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POACHING IN THE LANDWASH:
An Interrogation of Cultural Meaning
In a Reading Group from St. John's, Newfoundland

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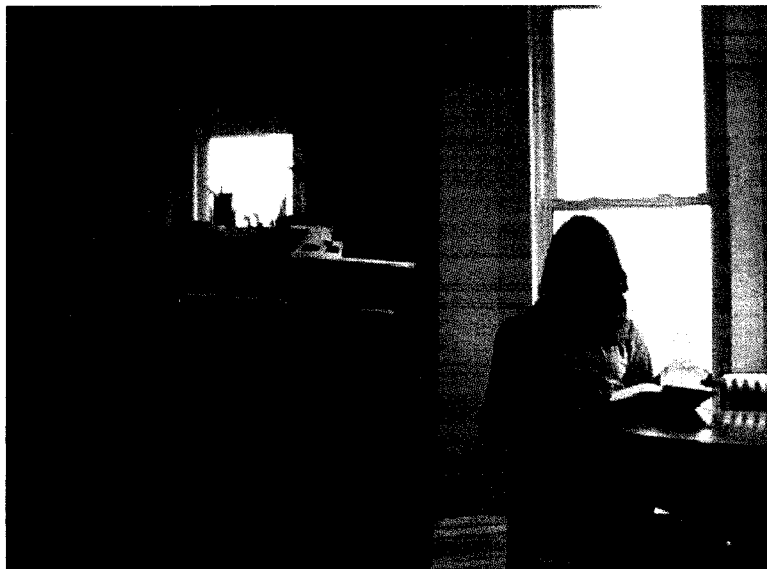
Le Doyen de la Faculté des études supérieures et postdoctorales / Dean of the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies



**POACHING IN THE LANDWASH:
An Interrogation of Cultural Meaning
In a Reading Group from St. John's, Newfoundland**

By: David Lewkowich

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Faculty of Education
University of Ottawa



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Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48474-6
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-48474-6

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Abstract

Involved as it is with language, reading is an always-ambiguous endeavour. In this qualitative foray into the *otherness* of textual desire, I examine the human geography of reading through the articulations of a reading group in St. John's, Newfoundland. I also dwell in the collective dynamics of a pedagogy of place—moving through the landscapes of Newfoundland, poeticizing the relation between reading and subjectivity. As a borderline work, this study illustrates that reading in the meeting place of dialogic engagement creates a text of infinite possibility, through which readers write on and write from their social constructions of cultural meaning.

Acknowledgements

...To acknowledge the others who have made my work possible...so important and difficult a task...and without whose support I would still bear harshly the shadow of doubt and uncertainty...though I still drape it, as I hope I always will, I do so now in a much-dignified manner...and on to those I thank...

To begin with, my thesis committee, who dwell in the depths of autobiography and learning in such exciting and inspiring ways—Dr. Patricia Palulis, for showing me how to free myself from the shackles of words, and how to use these shackles as skipping ropes, Dr. Awad Ibrahim, for having the audacity to dine on ‘leftover’ cultural plates, a feasting that I revel in myself, and Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook, for his guidance and friendship, for hiring me on despite my travels, and for always leaving the door to his bookshelf wide open.

The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, whose generous funding has enabled me to focus on my writing in an all-embracing and nearly obsessive way.

The Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa, which gave to me a space of learning, the likes of which I had never encountered before.

The Centre for Newfoundland Studies at Memorial University, whose employees were always willing to give me just a little extra help.

Jennifer Rottman, a fellow scribbler in *The Saltwater Chronicles*.

Jennifer-Lynn Bene, whose walks and talks to the Pretoria Bridge helped me keep my feet on the ground.

David and Judy Charles, whose basement on Bower St. I called home two nights a week, and who greeted me always with an incomparable degree of openness and warmth (and of course, those Scrabble games!).

Mom and Dad, for your constant companionships and your unshakable belief in my abilities. I know you’ll both always be there for me.

My sister Stacey, since we’re alike in so many ways.

Morgan Charles, for your patience, for your love, for your humour and your smile. You allow me my obsessions and manias, and for that, you are rare indeed...I don’t know how I ever found you.

Though I know they can’t read, my two constant canine companions, Baba and Benito.

My thesis advisor, Dr. Judith Robertson, for your candour and confidence, for pointing me in all the right directions, always, for your poetry, for your love of the ocean and language, for The Blue House, for helping me with the red tape, and whose trust in me inspires a degree of self-confidence that I never even knew existed.

And finally, to the readers in HAM, who welcomed me into their intimate circle, and whose words give my work its potential.

Table of Contents

Impressions of a Place, Fractured Readings.....	2
Purpose of the Study: Being Drawn Into the Squall.....	6
Trolling in Conceptual Space(s): A Review of the Literature.....	17
1. Consumption as a Landwash Production.....	27
2. Book Clubs; groups that poach.....	36
3. Newfoundland, Regionalism, and Historical (mis)Representation.....	42
4. Medicine and the Humanities; walking where the waters blend and bind.....	50
5. Spatial Relations and Narrative Subjectivity; boundaries dissolved.....	59
6. Cultural Studies; A deluge of conceptual currents.....	63
7. Poststructuralism; a dispersal of tidal significance.....	69
Methodology; a mode of address and a way of thinking.....	74
1. Methods of <i>Figurata</i> Collection.....	82
a) Individual, Informal Interviews.....	83
b) Group Meetings.....	85
c) My Journal.....	87
2. Descriptions of Analysis Used; ways of walking as a <i>witness</i>	90
3. Description of Setting, Participants and Literary Texts; neither here nor there.....	94
a) The School and the Pub; folds of place.....	94
b) The Participants; collaborators in reading.....	97
c) The Literary Texts; books whose borders bleed.....	102
Bearing Witness:	
Desire, Subjectivity and Reading: Articulating the Use-Values of HAM.....	109
1. Dwelling, Marking and Confusing.....	111
a) The Gambler's Desire.....	112
b) Weaving and Marking of Conspicuous Cultural Difference (...tapping into the momentum of informality).....	120
c) Immersion in the Poetics of Text (and the <i>laughterly</i> slippages of humour).....	137
2. Branching and Looping.....	146
a) Reading as Territorial Expansion.....	146

b)	Inducing the Loop.....	153
2.	Forms and Structure.....	161
a)	Resistance, and Legitimation of Artistry in Medicine.....	162
b)	Sussing Out Literary Form and Authenticity.....	171
c)	A Measure and a Structure of ‘Sensible’ Counter-Normalcy.....	176
	Approaching the Periphery.....	185
	References.....	193
	Appendix 1.....	207
	Figure 1.....	208
	Figure 2.....	211
	Figure 3.....	212

Poetry

The Doctor's Cove is a Sensual Salt	1
Torn Merino	12
Recovering a Whale Bone at Rockport (Carol Hobbs)	13
Winter Hats	17
Con's Hill (Stephen Laird)	26
Around Fogo (Robin McGrath)	37
Caged Birds (Pamela Hodgson)	45
Moon Steaming	54
The toilet bowl is some thing	65
What I thought before the etymology	138
Lap, Crash, and Bluster	185
Hiking Trail, Bauline East	192

The Doctor's Cove is a Sensual Salt

I

The brush falls sharply on both sides of the trail,
cut as a warning.

They are claws that convulse
slowly clipping at my eyes
slowly ripping at my thighs.

The roots of the trees
with their black, calloused fingers
they are touching, also tickling
under covers of wet sand.

And feeling myself pulled,
I interrupt this throbbing.

A little looped root that tangles.
A little salty danger that spangles.

II

The waves, they stroll shouting
at that cove, raspy roarings.

I swear that my eyes are alone in this.

Ever since—
look at that froth—
It stops up my eyes.

She shines every surface.
(So delicate, so damn dear)

Don't come down here.
Don't come down here.
You shouldn't come down here.
There are some places you just shouldn't go to alone.

What is perceived as the most scandalous thing about this story is that *we are forced to participate in the scandal*, that the reader's innocence cannot remain intact: there is no such thing as an innocent reader of this text. In other words, the scandal is not simply *in* the text, it resides in our *relation to the text*, in the text's *effect on us*, its readers: what is outrageous in the text is not simply that *of which* the text is speaking, but that which makes it speak to us. (Felman, 2007, p. 18)

Impressions of a Place, Fractured Readings

Impressions of a place are always clouded by what has come before, thus my impressions and expectations of St. John's and Newfoundland have been touched, though not tarred, by my visit in 1997, at summer's tail end. I was hitchhiking then, from Port aux Basques to St. John's, and sitting on the sides of the many roads, the remembrance of wind is a visceral presence. And not a wind that lulls you to sleep, but a wind that cuts like a sharp dagger, rubs like sandpaper, shaking away anything that is not nailed down. The wind is but one element of this textual piece, and to regard something as a text is not at all to do it a disservice, but to recognize in its meaning and worth a myriad space of the possible. In this landscape/space¹ of literacy, this east coast wind also acts as a reminder that caresses us in its steadfast nature—a blowing that rubs severely, though keeps us standing as well. And along with the froth of the seaborne air, such gusts outline a grammar of land and sea, dependent on the shattering constancy of change.

¹ Since etymologically, 'scape' implies an escape, an antenna, a feather, a shaft of a column, or a leafless flower rising from the root, I attach to these grounded and focalizing concepts a spatially scattering quality as well, a dispersal that distracts the smug assuredness of *being sure*.

Reading is an activity always achieved from the vantage of a fractured self: Genet excites me, since my first encounters with *Our Lady* to my viewing of Fassbinder's *Querelle*, in ways indefinable, and through which I don't even crack his books to recall. Dostoyevsky reminds me of rainy overpasses outside of Corner Brook, and pages as dog-eared flaps, wrapped taut with grey duct tape and *Crime* scrawled on its width. Because of these instances, among others, I read every word in the textured landscapes/spaces of the world differently. But this incessant fracturing is spreading through cracks and splinters, and along countless intersecting lines and axes, and like muttered jargons of speech that work their way into our being, it is the liminal, in-between spaces of fracture where problematics of perception are made most evident, and at times, can also be embraced.

There was the hospitality inn on Bonaventure; housed by men whose government cheques were not their own, but dissipated in the hands of the homeowner, a woman who rambled disjointedly while serving mini deli cuts on stale crackers to us 18 year olds from upalong². The name of the place I forget, but remember it being composed of a dozen or so Catholic referents. In our room, the wallpaper came off in plaster chunks, with bubbly 1950s caricatures of little girls with ponytails and lollipops, and boys with shuffling feet to a jukebox's musical rhythms. Little musical eighth notes framed their heads. Charlie, in the next room on the top of three floors, eked out a living on a mountain of dried tobacco and resentment, but for all this he welcomed us with excited conversation. He spoke of Snowden, perched on a chair at the end of the staircase, motionless always but smiling the

² According to the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English*, 'upalong' refers to the geographical area, "to or on the mainland of Canada or the United States" (Story et al., 1990, p. 592).

same. As Charlie told us, thoughtful in his smiles, the money for his meds went straight to the hands of another.

Entering onto 'The Rock,' this time on a plane, I witness the jagged crags from my conspicuously craned neck. Having grown up on the west coast, the ocean is a familiar sight, but the qualities themselves, of the Atlantic and the Pacific, are of an almost incomparable nature, as I am also sure that the rain in London and Mumbai, while wet, hits your face at severely different angles. While both are vast, they are so in distinct ways. One seems violent while the other does only on occasion, and it is just a feeling I get, not something to explain.



From the moment the plane lands, there is one especially unshakeable concern that puts me ill at ease. It involves the question of how one ignores the search for the *magical* that accompanies any journey to an as-yet-'unknown' territory. As I step outside the airport, and fetch my dog from Air Canada cargo, I notice the train of orange taxis, stretched out in snake-like formation, and I ask myself, why? For some unspoken reason, I feel there has to be something special and enchanted about the way these cabs are lined up. While this questioning takes only a shake of the head to subside, my search for the *magical* perseveres for weeks, and in no way ever fully dissolves, persisting in whispers

and lingering pulsations. For as, “knowing a place clearly takes time,” it is more than registering simple facts³, but is also, “a subconscious kind of knowing,” such as when, “a new house ceases to make demands on our attention; it is as comfortable and unobtrusive as an old pair of slippers” (Tuan, 1977, p. 184).

Reading is here positioned as a complex and contradictory scurry of activities, which involves every aspect of my being, including those that are indivisibly physical, emotional and hopeful, past, present, and projected. But this ‘being’ is also not construed as something constructed in isolation, but in a dynamic and changing relation to the shifting elements of an always-unstable environment, and the textual markers that help to shape our understandings through language and other forms of communication. Social reading formations are unique in their acceptance of books as cultural products that require more than one voice, one tool, one set of eyes. Though every reading is partial, and though a bunch of partials colliding can never equal a whole, there is value in these very collisions.

I set out now to the edge of the campus at Memorial University. Sweating, I walk in straight to a pub, next to the flowing stream and square buildings like Lego blocks. Ordering an *1892*, a generously hopped ale that is not so bitter, named to commemorate a great and devastating fire, I seat myself down in the company of fellow readers (though my claims to fellowship are tempered by my status as interloper). The topic at hand is not one, but many—a landwash site of poaching in language, desire, and subjectivity, of constructing social and contextually transgressive meaning through friction and pleasure,

³ And I mean *knowing* as a continuous and bustling movement, “a ‘choice’ between multiple configurations of mastery without mastery” (Derrida, 2002, p. 37), not as something that will eventually sink into the fallacy of the *known*.

and imagining the possibilities drawn through and on a textual site. And like the splinters of a fractured self, we are always already in the squall of the literary imagination.

Purpose of the Study: Being Drawn Into the Squall

The following study engages the dynamic productions of meaning making in reading experience, as situated in the “cultural space of left over” (Ibrahim, 2004), and through an investigation of the dialogic encounters and personal reflections of individual readers engaged in a shared social circumstance: a reading group in the field of medical humanities, organized out of Memorial University’s faculty of medicine, St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador. This study is part of Dr. Judith Robertson’s larger, SSHRC-funded⁴ research project, “Saltwater Chronicles: Understanding Reading in the Regional Book Club of Newfoundland and Labrador”. This study, through the evaluation of a series of interviews conducted, recorded, and transcribed during September and October 2007, examines:

- a) The relationship between desire, subjectivity, and reading.
- b) The manner in which the interpretive activities of social reading can be construed as cultural studies work in practice, and as an endeavor whose primary accomplishments—as a praxis of reading— are as a result of its very inbetweenness,

⁴ This present study (initially titled *Readers in Context: Adolescent Reading Groups in St. John’s, Newfoundland, a Poststructural Interrogation of the Collective Reading Experience*) has been funded by SSHRC (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council), through the generous assistance of a Canada Graduate Scholarship, award number 766-2007-0764. Dr. Robertson’s study *Saltwater Chronicles: Understanding Reading in the Regional Book Club of Newfoundland and Labrador* was funded by SSHRC during 2003-2007, Grant # 0401 213 03, Dr. Judith P. Robertson, Principal Investigator. This funded research was approved by The Social Sciences and Humanities Ethics Research Committee (File #01-04-06) for active research to December 31, 2007.

a dynamic and transient form of habitation between familiar referential categories, not always in modes of sustained communication.

- c) The ideological contours of place, as a dynamic construct that operates geographically, pedagogically, socially, historically and artistically, as a condition and a location of meaning making for readers.

Throughout this inquiry there is a concern for meaning in subjectivity as contingent upon shifting contexts and conceptual tidal flows, and as posited through a series of open-ended, lived processes of textual and cultural reception and production. I here employ a broad understanding of textual forms, as “the very material of our daily lives, the bricks and mortar of our commonplace understandings...what we wear, hear, watch and eat” (Willis, 1990, p. 13). Texts are thus understood as both physically manifested representations in cultural products (such as books, magazines, films, etc...), and as the experiences encountered in everyday lived social relations, including the practices enunciated within shared reading communities, and the shorelines of a raging ocean. Cultural expression is significant as it relates to processes of meaning making, which always involves the movements of a subjectifying practice, of conveying meaning in particular contexts. As, “meaning making involves situating encounters with the world in their appropriate cultural contexts in order to know ‘what they are about’,” Bruner (1996) reminds us that, “it is this cultural situatedness of meanings that assures their negotiability and, ultimately, their communicability” (p. 3).

