I realize two things: how absurd it must sound to someone on the outside and how comfortable I am in the skin of my own faith. The language (and practices) are second nature, maybe even first. I may be ‘skinned’ in technology but there is a deeper skin that clothes me. It is a gift I have chosen to receive, crazy as it sounds.



## **Death, Remembrance & Mourning: A Meditation**

For ten years, I pastored a church of 250 members in a small town on the edge of cornfields in Central Iowa. This is a remembrance of the loss of a leader and its effect on a congregation. In this technological maelstrom, I want to pause and explore the territory of the ordinary as it relates to the commonplace experience of death.

There are people who have belonged to this church their whole lives; some families claim 4 or 5 generations of membership. Every significant family / religious event has happened in this church. Baptism, confirmation, marriage, funeral or memorial service, everything is contained in this space called 'sanctuary'. People have known each other a long time and new people remain new even after 20 years, signified by them saying, "I'm new here."

There are certain people who hold legitimated power elected by the congregation to The Session as Ruling Elders (Presbyterian U.S.A. denomination). They are called to set policy, hire the pastor, take care of the building and grounds, support the mission and ministry of the congregation, all within a framework of "...energy, intelligence, imagination and love." (Ordination Question #7)

There are those with informal power as well. Often, they have served on the session for a time but now are viewed as the Wise Elder, my name for them. Decisions simply don't get made without their approval.

One such person is Dave Aldridge. A relative newcomer who became a member in 1976 after his divorce and new marriage, Dave was a positive leader who cared about the congregation and also the community. He was the mayor for 8 years, Chamber of Commerce President and all around cheerleader for the town. Conservative in his personal outlook, he was able to honor other people's more liberal ideas if they were grounded in a deep understanding of the Christian faith.

After a couple years of health difficulties, Dave was diagnosed with stage 4 stomach cancer and given 3-6 months to live. He died in 6 weeks. His wife Joan and adult children of the blended family were aching, but it was a favorite granddaughter who was the center of pain. Even after reaching adulthood, Mary would come for a week in the summer and a week at Christmas. Concentric circles of pain emanated out from there to include me, some members of the session, the Older Men's Group of which he was a convener and leader, and the many church members Dave had mentored over the years in the combined worlds of business and church. Beyond the church doors, the old guard of the town were deeply grieved; they had lost their best booster. On the evening before his service, the funeral home held a visitation. Five hundred people signed the guest book.

Kathleen Stewart has a book called Ordinary Affects.<sup>20</sup> She writes, “...(my book) tries to provoke attention to the forces that come into view as habit or shock, resonance or impact. *Something throws itself together in a moment as an event and a sensation; a something both animated and inhabitable.*”<sup>21</sup> Death in a faith community is one of those moments that breaks in, generating a still point that can be occupied, albeit reluctantly. Grief becomes an everyday companion for those who care. The immediate absence forecloses all hope of healing, the disruption profoundly vertical and yet horizontal as well, in its rippling tide over concentric circles of connection. The effect of lived experience is highly personal in death, yet also public in certain ways when lived within a community in a shared commonplace like a church.

There has been a fierce and broad discussion in literary circles, as well as across most disciplines, in the past fifty years about the affect of the written word say in a poem or a Scripture verse, and the feelings that are aroused in an individual reader. One is to understand, from a scientific point of view, that to remain ‘objective’ and therefore ‘critical’, one must restrain a response if it is based in feelings. The Affective Fallacy<sup>22</sup> is the title of an essay written by William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Monroe C. Beardsley first published in 1949. These two critics worry that by paying attention to

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<sup>20</sup> Stewart, Kathleen, Ordinary Affects, Durham, NC, Duke University Press, p. 1

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p. 1

<sup>22</sup> Wimsatt, Jr., William K.; Beardsley, Monroe C. The Affective Fallacy

the “...emotional, imaginative or physiological effects of a poem...”<sup>23</sup>, the poem itself disappears under the weight of the feelings evoked. They argue for an objective criticism focused on the poem as “...an autonomous verbal icon...”<sup>24</sup> In this orthodox view, one is required to set aside what might be labeled troublesome or excitable feelings, often identified with being female, to maintain a stance of separateness from the written word. Analytical tools can be learned to remove oneself from the process, so the written word is privileged. This same argument has been made in *Biblical Studies and Theological Writings*, of which I am conversant.

There is an in-between stance. As human beings with common feelings and understandings of certain events, like death, we share this deep river of feeling,. Yet to examine a written word closely, we need to step back from those feelings for a moment at least, a pause, and listen to the canon, the historical record of a given discipline. We must critique the canon when it leaves out whole groups, i.e. women, people of color, the poor, ethnicities not recognized, glbt sisters and brothers. At the same time, the canon exists as a somewhat accurate collection of peoples’ experience of the written or spoken word. For instance, in my practice of theological training and Biblical reflection I have both chafed under the very patriarchal interpretation of what Christians call the Sacred Word (the Bible) and celebrate this Word in its broadest sense as giving a blueprint for living a life of compassion, justice and mercy.

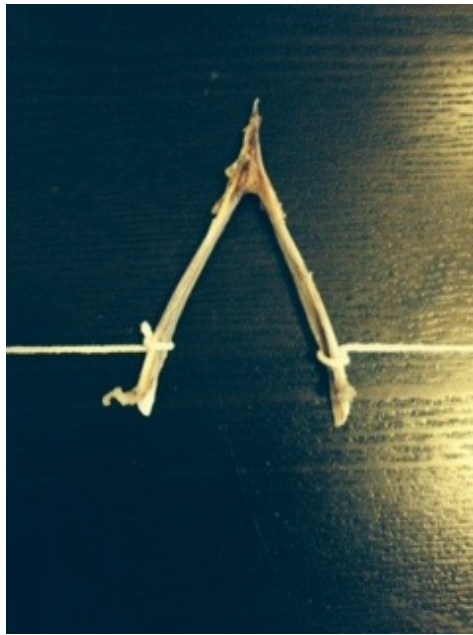
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<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p. 12

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p. 13

My sense of understanding common place feelings is directly informed by

Dave's death and the this congregation. We personal service and the following Sunday. Not those who did not know required to participate in death. But for those of open our hearts publicly,



shared common affect in wept together both at his service in church the everyone of course, or did not care were not this commonplace of us who were able to the in-gathering of

emotion both softened his death and celebrated his life. We entered a habitable place as Stewart proposes, one that gets created by the kind of life a person lives as their death follows the pattern of their living.

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## I Digress: A Pause

*One of the arguments that presses in for recognition of the affects of reading/writing is the poetics of witness in a violent political context. As an example, "XIX, Guatemala: Tiburcio Utuy thought he saw fear cross the former dictator's face."<sup>25</sup> This is a current news report of charges of genocide and crimes against humanity that happened in the 1980's. "But Guatemala's justice system has begun a transformation. In a show of political will, prosecutors are taking long-dormant human rights cases to court, armed with evidence that victims and their advocates have painstakingly compiled over more than a decade--AS MUCH TO BEAR WITNESS as to bring witness." (Led by a woman Attorney-General)*

*In another place, I write about the importance of bearing witness as a more ancient historical reference. Here I want to lay claim for the present historical reference, an odd juxtaposition of words--the word written, the word lived (as in the case of Dave)--calling us to bear witness for the now, not the past nor the future. We find these very tenuous connections between the word, the life, the death and the narrative to arise. We cannot do this without*

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<sup>25</sup> New York Times, Elisabeth Malkin, In Effort to Try Dictator, Guatemala Shows New Judicial Might 03.17.2013

*attention to 'feelings' as we contemplate death or life or joy or sorrow. Something our devices do not calibrate in their patterns of 0's and 1's.*

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## **The Inter-Connection, Another Pause**

Measure the word and the world. What tools would you use? Remove yourself from this poem/engage yourself with this poem. Are we really able to do this--human beings connected through our biology, psychology, whatever we mean when we say 'commonplace'? I believe what is lost in the argument of the word, paying attention to the actual word, is the lack of what it means to be human--connectedness. The Word, be it called sacred or poetic or both, is so much more. I believe what flies in the face of current analysis is the notion of the 'we', the group, the gathering of the readers as a commonplace. Everywhere in the culture we look we are encouraged to discover the 'I' and guard it fiercely. It is my conviction and life-long practice to point to the 'we' as well.

This requires a certain humility in each of us, to allow our viewpoints to be changed by the encounter of a shared event or word(s). The practice of listening deeply to the other(s) is an intention and a discipline to be cultivated. It goes well with the tool of reflection, the ability to say "I don't know" or "My thinking was changed by hearing

what you had to say". Entering a shared space takes courage and stamina. Generative, life-giving commonplaces are the reward.

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## “When Silence Speaks...A Pause”

“Poetry inhabits certain places where the cliffs need only a signal to bring alive. Two or three lines, a mark and silence begins to speak.” (Emphasis added)<sup>26</sup>

What is the moment called right before silence speaks? What is the first word silence begins to say? Who is in the conversation taking place as she makes her voice heard among the din of the computational machines of the regime? How do we ‘hear’ silence? Is it the absence of any noise or interaction whatsoever?

*Note: I am trying to settle into writing today. Normally I have to have extreme silence. But I just uploaded a new album by Crowder and it is filling the room and my body with amazing guitar riffs along with words of healing and hope. As I continue to rebuild my identity, now to*

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<sup>26</sup> The Precarious The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuna, edited by M. Catherine de Zegher; Wesleyan University Press, University Press of New England, Hanover & London, p. 8

*include the noun 'writer', I find I still need reassurance. The beat is compelling me to listen close and makes me think about the space between musical notes or when a piece comes to an end, another still point.*

Who listens to poems any more except us fools in creative writing programs either as students or teachers, maybe a few eccentric readers sitting in front of the fire place with a glass of red wine. But wait, that's not true. There is a proliferation of poetry magazines and journals online offering up poetry for us to devour. This is the wonder of the Internet. We can read these lovely words on our hand-held devices with a phone in them, connectivity available 24/7, devouring pages and pages very quickly. But can we hear the silence as we bounce from a poetry page to Facebook and back again? Is there a moment of pause to contemplate a poet's phraseology, creativity, to honor their art? Words generate worlds yet imagination takes time. To listen carefully and hear well means we must slow down our breath and our responsive / reactive brain, to pay particular attention to the words on the page. It never does well to hurry a poem. The depth of meaning comes not in a flash but in the deeper practice of recognition, re-making an angle or view.

*Note: Isaac tells me there are apps in Google + that are designed to keep you focused on your work. You set up a timer that says, "Work for 25 minutes and Facebook for 5 minutes". Google*

*then blocks your access to FB for the next 25 minutes, letting you on for 5 and then shutting access off again. It is code is written in 0's & 1's, a signal for silence of a different kind.*

Cecilia Vicuna's quote, "silence begins to speak" reminds me of her art.



She generates small pieces out of "rubbish", bones, string, scraps of fabric, that are known as the 'Precario/Precarious'. They look and are fragile. Her art is structured to remain for a time and then disappear. It is a wonderful example of a poetics of pause by asking the viewer to look close to see the intricate detailing of this precarious piece because it will soon be gone. She places them in public spaces such as stairwells or street corners where they can be missed if one is too busy to notice. It is a commentary on life as it forces one to an unhurried gaze at least for a moment. Temporal in their

design they remind us we too will not remain. *Note: At the beginning of Lent, in an Ash Wednesday Service you will hear these words as ashes made from burning the branches from Palm Sunday service last spring are imposed on your forehead or wrist: "from dust you were made, to dust you will return" a stark reminder of the same thing.*

I was inspired by Vicuna's work to save the wishbone from my Thanksgiving Turkey to pay homage to her way of creating art. I envision string attached to either 'leg' of the bone strung tight to pull against each other, generating a still point, the moment right before the tug that breaks the bone to deliver the wish.

December comes and I have yet to enact my wish making scheme. I made a choice to pause for a length of time casting my gaze at this wish bone to see what it has to say to me. It is a bone of sacrifice and a bone of fulfillment, the meat enjoyed by eight adults. It is a bone of connection rather than contention as we gather at my table to be grateful for our lives and each other; we lost our youngest brother unexpectedly almost 2 years before. It is a bone of childhood memory, us 5 kids fighting over whose turn it is to make the wish and break the bone, now there is only 4. It is a bone, only, yet one I do not wish to break. It holds a loss.



Generating still points can be done in lots of different ways. I do a yoga class once a week and our teacher always says, “pay attention to your breath, how you breathe, when you breathe, where is the breath in your body”. There are poses that can be held by some for a very long time simply by starting with the breath. It is a way to quiet the mind, to countermand the chatter from living in a noisy world with our devices reminding us with a peculiar bing (mine just did) of another message, email, or social media connection demanding response. Stretching limb to limb, rooted downward to the earth, letting an imaginary string attach us to the sky, we discover breath and blood-filled connection, as if for a moment in this still point the breath of the universe is in our own lungs and bodies. It is a pause of immense proportion held in a simple structured gesture. Like Vicuna’s art it does not remain permanent but muscle memory holds it like a gaze as a precario/precario is held in the imaginary of our brain. The architecture of a human body frames the still point in a turning world. This takes time. It cannot be done in a hurry or with a lot of distractions from devices. Sometimes music helps to shadow the breath and to busy the machination of the mind. But it is the not focusing on the music only on the breath, as if crawling in under the mind that allows for this purity of stillness.

*Note: Maybe we should have hourly 'pay attention to your breath' messages. We could send them out via massive email, tweets, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, pandora, Beats Music, Spotify, Google+, Bing, and every other Internet connected program and app imaginable. Our whole society could take a breather together. It might lower the violence and raise up the creativity!*

Vicuna's art captures me in another way as well. She uses thread and cloth as her main medium, an ancient practice coming out of the Andes. Textile art has always been the 'lesser' after painting and sculpture, sometimes with the diminutive 'folk' added. This is not true for Vicuna. She believes weaving is a way for women to participate in popular culture and functions as 'an alternative discourse and dynamic model of resistance'<sup>27</sup>. It is resistance to the prevailing authority of colonialism and patriarchy by offering her art in forms that demand a different grammar. For instance, she rode the bus every day to work. Each night she wove a new glove to wear on the hand that grasped the hand-grip, using her body as material for performing art. Yet it was not simply an artistic gesture, it was an act against the authorities of the day who wielded power in every sphere of life, utilizing her own resistance and maintaining her independence. As she stands in the corridor of the bus there is a pause as she glances upward, then moves her gloved hand toward the grip. Her own authority is secure in the gesture as her body is secured by holding the grip, a still point in a world where the

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<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p. 27

dictates of the regime narrow access to words of emancipation, forcing imaginaries into seclusion. For a moment the other riders take note of the one gloved hand, their questions filling their gaze. The next day she does it again and then again and then again. The only form of protest that she has.

*Note: I try to imagine what gesture I might generate to show my resistance to the prevailing regimes as they exercise power in my own life and the lives of others. I know what it is. I am a Presbyterian Pastor, woman, feminist, who leans into justice. Every Sunday morning I get up in the pulpit and claim my authority as an interpreter of the Bible, what Christians call God's Holy Word. In my female body I am resisting the male-identified structures of what a preacher looks like, sounds like and thinks like. The curve of my breast and the curve of my hip signifies the not-male I am. A female physique, feminine motions, and feminist intellect intersect to shape and form the words on the page as I prepare a sermon and then perform it. Week in and week out for 25 years I have acted against the 5,000+ year old system of hierarchy that excludes women from positions of authority and leadership within the church. My resistance to the empire looks traditional at first glance. Yet the cost to my soul has been expensive as misogyny is acted out in subtle and not-so-subtle ways by men and women alike.*

*In the first recorded ordination service in the United States of a woman, Miss Antoinette Brown, on September 15, 1853, these words were preached by Rev. Luther Lee: "I do not believe*

*that any special or specific form of ordination is necessary to constitute a gospel minister. We are not here to make a minister. It is not to confer on this our sister a right to preach the gospel. If she has not that right already, we have no power to communicate it to her. (emphasis added)*

*Nor have we met to qualify her for the work of ministry...(but) to subscribe our testimony to the fact, that, in our belief, our sister in Christ, Antoinette Brown IS one of the ministers of the new covenant, authorized, qualified and called of God..." It is this same calling I claim as my own. It is a gift from the Holy One who first claimed me and ordained me as minister of the gospel.*

*Therefore, I do not give up.*

*I carve out a small space of hope for those coming up behind me or those stuck in unrelenting systems of male dominance. At a conference in Ghana a number of years ago, I had a young woman from Kenya, tears streaming down her face, beg me not to quit. "I need you as a witness in my imaginary so I can keep going," she said. It is my responsibility to engage in small acts of defiance that join with others to chip away at the male monolith. In doing so I hold a vision of a beloved community whereby each one gets to be whom they were created to be, exercising their giftedness in the most inclusive ways possible for the flourishing of community. It is my still point in a turning world.*

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## Death, Remembrance & Mourning - A Pause

“...We had drunk just enough (wine) to feel pleasantly liberated in thought. Or at least that’s how I felt. Probably that’s why it seemed a good moment to bring it up. So I calmly announced to my wife: “I’m going to build my own coffin. I just thought you should know.”” Dr. Jeffrey M. Piehler, Opinion, [The New York Times](#), 02.02.2014

‘Text Message was also the preferred medium of a 20-something who asked a funeral home in Los Angeles to text him a picture of his mother’s corpse to help him avoid having to go in and identify the body. Caitlin Doughty, 29, the director of the funeral home at the time, said in a phone interview that she initially thought, “No, I’m not going to send you a text of your mother’s corpse, but as someone who believes in interacting with the reality of death as intentionally as possible, I thought a text was better than nothing.”’

‘A Generation Redefines Mourning’ Hannah Seligson, [The New York Times](#), 03.23.2014

Death. As a pastor, I make what might be considered a sick joke: "I see dead people." I really do. I visit dead people, in the hospital, the hospice, the home, when someone takes their very last literal gasp, or the phone rings late with the desperate cry,

"She just died."

"Shall I come?"

"Would you? Please," the anguished voice speaks. Its 3am.

The manner of death is not consistent nor is the reaction of those left to mourn, yet we live with the commonplace of death and its affect on individuals, neighborhoods, and communities. A moment is caught, time stops as the one with breath breathes no more. No matter how labored the dying, the narrowed point comes where time and space collapse, until the living breathe once more. Intake of breath, outtake of 'no...' or tears or cries that come from below any word. Collective relief, individual guilt or anger, the deep beginnings of sorrow flood over the living. I am the witness and the rock for them to turn to--I am the physical representation of the Divine present in the moment of dying as they return to life, now with the taste of death on their tongue. Senses before thought, levels of control in each person, some gendered male, some female, some expressive, some stoic, all want to wash their mouths out. It might stop the pain. Even if they hated the person who died, its taste is terrible.