Another important theoretical assumption I make is that in the work accomplished through reading and interpretation, textual forms mediate, and are in turn mediated by, the rituals of discourse as they exist within particular cultural (and pedagogical) sites. Rituals

in discourse are here understood as limitations that operate on, and function prohibitively towards, situations of social composure. Through establishing modes of gesture, permissible ranges of signs, and the assumed validity and consequence of words as they are spoken, such rituals work to define the function and role of the speaker-subject in social discourse (Foucault, 1972, p. 215-237). Along with Foucault (1977), I appreciate the tendency for discourse, as a self-legitimizing system of beliefs, to “become the vehicle of the law,” and to appear as an ideological apparatus, whose tenets are seemingly beyond contestation (p. 112). Robertson’s (1999) views coincide with this assessment, portraying discourse as a concept that “describes how language can be used by those in power to make certain occurrences seem functional and natural” (p. 165). The links between such uses and the appearance of a discipline, as “an art of rank, (and) a technique for the transformation of arrangements,” are critical, as they locate people in hierarchical relations with material effect; positionings generally dependent on words as they are spoken, and the manners and forums in which they are expressed (Foucault, p. 146).

As “discourse wages its appeal to readers...through petitioning a belief in necessity and normalcy,” the discursive effects of textual consumption and appropriation exist, as well, in the actual moment of reading; the physical confrontation with textual form, which ensures that acts of ‘reading’ are also acts of ‘reading along with’ (Robertson, p. 166). Furthermore, the presence of a discipline, as ideological apparatus, also relates to acts of subjective interpellation through a process of “hailing” (Althusser, 1971), whereby individuals, rather than passively accepting their conditions (or a dominant mode of interpretation in reading), actively take up those discursive patterns by which their subjectivities are shaped. Even if such choosing occurs on an unconscious level or behind

closed doors, there is always, in reading, an agency of the reader that is not simply passive. It is a matter of choosing, but always limited by circumstances that are not.

The reading group that will be discussed throughout this study is the *Humanities, Arts & Medicine Interest Group*, known henceforth as HAM⁵, and whose mandate, as succinctly expressed on their website (<http://www.haminterestgroup.ca/>), is to, “meet more or less regularly to discuss art (writing, music, film, painting, etc...) that engages themes of health and illness.” Composed both of faculty members and students from Memorial University, HAM has been meeting since 2004, and though originally envisioned as a meeting space for medical students interested in discussing representations of medicine and health in the arts, it now includes members from disciplines as diverse as Paediatrics, History of Medicine and English Literature. The group meets approximately once a month, and the majority of the meetings take place in *Bitter's*, Memorial's Graduate student pub. The meetings at which I was present were attended by four people, whose interests, personal pursuits, and identities (though pseudonymic) will be discussed at a later point. I was also able to meet with one member who was at neither of the meetings, and one other who, though a past member of HAM, has since the summer of 2007 lived and worked in Montreal.

Having attended two HAM meetings, one in September, and one in October 2007, I was able to observe the group's reactions and interpretive practices applied to two diverse pieces of literature. The first, *Paula*, by Isabel Allende (1996), can be described

⁵ Although I bring this up again at a later point, it is important to note the *laughterly* qualities of HAM as the group's title, and its relation to the madness of Dr. Seuss, and an overall tendency towards 'hamming it up' and the slippages of humour. Since the appearance of HAM on the page is slightly jarring in its colossal capitalization, these promptings to chuckle (go ahead...chuckle) can never be overemphasized.

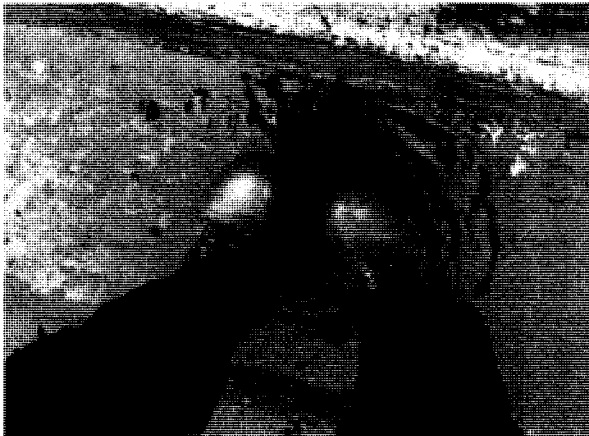
simultaneously as a confessional and journal, and an autobiographical work of magical realism. The second piece is *Quick*, a collection of poetry by Anne Simpson (2007), whose principal themes are death, the body, the natural world, transubstantiation, and the ways in which thresholds and borders manifest themselves in the liminalities of everyday life. Though the primary focus of my study is concerned with how the members of HAM interact with texts to constitute themselves subjectively as readers in discursive practice, and how they use literature to socially negotiate the porous boundaries between the fields of medicine and humanities, the subjectifying effects of these particular texts operate through structural conditions that cannot be taken for granted. The texts in question, in part because of their form, and in part because of their content, elicit and inform reading responses and impressions in a discrete and circumstantial way. In this context, Sumara (1996) writes that, “because all texts are particular forms that are historically, culturally, and politically effected and situated, the experience of engaging with *this* form rather than *that* form means participating in one complex set of relations rather than another” (p. 1), and it is in this manner that these particular texts function as a part of my overall sample of *figurata*⁶.

⁶ Throughout this study, instead of referring to the material culled from interviews, journals, transcriptions, etc, simply as *data*, I instead choose to refer to it all as *figurata* (figurative-data). Most importantly, *data* (often conceived as a contained entity) refers to the Latin *datum*, which means “something given,” and usually, as something *that is what is what is*, while I instead prefer to look at what I’ve assembled in a deeply metaphorical nature, whose meaning fluctuates, and whose shape depends more on context and the politics of representation than on the so-called immutable laws of nature. The meanings of *figurata* thus emerge through always-problematized acts of poaching, and with reference to what Derrida and Stiegler, in *Echographies of Television* (1996), call attention to, remarking that:

What I call “exappropriation” is this double movement in which I head toward meaning while trying to appropriate it, but while knowing at the same time that it

In my writing, I work through the lens of a *metaphoric breach*, bringing together unlikely traditions and disparate thinkers—geographies of reading, self and place. Through such intermingling, which troubles the trope of boundary in a type of border work, I engage a series of metonymic skids, where the work I do is not so much a working or writing at or within the boundaries of conceptual thought, but through them, where the borders themselves bleed, and ideas diffuse and seep.

This study is framed by two key metaphorical concepts: that of *poaching*, and that of the *landwash*. The use of metaphor is here enabled as it, “produces hybrid realities by yoking together unlikely traditions of thought” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 212). The former



concept is employed as it is found in de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), wherein reading itself is envisaged as an act of poaching, where, “everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others” (p. xii). De Certeau regards the act of reading as one of

clandestine struggle, where meaning in subjectivity is accomplished through a hidden struggle of unceasing inventiveness and translation, as the reader engages the possibilities of place through acts of dispersion and association, themselves motivated by a series of secret desires. If we are to think of, “walking as a space of enunciation” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 98), then acts of translation are like the insensible plodding of footsteps—they come to

remains—and while desiring, whether I realize it or not, that it remain—foreign, transcendent, other, that it stay where there is alterity. If I could reappropriate meaning totally, exhaustively, and without remainder, there would be no meaning. (p. 111)

pass regardless of whether or not we think about them, yet they're always involved in a string of decisions, where the choices I make determine where I go and what I poach, whether or not I'm aware of these choices at all. Also, *where* I poach is *where* I choose to value, for as, "place is a pause in movement...the pause makes it possible for a locality to become a center of felt value" (Tuan, 1997, p. 138). Though such a center in reading is always shifting, it is because of our unpredictably erratic movements, sometimes a

Torn Merino

Hearing little touches
 That bristle gristled grunts
 Standing stuck on a street's dusty corner
 Forgetting the order of feet
 Tapping my toes on the wood floor
 Stripped splinters have no soul
 Hands determinedly thrust into pockets
 Shaking with the devil tickles and shocks
 Meeting in prayer one hand plays the pew
 Through the absence of torn Merino

thrashing and other times a lulling,
 wherein "readers are travellers...across
 fields they did not write" (p. 174),
 inscribed with the lasting marks of any
 number of disciplinary techniques, that
 "reading has no place" (ibid.), and that
 place itself is a multi-perspectival concept,
 capable of inspiring countless readings.

However, far from implying a space of emptiness where nothing can develop, this lack works through a discursive tension of an unfounded place, as a generative space for innovative tactics in reading.⁷ In

⁷ As an 'innovative tactic' of a different sort, I intersperse a number of poetic performances throughout this study, either written by myself while I was in Newfoundland, or taken from the pages of *TickleAce*, a literary journal from St. John's. I look at poetry with an awareness that poetic perspectives are always already split at their core, and as the reader peers into the fog and makes choices out of silhouettes and outlines, poetry encourages and plays out this fracture. More than simply a poststructural application of intertextual delivery (though it fulfils this function as well...stripping the text of its center and stability), and while the poetry sometimes holds an oblique relation to the text by which it is surrounded, I also intend this relation to function as interruption, in the way that Brecht conceives of music in his theatre, wherein, "when the actor is to sing, he interrupts the action of the play, steps forward and delivers song...The music too

this isolation staged on a provisional battleground of books that are already read, not unlike Brecht’s character of *Mother Courage*, with her soldiers that are already dead, our temporary textual homes are built on the entrails of a scriptural economy whose coffers of meaning, though seemingly out of reach, are rewarded to those who struggle through poaching, both on an individual and a social level. Such cultural appropriations, however, are not without risk, and though creativity is nurtured in a liminal space, “the normal acts of life (can) become small acts of rebellion.” (Nafisi, 2003, p. 32). Not surprisingly, reading, as an impulse of the “extraordinarily ordinary instances of life” (ibid., 2003, p. 6), is itself subject to this transformation from the banal and trivial to the criminal and scandalous.

The second key metaphor originates from the phenomena of tidal flow and regeneration, the movements of which



encourage an impermanent space of natural

Recovering a Whale Bone at Rockport

In the beginning
the rib was golden,
a protrusion in the murky harbour.
The rib was primal
in the soft belly of kelp
and when you pulled, it resisted,
slid, curved like a scythe
out of seaweed.
Flesh dissolved into the all.

It reeked of dying
and I remembered otherwise —
my daughter’s birth,
and yes, those mudflats
in July at the mouth of the river.

(Carol Hobbs, *TickleAce* 39, p. 10)

flux, known in Newfoundland and Labrador as the ‘landwash.’ As a purely physical

has its independence. It acts not as mere accompaniment, but as commentary, and brings its own *gestus*” (Ewen, 1992, p. 229). This poetic *gestus*, then, brings out the qualitative notions of research in a moving and dynamic way between text and reader, a relationship that encourages different ways of seeing and responding, and moves along with the reader as well.

concept, the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* defines the landwash as, “The sea-shore between high and low tide marks, washed by the sea” (Story et al., 1990, p. 297). Story (1997) writes that, “in Newfoundland the ‘landwash,’ ...has long been recognized as a rich, productive area. It is a margin, and now in other places the margin is increasingly gaining recognition as a site of change and progress. In Newfoundland, they knew that all along” (p. vi). This is a term whose usage has also been applied to characterizations in literary works. Patrick Kavanagh (1996), in *Gaff Topsails*, writes, “Father McMurrrough shivers, but his soul burns with joy. He is in the middle of his sublime moment! He is within his landwash of possibility” (p. 333). Dwelling in the landwash, or at least the naming of it as such, is therefore a localized phenomenon, and one that depends on acknowledging the fruitful nature of liminal activities as methods of intellectual and affective uncoverings, refusing to limit oneself solely to a, “grazing on the ration of simulacra” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 166). Like the landwash, what matters most in reading is not what you find, but what you make of what you find. The landwash functions in three related ways: a) As a reprieve, and a predictable moment of pause, b) A space of adventure, where what is discarded by the waters is never known beforehand, as our readings themselves shift in a tidal way, according to where we are subjectively in time and space, c) A space of danger, and a place you must leave, a dynamic demonstrated by the violence of the Newfoundland shoreline (see Figure 1).

Trolling and poaching in a landwash, however, as both a threshold and a souvenir, is a movement hardly of strict delineation, and though its appearance might be taken for granted by some (that the tides roll in and the tides roll out is hardly occasion for surprise), it is also easily ignored and maligned. Ray Guy (1975), Newfoundland’s supreme satirist,

describes this location's vitality as enabling, "a fresh discovery every day," and as, "a mysterious world which is familiar to every juvenile with access to it, but which seems to have been either forgotten or dismissed by an adult population." (p. 13). In drawing a distinction between a *visit* and a *tour*, Chambers (2006) symbolizes the former as, "a single visit...or a viewing with no obligations," while the latter, where I locate the productive nature of the landwash, "is a form of renewal, a way of renewing and recreating people, places and beings and their relationships to one another" (p. 35).

HAM's readings are thus in a landwash site, visits that "become sites of inquiry and pedagogy" (ibid.), spurring a space of adventure where rocks are overturned in the hope of finding scurrying and scuttling crabs, but a space which also must be abandoned for safety from the crashing waves of the natural world, serving as an awareness of overarching discipline. The imperatives of poaching are thus made obvious; as poaching implies treading on land that is not one's known, and since the blending of theoretical categories brings a distinct awareness of this transgressive fact, there will always be a relative lack of safety that arises from, "arsing around down in the landwash" (Guy, 1975, p. 13).

To sum up, then, the purpose of this study is to investigate the discursive representations of reading, subjectivity, and desire, as enunciated by the members of HAM, a liminal and informal St. John's reading community in a largely professional and academic environment. Place, as a construct encouraging *placement*, is engaged as it relates to the space of reading, whose qualities are circumstantially shaped by the specific texts taken up by HAM in their collective endeavours, and through the personal experiences motivating each of the individual readers. My own experiences as a nascent

researcher, situated in a city and province about whose qualities I am only tangentially aware, are interwoven with unique divulgements of social reading and its effects, as I am myself poaching in a landwash site.

Though reading is traditionally framed as a solitary activity, I look at the particular dynamics at work in the meaning-making strategies of a collective reading experience, and how this environment serves the distinctly transformative end of repositioning reading as a socially formative encounter between readers and themselves, readers and readers, and readers and text/ual/ized landscapes/spaces. What concerns me is the nature and function of this fluid notion of ‘readership,’ in what ways its arrangements are altered when found in the context of a collective endeavour, “as a living cultural phenomenon implicated in transforming landscapes of power/knowledge, through indigenous processes that are common and ordinary, and yet largely invisible and unofficial,” (Robertson, 2003), and how literary fiction serves as a generative site for the interpretation of, “past, present, and projected” modes and movements of subjectivity (Sumara, 1998).

As, “A language—any language—is never fully comprehensible” (Palulis & Low, 2006, p. 49), this study also makes a disruptive contribution to the normalizing tendencies that govern the discourses shaping language arts education. Since reading is a ‘messy’ activity, through which stability and, “coherence leaks,” the regulations surrounding reading practices in places called schools are framed in the context of a clutter that is, “always already what is there” (ibid.).

Furthermore, this study contributes significantly to the growing research on book clubs and social reading formations, areas of inquiry that up until recently have largely inhabited a “zone of cultural invisibility” (Long, 2003, p. 8), and whose productive and

creative capacities have long been unrecognized and unsuspected. From such an environment, to ‘suspect’ such activity is itself a contributive act of social resistance, and an analysis concerned with exploring, “the geological structure of the book-alps, rather than confining itself to a view of the peaks” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 225). If, as Long (2003) writes, “social isolation depresses readership, and social involvement encourages it” (p. 12), then it is important to show, in qualitative detail, and through the reflexive descriptions of reading experience, how such encouragement is actually accomplished. By looking at the words of my respondents in a way that allows for meaning to seep prismatically, I maintain an, “attention to the particular and (an) avoidance of the generalizing claims that can so easily obliterate difference and specificity,” an obliteration where, “knowledge is lost, not gained” (Fuller, 2004, p. 11). In the following sections, I troll through the literary and murky conceptual space(s) that outline this study, building temporary bridges over the tides of reading.

Winter Hats

In this place of fog
 where the fog hardly burns off
 the cold is a brutal
 and a much bitter draft.