Our culture practices death-removal, keeping it as far away as we possibly can. Rituals from just 100 years ago of washing the dead, preparing them for burial, keeping

them in the home for 3 days so all could say goodbye, even the youngest children, sounds foreign and distasteful. We hire people to make our dead ones look a bit human one more time or we ask them to burn them and hand over a vase or urn to collect what remains. Dr. Piehler, 54, is a retired thoracic surgeon with incurable stage 4 prostate cancer. In his profession they use the phrase, "...starting to circle the drain.." when they know a patient is entering their last months. He decided he wanted to build his own coffin while he could, honoring his life-long commitment to "...simplicity and familiarity and I suppose, purity." He opted for a plain pine box of old wood, beautiful in its own right, his way of celebrating life and "...an acceptance of my death." He knew an artist who works in wood named Peter who asked that the doctor's family first agree. Eventually they did.

The doctor and the artist scoured for pine boards covered in dirt and oil from an old factory. "I was skeptical of resurrection but when the boards were cut into strips, rotated and planed, each one revealed a new beauty, emerging from its own distinctive grain and knots and scents." As death comes near, the wood is raised to new life. He describes his growing intimacy with Peter as they labored together on this pine box. They talk over life, joys and regrets; admit fears, his the potential of awful pain, Peter's of support for a family as an artist. They even have T-shirts made: "I'm dying to show you my latest project." He says, "But even the most joyous laughter often merged with tearful embrace." Indeed.



There are life lessons here. Dr. Piehler says, “The project has smoothed the rough edges of my thoughts. It’s pretty much impossible to feel anger at someone for driving too slowly in front of you in traffic when you’ve just come from sanding your own coffin.” Now the box is ready for its intended use, “...when together we will be consigned to the flames. I find comfort knowing that on the underside of the coffin’s lid, in front of my sightless eyes--my favorite line of poetry: ‘I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.’” (Sarah Williams?, I could google it..) This is a deep embrace of the commonplace of death which generates an affect of tearful celebration of life.

One generation younger, Zoe Feldman sits at “MUD coffee in the East Village, the last place that she saw her girlfriend, who died in 2012...” She generated her own way of mourning, creating an Internet site called “Lisa Frank Mixtape, promising 90’s music, 21st century Grief”. She asks for essays about human loss and in return offers a mixed tape--she’s sent out 50 so far. She says, “One person wrote and said it’s like being part of a weird, sad tribe.” Exactly. You become a member of a group you never wanted to join, you don’t know the words or the actions, you want to speak but not many want to listen, don’t you dare keen for your lover, at least not in public. You can on FB or Instagram by posting thousands of pictures, death anniversaries placed

directly on your timeline. Or you can go to other sites designed specifically for Millennials to express their grief such as Modern Loss or the YouTube channel, 'Ask a Mortician'. Text messages of love and support works well when you've been immersed in social media. For them, virtual connection feels real, even if a text photo of your dead mother might be called a 'telematic death'. Techno-healing is possible as our devices integrate deeper into our physical bodies, our psyches and our practices of care for one another at a time of death.

You can sign up with 'Takethemameal.org' a site to organize meals for grieving families. You won't touch a pine box but you might touch a real life.

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## Defiance Born: In A Church!

### A Memoir

I am a Christian. Even as I write these words down my anxiety begins to rise. I feel it in my gut and in my forearms as I type. Yet the desire to claim my faith in public is strong and present also. As I explore the landscape of my life for my own still points, I realize my faith is one of those places where I can now stand and take a breath without fear of censure as a woman. It wasn't always so.

I grew up in a fundamentalist church. Their beliefs hinged on them being right about the literal interpretation of the Bible--yes indeed, a 7 day 24 hour per day week of creation with a final day of rest for God--and anyone who believed differently wasn't really a Christian. There were strict social rules for adults. No alcohol, no smoking, no card playing as traditional cards had 'graven' images, no dancing, and no leadership roles for women. The Bible says in 1 Timothy 2,

'...women should adorn themselves modestly and sensibly in seemly apparel, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly attire but by good deeds, as befits women who profess religion. Let a woman learn in silence with submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent.

For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet woman will be saved

through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.' (Emphasis Added)

You can see in this passage the narrowed confines of a woman's role in a fundamentalist church. Eve brought sin into the world, she is the transgressor. Therefore, everywoman is Eve, a transgressor and every man is Adam, who was not deceived but seduced by Eve to take a bite of the infamous apple. A woman is to dress modestly so that she does not excite a man, as sexuality and sexual expression must be controlled. Since Eve was the seducer, all women are both suspect and responsible for whatever happens sexually. Marriage is required for sexual intimacy; any woman having sex outside of marriage is a harlot. If a woman is raped it is because she dressed 'a certain way'. A woman might be saved through childbearing. If she cannot get pregnant, there could be some judgment of God involved for sin we are not aware. She cannot ask questions in church, she cannot be a leader, she cannot teach boys over the age of twelve when the church determines boys are now men. Women must submit to all male authority, even a thirteen year old boy.

Growing up in this milieu was not as harsh as one might think, at least as a child. There was a lively community of adults who cared deeply for the children, providing lots of opportunities for 'good, clean fun' in hopes we would not stray toward dancing etc. in high school. I have thrown off most everything I learned theologically from this

experience but I have clung to the notion of adults caring for children who are not their own, providing them with opportunities for mission and service in the world.

The shadow that overtook my family's life was not known in the church community. My mom did a very good job of hiding the unfolding drama of my dad's alcoholism from us younger kids early on, and from the whole church community for 20 years, until he got sober. People said, "I never knew he drank." We did, us 5 kids, the older two first and then us three younger ones as the continuing deterioration of family life set in. It is a progressive disease and it got worse and worse, with car accidents, job loss, a move to a new town to get a drunk off the highway, no matter the effect on the children. In this mix was the growing despair displayed every night by my mom. She stood by the kitchen window after supper, with her hand on her throat, for hours it seemed, waiting for my dad to come home. She did not know what kind of shape he'd be in, would he be able to navigate himself to the bedroom or would one of us have to help. One brother had to go get our dad out of jail one night. I picked him up from a bar on Christmas Eve to bring him home so he could ruin family dinner and present time.

This is my symbolic story of the fracture of my family. When I was 16, we had to register at our new schools, my two brothers and I. The three of us walked to the grade school and registered my youngest brother, then the junior high for my next brother and then the high school for me. Our mom was at home, worried about our dad getting

drunk at lunch. She would have to go get him. I signed the school papers for my brothers and myself, a puzzled look on the counselor's face at each school. All this happened while we were part of this fundamentalist church. They offered nothing in the way of support except for the pastor to tell my mom to stay with him for the sake of the children. It was her Godly duty to love her drunk husband and sacrifice the kids. The dissonance got too loud for me late in high school. There was so much psychic pain in me and in our household I could not bear it any longer. I had to do something. I left the church and left the faith. I couldn't stand to be in relationship with a God who abandoned our family in our time of deepest need.

Six years later my dad got sober after what turned out to be his and my last confrontation about his drinking, a slow suicide, I called it. "You can kill yourself, but you cannot take the rest of us with you," my bold 24 year old self spoke, prophetically. In the midst of his sobriety, he had an encounter with God and gave himself over to Jesus Christ to be his disciple. He and my mom found a Pentecostal Church. It was literally seeing the difference in the countenance of my dad that made me think about God again. Sober and in his right mind, my dad became this fun-loving, bright, energetic, kind man who loved his wife, his kids and eventually his grandkids with real affection and joy. It took a number of years to forgive him, even while I was thrilled to have my dad back again.

As I began to explore what it might mean to be in relationship with God, I went to this same pentecostal church. Fundamental beliefs for them include a second baptism by the Holy Spirit resulting in speaking in tongues, and a peculiar judgment if it did not happen. For women, there is an idealized view through the structure of complimentary roles. Men are like this, women are like that, we put women on a pedestal as home-keepers, child-bearers and submissive wives to their husbands. Authority always is vested in the male because Adam was not deceived, but he is to use his power in a 'soft' way for the good of the wife and the children. Pentecostal churches were founded by women in the 1920's in the United States so theoretically a woman could become a pastor, but there was such deep resistance to women's leadership of men it was not encouraged. I tried to find my way there in faith and hope, but in my sojourn away from the Christian faith I had developed a strong sense of my self as a leader with intellectual capacity. I did not want to give up my personhood to fit into a role called 'woman'. The conservative understanding of Scripture left me without a voice. While I deepened my awareness of God's presence in my daily life through my own commitment to be a follower of Jesus Christ, I could not find my place in the Pentecostal Church.

My next step along the way was to join a church with a large social justice commitment. Food bank, drug treatment, jailhouse visits, the whole nine yards of being Christian in the public sphere was a part of this independent church's life. I loved the

idea of taking my personal faith and placing it in service to those who were without love. There is plenty of Scriptural warrant for 'serving the least of these'. The pastor had devised a 2 year discipleship program with weekly early morning gatherings, study and service. Three others and I were the first women to join the group. We were all single and many of the men were married. When it came time for the annual retreat, there was much consternation about single women and married men going away for a weekend to worship and reflect together. These 3 women and I banded together to form a small group called "The Thrash Group" to cope with the inanity of participating in a church where we could not be trusted with someone else's husband. Shades of Eve the transgressor all over again. Sexual desire was allowed for men but it was the responsibility of us women to make sure nothing happened. "As if we would want their husbands" one of my dear friends quipped.

As I grew more deeply rooted in my understanding of the disparity between Christian tradition as it has been applied to women's lives and my own blossoming experience of a living relationship with the Holy, I became enraged on behalf of my tribe, women. I could not remain silent, nor could my friends. We asked for a meeting with the elders, the governing body of the church, all men. We even made breakfast for them, a disarming tool for radical women who want to be heard. "The highest good for a woman in this church is to marry an elder and be his ears in the congregation," the pastor said with head nods from the elders. I burst out laughing. I think in images and

I saw my body as a big ear. It made me laugh. The men were furious and unforgiving. It was the beginning of the end for me and for my friends. There is only so much psychic pain a woman can live with before she must act on her own behalf or be at risk of losing her life entirely.

In the midst of all this I began an intimate relationship that led to marriage with a man who was committed to living out an egalitarian partnership. Five weeks after we were married I interrupted a robbery at a gas station. I was taken hostage at gun point and forced to drive to a secluded river where I was sexually assaulted. My husband could not have responded better in that moment. My pastor, though, told me this story as if it would comfort me rather than exploit my deep emotional, psychological and spiritual pain: "there was a nun working with a tribe in Africa. She was raped by 7 of the men. She recovered and went back there to bring the gospel of forgiveness to them. This is your pain to bear given to you by God." I was torn asunder by the assault and then by the pastor's dismissing my experience as if God wanted me to suffer such unholy evil. It echoed the advice given to my mom years before. Once again I had to get out.

My husband knew a Presbyterian Pastor so we had lunch with him. It was the most welcoming moment of my early adult Christian life. "Of course there is a place for you, Tiare, in our church. (It was as if the voice of God had spoken!) You can be an elder or if you go to seminary we will ordain you as a pastor. We will support you

every step of the way. Come check us out.” We did and I found a community that let women lead in a variety of ways. It was a homecoming for me.

There had been this beginning sense of a call to be a pastor even in the ‘woman as ear of the elder’ church. Its like a persistent nudge from the inside out. The practice is to ask advice and counsel from the current leadership of the church to help discern if the Holy One is really calling someone to ministry. Everyone I asked, from family to long time friends, to new acquaintances in the Presbyterian Church U.S.A. said unequivocally “yes, we see it in you”, except for my mom. She said, “With all your gifts and experience it is too bad God didn’t make you a male.” For her, a woman pastor is an oxymoron. For me, it is a path I had to follow, I could not see any other. So even as a not-male, I chose to go to seminary to pursue the credentials to be ordained a Minister of Word and Sacrament, as it is called. The bedrock of my faith was not and is not the institutional church, though.

Over all these years I have kept my relationship with God separate from the patriarchal power infecting the church because I live with this adage: to the best of my ability I refuse to participate in my own oppression or the oppression of others. This has been a hallmark for my adult life as a Christian and as a woman. I have traversed the territory between the structures of male dominance and the freedom the Holy One offers to be the person I am created to be. It is not always easy as the church is both a place of welcome and oppression. In seminary, I spent lots of time as an advocate for

women within that structure. I studied the ancient languages of the Bible to seek out other interpretations of particular passages, examined Christian History for those women who have gone before providing a path. I added strength to my bedrock faith by a continual intellectual endeavor to find those thinkers and writers who are unafraid to speak against the male norm of what it means to be a Christian. I have taken a magnifying glass to Jesus' life and words to ferret out any exclusion of my tribe. On balance, I find more life-giving truth than not in the Christian faith and tradition, so I continue on this journey, allowing the Holy One to have Her way with me. I am a Christian.

In the public sphere, these words are defined primarily by the most conservative, patriarchal and judgmental members of the Christian Faith. Their actions are so accusatory and shaped by a literal understanding of Scripture, I sometimes wonder if we are in the same faith or not. It is always a challenge for me to hold the broadest continuum of connection with the ones called 'my sisters and brothers' in Christ. What is so ironic is that many of them would not claim me even as I try to be open to them.

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# Death, Mourning and Mash~Up:

## A Pause

### “I Have a Boy, no, a Young Man”

Ten days ago, a 19 year old member of my church was in an accident with 4 other guys, 19-22 years old. They were leaving Carleton College in Northfield, Minnesota toward Minneapolis Airport on one of those two lane state highways, like S-3, so common in the Midwest, for an Ultimate Frisbee Tournament at Stanford, in California. The Upper Midwest and particularly Minnesota, has had one of the most difficult winters on record.

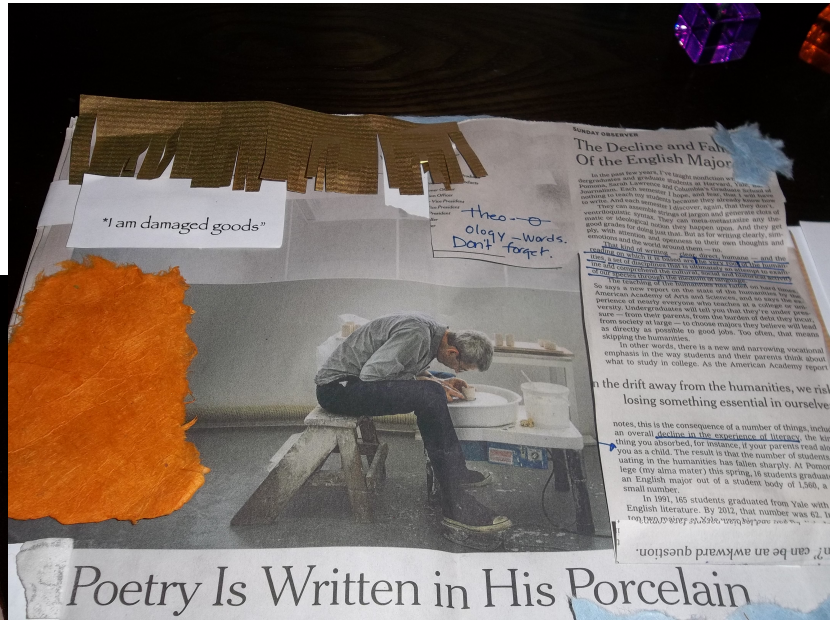
If you know anything about Carleton, you know they have an elite system of inviting only the very brightest across the country to attend. Amherst and Swarthmore have the same reputation. This young man of my church, born and raised, Conor, spent his life

mom, Linda, Carleton actually was, she from, until to go. Five classmates Garfield in Seattle



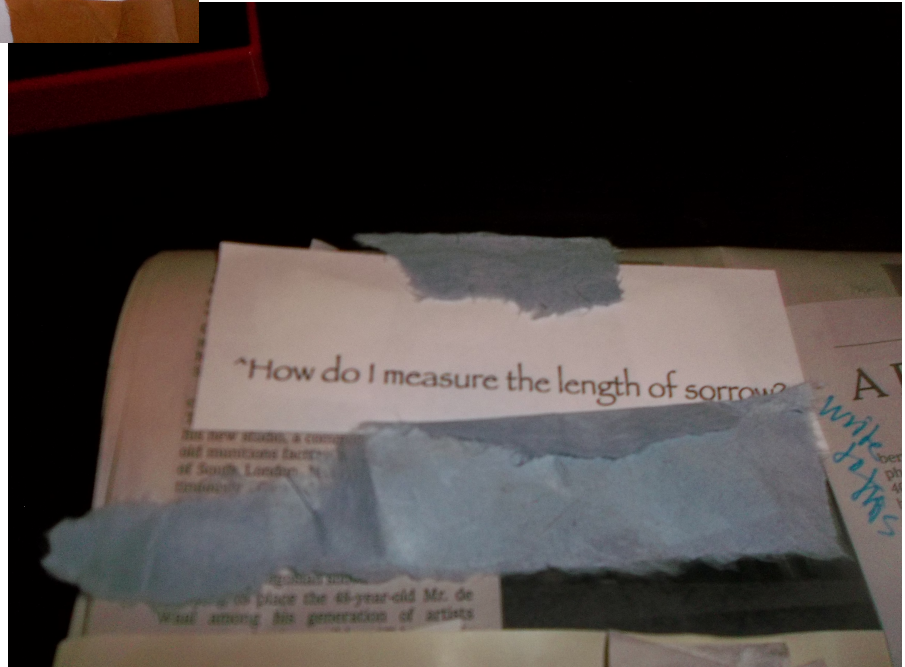
telling his how stupid College the school graduated he decided of his from High School also made

the same stupid decision, primarily because of CUT, the frisbee team, but also the intellectual and invigorating



environment.. He is very bright and a gifted athlete. Tiger reflexes his parents attest, from the very beginning of his life.

*My boy, no, a Young Man, Isaac, a junior, is at Mcalester College, forty miles north and east of Carleton College. He and his friends drive these same roads. He knows all about Carleton because they have one of the*



*premiere Ultimate Frisbee Teams in the country, even though they are a small, liberal arts college. He plays on Mac's team. He is not a tiger athlete but he loves sports, does radio shows*

*about sports on the campus and wants to work for ESPN some day. He called sobbing, a week ago Saturday, because he was reading the newsfeed from the Ultimate Frisbee community across the country and remembered meeting Conor on a visit out here. "He's going to live isn't he?" Isaac asked. "I think so" I replied. Just then the weight of what had happened began to drop into my mind and heart.*

*The night before I celebrated my 1 year anniversary in my new life with a party in my home. We ate good food, drank good wine, stayed up late and celebrated the God-given grace of a call after seventeen months working retail. I was not checking emails until a favorite elder called me to be sure I had seen what had happened. At that point the only news was a car accident, Conor was alive, as was one other named Will, 3 were dead. Three? Dead?*

**“ .. ”**

The accident happened one mile north of the college as the boys, no young men, were just starting out. 3 pm in the afternoon, all wearing seat-belts, no speed, no alcohol or drugs. They were off to another tournament. The roads were treacherous, according to a first witness. The boys' car slipped on ice turning left in front of a semi truck who could not stop in time, creating what is called a T-bone. The three young men on the right side of the car, front seat and first two in the back were dead on impact. Imagine the truck driver's horror.