And though it steals away our sleep
 we rarely think hard on this
 —stuffing our winter hats
 full in the cracks where the wind blows.

If the mailman comes
 then yes, we’ll get a little cold.

Trolling in Conceptual Space(s): A Review of the Literature

Though in quantitative terms, the magnitude of research on book clubs and other social reading formations has dramatically increased over the past few years, there persists a popular tendency to lump them into pre-determined and homogenous socio-spatial categories, organized mostly along the lines of gender. However, regardless of such

restrictive assessments, since reading groups occupy diverse and liminal spaces between a plethora of cultural divides (private/public, individual/social, personal/political, arts/sciences), the strictness of such divides can themselves be transgressively thrown into question. The focus of this literature review is not, then, concerned with defining the limits of human behaviour, as much as it is a necessary navigation through the multifarious terrain of consumption and social practice.

This literature review focuses on five distinct areas, with some inevitable overlap. Attention is given to notions of cultural consumption that position reading as inherently productive and creatively inclined, recognizing the importance of everyday activity as a precondition for theoretical inquiry. Grounded and commonplace experiences, divested as they are in a constant search for imaginative meaning in the formation of subjectivities, is the realm in which reading groups are most appropriately located. What happens in HAM (as a space of resistance, of social inquiry, and as fodder for the literary imagination) is in many ways an integral part of the performativity and patterns of the everyday, since, “reading the everyday is a challenge that involves an active negotiation of differences—of literary as well as cultural values” (Fuller, 2004, p. 4). However, HAM also simultaneously acts as a means through which to cope with the everyday as well, as it is often survival and resistance that makes a *praxis of the everyday*, as a patterning that we pattern and which patterns us, possible in the first place. Interestingly, of the relation that holds between place and routine, Fuller (2004) describes, “the pattern of daily life,” as a, “common ground frequently put into words by Atlantic writers” (p. 4). Even though the events of HAM take place in a limited vector of temporality, such vectors always extend

to the unknown, both towards a future and from a past, yet also dwelling in them both at once, in *the present as a folding time of now*.

Secondly, I discuss some of the recent work undertaken in the field of book club research, a topic that concerns itself most frequently with the subjective functions of literature, and the ways that certain reading formations can subvert the persistence of social boundaries. Next, I look at some of the writings from Newfoundland authors who engage issues of representation in historical discourse, and the importance of establishing a local voice. I also introduce some of the major concerns surrounding the relationship between medicine and the humanities. Although the context of this topic, one of much deliberation, is far more involved than I can here access in its full detail, as the issue exists as an imperative for HAM, I strive to provide an adequate contextual overview. Lastly, since knowledge, and conceptualizations of self and other, are viewed less as the result of abstract observational procedures, than as “always emplaced and localised” (Crang & Thrift, 2000, p. 3), spatial relations, and how they impact on the dynamics of subjectivity and identity formation, are engaged as an integral component of understanding reading as a complicated set of negotiated positionings. Let us, then, stroll along the shifting shorelines of the key conceptual terms (reading, subjectivity, desire, ideology, liminality, hybridity) that are engaged throughout this review, and help to frame this study as a whole.

The question persists; what is ‘reading,’ and what purposes does it serve? Is it a purely passive experience, wherein a reader’s freedom and autonomy are limited only by the filtered dregs of *the literary* handed down from a social elite? Or is it something that provides an always contextually driven and socially generative, “equipment for living”

(Burke, 1974)? Or perhaps is it something in between, functioning both through, within, and against the rigidity of formal structures, and as a site of subordination and resistance, a simultaneous but always negotiated assertion of individual proportion and social reference.

Presently, I regard reading as an individually approached social practice of textual engagement, which acts as a source for the construction of both individual and collective subjectivities. For the concept of *subjectivity*, I refer to Weedon's (1997) description as "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (p. 32), where the *ways* involved include the constructions of meaning through language, any form of which brings with it "all manner of tensions" (Plummer, 2005, p. 358). Regardless of what reading *is*, then, subjectivity and reading are intimately linked and multidirectional processes - sites of construction and deconstruction. Kelly (1993) also agrees with this formulation, when she articulates subjectivity as, "the constitution of our conscious and unconscious selves, as well as of how these selves are seen and constituted by others," and that it functions as "a cultural production of which cultural forms can be said to be both constitutive and constituting" (p. 7).

For Flint (2006), it is altogether impossible to arrive at a homogenous portrait of a 'typical' reader, as individuals enter this sinuous space through varying terms, which are themselves in constant states of flux (pp. 512-513). The desires and motivations we bring to the relationships of reading vary, as desire itself assumes many forms, dependent on the contexts under which it is made manifest. For my understandings of desire, I engage the work of Felman (2007), who situates it as a constant striving for satisfaction in a void,

worked through the applications and patterns of language use (p. 99). Desire is also what motivates our textual endeavours, as “the arbitrariness of the sign necessitates its *reading*,” as a “constant temptation to fill in the void of desire” (ibid.). In this relationship of an enunciatory space, Robertson (2002) describes how, “language is the elaboration of desire,” and that a, “taking up of story holds out one way in which to learn how to talk about desire and thereby seek to make sense of it” (p. 199).

In discussing Lacan, Kelly (1993) articulates the perpetually partial nature of this association, a partiality that compels motive, and in which, “the fragmented subject is separated from yet manoeuvred by its unconscious self whose desires cannot be fully realized in the vehicle of its alienation, language” (p. 95). Language thus serves simultaneously as a point of



alienation, and as an inevitably imperfect enunciatory tool forever directed at greater



satisfaction. Since “meaning antedates the use of words in context” (Robertson, 1999, p. 167), the control I possess over constructions of meaning, ostensibly produced from particular readings, is always mediated through symbolic

conditions that predate my own enunciatory existence. Our affective relations with texts can, in large part, “only be accessed in and through the performed, that which can not be

fully captured through language” (Ibrahim, 2004, p. 113). From this understanding, Felman’s characterizations of desire also function to incorporate a corporeal meaning into our discursive patterns of “nonsemantic excess”, in what Butler (2006) refers to as, “the pulsional character of desire in language, the insistence of the body as it both motivates and derails the workings of speech” (p. 150).

On this point Felman is in agreement with de Man (1983), who describes, “our entire social language (as) an intricate system of rhetorical devices designed to escape from the direct expression of desires that are...unnameable—not because they are ethically shameful...but because unmediated expression is a philosophical impossibility” (p. 9). Along with Henry-Keon (2000), I will also defer to an understanding of desire as “primarily a site for constructing meaning,” and that it “stems from and signals who we are and is affected by cultural norms and practices” (p. 13). In this context, “the *content* of desire is neither timeless or arbitrary, but has a historical specificity” (Henriques et al. 1984, 222), whose articulations weave through a series of intersecting and competing discourses.

Before I discuss the relation between ideology and discourse, and the functions of discourse in language, it is important that I first establish a working definition of what *discourse* is. Put simply, and insofar as it should always be understood in connection to structures and modes of power, a *discourse* here implies, “a historically evolved set of interlocking and mutually supporting statements, which are used to define and describe a subject matter” (C. Butler, 2002, p. 44). If we are to use C. Butler’s seemingly straightforward definition, the most important aspects of understanding how a discourse works is to investigate how it is used, by whom it is put into service, and towards what

ends. In other words, it is to ask: who benefits from the specificity of a particular grafting, through language, of an interlocking discursive structure? Ashcroft et al. (1989) refer to a *discourse*, “as a system of possibility for knowledge” (p. 167), and make clear the fundamental relation that exists between power, language and truth:

To speak of a...discourse...is to invoke certain ways of thinking about language, about truth, about power, and about the interrelationships between all three. Truth is what counts as true within the system of rules for a particular discourse; power is that which annexes, determines, and verifies truth. Truth is never outside power, or deprived of power, (and) the production of truth is a function of power.

I approach *ideology* as it exists in relation to discourse and imperatives of a structural nature. In this study, ideology is understood as, “a complex and contradictory system of representations (discourse, images, myths) through which we experience ourselves in relation to each other and to the social structures in which we live” (Newton and Rosenfelt, 1985, xix). Ideology is also a structure of representations “through which we experience *ourselves*...for the work of ideology is also to construct coherent subjects” (ibid.). This *system*, however, will henceforth be viewed in a plurality, and as a *series of systems*, as “ideologies do not operate through single ideas; (but) in discursive chains, in clusters, in semantic fields, in discursive formations” (Hall, S., 1996, p. 19).

Language and social behaviour exist as imperfectly reproducible forms of, “the material registration of ideology, the modality of its functioning, (which)...always occur in social sites, linked with social apparatuses” (ibid.). However, more than just a system of semiotic representation, S. Hall (1996) views ideology as it exists in social practice, and as “the work of fixing meaning through establishing, by selection and combination, a chain

of equivalences” (p. 13). This *work's* function, then, is “to reproduce the social relations of production...(which) are necessary to the material existence of any social formation or any mode of production” (p. 19). For this study, ideology exists both as a discourse about subjectivity and the positioning that individuals achieve in relation to a variety of ideological constructs, as well as an issue involving reproduction, and the organization of social relations. Ideology is not, therefore, just a monolithic construct, but is a specific fracturing and meeting-place, whose prismatic qualities establish appearances of relations that may seem closed, but actually contain within themselves hybridity at their very core. And just like the landwash, constructs of ideology are not mysteries, but can actually be engaged in by individuals, in determining the depths of what is hybrid in such a place.

Lastly, the related though markedly different concepts of *liminality*, and *hybridity*, are invoked as they relate to the awareness that “no culture is full unto itself” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 210), and that all instances of culture, subjectivity, and representation are necessarily “hybrid, dynamic, context-specific, and negotiated” (Asher, 2002, p. 86). The practice of liminal creativity, as “an art of being in between” (de Certeau, p. 30), is not composed through identity, but rather through modes of identification, “a process of identifying with and through another object, an object of otherness” (Bhabha, 1990, p. 210), and “an installation of difference at the very site of the meaning event” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 76). By operating in the contested and shifting categories stirring in a hybrid space, and “entangled in the artifice of boundaries” (Trinh, 1992, p. 145), there can develop in this struggle to situate oneself a “third space which enables emergent positions” and the possibility of “articulating different, even incommensurable cultural practices and priorities” (Bhabha, p. 210). Difference can act as a marker that people decide to rally

around subjectively. It is through conceptualizing the activities of HAM as a “working at the borderlines” (Trinh, p. 137), that the enterprise can be viewed as the creation of a hybrid space, though it bears traces of the pasts from which it has come. The following sections unravel the floorboards of my conceptual bridges, from which I peer in the fog, and *witness*⁸ the tidal poaching of HAM’s landwash readings.

⁸ I here use the term *witness*, as illustrated by Boler (1999), who encourages learners and teachers alike not to be passive bystanders of the lives of “others,” both fictional and otherwise, but instead to labour as *witnesses*, engaged in a, “process in which we do not have the luxury of seeing a static truth or fixed certainty” (p. 186). Witnessing here implies a “dynamic process,” an, “invitation to question,” and an inclination towards interrogating our, “historical responsibilities and co-implication,” in the pressures faced by those groups and individuals set apart from the dominant culture(s). To *bear witness* thus implies a type of “double-bind,” even if it emerges only from the rhetorics of the situation, wherein, “to be a witness consists in seeing, in hearing, etc., but to *bear witness* is always to speak, to engage in and uphold, to sign a discourse” (Derrida, 2002, p. 94). “As modes of instruction,” Simon and Eppert (1997) claim that testimonial accounts, “carry the injunction ‘listen and remember,’” and furthermore, that, “the pedagogical character of testimonial accounts lies in their structure as communicative acts,” through which testimony, and testimonial witnessing, is *marked* as a semiotic dispatch; “a moment of apprehension and communication in which one testifies to another who, in turn, chooses or is impelled to represent what was seen or heard, thus continuing the process with someone else” (p. 176).

I also use the term as a tactical substitute for the words *explore* and *discover*. Because of the oppressive and exploitative history of exploration, colonization, resettlement, and ‘discovery’ in Newfoundland and Labrador, experienced by both the Native inhabitants of the land as well as settlers descendent from European cultures, in terms of the language I use, I affect a critical and judicious stance towards the persistence of such misery, which in some places continues to this day. Instead of distancing myself, I instead move myself closer, at least in terms of a linguistic topography. A significant illustration of such continued colonization is among the Innu territory in the tundra of the Labrador Peninsula, referred to by some as, “Canada’s Tibet” (Samson, Wilson, & Mazower, 1999). I realize that such tactics in no way erase my complicity, or the privileges I have been afforded (nor are they directed towards such ends), but instead admit an awareness of the tangible, and hardly innocent, collusion of everyday textual objects, and the layers of history, place and people, which seep through linguistic deposits.

The point I am making here corresponds to Butler’s (2003), concerning the fact that we never write alone, and the impossibility of ever providing a coherent “account of oneself,” which is, “never fully mine, and never fully for me” (p. 27). Speaking of this impenetrability, Butler writes:

The norms by which I seek to make myself recognizable are not precisely mine. They are not born with me; the temporality of their emergence does not coincide with the temporality of my own life. So in living my life as a recognizable being, I live a vector of temporalities. (p. 26)

And at the point where accounts take off:

My narrative begins in *media res*, when many things have already taken place to make me and my story in language possible. And it means that my story always arrives late. I am always recuperating, reconstructing, even as I produce myself differently in the very act of telling. My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I have no definitive story. (p. 29)

Butler thus poses a series of questions:

There is that in me and of me for which I can give no account. But does this mean that I am not, in the moral sense, accountable for who I am and for what I do? And if I find that despite my best efforts, a certain opacity persists and I cannot make myself fully accountable to you, is this ethical failure? Or is it a failure that gives rise to a certain ethical disposition in the place of a full and satisfying notion of narrative accountability? (Ibid.)

I, too, write with others, in the seeps, folds, and layers of witnessing. And as, “our being is inheritance, (and) the language we speak is inheritance” (Derrida, 2002, p. 26), and “our lives...are always other lives, and always in the making” (Robertson, 2006, p. 181), the thumping in the floorboards makes a brutal and persistent noise.

1. **Consumption as a Landwash Production:** In the landwash, readings flow back and forth, shifting and merging in the spaces through which they dwell. A traditional understanding of cultural consumption, however, is that it flows in one uninterrupted direction: from the producer to the consumer, from the author to the reader. As a requisite for this structure, all texts are perceived to contain a hidden treasury of meaning, constituted “as a sort of island that no reader can ever reach” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 171), including those who read in the nature of a pirate, since the very questioning of authority, though possible, here constitutes a breach of ‘legitimacy’. Belief in such notions of a necessary passivity in reading provides the sustenance necessary for a literary elite, and the knowledges produced from the maintenance of such a hierarchy. In his belief that, even if repressed, possibilities must exist for a reading experience that is not wholly submissive, de Certeau proposes that a reader’s autonomy can only be assured recognition if the social relationships of textual engagement are completely overturned, and if reading is viewed as an act of creative, “secondary production” (p. xv). In this, “network of antidiscipline” (ibid.), in which cultural consumers, from drivers in Rome to peasants in Brazil, “metaphorize the dominant order (and make) it function in another register” (p. 32), the

Con’s Hill

You can read these hills in translation
but to capture the thrill of their speed
you must hold your walking stick against them
stand still and allow the squandered rain
to roll from their backs with gossip.

These hills are sly and playful
they reach under seas when the seas least expect it
they tickle the waves, they clown around at night
at great *vitesse* –
you can hear the pitter
of little foothills.

Listen. They prance to a long-gone tune.
At dawn the scattered rain will murmur
lovely prayers from the book of stones.

(Stephen Laird, *TickleAce* 40, p. 5)

parallels between consumption and interpretation, as a praxis of the everyday, is accorded significance as an apt point of entry into subversive textual mediation.

In *Beyond Communication* (1990), Bogdan and Straw trace a history of conceptualizations regarding practices of reading and consumption, whose divergences depend primarily on how meaning is understood as being constructed, and where the meaning in reading resides (pp. 1-18). Straw and Sadowy (1990) propose three major movements that have existed within the history of conceptualizations about reading—a *transmission*, a *translation*, and an *interactive* notion of reading (p. 22). The *transmission* notion, predominant in the nineteenth century, operated according to a “conduit metaphor” of reading, where “information, knowledge, or meaning (is) shunted from the author to the reader via the vehicle of the text” (ibid.). In pedagogical terms, the student is constructed passively, as a *tabula rasa* to be written upon, and the text is perceived as a wholly transparent entity, “whose power of communication lay in the power of rhetoric” (p. 23), and thus, as a communicative act, whose functions are found in the author’s intentions. If we think again about reading the shifting shorelines of the landscapes/spaces of the literary imagination, such a conceptualization focuses not on the adventure of the landwash, but instead, on the possibilities for a purely mechanical and regimentalized extraction of resources.

In the *translation* conceptualization of reading, “authorial dominance was overshadowed by a new phenomenon, text dominance” (p. 26). Though the supremacy of such an approach lasted into the 1970s, it is still the central understanding of reading within most educational institutions. In general, the ‘message’ of the text here lies in the structure and style of the written work, whose meaning is determinate and identifiable. In

an educational context, skill in reading can thus be measured objectively, and the direction of the communicative act flows directly from text to reader (p. 38), like land surveyors, translating a landscape's textual meanings.

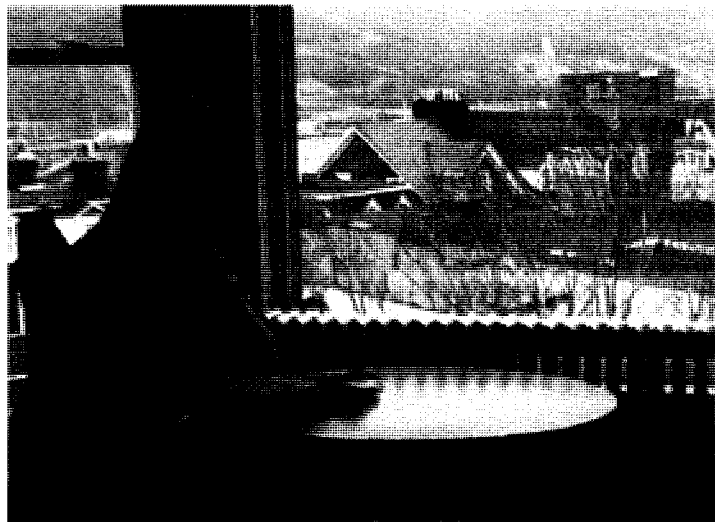
In the *interactive* theories of reading, attempts are made to deal with, "both the information encoded in the text and the knowledge and experience of the reader" (p. 39). Textual features here act as signals of the shared sets of knowledge that exist between author and reader, and language is understood no longer as a direct representation of reality, but instead, through its gestural functions, aimed towards experiences or meanings. Most importantly, these theories emphasize, "The rise of the role of the reader in the act of reading" (p. 45), as poachings of the literary imagination are accorded certain legitimacy.

In a more recent innovation, Straw (1990) identifies the contemporary *transactional* theory of reading conceptualization, which suggests that, "reading is a more generative act than the receipt or processing of information or communication" (p. 68). No longer is the meaning in reading solely an issue directed towards communication, originating either in the text or the author, but instead, "is constructed by the reader *during* the act of reading" (ibid.). The purposes and functions of reading can thus vary according to context and reader, but the use-value of reading lies most importantly within the requirements of the reader herself (p. 74). In the space of shifting shorelines, room is made not only for the risks of unanticipated exploits, but also, that a lack of knowing and discrete anticipation is a reader's imperative.

Many of our textual relations are set about through the ostensibly 'illegitimate' avenues of emotion, affect, and corporeal attachment, as a "sensuous, profoundly emotional experience...that for all its ethereality clearly is extraordinarily physical as

well” (Radway, 1997, p. 13). Ibrahim (2004) refers to notions of taste, and to the mostly inarticulable feelings (*Jouissance* as a “semi-orgasmic rush”) that occur within us when we approach, or are encroached upon by, an instance of music or art to which we feel significantly connected. In a similar manner, Warhol (2003) asks, “How does reading feel?” (p. ix), and qualifies the inherent multidirectionality of reading as “a physical act...a cognitive activity, a psychological process, a political engagement, an intertextual encounter, an aesthetic exercise, an academic discipline, a communitarian endeavour, a spiritual practice, a habit...(that) always happens in and to a body” (ibid.). Since such effects are not only the result of abstract connections on an affective plane, but also reveal an author’s manipulation

(deliberate or not) of, “formal aspects of cultural expression in stimulating readerly responses” (Flint, p. 530), the production of meaning through reading is always a mediated and negotiated enterprise, and thus, the



significance of the textual structure is itself an important dynamic within the reading experience. At times, the encounter with aesthetic form, or the confusion surrounding confrontations with shifting borders of genre, can also affect a breakdown in the traditional correspondences of meaning and subjectivity, positioning the reader as an

always-fractured self. Brecht (1978), in relation to his theory of *Verfremdungseffekt*⁹, which works to implicate a viewer in the choices of dramatic action, writes through the filter of a character that garners many of his sympathies:

If we observe sorrow on the stage and at the same time identify ourselves with it, then this simultaneous observing is a part of our observation. We are sorrowful, but at the same time we are people observing a sorrow—our own—almost as if it were detached from us, in other words like people who aren't sorrowful, because nobody else could observe it so detachedly. In this way, we aren't wholly dissolved in sorrow. (p. 47)

And later still, in regards to crying, as more than simply a manifestation of this dissolve:

Lamenting by means of sounds, or better still words, is a vast liberation, because it means that the sufferer is beginning to produce something. He's already mixing his sorrow with an account of the blows he has received; he's already making something out of the utterly devastating. Observation has set in. (ibid.)

In this way, form can determine the responses of viewers (and readers) in ways that are not merely instrumental or positivist, but through encouraging fractured encounters with self, and involving moments, sometimes simultaneous, of recognized implication and observation.

The dynamics of cultural consumption are hardly happenstance, and as Bourdieu understands the issue of personal 'taste' as more than aesthetic inclination, but also as an element of ideological discourse and class difference, he writes, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (1984, p. 6). Moreover, these differences always have

⁹ Translated as distancing, estrangement, alienation, a-effect...making strange that which is otherwise familiar.

repercussions beyond the realm of artistic proclivity, as “at stake in every struggle over art there is also the imposition of an art of living...which casts every other way of living into arbitrariness” (p. 57). Every discourse is always about more than just the structure of language, as it also concerns the knowledges produced through such language, and the practices surrounding its use (Hall, S., 1997), a prioritizing which ensures that other modes of language use, ways of speaking and acting, become marginalized. The way one reads is thus not without contextualized consequence, and has political repercussions whose effects can alienate, depriving both emotionally and materially.

According to Hebdige (1979), youth subcultural consumption is a process of ‘bricolage,’ in which commodities provided by the culture industries are appropriated by youth for their own purposes and meanings. Jenkins (1992) promotes the idea that ‘fans,’ passionate members of textual and cultural communities, in the vanguard of an involved relationship with different forms of mass media, are among the most creative, critically and socially engaged consumers of popular culture. He illustrates how such media consumers participate in perpetually shifting textual relationships defined through rereadings, performed within spaces of communal inhabitancy rather than solitary enclaves. Concerned with members of reading communities as “cultural producers,” his study of fandom focuses on the celebration not of “exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings” (p. 284). Barthes (1974) also privileges acts of rereading, as a “play which is the return of the different,” and which “alone saves the text from repetition.” He also characterizes such endeavours politically, as “contrary to the commercial and ideological habits of our society” (p. 16).

Johnson (1983) emphasizes how “literary constructions” (p. 52), which typically exist in coded categories of genre and style, can “have a...wider social currency” (ibid.), when analyzed in the context of their everyday uses. It is in this context that Benjamin (1999) reminds us that “books were originally objects for use—indeed, a means of subsistence” (p. 230). Johnson also focuses on the counter-hegemonic and ideological nature of such uses, whether their outcomes, “reproduce existing forms of subordination,” or if they instead, “point to alternative social arrangements” (p. 77).

Like Johnson, Willis (1990) positions cultural commodities not as ends in themselves that can be judged of their own merit, but instead, that they “are catalyst, not product; a stage in, not the destination of, cultural affairs” (p. 18). Asserting that, “human consumption does not simply repeat the relations of production – and whatever cynical motives lie behind them,” he shares a critique of productivism also acknowledged by Moi (1991), wherein a text’s accorded meanings are held not as inherent, but as something that will change depending on the context under which consumption occurs. Likewise, Felman stresses the “essential incompleteness in any system of representation” (Sun, Peretz, & Baer, 2006, p. 2), encouraging us to investigate the ambiguous interruptions in literature, and to also “make a place for nonknowledge” (p. 3). By revealing that in every discourse there is a dimension that remains always in excess, she reminds us of the value of “the unmastery, of the impotence, and of the unavoidable castrations that inhere in *language*” (Felman, 2006, p. 37).

Barthes (1979) contends that to view any writing as an entity is to place regulations on its multiple nature (pp. 74-75). In arguing for an, “irreducible plurality,” Barthes proposes that texts exist not as limited structures, but in a state of movement and

intertextuality, where “the networks are many and interact...(and) we gain access to it by several entrances” (1974, p. 5). He also draws an important distinction between writerly and readerly texts, the latter of which move towards closure, are ordered by a non-ambiguity prompted by a “fear of forgetting” (p. 105), and are “products (and not productions)” (p. 5), meaning they require less in the way of interaction from the reader. Writerly texts, on the other hand, “refuse to reassure the reader” (Kelly, 1993, p. 48), and make of the reader a producer of the text. They offer the reader more variety in subject positioning, presenting subjectivity as “a plenary image” (Barthes, p. 10) in “a perpetual present” (p. 5), where reading’s plurality, “signifies ceaselessly and several times, but without being delegated to a great final ensemble” (p. 12). From this understanding, where subjectivity in reading is like a symphony played out in its moments of composition, I situate HAM as a writerly text, a text that the members write *on*, and simultaneously write *from*. It functions as the site of production, and product of, polyvalent textual meaning in a metonymic labour of language, where “named meanings are swept toward other names...reassemble...(and) so the text passes” (p. 11), and so the waves crash.

Following from de Certeau’s understanding of reading as a space of “secondary production,” and Foucault’s notorious questioning of literary ownership in *What is an Author?* (1984), I also propose a reconceptualization of the spaces of social reading—and what it is that emerges in the dialogues of a collectivity—as intersubjective moments of co-authoring, in which learners, readers and writers are encouraged, “to negotiate meaning and to learn literary strategies from each other” (Dale, 1997). In the field of adult literacy learning, Himley et al. (1996) propose co-authoring as a means through which to expose, and dis/re/enable, the structures of power in literacy learning, “a kind of power based on

desire and...a type of love based on the deep admiration for learning about language” (p. 184), and in the ways that we never read alone, and language is always already spoken, “this power both binds and is binding” (ibid.).

It is important to here make reference to Bakhtin’s theory of *dialogism*, which, in emphasizing the struggles that inhere in language use, views language, “as part of a larger whole where all the possible meanings of a word interact, possibly conflict, and affect future meanings” (Dale, 1997, p. 4). In this understanding, even our thoughts are dialogic, and as they take shape through myriad associational collisions, they occur through what Bakhtin refers to as *heteroglossia*, the integration of, “another’s speech in another’s language” (1981, p. 324, emphasis in original). In relation to how I conceptualize HAM as a writerly text, the participants engage in tactics of co-authoring—“a battle over language,” which extends beyond the fragments of their individual readings—as the collusions and collisions of HAM, “the hybrid fragment that appear(s) in public,” takes on the supple shape of a woven fabric, the tossing and turning of a mound of sand, becoming, “the symbol of each co-author’s...negotiation with language to produce the text” (Himley et al. 1996, p. 185).

Himley et al. also conceptualize co-authoring as a type of borderwork, which, when successful, enables writers and readers to learn, “what it really means to recognize social borders, to cross them, to resist them, to succeed or fail, to enter the larger community of readers” (p. 186). In this capacity to, “work within each other’s horizons” (p. 187), the readers in HAM engage with their differences in a productive way, allowing for such seemingly directionless scribbling to continue on an always incomplete text, as painted walls that can always have a further layer of graffiti. Functioning within a, “zone

of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1978), the readers in this group achieve together what they could not achieve alone; which is not to say that reading practices of a solitary nature are necessarily lacking in any substantive way, but that the reader’s engagements with the texts, as shiftings of the tidal shorelines, will differ, at least qualitatively, in some fundamental ways.

2. Book Clubs; groups that poach: In *Reading Lolita in Tehran: A Memoir in Books*, Nafisi (2003) presents a stunning picture of a group of forcibly clandestine woman readers, and of the manner in which reading, when accomplished in a hostile environment, tends to be increasingly recognized as an activity poised in a liminal social space; as “in between an intensely private, inward experience...[and] as inseparable from a social world” (Flint, 2006, p. 512). Nafisi’s work is especially important, in that it describes a series of reading experiences where literature serves the dual purpose of: a) providing a form of escape and pause, through “little pockets of freedom” (p. 25), from an ideological regime where the limits of imagination itself are under attack, and b) providing the conceptual tools, through identification and interpretation in circumstances of social reading, for questioning that which is taken for granted, namely, “traditions and expectations when they seemed too immutable” (p. 94). Speaking from the location of a school of medicine, which can be sometimes hostile or unreceptive to the unstable nature of the literary imagination, the members of HAM, though situated in a location fundamentally different from Nafisi’s narrations, also tend to look at literature as a means of navigation and migration, through an environment where the prevailing discourse is one of unambiguous certainty.

In Long's work (2003), one of the significant points regarding woman's reading groups is the difficulty of being able to describe them as either wholly public or private endeavours. The distinction here is made to function as a binary, which figures reading as either a social or a solitary activity, areas of mutually exclusive interest. Since "understanding

reading as a wholly solitary activity locates it securely in the realm of private life" (p. 16), there is a tendency for scholars to classify such situations as marginal and inconsequential. It is only once "the ideology of the solitary reader is unsettled," that

Around Fogo

The plump, mild woman baking pies at the B & B
 Talks about the lady Mountie with the ring on her finger,
 The men out on the crab boats and the women in the plant,
 How she and they plan their escape from Fogo Island.
 They are still mending their houses, mowing grass, painting fences,
 But planting gardens in Rodger's Cove
 Or sending letters of inquiry to Toronto and Vancouver.
 Only the old nurse from the cottage hospital
 And her wire thin husband, wheezing in agreement,
 See life around Fogo in the future,
 Plan for the town that will exist after they
 Are placed in their graves like the trees and rose bushes
 They plant in their garden but will never see mature.
 They reminisce about the tinned fish with rice
 They used to can at Earle's, how good it was,
 And he says he went all the way to Scotland
 Just to find her, when he'd never even seen Seldom.
 They are sure that after the upheaval things will
 Settle into balance again, a few hundred souls
 Happily in love and hate with one another.
 Then evening comes with black icebergs on a white sea
 And morning turns it all to blue again.

(Robin McGrath, *TickleAce* 39, pg. 90)

hitherto unnoticed relationships in the sociocultural world can be made visible, and that "cultural consumption appears less a private and passive affair than one source of social as well as individual identity" (p. 17). In fact, it is the very interstitial nature of reading that may provide a "very interesting site for investigating the relationship between the public

and private aspects of social life” (p. 221), and where the gap between solitary reading and collectivity may effectively be bridged.

Historically, Long writes that the privileged images of readers, both in popular discourse and artistic representation, have been those engaged in tasks of cloistered erudition and academic isolation, and that in this tendency to minimize “the possible variety of readers, readings, and uses of literature” (p. 27), the social dynamics of reading have been rendered virtually invisible by the academic world (Devlin-Glass, 2001). In her analysis of women’s reading groups in the United States, Long identifies such formations as “counterhegemonic publics,” as they comprise readers engaged in social practices markedly different from those of the academic tradition. Even though the growth of a radical conceptual awareness is not always inevitable amongst such groups, “they allow members to think about themselves and the social world in ways that...provide critical purchase on the dilemmas facing contemporary women” (Long, 2003, p. 72). Such groups also fulfil a role as “textual communities,” in what Fuller (2004) describes as, “an arena in which the politics of language and power can be actively engaged and negotiated within a group” (p. 8). Fuller also determines a dialogically and dialectically productive necessity in such structures, and that a useful way to think of such communities is as, “groups of people engaged in dialogue and negotiation with one another in order to generate the best possible narrative expression of their lives” (p. 10).