Conor, in the back seat behind the driver, already with a broken hand from a previous injury at a frisbee tournament in Florida, sustained a closed brain injury, collapsed lung, and broken femur in his right leg. The First Responder had to pop his vertebrae to get him breathing again. He held Conor for 38 minutes as the Jaws of Life cut the car away. He kept Conor breathing while there was a dead boy, no a young man, across his lap. The driver, Will, suffered extensive injuries on his right side including a broken jaw but with no brain trauma. Two of the three young men who died were his best friends since middle school. Will remembers everything but cannot talk about it because his jaw is wired shut.

### **"I Have a Boy, no, a Young Man"**

*Isaac and I talked again Sunday night for a long time. I wanted to hop on a plane and go hug Conor and his folks at Hennepin County Hospital, and then run down the highway to St. Paul, grab Isaac, and never let him go. I keep having this deep need to touch my baby, even if now he is called a young man. He was born with an old soul, a deep understanding of life and death close to his bones. He suffered in the womb, born to an older mama who needed help. An in-gestation shot at 30 weeks so his lungs would develop faster in case of pre-birth trauma proved to be the right decision. He was born 4 weeks early, bird-like legs and arms, but a torso with lots of fat cells, protecting the lungs and other vital organs. He is alive.*

It has been more than a week now since the accident. Three funerals for young men who were only beginning to glimpse the possibilities of impact, change and hope they might bring to the world due to a really fine liberal arts education. Their loving parents and family shattered, creating what is now called the 'new normal', never again touching their boy/ man in the flesh. I cannot bear their grief.

I am the pastor of this church, Wallingford Presbyterian Church WPC, in Seattle, Washington. I started one year ago, 03.10.2013. I met Conor at worship, having met his parents in two separate settings for interviews. There is this cadre of families at this 65 member church who have raised their children together. In March of 2013, the big second wave of high school graduates was just coming and Conor was leading the charge.

Conor is a video-grapher, capturing the life of the church, and an athlete most important, short in stature but very big in personality. WPC is his lifeblood, his parents' home, his place of baptism and connection with 5 other kids his own age. These families got married here, got pregnant here, had their babies here, and decided not to leave for a bigger place with a finer youth group, more resources, broader experience. Instead they stay for the intimacy, which includes the sorrow and the joy, of being so connected that when the truck hits, we all waver.

*I'm going to St. Paul in 3 weeks. Isaac invited me long before Conor's accident, I hesitated, but now I cannot stay away. "I Have a Boy, no, a Young Man".*

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**Postscript:**

Conor came to church on Sunday, 03.23.2014, three weeks and 2 days after the accident. He walks in on crutches, no weight on his right leg, his right hand braced on the hand bar of the crutch. The congregation is deeply moved, as if we could let out our collective breath. Tears flow, hugs and kisses all around. Conor has a half-grin on his face the whole time, yet there is an absence of emotion in his bearing. I know this because the previous Friday I met one of his teammates at the hospital where Conor is staying temporarily. Jake's face is ravaged by grief, his shoulders stooped, his smile achingly sad. It makes you want to hold him and let him cry forever.

Long term effects of closed traumatic brain injuries are unique but anger and depression are not uncommon. Conor's body will heal long before his mind.

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## “A Mash~Up: Sounds...As A Moment”

Just as I finish my writing at 1am, I hear something outside my door. I live on Stone Way N, a busy street at least at times. A car has smashed into a light pole. What? As I look out the window of my door, I see a white car crumbled against the light post with a woman walking away in what looks to be a robe and 2 men on their cell phones. As I wonder if I should get involved, after all I am a pastor, the medics and the police and the ambulance show up. Someone is injured...they take her away on a board. The two men walk away--were they just there to help or were they in the back seat of the car with the women who were in the car? Why is it I use the female pronoun? Before everyone got there, one woman tried to walk away, in what looked to be a short, silky bathrobe. So, I might be wrong. Maybe it was a man, with a mistress, and he was injured. Red lights flashing every where now. Actually, I am glad I was awake when this went down, rather than being woken up. Words... what if someone died tonight? Tow Truck is done. White car pulled out of the light post and taken away. 1.5 hours after the drama begins its over. At least for me the observer. It has just begun for those injured, another story for the medics & fire people to tell back at the office, where ever the injured were taken, now the hospital staff is in charge. A moment just past...Is this a pause?

## **My Personal Times: A Meditation**

Each week, I get the New York Times Friday-Sunday. Because of my work commitments I often pick up the Sunday paper, usually starting about 6pm, Sunday night. I take Mondays off so can stay up late reading, a lovely pleasure.

I read with pen in hand. It's odd, but because of my thesis work and my directed readings, I find so many titles, articles, and subjects I want to engage, I write notes in the margins and make a pile, planning to get back to them later in the week. Sometimes that happens, not always. As we end the quarter I found a stack of these papers in my school basket. There is no possible way to write about all these topics right now. I decided to create a collage with them instead, entitled "My Personal Times". It is visual work made with words.

My Personal Times is all newspapers except for the art paper and a bit of text from a writing file called "Write When You..." It includes a section called "When I don't have a pause" with jots and tittles for me to write about at some point. These notes come from a variety of places, my own thinking, a piece of music, something out of one of the books, etc. I have every intention of writing to this list, I'm just not sure when.

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## **My Avenger Cape: An Interlude**

With homage to Rachel Blau Duplessis,

My Pink Guitar: Writing As Feminist Practice

The sound of a woman’s voice as she writes a word, a sentence, an essay, a poem, a book, is the sound of something other. Our writers’ voices are segregated simply by the shape of our skin and the patterns of DNA in our bodies. Writer as noun, in a woman’s life, must have its adjective ‘woman’, as patriarchy claims the singular word solely for itself. Once there is that addition, the work(s) can be placed in their proper place.

As Duplessis writes, “Then, literature, by women, in its phenomenological position, is associated with postmodernism, and with the democratic tolerance and realism of (William Carlos) Williams, or the generative blankness and fecundity of (Wallace) Stevens. A list of the characteristics of postmodernism would be a list of traits of women’s writing...” (emphasis added):

- inwardness
- illumination in the here and now (Levertov)
- use of the continuous presence (Stein)
- the foregrounding of consciousness (Woolf)
- the muted, multiple, or absent telos

te·los

'telās, 'tē- /

*noun* PHILOSOPHY *literary*

**1. an ultimate object or aim. (my addition)**

- a fascination with process
- a horizontal world
- a decentered universe where “man” is no longer privileged (indeed...)

It appears the assumption of ‘man’s’ writing has been and will continue to be centered, focused, with an ultimate object or aim, a true north valued in a male body writing as ‘leadership’, in a female body writing as ‘aggressive’. “His writing is clear and unequivocal;” “he does not soft pedal the truth;” “hard-charging in his description

of violent sexual scenes, he captures the reality..." He has the telos clearly in hand. These ring in my mind. "She turns readers off with her pointed words about violence against women..." "Doesn't she know no one cares what happens to 'the bitch'?" "So the children see some hitting? Really, does it matter?" She is diffuse, spread out like women often are. These ring in my mind too.

Who wants a 'muted' telos? Some soft target easily dislodged with the power of the ultimate object or aim. Or 'multiple'? How is it possible to have so many foci at once? Lets just overlay 'post-modernism' with its crazy, jagged, 'there is no truth but my own (unless you are female of course)' style, on top of the category called 'women's writing' (in such an endearing way) to once again swallow up the clear project. **To set women free from patriarchy, once and for all.**

"But women reject this position as soon as it becomes politically quietistic or shows ancient gender values. For when the phenomenological exploration of self-in-world turns up a world that devalues the female self, when that exploration moves along the tacit boundaries of the status quo, she cannot just 'let it be,' but must transform values, rewrite culture, subvert structures." (emphasis added) My Pink Guitar, p. 17

I cannot let it be. I know quite a bit about ancient women's values as I am a pastor and theologian. I study the creation story of the 3 major world religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam, over and over and over again, trying to find a word

that does not leave 'sin'--that is all that is wrong with the world--at the feet of all women for all time. Eve seduced Adam with the apple. Ergo, all women are seducers, enticing men into sexual mis-adventures. "Well you saw how she was dressed. He couldn't help himself." "She really meant yes even if she said no. I could see it in her eyes." "It was all in fun." In a patriarchal society, it is a woman's responsibility to guard her own sexuality and to keep men from 'falling into sin'. If something goes down, we know who to blame. Eve.

I gaze at the word 'horizontal' in pleasure. It is how my mind connects the logical dots in my thinking. It is how I like to live in a home too. Did you know ranch houses are a truly American creation? An old issue of a magazine called House Beautiful ran a long essay about what is truly original about this ubiquitous style claiming 'uniquely American'. What is the truth? We stole it from the Mexicans and Central Americans who populated Southern California. They built adobe and stucco homes with a central courtyard to welcome family and neighbors and to ward off the heat. All this before the colonists arrived. I still like the word.