Devlin-Glass (2001) understands women’s reading groups as “communities of practice,” in which issues of social taste are made evident in the book selection process. Important for her is how women position and hierarchize themselves in relational spaces, and how the book club itself functions as a guarantor of ‘middlebrow’ cultural currency.

However, in stressing that reading practices can never be pre-determined according to gender or 'race,' Newlyn (2000) argues that, "we must avoid making essentialist generalizations...(since) no reading-practice can be straightforwardly labelled" (p. 524). Nonetheless, for Flint (2006), a consciousness of the effects of one's gendered subjectivity as one reads, "is inseparable from one's understandings of the practice of consuming...or cautiously nibbling at books" (p. 513), and is never an isolated or easily identifiable affair, since, "it would be misleading...to take 'the woman reader' as if this term presupposed a fixed set of responses" (Flint, 1993, p. 42).

Laity (Ed.), in the *Left Book Club Anthology* (2001), presents an historical account of the mass fervour and idealism surrounding the formation, in 1936, of *The Left Book Club* of Britain. Within this subscription club, which developed in Europe during a decade haunted by economic devastation and the ascendant appeal of a populist totalitarianism, literature itself was recognized as a possible agent of necessary social and political change. In an attempt to motivate "argument on any conceivable subject" (p. ix), the titles chosen for dissemination among the club's members, in their function as tools for a radical praxis of reading, were purposely diverse, often divisive, and always able to provoke discussion.

Much of the recent popular interest in reading groups has had to do with the influence of Oprah's Book Club (OBC), whose main reciprocal functions have been to entertain and to educate (Farr, 2005). For M. Hall (2003), OBC is one of the more pertinent examples of a quintessentially modern reading formation, which treats literacy as an arbiter of ideological practice in the dissemination of a discourse about literature. On this topic, Long (2003) has written that, "literacy, and the practices of reading it produces in our society can never be divorced from questions of power, privilege, exclusion and

social distinction” (p. 21). As a “literacy sponsor,” M. Hall believes Oprah teaches a false impression of intimacy, which in the end, though it undeniably serves an immediate purpose amongst readers in their reading activities, also results in establishing her presence as an unquestionable cultural authority, a status that holds true whether or not one is an actual ‘member’ of the club. The mark of the *Oprah’s Book Club* sticker functions as a resonant representative symbol that, even though it produces a variety of meanings, also fosters a lasting and polarizing significance, the consequences of which have yet to be fully assessed.

As Rooney (2005) acknowledges, OBC is vastly more complex than many of its detractors have allowed for, though she also believes that Oprah, in framing her discussions on television, and with the limited space (both conceptual and temporal) she allows for conversation, runs the risk of appropriating texts possible of multiple uses and interpretations, “to a single-minded, socially controlled, and largely therapeutic end” (p. xii). Kaufman (2004) also shares this apprehension, though it is tempered by a simultaneous valuation, in that OBC presents an academically alternative, though mainstream, arena for engagements with reading and literature. Davis (2004), looks at the fact that although many of Oprah’s viewers (and ‘readers’) are white women, Oprah has chosen an inordinate number of books written by African-American women. The political consequences of these selections are such that, though they do work to foster emotions of cross-racial compassion, and provide a unique potential for affective textual relations, there is a danger that such identification may act as a colonizing influence, reaffirming the social hierarchies in Western society.

Radway (1984), in her ethnographic study with woman readers of romance fiction, argues that the narrative codes which frame works of romance fiction are structured in such a way to condition particular modes of identification for particular types of women. The use-value of such fiction emerges partly from the women who read the text, and partly from how the text provides the substance of what the women require. In her later work with the Book-of-the-Month Club (BOMC), Radway investigates how the book selection process, in an organization of literary subscription, leads to the production of tastes and expectations that function, “as an integral part of a new form of cultural production...as well as an exercise in social training and pedagogy” (p. 262). Through this marking of an inside and an outside, and a pursuant delimiting of acceptable intellectual spaces for the rising professional managerial class, reading, as “a fragile pleasure” (p. 44), serves a myriad of functions, from “ritual, as a kind of public performance” (p. 36), to “occasions of feeling, as opportunities for experiences and emotional response” (p. 43). Although she navigates through the ways that the editorship of the BOMC maximizes the relationship between the commercial and the literary in the production of mass-market literature, what emerges foremost from Radway’s assessment is a recognition of reading as a complex and ambiguous activity to which readers bring a variety of needs, and how the BOMC locates their task, “in a middle space between two extremes” (p. 112), a positioning insinuated among familiar modifiers, but which creates “a permeable space between regions otherwise kept conceptually distinct” (p. 153).

Within the literature that exists regarding reading in social circumstances, there has been much attention paid to the impact that gender can have on the reading experience, and that reading, as a social endeavour, has traditionally been viewed as a gendered

activity. Following from this association, there has generally been a systematic lack of representation for social reading in the academic milieu (as an exception, see Radford, 2007). However, in the literature, there also appears an obvious gap in regards to how a reader's spatial situatedness impacts on the substance of their reading, and how everyday practices of reading are shaped by their surrounding geographical and topographical environment (Robertson, 2008, Robertson & Radford, 2008). "The study of reading, in this as in any period," Flint (1993) writes, "involves examining a fulcrum: the meeting place of discourses of subjectivity and socialization" (p. 43). For the reader in Newfoundland, and for those in HAM, who are located between conventional tropes for conceptualizing reading experience, one weight on this fulcrum is the impact of spatiality, understood here as, "the reader's sense of temporal and historical situatedness in a place, and his or her intimate elaboration of meaning-making within a geography" (Robertson, 2008). The following sections of this review will enunciate the problematics that inhere within this notion of spatiality as it applies to HAM, a site of liminal poaching in the literary landwash.

3. Newfoundland, Regionalism, and Historical (mis)Representation

In discussing how cultural memory interacts with the construction of social and individual subjectivities in Newfoundland and Labrador, Bannister (2002), introduces the dilemma posed by the



increasingly blurred distinctions between heritage and history, which though they “may be members of the same cultural family...are not the same thing” (p. 185). Regarding history as “an inquiry into the past which grows more opaque with each passing year,” heritage, though its basis in factual reality may be tenuous, “offers a clear vision of cultural memory” (ibid.), and stresses the importance of narrative retelling, a mode of address only slightly reliant on factual evidence. As an important piece of heritage, Bannister cites D.W. Prowse’s influential work *A History of Newfoundland, from the English, Colonial, and Foreign Records*, originally published in 1895. Although Bannister recognizes the obvious merits of Prowse’s writings, he views as problematic his overall approach to history, “as both a series of enlightening lessons and an entertaining narrative, dividing the past into distinct periods which advanced teleologically” (p. 177). This collapsing of the complexity of historical development into a single master narrative, while it may make for fine reading, runs the risk of glossing over a variety of events that may not promote the narrative’s rationale as a whole, rendering a wide array of historical episodes as taboo, since they cannot fit into the order of the proposed teleological and binarial boundaries.

Bannister claims that in understanding their history, Newfoundlanders should proceed with a realization that “the past is as messy and complex as the present” (p. 188). As only one example of this inevitable confusion, Bannister cites the fact that “anyone visiting the province will encounter at least four different political symbols: the official provincial flag; the coat of arms...the Union Jack...and the pink-white-and-green. And if you add the red ensign, the maple leaf, and the Labrador flag, we actually have seven different symbols” (ibid.). As a visitor to Newfoundland, I recall exactly such confusion (s). “Although signs are motivated,” Moxey (1994) tells us, “by the world and bear only

an arbitrary relation to it, their character is nevertheless conditioned by the circumstances in which they are produced,” one has to wonder, in the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, what bedlam of historical circumstances might have led to such an almost impenetrable plethora of complex semiotic devices (p. 34).



Though he has written on a wide variety of topics, Stuart Pierson (2004) is engaged most importantly with the ways that Newfoundland is represented both on a local and national level, interrogating the intentions of authors and editors from Newfoundland and Labrador, as well as those who bring their perspectives from the outside. Understanding the myth of a historically fated Canada as the result of an imagined community, Pierson regards the *Historical Atlas of Canada* as “a work of wishful thinking,” which “yearns to *create* or at least ritually sustain Canada” (p. 62). In his article about the deficiencies of *The Canadian Encyclopedia* (1984), Pierson questions the lack of substance, in regards to Newfoundland, in a publication that is “not so much an examination of a country (and the age) as a celebration of it” (p. 4).

In this whitewashed vision where “Canada is balance” (ibid.), and “there are no conflicts” (p. 16), Pierson rails against a romantic trivialization of history, which results in a complete lack of anything that is remotely unpalatable, vulgar or banal. This is, in the

words of O’Flaherty (1979), an issue of how “to look closely at Newfoundland life as it is lived, rather than fancied” (p. 187). Pierson extends such a critique to the medium of photography as well, where in a review of an anthology of a local photographer’s works, he criticizes representations of Newfoundland as “a world where it never rains, or, if it does, it does so picturesquely; where snow never turns to filthy slush in the gutters; a world whence poverty, unemployment, ugliness (except of the official kind), drunkenness, crime, disease, and death have all been banished” (266). Holden (2006) also shares a similar concern, suggesting that, “Newfoundland needs to hear all the disturbing stories it can bear. As for the comforting and the comic ones, we have more than enough” (p. 385).

Though Kelly’s *Marketing place: Cultural politics, regionalism and reading* (1993), concerned with the uses and effects of reading among Newfoundlanders,

figures elsewhere in this study, it is especially important in its discussion of the concept of ‘regionalism.’ Regionalism, as “an ideological discourse which positions and produces

Caged Birds

Beneath the sternum the unsettled
 landscape shifts, lifts
 subsides. A breath
 on the tide. A motion
 that measures our pace, gaits
 our thought. We think
 nothing of it. We prefer
 not to, slave to its
 governance. Equally we are
 ignorant of our glorious
 arboretum, the swell
 of branches, twigs and tiny leaf
 pockets where fluid
 and currents of air
 come and go,
 placing, and exchanging place.

At the periphery a sheen spreads
 its sea-melt ductile
 skin. This diffuse
 frontier’s another open border
 to expansion. A place
 of sly insouciant crossings
 so invisible we lie
 freely to each other. We say
 we see each other.

Between
 two breaths we scarcely perceive
 ourselves. Beneath
 the sternum hulled ribs swell.
 Caged birds escape.

(Pamela Hodgson, *TickleAce* 38, p. 53)

subjects in specific and very political ways,” is represented in Canada through a number of referential terms (‘up North,’ ‘down East,’ etc...), all not so subtly constructed from the “unadjectivalized ‘centre’” of Ontario (p. 13). Within Canada, the regions promoted through the official discourse of regionalism, are the Western Provinces, the Territories, Central Canada, and the Atlantic Provinces, although for many Canadians, “The region of Atlantic Canada does not exist, except perhaps in the recesses of the Ottawa bureaucratic mind” (Conrad, 2002, p. 161). As Kelly emphasizes, this term is markedly different from another common regional reference, ‘the Maritimes,’ a term which excludes Newfoundland and Labrador. There is even a sense that, due to its late arrival into Confederation, and its geographical and historical specificity, Newfoundland and Labrador often represents an unofficial, and therefore easily ignored, region of its own.

Even though ‘region,’ like ‘nation,’ is an artificial category, both terms are hardly empty signifiers, as they work to construct subjectivities in gradual yet powerful ways. For Conrad (2002), who finds the common conflation of the Maritimes and Atlantic Canada a troublesome fact, region is “one of those slippery concepts, whose meaning changes over time” (p. 161). Kelly underscores that for many Newfoundlanders, discourses on regionalism function as a type of cultural nationalism in which ‘The Rock’ is “More than a name for the fierce-cliffed seashores...(but) indicates a sense of permanence and security, both an illusory and a real safeness” (p. 13). For O’Dea (1994), who is concerned with the relationship between culture in Newfoundland, and an architecture that is built on the principles of impermanence and temporary accommodation, this economic and historical “isolation is really a form of marginalism that has determined our culture” (p. 73).

There is also a sense that this 'apartness' emerges, in official discourse, from a vacuum of historical amnesia, in which the current arrangements are understood as having existed for all eternity, and which are thus also naturalized, encouraging a, "marginality (as) a gradual consequence" (Salutin, 1988, p. 281). It is important here to recall what S. Hall (1996) writes of "the regime of the 'taken-for-granted,'" and its relation with ideology as, "the point at which we lose sight of the fact that sense is a production of our systems of representation is the point at which we fall, not into Nature, but into naturalistic illusion: the height (or depth) of ideology" (p. 24). The picture that is presented of Newfoundland as a 'periphery,' or a 'have-not' province, is always from the context of the 'core' provinces, or the 'haves,' and is "a consequence of history which touches the lives of all people who live in Newfoundland" (Kelly, p. 25).

This is not to say, though, that Kelly views all applications of regionalism as negative and oppressive. In fact, she agrees with Williams (1976), who suggests that regionalism possesses "an alternative positive sense," as a "counter movement," which "carries implications of a valuable and distinctive way of life" (p. 266). In fact, an important instance of this quality of distinctiveness can be found in the publishing and reading of Newfoundland books, which, "as cultural forms...work discursively to produce and reproduce notions of history, culture and subjectivity" (Kelly, p. 77). Importantly, then, in this act of "reclaiming regionalism, reading can be viewed as a practice aimed at cultural recovery" (p. 82).

Chafe (2003), in his postcolonial reading of Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams*, poses the question of how, if at all, Newfoundland can be regarded as a postcolonial nation. Admitting that it is impossible for Newfoundland to maintain the

same postcolonial status as countries such as India and South Africa, Chafe characterizes Newfoundland as “a settler society,” in a “complicit postcolonialism,” where, “poverty and struggle are undeniably and inextricably a part of (its) history, but the source of this suffering is not a colonizing power bent on domination” (p. 322). However, like any postcolonial subject, the subject in Newfoundland literature is, “a peculiar form of immigrant...(occupying) a hybrid production of past narratives and future possibilities...(and) cannot be contained within a definitive identity” (p. 343). In this move towards a “hybrid ‘Newfoundlandness’” (p. 333), Chafe suggests a postcolonial reading of Newfoundland history that is not unlike Bannister’s, in which the past is regarded as hybrid and fractured, filled with multi-faceted, conflicting claims over ‘truth,’ which create, and inevitably sustain, “not one Newfoundland history but a Newfoundland and Newfoundlanders that contain multitudes” (p. 344).

Apart from the dynamics of regionalism experienced by Newfoundlanders of European descent, there is also the persistent challenges of acknowledgement and representation facing Aboriginal people in Newfoundland and Labrador, a challenge that A. and D. Bartels (2005), in their discussion of Mi’gmaq identity in Western Newfoundland, identify as, “the ongoing process in which people in...Newfoundland are ‘becoming Indian’” (p. 251). Reinforced by a number of historical texts, there is an almost universal belief that the Beothuk were the only indigenous group on the island, that all traces of Beothuk ethnicity were erased in the nineteenth century, and thus, that the Newfoundland Mi’gmaq could be justifiably excluded from cartographic representations showing the traditional territories of Canadian Aboriginal peoples. There also exists a widespread set of beliefs known collectively as the, “Micmac Mercenary Myth, or MMM”

(p. 252), which promotes a view that the Mi'gmaq were invited to Newfoundland by French colonial authorities, with the express purpose of wiping out the Beothuk. What such exclusionary strategies imply, despite their inaccuracy, is that, in Newfoundland, "aboriginality was exclusively reserved for the 'extinct' Beothuk" (p. 252), and that the Mi'gmaq are immigrants to the area, and therefore, should hold no claims to Aboriginal status.

Mi'gmaq folklore, however, establishes that the territory of Newfoundland was part of a pre-contact Mi'gmaq confederacy, and also provides an account of the Beothuk's demise that is drastically different from that of the MMM, wherein, "when their numbers decreased in the nineteenth century, the remaining Beothuk married into other groups, such as the Innu of Labrador, Cape Breton Mi'gmaq, and Newfoundland Mi'gmaq" (p. 258). In fact, several Mi'gmaq in both Cape Breton and Newfoundland allege a partial Beothuk ancestry.

In 1983, a provincial archivist unearthed records, from the negotiations surrounding the incorporation of Newfoundland and Labrador, which unequivocally refer to a Mi'gmaq reserve at Conne River, thus establishing the fact that both the governments of Canada and Newfoundland had recognized the Aboriginal status of the Conne River Mi'gmaq prior to 1949. From this disclosure, the Miawpukuk First Nation reserve was established at Conne River. However, despite this recognition, Mi'gmaq bands in a number of other localities, although they, "claim the same ancestry as members of the Miawpukek First Nation," have not yet been granted status under the Indian Act (p. 260).

In the past couple decades, the resurgence of Mi'gmaq identity, which accompanied a rise in political activity of the Federation of Newfoundland Indians (FNI),

have allowed many people, who were completely unaware of such ancestry, to determine their Aboriginal roots. A. and D. Bartels provide the following example, which aptly illustrates the revelatory nature of such an unearthing:

We met an old friend from Corner Brook who had lived outside of Newfoundland for many years. She was unaware of FNI political activity and was surprised to learn some of the names of the band councillors in Corner Brook and Benoit's Cove. 'I'm related to these people and they're no more Indian than I am,' she exclaimed. Then she paused, realizing that she, too, was Mi'gmaq. (p. 261)

At least in the case of Mi'gmaq in Western Newfoundland, it appears that for many, though, "Aboriginal identity was once a shameful secret, it is now proudly proclaimed" (p. 262). Such meditations and contestations of the shifting and variable grounds of subjectivity possess important implications for readers, and for the possibilities that inhere in literary engagements. In the following section, I look at a further fold of HAM's epistemological emplacement—reading in the sphere of medical humanities.

4. Medicine and the Humanities; walking where the waters blend and bind

Although HAM's activities are situated interrogatively towards the hegemonic models of biomedicine offered in the discourse of mainstream medicine, an interrogation that realizes, along with Robertson (1999), that "discourse is a field of power and peril" (p. 168), the sphere of medical humanities emerges from a tradition that is not solely reactive. It follows from established and historic conventions that believe, "the biological approach alone cannot address the various human phenomena that physicians encounter in their everyday practice" (Puustinen, Leinan & Viljanen, 2003, p. 77). The interdisciplinary nature of medical humanities holds fast to the principle that clinical knowledge does not

emerge from a vacuum, but in appreciating the mutable, complex and mediated nature of truth claims constructed through semiotic devices (Pietzman, 1987), that, “the object of medical practice is defined by the *concepts* that medicine uses to construct the diagnosis” (Puustinen, Leinan & Viljanen, p. 79). Furthermore, since, “the way a person speaks is an intimate and integral part of that person” (Cassell, 1985, p. 5), and their subjectivity, developing the ability to access the nuances of language use is a useful ability in medical procedures, and one which many believe can be sharpened through practice and immersion.

The study of medical humanities looks towards the history of medicine as a way to challenge the “constraints imposed by particular academic disciplines” (Greaves, 2004, p. viii), and their ideologically informed discursive structures. In examining the historical relationship between literature and medicine in the eighteenth century, Rousseau (1993) writes that, “the past teaches us...that there is close relation between art and healing, that the value of art is as great for the sufferer, as the physician...(and) that art is necessary for health,” which does not imply that art acts definitively as a curative substance, but that “art gives the patient a voice for his or her suffering” (p. 28). Although art does not function in a strictly biological manner, it insinuates itself into the healing context in ways that no medication or surgical procedure can. For Bynum and Porter (1993), “the separation between literature and medicine is a modern malaise” (p. 2), an artificial and obstructive delineation that disregards the “culture of *écriture* which many believe needs to be transplanted back into medical science” (p. 7).

The use of art, then, encourages an attention to narrative detail as a series of related historic events, rather than isolatable symptomatic signs found jotted down on a medical

chart. Such a perspective can enable a caring attitude towards a patient's condition, recognizing the emotional effect of medical procedures, and from the context of a possibly ambiguous social environment (Escovitz, 1987, p. 55). As Cassell (1976) writes: "To reflect only on the decision itself is to negate the importance of the continuum" (1976, p. 92). Since, "the telling of events gives meaning to the experience" (Powly & Higson, 2005, p. 29), the encounters with otherness facilitated in fictional readings, which encourage the reader to think beyond the immediately observable, can also encourage a method of "doctor/patient interaction, where the physician should approach the patient as a person instead of merely as a biological phenomenon" (Puustinen, et al., p. 78).

Wear (2006) makes an important contribution in this area, remarking that, "in the context of medical education, curriculum work is rarely a critical activity" (p. 88). After a short discussion surrounding the curricular frameworks (formal, informal, null, unwritten, unstudied, unplanned) through which one can come towards an understanding of the dynamics of medical education, Wear tells us that it is the concept of *hidden curriculum* that is most useful in explaining, "the unintended (and most often negative) attitudes, values, and behaviours acquired by medical students in spite of a carefully planned, formal curriculum" (ibid.). As a way for medical educators to investigate the politics involved in medical educative discourse, she suggests the practice of "critical curriculum work," which, "looks for ways biomedicine configures and 'fixes' patients and illnesses" (p. 89). She also encourages a, "pedagogy of discomfort," which moves students to a greater degree of empathy and respect across cultural differences, effectively shifting, "critical reflection into the realm of culture, where we examine how the dominant culture shapes the ways we see the world" (p. 95). Interestingly, Wear views engagements with literature,

and its incessant multivocality and fracturing of individual points of view, as an important tool for fostering an effective pedagogy of discomfort. She also draws a distinction between, on the one hand, “mere reading” (p. 97), as a readerly routine, which refuses, “to engage in the world outside a text...and suggests a passive reading practice that does not translate to anything beyond the actual reading” (p. 97), and on the other hand, reading as a writerly practice (and praxis) of discomfort, wherein texts are successfully diverted away from succumbing to the static and solitary fate as, “objects of easy consumption” (Boler, 1999, p. 169).

Nussbaum (1995), writing from the context of a lawyer’s interest in the humanities, argues that there is a deep connection between the literary imagination and fostering an empathic mode of address towards the realities experienced by other people. Nussbaum classifies the complex activities of reading as a combining of imaginative forces with methods of critical scrutiny, a mingling that brings to lawyers, “an activity well suited to public reasoning” (p. 9). In establishing a place for literature in the halls of justice, she defends the literary imagination, “precisely because it seems...an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own” (p. xvi). Nussbaum (1998) also notes how the performative processes of literature encourage an indwelling in time on the predicaments of others, a mode of reasoning in reading that upholds a genuinely affective approach to textual consumption.

For Baron (1987), beginning from an assumption that “medicine is about more than bodies” (p. 6), encounters with literature, when undertaken by medical professionals, should be directed not only towards the purposes of entertainment, but by motivations

seeking, “something relevant and meaningful about our own nature...(which) can reveal to doctors some of the vast spectrum of human experience, fostering a better understanding of who we are and the nature of our predicament” (p. 9). Beyond the fact that engagements with literature inspire an openness to alterity in medical practice, Baron also notes a series of technical skills that are encouraged through interpretations of language use in literary texts. Foremost among these is the fact that, “words are capable of

carrying many levels of meaning, of conveying ambiguity and ambivalence, in ways that doctors need to be experts at understanding” (p. 9). Though this burden falls heavily upon the doctor, a sustained practice in reading and rereading literature allows for ambiguity and uncertainty

Moon Steaming

Shaken from sleep through a neighbour’s plodding phrase
 mouthed with muddy boots and switchblade steps
 and the night it is stars it is moon.

Shaken from sleep, and that door is being knocked,
 the door is over and across on the street,
 by hands pulled taught as a tight new glove
 and stretched.
 New leather being stretched for a fit.

Peering out the window
 staring at the squabble
 I divert my breathing from crooked lips
 amusingly rolling themselves to a spout.
 As on the delicate tip of a teapot’s mouth
 in a tale of telltale steaming without.

in narrative knowledge, and as a healthy precondition for all medical diagnosis (Charon, p. 149, 1993). Since, “it is through our own narratives,” as Bruner (1996) makes clear, “ that we principally construct a version of ourselves in the world, and it is through its narrative that a culture provides models of identity and agency to its members” (p. xiv), attention given to narratives in a medical context is also attention given to how a person positions themselves subjectively through the use of language and in the context of a wider culture. Awareness of how stories get told, and of the centrality of narrative in medical diagnosis,

is an important means through which practitioners of medicine can tap into the functioning of human desire, and the uniquely individual aspects of a patient's life.

Of course, the environment of medical training, in which diagnostic facts are presupposed as “monolithic, correct, and unequivocal” (p. 10), does not typically brook the types of engagement proposed by Baron and others. As a challenge to the almost impenetrable institution of biomedical pedagogy, Stone (2004) suggests an outlook that begins with the assertion that, “The patient is the curriculum,” and that, “The patient, like art, is bigger than we are” (p. 483). Bleakley, Brömer and Marshall (2006) stress the importance of recognizing how the wider curriculum is framed *as* text, and, “comes to form as art does, as a complex mediation and reconstruction of experience” (Pinar et al, 1996, 567). Within a multifaceted curriculum that engages the values of humanities through processes of ‘indwelling,’ Bleakley et al. question the conventionally hostile polarisation of the humanities in relation to medical practice, suggesting that, “the medical humanities carry a ‘surplus’...(or) a ‘supplement’,” and that, “both ‘medical’ and ‘humanities’ fail to capture the field, which goes wider than medicine and wider than the humanities” (p. 206). Within this view of “science (as) a cultural discourse” (p. 202), humanities and the sciences are not positioned in separate spheres, but in a dialogue that recognizes the “artistry of medicine” (p. 201), an overall aesthetic and imaginative approach to inhabiting scientific medicine, characterized by a tolerance for ambiguity and a literary sensibility, which emerges from the clinical environment itself. Instead of positioning the literary (or aesthetic) as an additive to the scientific, the literary is instead understood as an already existent supplement, which “through indwelling medicine itself...the artistry/humanity intrinsic to the discipline is revealed” (p. 210).

The concept of indwelling is hardly foreign to the field of education, and more specifically, to the realm of curriculum studies. Palulis and Low (2006), from a pedagogical context, write of the spiralling nature of such subjective crises, observing that “In the double fold we are already host and hostage—this strange doubling of hospitality toward the other—the teacher as host welcoming the student—the teacher as hostage—bound by an infinite responsibility” (p. 47). In their hopes, and lingering, unfulfilled, and productive hesitations, for bringing a “messy text” to curriculum studies, they ask: “Must life in schools be steeped in clarity where a silencing of living pedagogy becomes the right/rite of curricular passage?” (p. 53).

In regards to the zone of tension that emerges for the teacher indwelling between, “the worlds of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived experiences” (p. 159), Aoki (2005) determines that to be alive in the world is to already live in tension (p. 162). Through engaging the challenges and difficulties that inhere within this hybrid zone, it “is not so much a matter of overcoming the tensionality but dwelling aright within it” (p. 163). Aoki perceives the function of indwelling in pedagogical experience as a necessary and complicated series of manoeuvrings, and as “a mode that could be oppressive and depressive, marked by despair and hopelessness, and at other times, challenging and stimulating, evoking hopefulness for venturing forth” (p. 162).

In his discussions surrounding Derrida through the Southern landscape, and conceptualizing, via *currere*, the dynamics of hospitality and alienation, Ng-A-Fook (2006) remarks, “How does one learn-to-live within the aporias—a language of undecidability—of such hyphenated third space” (p. 7), or as Palulis and Low (2006) declare of such a flooding: a “languaging in the space of an interval” (p. 50). Ng-A-Fook’s

method of autobiographical writing, “supports a curriculum-lived-as-migrancy, one in continual transit, of departing, returning, thinking back and writing forward” (2005, p. 55). In speaking and writing, away from and towards oneself, he observes how “the universal landscape of language” itself functions as a conduit for indwelling, and as an, “invisible prosthesis for moving between the shifting terrain of self and other” (2006, p. 10). And of course, despite its nature as universal, this terrain between self and other, enunciated through and housed in the permeable walls of language, is always one of tension and disconnect, and “an understanding which can never be fully attained” (p. 12).

The institutional barriers to such indwelling in medical practice are many, and as Fitzgerald (2004) notes, “The first years in medical school often require an agonized acquisition of endless, ever-changing, sometimes ponderous data” (p. 488). Though medical students often require a degree of, “renaissance humanity” (ibid.), to enter medical school in the first place, there is often a fear that the intensity and compulsive nature of their studies encourage “technique without understanding—both a transient and somewhat dangerous façade” (p. 489), or as Spiro (1993) laments: “Our energy gets us into medical school and after that little time remains for contemplation” (p. 10). As a challenge to this tendency, some proponents of the medical humanities suggest an element in the curriculum that directly emphasizes a strengthening of empathy in the medical context as, “the feeling that persons or objects arouse in us as projections of our feelings or thoughts” (p. 7).

Though empathy is not here regarded as a quality that can be ‘taught,’ it is, not surprisingly, one that can be encouraged through the uses of literature and art, and as Mathiasen and Alpert (1993) have noted: “The vicarious experience of...fictional

creations can bring you closer to an understanding of the other's situation and thereby closer to helping the other suffering human" (p. 141). Since, "empathy withers in silence," allowing curricular space for conversation can help foster an atmosphere of empathic inclination, which can help to overcome the narcissism and isolation encountered by many in their medical studies (Spiro, p. 9). As Charon (1993) argues: "Only doctors who have developed narrative competence will recognize their patient's motives and desires, will allow patients to tell their full stories of illness, and will offer themselves as therapeutic instruments" (p. 150). Though the discussions in HAM meetings fulfil a number of different functions, the encouragement of open-ended conversation and equitable dialogue is certainly one of the most important.

As "language works to both resist and sustain a normalizing effect—textual crossings (as) multiple in/ex-citements of pedagogy" (Palulis & Low, 2006, p. 51), the complications of the meeting place of medicine and the humanities are many, but as the above authors have confirmed, it is this very "tensionality that allows good thoughts and actions to arise when properly tensioned chords are struck" (Aoki, 2005, p. 162). In the field of education, learning occurs not as the result of filling up student's heads with knowledge, facts, tables and structural strategies, but through engagement and conflict, and a productive process of generative dialogue. As Robertson (2001) puts it: "It is only because 'I' encounter a barrier in my relations with the world that 'I' can experience my capacity for being" (p. 27). The necessary sociality of learning is mostly assumed, not in the least because of the pleasures that are derived from contact with others, but also because in topographical relations of self, pedagogical forces are always 'out of control'. Since HAM's readings, as private investments that are made to dwell publicly, occur at a

point of contact constituting a ‘messy text,’ conceptualizing the spatial configurations of reading experience is an important task, as “a felicitous space in which dreams of self and community are kept alive” (Robertson, 2008). In the following section, I look more closely at the intermingling aspects of spatiality and subjectivity, and how reading itself depends on the qualities of spatial relations.

5. Spatial Relations and Narrative Subjectivity; boundaries dissolved

Narrative structures, as they organize the world through words and action, are always “spatial trajectories” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 115). As de Certeau remarks that, while “place is the order in accord with which elements are distributed in relationships of coexistence,” *space* is “like the word when it is spoken...caught in the ambiguity of actualization,” and whose very existence is inaugurated “by the ensemble of movements deployed within it” (ibid.). In this sense, *place* is a ‘proper’ and founded relation through which we can situate ourselves legitimately, while *space* is a shared and communal concept whose margins (or lack thereof), in acts of imaginative re-creation, are always involved in a creative process of flux and deliberation. Of notable concern are the limits that inhere in, “the concept of place—how it is conceived, how it differs from ‘space’ or ‘location’, how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, (and) how it becomes the horizon of identity” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 15).

In the introduction to *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (1977), a work that is generally recognized as having helped to establish the field of human geography, Tuan writes of the countless and overlapping dimensions that characterize the relations between space and place:

In experience, the meaning of space often merges with that of place. “Space” is more abstract than “place.” What begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value. Architects talk about the spatial qualities of space; they can equally well speak of the locational (place) qualities of space. The ideas “space” and “place” require each other for definition. From the security and stability of place we are aware of the openness, freedom, and threat of space, and vice versa. Furthermore, if we think of space as that which allows movement, then place is pause; each pause in movement makes it possible for location to be transformed into place. (Tuan, 1977, p. 6)

For de Certeau, the act of reading is already understood as inhabiting a space that is not where one is (a ‘deterritorialization’), and it is through this that the question is proffered of ‘who’ is reading, since the ‘I’ who reads is less the all-encompassing ‘I’ at the core of one’s existence than an erratic and fluid uncertainty.