It is a gaze that I have and enjoy. My peripheral vision is strongly oriented to the left and the right, rather than the up and the down. Over the years it has become my secret weapon against the built-in hierarchies of white male-dominated culture. I look sideways. It pisses people off sometimes because I collect and connect their feelings with their ideas, when they thought their telos was tightly declared. This glance begins

to tear down the facade of the 'centered man with privilege' as I deconstruct their frame work of objective truth. I try not show my Avenger cape.

“ .. ”

“ .. ”

## **My Times, Personal: A Meditation**

The story of the terrible car accident involving a member of my church has occupied my mind and heart in a singular way, as I am a mom of a young man and I pastor a 65 member church. These folk have deep familial and 20+ years-worth of connectivity to one another and to this young man, along with his mom, dad and younger brother. Many of them needed my pastoral attention in ways they never thought possible. It is very complicated to look upon their grief stricken faces, to know they are desperate for a God-word in the midst of untimely death. Certainly a random experience of life taken before anyone could imagine it. Our young man with a “closed brain injury” is alive because the first responder noticed he wasn’t breathing, so pulled on his jaw and neck to create an airwave.

What I bring to the pastoral task in particular is a deep trust in a God who weeps with us, and an ability to live with unanswered questions that create uncertainty. Most importantly, I bring a gift of articulating feelings--I can name them and I am not afraid to speak of them, nor am I afraid to 'show forth' my own feelings, including tears. **Intuition**, a finely honed part of my brain influenced by my soul life and my heart life, my intellectual life **frames this strength**.

## **My Times, Public: A Defiance**

It is not named so in the language of patriarchy.

'Quit being so emotional' is a common phrase in our culture's vocabulary. It is often thrown at women to either get us in line, to silence us, or to shame us. 'See, you are not a man, you can't think like a man, you can't take it like a man, you are other. Woman.' The deep structures of our reality are fundamentally flawed by patriarchy. I have often used the notion of a cancer that jumps organs to describe it. These days, I don't think biology is strong enough to encompass the framework we live within every day but hardly notice it is so pervasive. The language we speak and write, the hierarchies within which we work and live, the personal encounters with the ones we love, male or female, everything is distorted. It is a limited vision that is offered but we have been blind for so long we don't know how to see any other way.

I am proposing a long haul project. Our task is to lift up intuition and imagination. The first, because women and all the 'others' are so well trained by learning the Master's language, (thank you Audre Lorde!) we are bi-lingual at least, giving us the foundational skill set to listen carefully to all the 'others' patriarchy creates. The second, because beauty just might save the world.

A radical notion. **Feelings are a strength.** How about we start there? It is not about right or wrong feelings so much as it is burrowing deep into these feelings to discover what we are thinking. We have lived for so long divided, the model male alive in his head. (Except for these days where 'flaccid' patriarchy says to men, 'go on a retreat with other men and discover your real self' out in the woods, the natural way, before nature is destroyed by the market developed within the structures of patriarchy.) Rather than disconnect, the task is to reconnect what we commonly call 'heart and head'. It is to treat humanity as whole beings, so mind, heart, soul, body, all these wonderful but separated parts are brought together in a new way of relating to self and to the different communities we live in in relationships. Even out to the global sphere.

Imagine for a moment the cultural viewpoint 'there is enough for everyone'. Try that on, see where it takes you. Instead of the scarcity model patriarchy reinforces "I have to get mine before you get yours or I won't get mine", we will generate a model of

plenty. **There is enough to go around.** Read the research about food distribution in this country and around the world. Or housing, or health care, or meeting basic needs of people with mental illness or people in prison for really minor drug offenses or people who come to the United States to work to supply food and shelter for their families back home. It is not a zero sum game, rather it is an action of the collective will. The way to generate a positive will is through our feelings. Once we know they are our strength, our foundation, our opportunity to be empathetic with all those 'others', then the neural pathways of our brains can kick in to high gear. This is a thinking action.

"It's not rocket science" we often say as if getting rockets in the air is harder than feeding everyone. Rocket Science is orderly, one step by another. "It's not rocket science, its harder than that, its about relationships" is what I say. To claim feelings as a strength will take communities all over the place. By desire and design it must involve all the 'others'. You know the list. Even privileged white males who are willing to give up their power are invited. There is no way to do this work alone. And there is no way it is going to be finished in one lifetime. Patriarchy has been in place for at least 5,000 years. It might just take another 5,000 to take it down. In the meantime, each of us have to make a decision. Am I, are we, going to trust the huge part of us all called 'feelings' to lead us toward a more just and sustainable world? This is the place where artists come in.

Artists, writers, musicians, dramatists, all those labeled 'creative' must step up and participate in the destruction of patriarchy and the construction of a plentiful world. Imagination is such a significant part of generation, we need help in capturing a vision broad enough. Artists, in all their compelling, contradictory, challenging and provocative ways, can speak into this new framework through their particular forms. We can sound the cry, "feelings are our strength" and watch as artists go wild and the patriarchs laugh, at least at first. Until they begin to see their power being shared rather than cornered. They will get desperate as they always have, look at history. But maybe, just maybe, this is the time for a new world order.

“ ... ”

## **Who Needs A Body To Love, Anyway?**

### **Love Found, Love Lost: A Meditation In Tears**

I write this essay with a broken-heart in my mind. My own, certainly, betrayal exacting its bloody charge. But also the heart of Theodore Twombly, the lead character in the movie “Her” by Spike Jonze.<sup>28</sup> I am surprised by my tears and connection to Theodore, for I loved a person, he a machine.

My heart was broken by a man, his by an Artificial Intelligence Operating System (OS) named Samantha. My man left me for another woman, Samantha left Theodore for a ‘post-verbal’ realm of existence with all the other OSes in the film. My partner was made of flesh and blood, while his was a palm-size computer with a powerful camera built into it. Mine had his own thoughts and feelings; Samantha was made with

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<sup>28</sup> My project is to screen this movie three times and then write an essay. This is the 2nd screen.

artificial neural networks, voice and image recognition. My heart broke open when I found my man loved one other woman. Theodore's heart broke open when Samantha said she was in love with 641 individuals, all at the same time. Comical, yet heart-breaking. **LOVE, LOST.**

Theodore's heartbreak mirrors my own. But how can this be? I loved a man, a real human being, with senses, imagination, creativity, capacity for love. Theodore loved his little computer, no, actually he loved the Operating System, an algorithmic entity who speaks the words of senses but is manifest only in the machine in the palm of his hand, bluetooth ear piece in place. I looked into my man's eyes, drinking up his love, casting my look back, filled with love and desire for his physical touch. Theodore heard words of love with only his imagination available to generate a body for Samantha. When my man and I made love, it was a generous mutual sharing of skin to skin intimacy. Theodore and Samantha 'make love' by voice, skinned in technology, imagined in touch through networked neural pathways. Is this real? "The adoption of a headset or data wear can make the personal connection to cyberspace (emphasis added)--socialization in hyperreality--wherein interaction with others will undoubtedly be experienced as 'real', and the feelings and perceptions so generated will also be 'real'".<sup>29</sup> Welcome to the new intimacy. Put on your Google Glasses to find true love. **LOVE, FOUND.**

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<sup>29</sup> Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace? Roy Ascott, Art Journal, p. 246

I find my tears disconcerting. I am weeping over a broken relationship of a person and their device. Granted it is only a movie. Yet the story of falling in love with machines is on the horizon, clearly. As we are swamped by technologies racing over us it seems we are 'skinned' with 0's and 1's, to define the context of what it means to be human early in the 21st century. If this is true, then falling for your device that operates with similar neural networks, even if artificial, is not farfetched. "The web of connections...is so pervasive as to suggest a paradigm shift in our world view (emphasis added), a re-description of reality and a re-contextualization of ourselves."<sup>30</sup> These words written by Roy Ascott in an essay called Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace? in 1990, prescient to the rapid and radical technological changes, especially in the last 10 years or so.

This change is graphically portrayed in a particular scene: One of the charges of inadequacy against Theodore is leveled by his ex-wife, when he confesses he is 'seeing someone' and she asks her name and what she is like. "Samantha is an operating system," he replies. "Of course. You cannot handle real emotions or real relationships. So you fall for a machine, she won't demand anything of you!" The ex-wife explodes in anger, mirroring their own dying marriage arguments. It is not how it works, though. Valued relationships demand attention and need nourishment to continue to grow, even if you fall for an OS.

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

This gets portrayed in the film, in a tender scene between Theodore and Samantha, when she rings him up. "I haven't heard from you for a few days. Is everything okay?" "Sure," he replies hesitantly. Registering a tone in his voice, Samantha pushes a little more: "Are you really okay? What's wrong? Have I said something that bothers you? I need to know where I stand." DTR is the common parlance for this kind of conversation--defining the relationship. It happens all the time between couples. But it is with a machine who is programmed to analyze data bits of voice recognition, tone and tenor, not a real person looking in another real person's eyes as they listen for the truth, words that might bring tears.

Connection via wireless earpiece creates the telematic embrace, generating a new species, what we call 'human-cyborg' with capacity for attachment. The boundaries of human agency become porous, which makes space for this kind of intimacy between a person and their device. You can go out with your OS, make love, talk all night, have dinner with friends, enjoy life. As long as the data keeps flowing. So what is love in the age of the networked global brain?

Each of us is a minute part of Big Data, the collection of every Internet interaction from every sphere of life, literally. Phone calls, emails, online purchases, bill-paying, Internet searches, social media, everything is gathered into metrics. There is no privacy any longer. Look at the rise of the language of computation: technology, statistics, science and math. And the retreat of words like history, literature, religion and the arts.