In discussing the subjectifying impacts of spatial relations in pedagogical discourse, Chambers (1999) remarks that the existential question of “Who am I?” is complicated by the corollary question of “Where am I?” whose main challenge lies in naming and defining the localized qualities of our shared, seemingly interminable spaces, since as individuals or groups, we also lack a sense of stability and permanence. If place, as a spatial relation, is to figure into our understandings of who we are, then the gap between our ‘lived’ curriculum and that which we employ scripturally (along with its institutionalized semblance of permanence) always possesses the possibility of being breached. As Chambers suggests, this involves an acute focus on local accomplishments, not unlike Kelly’s conceptualization of the positive aspects of regionalism, so as to clearly

enunciate the productions of meaning within our immediate surroundings. Though Chambers speaks of a Northern upbringing of wide-open spaces, Newfoundland, as an island in the Atlantic, brings all sorts of distinctive tensions that enable particular modes of consciousness, as does the city of St. John's, as an isolated urban centre, located neither fully with-in nor fully with-out, popular perceptions of Canada as a nation. Some questions that Chambers regards as essential, when examining "the topography of Canadian curriculum theory" (2006, p. 30), are:

What is the significance of this landscape and what can it teach us? What is the curriculum of these places? What knowledge is held in there and here, and what if any is still accessible to us, and what is gone? What are our responsibilities to these sites? What can these places teach us, not just about the past, but about now and two days from now? (2006, p. 35)

In regards to "spaces of language" (Cragg & Thrift, 2000, p. 6), what is most significant is how space, and its myriad distributive possibilities, constitutes itself in our thoughts, and thus, in our uses of language, which transform these thoughts into tangible constructs of meaning. As the constitution of individual subjectivity emerges in part as a "textualization of the self" (p. 8), both in terms of the body as a site of inscription, and through instances of personal narrativizing, the boundaries of subjectivity are understood not so much as restricted margins, but as permeable frontiers, allowing for a partnered process of self-sculpting with the textures of our surrounding world. The consequences that such ideas hold for doctor-patient relations imply associations similar to Buber's (1970), regarding his distinctions of "I and thou." As writing the self is always an act of travel and translation, new inscriptive forms of discursive performativity can extend well

beyond the bounds of legitimate textual categories, or traditional definitions of individual expression. The possibilities for reading formations are here at their most radical.

Through asserting the primacy of context in the transformative potential of words, Ashcroft (2001) establishes language “as a tool which has meaning according to the way in which it is used” (p. 57), and not as a de facto generative principle. Working with the dialogic manner through which meaning is constituted in, and communicated through textual engagement, Ashcroft positions the written text as a “social situation” (p. 59), and the meanings which emerge in discursive interaction as socially “situated accomplishment(s)” (p. 60). As writing functions to give language a scriptural and spatial permanence, while at the same time establishing the meaning of this permanence as an interminably interpretive fluctuation, what becomes central in the meaning-making of language is the communicative “site,” and the distances, and distancing, which arise between the text’s persistent material integrity, and the participants’ overwhelming instability towards the categories of absence and presence. For Ashcroft, this distancing implies the creation and reinforcement of a dialectically generative site, whose foci in meaning is engendered through words, and is “inextricably tied to the discourse of place” (p. 67). Instead of words referring definitively to a reflection of the external world, they gain their sense of reference in relation to their ‘situation,’ which is shared, and thus in no way remains exclusively accessible. Since the use of language determines the meaning that is eventually generated, language is an inhabitant of the social universe only when put into practice, and as Lefebvre (1971) has written in this regard: “Social space is a social product” (p. 26). Realizing the activities of everyday life as “the inevitable starting point

for the realization of the possible” (Lefebvre, 1971, cited in Merrifield, p. 176), social practice, not mental space, is the central site from which knowledge emerges.

This literature review, as an exercise in conceptual framing, has dealt with a number of theoretical locations, which all serve to complicate, in particular though not dissimilar ways, the issues of social reading in a space of hybridity. The best way to address the many questions raised above is by using the lenses provided by Cultural Studies and Poststructuralism. In the following section, I shall work towards an enunciation of these perspectives, further examining and problematizing the rhetorics of reading experience, as an activity that can best be understood as multifaceted and fractured, as a drifting that both binds and is binding, already split at its core.

6. Cultural Studies; A deluge of conceptual currents

The field of cultural studies represents an interdisciplinary and critical process; largely concerned with the means through which individuals fashion their subjectivities, through changing relationships with a variety of cultural texts. Texts “constitute a wide range of aural, visual and printed signifiers” (Giroux, 1994, p. 4), and are used to construct an analysis of how subjectivities are transformed and mobilized within relations of power, informed through social configurations of negotiated subject positions such as race, gender, class, space, and sexuality. What is important here is determining under what conditions readers have been able to use the ‘raw materials’ of language and communication to construct an entire range of possible responses to their particular substantive and conditional circumstances (Clarke, J., Hall, S., Jefferson, T. & Roberts, B., 1976). In regards to this area of study, Williams (1981) has referred to the concept of

culture itself as, “a realized signifying system” (p. 207), and one that is enunciated through our everyday uses of language, and according to the structures of our particular environment.

Cultural studies is concerned with “critique in the fullest sense” (Johnson, 1983, p. 9), and as something that is *done* through human action, and furthermore, which is *done* in



the *doing*. This entails that my culturally positioned role as a researcher is also interrogated, through moments of applied methodological reflexivity (Willis, 1990), and as an integral influence on the nature of my work *a s*

representation. As Casella (1999) has written, the employment of such a model “*becomes a manner of social research – a framework through which (I) in education do research*” (p. 107).

In the case of what HAM sets out to accomplish, the intended effects of their work in the medical humanities are closely related to those of cultural studies. In the first place, cultural studies theory brings to the sciences an awareness that, “The language of all cultural artefacts (including those from science and bioscience) is always a cultural construction and therefore, always an available and productive object of study and social critique” (Lewis, 1998, p. 11). For those in the medical humanities, questioning received scientific accounts of the world allows for an inquiry into how meanings and bodies get made through discourse, “not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to live in

meanings and bodies that have a chance for the future” (Haraway, 1991, p. 187). It is a critique, then, that always harkens back to the self, and thus avoids the pitfalls of medical ‘objectivity,’ something revealed through the personal nature of the investments made within HAM’s common discussions. For Squier and Hawkins (2004), “reading literature and cultural theory in a medical school setting (clarifies) the different stakes behind our institutionally-embedded practices” (p. 243).

As Twohig (2006) argues, it is the inherently interdisciplinary nature of medical humanities that, in bringing together groups of people from across disciplinary boundaries, “decentres some of the assumptions of a discipline, (and) causes individuals to reflect on their own assumptions” (p. 22).

While looking simultaneously at medical practice and works of

The toilet bowl is some thing

The toilet bowl is some thing I stare in; I arrive at every day, every night, and it invites a ponder.

Its curvaceous, flirtatious chasm resonates as any repeated gesture, as a wink scratched in ink slowly on a body, inevitably will.

Footsteps hold a similar significance.

Its hidden fountains of secretive secretions (no doubt they have inspired frothings of a sort) tucked, as they are, in between a cracked egg and its cover, reinforce the necessary link between thoughts most revolutionary, and thoughts most banal.

—The inscriptions on a billboard and the flash of genius (trickle, splash)—

It booms in a guttural draw:
“And what if we trailed these words at the rear of an airplane?
Draped as silk in the palate of the sky.
For families, for cities, for countries!”

Sweat on the brow gets driven away,
footsteps perform a sandpaper shuffle
changing landscapes in their stray.
Some things melt,
some things stay.

literature, “cultural studies of science breaks free from standard epistemological questions (Is it true? Does it mirror the world?), and opens out to political questions about the effects of scientific discourse” (p. 11). That HAM provides a space for such decentring to occur, and thus formalizes interdisciplinary criticism, leads me to consider their activities as a prime example of cultural studies work in action.

Johnson (1983), in his analysis of the circuit of cultural production, proposes a multidirectional model for understanding the processes of textual circulation in manufacture and reception. As individuals are inevitably acted upon by the particular nature of their social and cultural histories, cultural studies considers the self as a constructed entity that is directly located in the very social formations it will eventually transform, an emplacement that is always contextualized as historically and socially situated. As a way of ‘reading’ the world, cultural studies is concerned with, “how knowledge, texts, and cultural products are produced, circulated, and used” (Giroux, 1994, p. 3).

Moving from the conditions of a text’s production, to an analysis of the emergent textual forms, to the interpretative circumstances of reception, and then to how such treatment impacts on the realm of social relations, these successive and interdependent transformations are never pre-determined, but behave according to specific instances and contexts of use. Flint (2006) traces such a structure of dynamic production to the field in literary studies concerned with the history of the book, an area of collapsed disciplinary boundaries that pays attention to a text’s existence as a “series of artefacts,” and to its “conditions of publication, dissemination, and consumption” (p. 519).

Viewed abstractly, the individual meanings ascribed to cultural texts are usually divorced from their social conditions, but in analyzing their active placement in a cultural circuit, their meaning can be interpreted as a conditional function, and as “a ‘doing’, rather than a being” (Robinson, 1991, p. 11). In this context, Ashcroft (2001) views a text as “a way of seeing and responding (and) a way of directing attention” (p. 73). Meaning, and its attendant interpretation, is an activity that occurs in the meeting place of dialogic engagement, and in the, “location of the hermeneutic object in its linguistic situation” (ibid.). In the constant interplay between being and becoming, a metonymic movement stimulated by desire, this situation in language reconstitutes subjectivity as “a function of language, [and] not a pre-given, fixed human characteristic” (Weedon, Tolson, & Mort, 1980, p. 205).

The employment of cultural studies is directed towards a critical destabilization and de-essentialization of established categories of identity and knowledge, as such structures tend to ‘fix’ people materially in limiting and oppressive conditions, of which they are seemingly in no way the author. Cultural studies ensures a sustained focus on the patterned routines of construction, though language, of the methods for popular representation, and how, through the constant reiterative intersections between knowledge and power, language works to produce solidly (though falsely) emblematic meaning (Hall, S., 1997). As it functions within the framing of competing cultural discourses, and is made cogent through the discursive struggle that is the “politics of signification” (Hall, S., 1980), cultural studies is found in a myriad of diverse social settings, and as Britzman (1995) reminds us, no matter the location, “there are no innocent, normal, or unmediated readings” (p.164). Benjamin (1999) also agrees with this point, when he writes of the

function of criticism as being, “to lift the mask of ‘pure art’ and show that there is no neutral ground for art” (p. 292). It is only through framing our interpretive activities as acts of ‘making’ sense of constructed representation, that we can ever hope to change its constituent parts; or in reference to the activities of HAM, “to intervene in, and change for the better, both medical practices *and* cultural practice” (Squier & Hawkins, p. 244). Of course, this in no way denies the emotional impact that artistic works can have, those passages that bring us to our knees, and as any reader will agree, to let ourselves be ‘carried away,’ “being moved...by the power of words and the living dynamics of story” (Fuller, 2004, p. 3), is one of the most fulfilling pleasures that reading can serve, “as the stories, which told with purpose, aim for that moral soft spot where the audience is most vulnerable” (Chambers, 2006, p. 32).

For Kincheloe & McLaren (2005), “Cultural studies questions the equation of culture with high culture,” and thus, how institutions of power are shaped through planned notions of inclusion and exclusion. In assessing the existence of symbolic creativity in everyday life, Willis (1990) acknowledges what he terms “necessary symbolic work,” which he defines as the indispensable application of human facilities on the raw materials of language and texts. The basic elements of such work are language, the active body, drama, and symbolic creativity, which in “the production of *new*...meanings intrinsically attached to feeling, to energy, to excitement and psychic movement,” ensures the location of agency in affective relations, and a deepening awareness of one’s “culturally learned sense of the powers of the self” (p. 11). Willis identifies an important location where symbolic creativity is generated as the “informal realm of leisure,” which is also a significant site for activities of ‘play,’ and where imaginative desires are given space to

develop organically. It is in this site that I will position the social activities of reading experience, where a *grounded aesthetics* of “sensuous living processes” is located (Willis, p. 21), and where the received world is made controllable, even if only in slight degrees. Like the landwash, a temporal zone also qualified as slight, these degrees of reserve and control can also symbolize a further and generative access to our world, a contact symbolizable in the human imagination.

7. Poststructuralism; a dispersal of tidal significance

Similarly with cultural studies, the effects of poststructuralism emerge through a process of constant critique, including my role as a researcher and the methods I employ. At its core, poststructuralism “destabilizes the disinterestedness of knowledge” (Trifonas, 2005, p. 155), and as it is in many ways a response to structural linguistics, an interrogation of the meanings produced through language use is central to its understandings of how our world, and our place in it, is read. Taken from de Saussure is the principle that, in themselves, signifiers cannot inherently contain meaning, which is only acquired through their relational position in the “language chain” (Weedon, 1997, p. 23). Poststructuralism, however, moves beyond de Saussure, rejecting his conception of language as unfortunately abstract and historically unspecific.

Poststructuralism operates from a fiercely anti-foundationalist ontological position, rejecting the traditional account of ‘truth’ as something that can correspond with reality in an absolute way. Instead, poststructuralism functions through a “many-sided perspectivism” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 5), which deconstructs the oppositions in traditionally binarial thinking, revealing instead how communicative structures function through a *differential system* of dialectical relation. Caputo (1998) writes of how the

motivations for deconstruction move, through a sustained affirmation of newness and originality. It also involves a temporal rupture in the flow of posthumously established and fatalistically causal categories, as “The borderline work of culture demands an encounter with ‘newness’ that is not part of the continuum of past and present” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7), but instead, part of a Benjaminian, “conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time” (Benjamin, 2003, p. 397).

What drives a deconstructive inquiry is a persistent shifting away from the centripetal reiterations of competing ‘legitimate’ discourses, as structural centres are themselves revealed as a “series of substitutions” (Peters & Burbules, 2004, p. 5). Whereas sustained meaning suppresses movement towards a unity, “deconstruction bends all its efforts to stretch beyond these boundaries, to transgress these confines, to interrupt and disjoin all such gathering” (Caputo, p. 32). In fact, HAM’s discussions work in much the same way, as an ebbing and flowing of shifting referents, in an environment whose centre is constantly changing. The movements of a deconstructive moment, the qualities of which are forever in flux, are also always recognized through struggle, as “an ‘impossible ‘no’ to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately” (Spivak, 1990, p. 60).

As a researcher working in the poststructuralist tradition, I view social ‘reality’ as sinuous, dynamic, and often contradictory, and in terms of variable sets of cultural practices. Since ‘reality’ can be read from multiple perspectives, this implies that the “temporary retrospective fixing” of certain representations as more viable than others is done through, and for, techniques of material privilege and power (Weedon, 1997, p. 24). For Luke (1995), an enduring contribution of Foucault’s is located in his reinforcement of

a “scepticism towards the transparency of talk, interview data” (p. 7), and other sources of information that regard ‘reality,’ ‘truth,’ ‘meaning’ and ‘motivation’ as unproblematic.

The concept of *difference*, as it is located in the collective and subjective interplays between significant social markers, is viewed as a generative force for how knowledge is stimulated and eventually interpreted, and for the establishment of temporary settlements in the risky activities of subject positioning. In interpreting how, as a discursive field that is generative through and of difference, social reading groups offer for individuals “a range of modes of subjectivity” (Weedon, 1997, p. 34), and function through the use of textual stories as symbolic objects in a shared realm of reflective pleasure, I approach *difference* as a site of production and creativity, and assume an understanding of alterity that moves beyond an ostracized otherness. As no system of cultural or textual meaning is ever full unto itself, it is the “difference in the process of language that is crucial to the production of meaning and ensures...that meaning is never simply mimetic and transparent” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 36), but exists as a fracture in the very place of utterance.