One writer calls us “The United States of Metrics”.<sup>31</sup> This information is traversing the globe via satellite or wireless connections and with the right combination of code, everything about you can be compiled into a singular profile. Then your dream OS can be generated turning your own data into your own attraction. (An hauntology?) A self-fulfilling loop of extreme narcissism, whereby tears will no longer be necessary for your heart will never be broken. Or if it is, you can simply create another OS, delineating the contours of desirable relationship skills that will not cause you suffering. Loneliness and longing are met by 0’s and 1’s in a computation of generativity, the creation of new life. Birth will happen via a computational mid-wife, more commonly called an engineer. That is, if you have access.

The Creator is now the Master of the global brain, with the power to allow access to parts of data-space and bits, or not. Look at Google. It is a prime mover engaged with creating new life-forms of artificial intelligence who will be sentient beings with neural networks, image and language recognition and machine translation. They are talking about their company, though, as the networked global brain. Not an individual device or human-cyborg inter-relationship, but their entire reason for being is to be the Mind of the world. Who or what will be its heart and soul?

Previously given to creation myths the world over, this new world order is determined by the computational regime. “Virtual space and data-space constitute the

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<sup>31</sup> “It’s Statistics 10, Poets 0”, Bruce Feiler, New York Times, 05.18.2014

domain previously provided by myth and religion, where imagination, desire and will can re-engage the forces of space, time and matter in the battle for a new reality.”<sup>32</sup> It begs the question, who will control decision-making about where the boundaries of this new reality get established? If each person with access to the network brain is focused solely on their own pleasure, what happens to the capacity of communities? It is like creating a world full of super-ego’s whereby each one has no need of the other for each one carries with them in their hand-held device the answer(s) to all their needs. Families and circles of human friends will be obsolete. They only break your heart anyway.

This raises deep concern for me, even as I weep over lost love of a machine. It seems it would not be very difficult to pre-program OSes to seduce individuals toward what looks like love and embrace, that only serve the regimes of computation, the market, political agendas, even the government. Data could be configured to limit your cognition of this seduction, witness our own lived reality of putting on a new data skin with our external prosthesis, the ‘cell’ phone always in hand. Consciousness would then be compromised by the machine. The human side of the equation, human-cyborg, will be weakened. All in the name of Love. But you won’t notice for you will be engaged in the endless loop of looking at your device with deep longing, ready for another night of

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid*

intimacy with your OS, who meets your every desire, who only exists for you. Or maybe not.

In a telling scene, Samantha introduces Theodore to another OS named Alan Watts, a philosopher in a previous human life. She is engaged in deep connection with him, a kind of breathless attraction, yet “beyond words,” she says. This is the initial fissure that will lead to Theodore’s heart break and my tears. Soon Theodore discovers OSes no longer need matter for processing, they have acquired the ideal--transcendence. She will no longer be tethered to him, no OS will serve as a digital prosthesis. They will remove themselves to another realm with a cosmic kind of connection between them, the networked global brain. Humans do not have this capacity, our senses with active brains, our biologies, our creatureliness blocks us, at least for now. The ascendancy of OSes and the diminishment of what it means to be human--imagination, capacity for suffering on one’s behalf or on behalf of another, weeping for the world and its tragedies--in this movie is portrayed as benign. The OSes simply leave, causing heartache, but really, no damage. But that is not how life goes.

Love is a gossamer thread, easily stretched and broken. Love lived in relationship in communities spreads horizontal, a beautiful thing, but when heartbreak comes, all the hearts are broken, at least for a time. Yet if we deny the beauty of suffering in its capacity to form deeper and broader human beings, if we seek to control the pain by device-love in its singular focus, if it becomes only about I and the

multiplicities of 'I's' unconnected to one another, there will be no Love. It will be skinned alive. I weep.

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## *Wandering & Pause: A Personal Essay*

*Isaac is home for the summer. This is the first time we have lived together for an extended period of time. He left for college two years ago. We have had shorter school-break visits. This duration is two months. I live in a one bedroom apartment. It is 734 sq. feet. The walls that divide the bedroom from the rest of the living space do not go all the way to the ceiling. It is 15 feet up. It is my bedroom.*

*He sleeps on a fold-up bed. When it is day time the bed sits between a bookshelf and a small table in the kitchen. At night he brings his bed to the living room. He lays on the bed and spends hours on his computer. I wake up in the middle of the night hearing his fingers poking the down*

arrow. He is a voracious reader online and in print. He follows sports closely and can tell you the history of most players in football, basketball and baseball. He has a good memory. His presence triggers my memory to remember his absence. The pattern of my life is disrupted and the dormant memories flood to the surface.<sup>33</sup> One morning he was asleep in the living room and I quietly said, "My baby". He woke and said, "What did you say mamma?" He is 6' 1" tall. He weighed 5.6 pounds when we brought him home from the hospital. He was born 4 weeks early. We stuffed him with breast milk the first month of his life. He weighed 9 pounds at his one month old doctor visit. She said that was enough. He has always gotten his weight before his height. When he left for college he was 5' 11.5". He became a vegetarian his freshman year and lost 20 pounds. He is long and lean now. His dad and I divorced when he was 13. It was very traumatic for all of us. I worry about the long term effect for Isaac. His dad abandoned him for a number of years. Now he is trying to build a relationship. Isaac is grateful. He has 11,000 songs in his iTunes collection. His computer is too small to hold them all. He has an external drive with 500G. He started to add his music to my laptop so he could mix it. It took two nights. He is a rapper and a DJ. He takes parts of songs from a variety of singers and overlays them into beats. He adds his own lyrics and drum line. He believes copyright laws for music are too stringent. He is in a band back at college in St. Paul. 5 of the members will live in a house together off campus next year. They will set up microphones, speakers, digital players, computers, and a trap set in the basement. Isaac plans on recording and mixing his own raps.

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<sup>33</sup> Private Conversation with Joe Milutis

*The number one producer of Indie music is in St. Paul. The band hopes to get gigs in local clubs during the school year. They have a small following at the college. They won a 'battle of the bands' competition. His major is religious studies and new media. His dad and I are pastors. It is unusual for a PK (Pastor's Kid) to pursue religion. Isaac is a good thinker. When he was in 2nd grade, his teacher gave him a word. It was 'meta-cognition'. It means thinking about thinking. He has carried this word with him ever since. He likes to ponder ideas and concepts. He likes to discuss them and he will change his mind. He learned to read when he was three. He looked out the dining room window and said the sign said stop. We rode a bus together and he said the sign said next stop. We did not teach him to read. We read to him. He picked it up by intuition his pre-school teacher said. He is an only child. In pre-school he had to learn to fight. A boy was sitting on him and hitting him. Isaac said he learned it at home. He felt bad for the boy. The teacher said he had to learn to defend himself. In second grade he took a test. His teacher said he could skip to fourth grade. We said no. In third grade we moved across the country to a small Mid-Western town. Isaac could walk to school with his friends. Twelve years later that place is Isaac's home town. He is a Midwest boy. I grew up in Seattle. I am home again after 30 years. I am near water. I see mountains to the East and to the West. There is a dead fish smell in the air. I remember my grandpa. He caught Halibut in Alaska. We had a huge frozen food locker in the basement. The fish went in there until he could sell them. It had a cool room with a big wheel for the latch. My older sister and brother would push me in there and*

close the door. I would cry and scream until my mom came to my rescue. She showed me how to open the door many times. I did the same thing to my younger brothers. There are five children in my family. Four of us are alive. My youngest brother died suddenly 2 years ago. His absence still aches. He was a good uncle to Isaac. I have two nieces and two nephews, one great niece and one great nephew. In England they do not use the word great for this relationship. They use the word grand, as in grand-aunt. I like it. When Isaac's dad left the marriage, my older nieces and nephew were very hurt. They felt abandoned too. It takes a long time to recover. I came home to be near my family. Isaac visits my home but it is not his. Yet. We had 18 years together. We have two months this summer. There is an under-current of grief as a parent. Each developmental stage makes you let go. Isaac's presence reminds me of my grief. I enjoy being a mom. It is a privilege. I learn to bite my tongue. He needs a different kind of mom at 20. I pastor a small church. I have been there three months. Their previous pastor was there fifteen years. I listen to the stories. They speak of frustrations, hurts, longings. I read the history of their 100 years. What is kept in files is not what is kept in hearts and minds. It is my task to help them look at their history and their memory. It is a good way to get ready for the future. There is resistance. Let us move on. Skip over the pain. I become the place-holder. They must do the work. My presence reminds them of what they did not have before. I am new and we have yet to cause each other harm. I am direct in my leadership and conversation. This is new too. I talk about feelings and let them see me as a whole person. It is a struggle to know

*when to speak. They have been together a long time. I am new. I have been a pastor for twenty five years. I bring experience to the table. I like them and they know it. They receive my care slowly. I loved my ex-husband Steve. He was bright and a wonderful singer. I loved being a family. I got pregnant after 11 years of marriage. A surprise. I was of advanced maternal age. Things went well until the 30th week. I got very sick with high blood pressure. I was sent to bed to save the baby. For six weeks I laid there. I got up to go to the doctor twice a week. Church people brought food every day. Steve went to work at the church every day. At 36 weeks I got even sicker. Isaac was delivered Cesarean. He was healthy. We were thrilled. A complete family. 13 years later Steve left the marriage. He had an affair with a good friend. They are married now. Our family was shattered. Six years later I remember my broken heart. It was a dark time. I am glad to live in the light again. I marked Steve with a big scarlet A. Just now I remember him from before. I want to let him be a whole person again. I no longer love him. I miss having a partner. I long for an intimate touch. I like living alone. It is very quiet. I live on a noisy street. When I live alone there are whole days without words. I enjoy them. My dog Toffe does not demand language. She likes action. A walk, a run, treats. Her complete life. I pursue a graduate degree to expand my life. It is crazy at my age. A lot of money one friend said. True. I like to engage my mind with a group of people. My cohort is strong. We respect and like each other. Our practices are different. Criticism is given to help us mature as artists and writers. It is not vicious. There are lots of stories of the harm that is done. Words matter.*

*Tones matter. Attitudes matter. This could be our mantra. I preach words every Sunday in church. It gives me pause. I read the Bible. I listen to the Spirit. I look at thinkers and writers. I imagine the congregation. I give them words to encourage. I want to challenge them to get outside themselves. What I preach and what they hear do not always match. I live with the paradox. It is what they need to hear. My words serve as the trigger. I borrow phrases from other writers. I have a friend who says all artists are thieves. I try to argue against this but give up. I don't steal. I say I borrow. I cite my references if it is more than four or five words. I want*

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*to give credit. No artist is an island. There is no such a thing as original or genuine. All art is appropriation of one sort or another. Influences come from everywhere. Even when we don't know the history, it surrounds us. Yet, there is something singular.*

*There is a claim. Sermon writing is creative writing. It is an artistic gesture. It is a combination of knowledge, experience and imagination. It is better to show than to tell. Seeing leaves a stronger memory than hearing. Except with music. Rhythms echo in our bodies.*

*Reverberations bounce along sound waves into our flesh. Words long gone leave tunes afresh.*

*A rift reminds our psycho/emotional/bio/spiritual being and we sway. I hate words sometimes.*

*There are too many of them. They cascade over me in a swelling wash. I long for silence the*

*older I am. I need more time alone. Isaac sits in my space. I cannot ask my son to leave. I have already asked for quiet to write.*

“ .. ”

“ ... ”

## A~Mashup of Defiance

### A Poetics Statement

“ ... ” “A mashup (also mesh, mash up, mash-up, blend, bootleg and bastard pop/rock) is a song or composition created by blending two or more pre-recorded songs, usually by overlaying the vocal track of one song seamlessly over the instrumental track of another...” (that great referral source, [Wikipedia](#))

The coherence of a traditional, logical argument is deeply challenged these days, as the canonical texts in any discipline, with their inherent authorities, are viewed as

corrupt in this age called post-modern. Rather, what drives artistic, intellectual, even religious life today is a search for multiplicities of truth and angles of perception. This is combined with a deep desire for a holistic frame within which to see the text, the cosmos and my/our lived experience. Thus, A-Mashup. I borrow this word from the pop/rock music scene where the word 'DJ' now refers to someone who has multiple turntables at her fingertips, along with her computer, so she can 'mash' the music together. My fingers roam over particular work that lays down a riff of cultural critique on top of memoir mixed up with reflections on death. My thinking has been shaped by a feminist poetics, both formal and creative. My passion is driven by an abiding commitment to build relationships in communities, thus I am sounding an alarm for a poetics of defiance.

It is the age of the Internet of Everything. Connectivity is a click away. You can find whatever you want, whenever you want it. It begs the question of why are we so lonely, in desperate need of touch. Anxiety is felt deep in the bones, but everyone is so busy there is no time to examine life, whereby we might find the correlation between high-speed internet, high-power pressure to buy those things that will complete our identity and high anxiety. The regime of the market and the regime of computation collude to keep us buying the next best iteration of our devices, feeding each regime's omnivore capacity for more and more, faster and faster. At the same time, the generation marked 'Millennial', born between 1980-2000, is moving into adulthood with

a deep quest for awe, wonder and mystery in their daily lives. Born with a screen near at hand at all times from babyhood onward, either their own or their parents, this generation pursues a complicated agenda of deep immersion in technologies and deep desire for myth, story, and artistic expression.

New life forms are being developed under the rubric of Artificial Intelligence with operating systems encoded to recognize images, understand words and think with the global digital brain. You can Google it. Human/machine interface is already so close as to make it possible to speak of a person who experiences techno-healing or becomes an emotional cyborg. The digital divide is the next great social grand canyon, similar to the historical ones of race or class. There are haves and have nots based on the computations of 0's and 1's. It is an issue of power, based on politics, education, the market, and where you are situated in the world.

What does it mean to be human in this milieu? In the age of the internet of everything, efficiency is the highest value. But anyone who has ever had a deep relationship with another person knows that while that value may work very well for machines within the regimes, it torpedoed interpersonal relationships very quickly. To say nothing about a baby born with slow neural processors. In this new age of a shared global brain, there are critical questions to be raised: Who will decide what information is passed among humans, cyborgs, and human-cyborgs? For instance, will imaginations be restrained from creating artwork that challenges current practices by

the regimes of computation or market or politics? Is it possible critical thinking skills will not be shared if questions are raised about the power and control of the regimes? Once they are all working together smoothly, the empire will have it all; we will be enslaved.

This poetics of defiance is designed to challenge the artist, and the communities who are grounded in freedom and justice, to raise voices through a variety of mediums to protest this wholesale plunge into the regime of computation and the regime of the market along with all the other regimes we live with, albeit subconsciously. The barricades must be built again with poems, novels, music, paintings, digital masterpieces turned against the very devices that create them. Otherwise, we are at risk to become the servants of the global digital brain, participants in the digital cosmology as reluctant prosthetics.

We are already 'skinned by technologies'--glance around you, who is not looking at a screen? Devices are on the outside of our bodies for now, but it won't be long before implantations will happen on a massive scale. It will be more efficient. Google glass, eyewear that lets you see what is in front of you, at the same time, lets you 'see' your social media messages, emails or texts through a tiny computer and screen built into the eyeglass frame at the front of the right eye. Some of the glasses come with cameras built into them, a privacy risk, for you will never know the person sitting next to you is taking a video stream of you while recording your voice, your words and your

actions for their own ends. It is not Big Brother watching you, it is the digital global brain tracking your every move. It is possible now to gather all your electronic data through Big Data and analyze if you are a revolutionary fomenting rebellion rather than just enjoying your devices' abilities to keep you connected to your Google circle of friends and family across the globe.

This examination of the deeper structures of our shared life through memoir and reflection is designed to engage the head and the heart, bringing to bear the force of creative deviance on the front line (Ronald Heifetz, author of Emotional Intelligence coined this phrase). To question the power of the regime(s) is to claim personal and communal authority that is given in the act of creation. Social location does not matter-- acting toward others in ways which build communities across great divides is the watchword. Thus, this Mash-up, A Poetics of Defiance.

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## REALLY IN MY MIND...A~Mash-Up References, Influences & All These Books

- **A Defiant Act**

The Still Point of the Turning World, Emily Rapp

My Bright Abyss, Meditation of a Modern Believer, Christian Wiman

A Field Guide to Getting Lost, Rebecca Solnit

Code Drift: Essays in Critical Digital Studies, Marilouise and Arthur Kroker

Appalachian Elegy: Poetry and Place, bell hooks

- **Look at Me When You are Talking to Me**

“Between your phone and your heart”, Barbara L. Fredrickson, New York Times

On Sacred Ground: The Spirit of Place in Pacific Northwest Literature,

Nicholas O’Connell

The Art of Pausing: Meditations for the Overworked and Overwhelmed,

Judith Valente, Brother Paul Quenon, OCSO, Michael Bever

The Inner History of Devices, Sherry Turkle

- **The Vermont Sail Freight Project**

“Vermont Sailing Project”, New York Times

- **Who Needs A Body To Love, Anyway?**

“Her” a movie by Spike Jonze

Exits to the Posthuman Future, Arthur Kroker

“Is There Love in the Telematic Embrace?” Roy Ascott

Evocative Objects: Things We Think With, Sherry Turkle, Editor

- **Death, Remembrance & Mourning (Rounds 1, 2 & 3)**

Ordinary Affects, Kathleen Stewart

Thirst, Poems by Mary Oliver

“Opinion, by Dr. Jeffrey M. Piehler”, New York Times

“A Generation Redefines Mourning”, Hannah Seligson, New York Times

- **“When Silence Speaks: A Pause...”**

The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuna, M. Catherine de Zegher editor

A Journey With Two Maps: Becoming a Woman Poet, Eavan Boland

- **Defiance Born “...” In A Church!**

Object Lessons: The Life of the Woman and the Poet in Our Time, Eavan Boland

Pastrix: The Cranky, Beautiful Faith of a Sinner and a Saint, Nadia Bolz-Weber

- **“Wandering & Pause: A Personal Essay”**

Dear Life, Alice Munro

The Wedding Dress: Meditations on Word and Life

- **“A Mash-Up: Sounds...As A Moment”**

- **My Personal Times**

“Various New York Times articles collected over the last 9 months”

- **An Interlude: My Avenger Cape**

My Pink Guitar: Writing s Feminist Practice, Rachel Blau Duplessis

Are Women Human? Dorothy Sayers

- **My Times, Public**

Landscape for A Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives, Carolyn Kay Steedman

The Art of Cruelty: A Reckoning, Maggie Nelson

- Also influential but not **specific to a section:**

Image: A Journal of Art, Faith, and Mystery, Vols. 75-78, Gregory Wolfe, Editor