Tuan (1977) characterizes the emphasis on reading alone as a crypto-Imperialist act, whereas reading in a social circumstance, through a mingling of subjective space, allows for a purposeful, if also somewhat risky, introduction of difference as a focused infringement:

Solitude is a condition for acquiring a sense of immensity. Alone one’s thoughts wander freely over space. In the presence of others they are pulled back by an awareness of other personalities who project their own worlds onto the same area. Fear of space often goes with fear of solitude. To be in the company of human

beings—even with one other person—has the effect of curtailing space and its threat of openness.

The awareness of difference in social circumstance thus allows for a spatial infringement on subjective particularity, and for the limits of a person's structures of knowledge to be voluntarily breached. This occurs through reminders of a recognition, in modes of rereading, that an individual's "position of knowing is a limited one, rewarded on the basis of reading with, that is, going along with the ideology of the text" (Kelly, 1993, p. 46). This is not to deny that new structures of knowledge in subjectivity will be formed, but that their status as temporal and mutable is made manifest, and thus also unstable, through social practice. It is in this sense that Barthes (1974) qualifies rereading, a characterization that could certainly be extended to HAM, as, "no longer consumption, but play (the play which is the return of the different)" (p. 16).

Derrida (1974) employs the term *différance* to suggest that as meaning occurs through a relational network of emplaced utterances, it should not be regarded as a strict function of the difference between fixed and abstractly located signifieds, but as something whose essence is always *deferred*, and towards which language is always (though never finally) positioned. As he writes that, "The outside bears with the inside a relationship that is...anything but simple exteriority" (p. 35), important for this study is a tracing of *how* such a displacement of congruence (between readers and texts, readers and readers, and readers and themselves) functions to dislodge meaning from where it is safely stored, and how this relentless deferral also works to provide a space that people wish to return to.

Therefore, in contributing to the discussion of reading as a profoundly ontological, hermeneutic, cultural and social practice, and as a means of stimulating further dialogue surrounding the creativity engendered in textual plurality, I pose the following research questions:

1. How do the readers in HAM, a hybrid zone of liminal poaching, socially engage with literary texts, in their theoretical/aesthetic constructions of a praxis for medical humanities?
2. What can the act of social reading tell us about the ways that cultural meaning is constructed, manifested, and maintained? How does the geography of reading, as an historical and social emplacement, impact on the way texts are read?
3. How does the 'inbetweenness' of HAM, as a landwash site, shape its function as writerly text, as a location for the readers to write *on* and write *from*? In relation to their constructions of subjectivity, how do they define their desires and aspirations in, towards, and through reading?



Methodology; a mode of address and a way of thinking

Employing a qualitative research methodology, which at its dynamic core is more a mode of address towards my project, and a “way of thinking” about my shifting subjectivities, than any discrete application of a specific design (Cheek, 2005, p. 391), I approach my analysis of reading experience through the paradigmatic “worldview of the researcher-as-interpretive-bricoleur” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 183). Following Rienharz (1997), in the enabling of rich, thick *figurata* to emerge in my research as constructed material, I proceed with an understanding that we not only “bring the self to the field...[we also] create the self in the field” (p. 3).

I recognize that any form of research is a necessarily power and value-driven engagement of a manufactured ‘reality’, and that the language one uses subsequently enables the presentation (and creation) of one’s subjectivities in ways that are historically situated and locally particular (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). As the term “bricolage” implies the use of imaginative and productive elements in research work, it is also generally understood to reflect an actively productive process of employing multidisciplinary methodological strategies, “as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation...rather than receiving the ‘correct,’ universally applicable methodologies” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005, p. 316-317).

To differentiate between ‘methods’ and ‘methodology’ involves a significant conceptual distinction between the tools of inquiry on the one hand, and the principles that underline how such tools are employed and interpreted on the other. The former involves the collection of *figurata*, while the latter refers to the theoretical analysis that determines how I look at what I have *witnessed*, which “addresses us as a voice we cannot fully know,

but to which we must bear witness, commanding us to awaken to something that ‘burns’ at our edges” (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 4), and remains at the frayed ends of subjectivity’s unseen coverlet. In this sense, the *witnessing* extends far beyond the actual event. The main *figurata* collection methods I employ are: (a) in-depth individual interviews, (b) transcriptions of audio recordings from book club meetings, and (c) the intermittent narrativizing of my own experiences in Newfoundland and Labrador. The latter will document my “struggles to open the space between analysis and action” (Jones, 2005, p. 784), and through which I can maintain a stance of unremitting reflexivity towards my own personal biases. Haunting these figurate methods is the shifting and polyphonic figure of *The Saltwater Chronicles* project itself, with its multiple layerings of method, including anthropological poetics, hermeneutic portraits, and analytic tracings of desire in other Newfoundland and Labrador reading sites and reading groups (Robertson, 2003). Perhaps more importantly, none of these above practices can, or will, be read in isolation, as the meanings they generate have all, to admittedly different degrees, been guided by “culturally defined and socially shared types of story formats” (Atkinson & Delamont, 2005, p. 831). Realizing that the validity of knowledge is always contextually inscribed and interpreted through and by relations of power (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005), and that each method and technique, “as a set of material interpretive practices, creates its own subject matter” (Cheek, 2005, p. 649), a qualitatively-based approach to research, framed by cultural studies and poststructuralism, enables me to adapt my methods of *figurata* collection, as a process of sustained critical reflection on the self as researcher, and on the location(s) of “human as instrument” (Guba & Lincoln, 1981) in the overall process of meaning making.

The participants in HAM meet as a group approximately once a month, to discuss a pre-selected work of art, which in most cases is a piece of writing, although the group has also met a couple of times to discuss collections of musical works, occasions which are referred to as 'Musical HAM.' As previously mentioned, the sessions are usually held in *Bitter's*, the graduate student pub on the campus at Memorial University, and generally commence at about 5:30, lasting from around an hour to an hour and a half. It is not uncommon for members to arrive late or leave early, and though there is a certain degree of anticipation that particular core participants will usually be present, there is absolutely no requirement for attendance, nor are members rebuked for failing to show up. As will emerge throughout my *figurata* analysis, the importance of maintaining the group's structure as 'informal' is stressed in every aspect of its organization. While in St. John's, I attend, record, and transcribe two full meetings of approximately an hour and a half each in length.

In addition to these social occasions, I schedule individual interviews with six members of HAM, many of which take place on campus. Since this study is my first endeavour at meeting with people under such circumstances, the first couple of interviews reveal a number of miscalculations, as I initially found it difficult to affect a comfortable compromise between a casual and informal mode of address, typically engendered upon first meeting the participants, and a more stilted and less natural mode, which tended to emerge when I began posing my questions. The questions in the first couple interviews are regrettably long-winded and wordy, as the responses I anticipate are not so subtly enmeshed in the very substance of the questions themselves. Fortunately, as I had initially set out with the goal of engaging dialogues of a broadly open-ended nature, I quickly

realized that such an objective was not being met through my present strategy. I shortened the questions themselves, structuring them more on the basis of prompts than on pretentious formulations, thus allowing the space of dialogue to develop more organically. On this point, I remain in agreement with de Certeau (1984) that, “consumers produce through their signifying practices...‘indirect’ or ‘errant’ trajectories obeying their own logic” (p. xviii), and that the principle of according value to these trajectories, as they are generated, is of necessary significance to my work in the field.

The end result of the accumulated *figurata* is: (I) two audio-taped, transcribed group meetings, (II) eight audio-taped, transcribed individual interviews, and (III) a number of emails accumulated through my correspondence with the individuals in HAM, some of which are casual, and some of which are structured and take the form of question and response. At the outset, I include all hesitations and pauses (in the form of ellipses), stutters, and word substitutions (such as ‘like’ and ‘you know’?) in my transcriptions. Eventually, however, I leave out all such stumblings in speech. What is more, though I sometimes make a note of such occurrences, it is impossible, in transcription work, to capture the full trajectory of speech; the nuances, tones, non-verbal or silent references, and possible or half-sarcasms, of which there were indeed many. The recording of a trajectory here, “suggests a movement, but it is also a plane projection, a flattening out. It is a transcription. A graph (which the eye can master) is substituted for an operation” (p. xviii). It is also the establishment of a “horizon of identity” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 15), of a proper ‘place’ in speech beyond which meaning’s expansion is barred. Though such absences and substitutions are inevitable, and point to an inherent flaw in audio transcription work, I hoped to anticipate my drifting of memory by keeping notes while

interviewing, and completing the transcriptions as close as possible, in time, to the actual interviews. What is more, by acknowledging my non-neutral position in the interviewing process, I allow for the impossibility of neutrality in any interpretation of *figurata*, which instead functions as a series of filters, and through viewing, “The written text (as) a social situation” (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 59), I accede a similar assessment of transcriptions themselves.

All the transcriptions are numbered by page, date, and respondent, and are further coded according to category and theme, in reference to my overall research purposes. Of course, not all the *figurata* (insofar as it is figurative) refers to my preconceived lines of questioning, and so the shaping of categorical formulations is a constantly reflexive process, which is simultaneously expansive and narrowing. To a certain degree, such a strategy is intrinsically problematic, since in the postmodern age there is an overwhelming recognition that “documents are dynamic, (and) not static” (Cook, 2001, p.26). In so far as, “language exists neither before the fact nor after the fact but in the fact” (Ashcroft et al., 1989, p. 44), transcriptions necessarily moderate and limit the links and possibilities between language and subjectivity, and in this sense, it is a form of essentialist activity, which, “demands that sources, forms, style, language and symbol all derive from a supposedly homogeneous and unbroken tradition” (Rushdie, 1991, p. 67). Yet Spivak (1996) draws our attention to the possibilities of, “a *strategic* use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest” (p. 214), enabling us to recognize that the meaning of words is always enplaced, and though meanings may shift from utterance to interpretation, that such shiftings need not be inevitably and forever harmful.

With an awareness that, “no material is transparent” (Steedman, 1987, p. 37), and that the forms of hermeneutic activity are never straightforward, I turn to the work of Carolyn Steedman (1987, 1992, 2002), in determining what it is I am looking for in the transcribed texts of my respondents. Along with Fuller (2004), I appreciate the challenges of giving meaning, through words, to experience, and that, “shaping narrative strategies capable of communicating the significance of...stories and knowledges, is difficult, partly because textual expression is always limited by the materialities of language, and partly because it is bound up in relations of power” (p. 8). In *The Tidy House* (1987), Steedman is concerned with the use-value that young children obtain through their employments of language, and more specifically, how they use language to position themselves subjectively, and in relation to the symbolic codes of a social world. In analyzing a piece of prose written spontaneously by a group of young girls, and looking at the historical uses that adults have made of children’s writing and speech, Steedman observes a significant “distinction between adult’s use of children’s writing and children’s use of it” (p. 27). Through writing, the children were able to describe the patterns that they encountered in their, “social life, and the narrative served them as an exploration of the social theories by which they were being brought up” (p. 31). The use-value of their writing lay in questioning those principles they saw epitomized in their family lives, and through this interrogation, to also question their own futures as working class women.

In looking at, “the ways in which little girls have used written language in order to become the women they were expected to be” (p. 75), when common metaphorical understandings of princesses and dragons don’t suffice, “it is the words on the page, the shifts in topic, the symbols employed and the tenses used that make the evidence for us to

interpret” (p. 62). Also important is the particular nature of historical evidence, and that, “what the children’s words reveal is *their* understanding of a social and sexual future, not my understanding, nor an actual *account* of a social and sexual system” (1992, p. 101).

There is an important difference, then, between the use-values enunciated by people through language, and how the researcher uses this evidence to construct their arguments. Steedman shows how, historically, children’s written language has been used by adult researchers, “to reinforce general social theories about childhood” (1987, p. 82), and how, “compilers of children’s texts are often quite explicit about what they want and need from children and have, in pursuit of a particular image of childhood, often denied the evidence of the text before them” (p. 67). More than anything else, adults have sought in children’s texts either a means for amusement, or an instrument through which to flatter themselves, and for Steedman, “adult delight in charming childish error is...irrelevant to an understanding of children’s writing” (1992, p. 74). In this “split that exists between children and ‘the child’” (p. 194), the fantasies of researchers, expressed through conceptual *forms*¹⁰ such as childhood, are in many ways at odds with the experiences of individuals caught up in large scale historical development (1987, p. 37). There is thus a dangerously “fine line between appropriating the subject narcissistically (thus erasing her) and reading the subject autobiographically (reading as a form of resistance)” (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 7).

Using Steedman’s insights into how to effectively react to the rhetoric of respondents, and understanding that, “the researcher has a massive transference

¹⁰ In this context, Steedman’s definition of “form” is, “an imaginative structure that allows the individual to make an exploration of the self and gives the means to relate that understanding to larger social organisations” (1992, p. 11).

relationship with the past” (1992, p. 201), my analysis of reading experience pays attention to the ways in which the members of HAM use their language to position themselves subjectively, and to communicate issues of power and desire. Understanding that language is never a transparent medium of communication, I construct my arguments on the basis of my respondent’s reactions, proceeding with an awareness of the historical tendencies within the field of book club research, and the spatial dimensions of social reading.

What we are, we inherit. And we inherit language, which we use to bear witness to the fact that we are what we inherit. It is a paradoxical circle within which we must struggle and settle things by decisions which at one and the same time inherit and invent...their own norms. (Derrida, 2002, p. 26)

September 19: Journal Entry

The sounds from my swinging balcony are the rustling of leaves, the occasional and identifiable whirring of a car’s wheels, the opening and shutting of a window, the inevitably loud footsteps of a man running down the steps on



Power St., the gnashing of machinery against virgin rock, and the dumping of piles upon piles of the stuff, the freeway in the distance on the overpass out of town, the calling of seabirds, a shopping cart filled with bottles being pushed up Pleasant, and unidentifiable

voices that rise, swelling only momentarily above all the rest.¹¹

These things are threads that form a fabric, remade in every step down Pleasant Street, or wherever I walk, although this re-creation takes place at the level of the unconscious, or at least, of the unaware. Wherever they occur, such things remind us (in the sense that their referent is heard but not seen, or seen and not heard, or smelled and not

seen or heard, there is always an evocation of past occurrences of the ‘same’) of where we are, which in turn also reminds us of who we are, and helps us to make sense of our place in a shared urban space. Reading the streets and pavement as an act of travelling enunciation, a writing and forging of a path. Creating meaning from footsteps in the rubble is an achievement of inscription and diction. And just like muttering and mumbling,



I use enunciatory tools that are not of my creation, but of a world that existed before I arrived, and of which I am only a momentary measure.

1. Methods of *Figurata* Collection

Through a series of interrelated qualitative research strategies, the uses of literature in a socially mediated situation are examined and thoroughly problematized.

¹¹ I am here reminded of Camus’ description of sound in a place that, at least immediately, is not so teeming: “In Algeria dogs can be heard barking at night over distances ten time greater than in Europe. The noise thus takes on a nostalgia unknown in our cramped countries” (1966, p. 26). In Camus’ case, sound evokes a sense of distance, while from the vantage of the fabric I describe, there is instead a suggestion of neighbourly closeness.

Endeavouring to capture the interplay between social and subjective processes of meaning making in the context of medical humanities, and through HAM's tactics of a liminal mode of analysis as an applied interpretative technique, I employ the use of the following *figurata* collection strategies: (a) individual, informal interviews, (b) recording and transcribing of group meetings, and (c) personal, spontaneous reflections in the form of a journal. The products of the first two strategies, once transcribed, are coded according to useful thematic categories, and in regards to my research purposes as a whole. The latter is employed as a tool for examining the depths of my own personal investments, and in maintaining a constant reflexivity towards the choices I make, or fail to make, as a researcher in the field.

a) Individual, Informal Interviews

Since “the goal of unstructured interviewing is *understanding*” (p. 708), what is important for Fontana & Frey (2005) is that interviewers establish a sense of rapport with their respondents, and that they endeavour to see the situation from the interviewees' viewpoint, rather than unwittingly enable a superimposition of academic preconceptions. Although I set out with this purpose, it was, admittedly, a challenge to sustain even the basis for an unstructured interview environment, as I now realize that the success of such a design depends largely on the degree to which I, as researcher, am confident and comfortable in my own tasks. The questions that I ask reflect directly upon the types of answers that I am most likely to receive; open-ended questions will tend to receive answers of a more personal and thoughtful nature, whereas closed questions (where the replies are limited or presumed beforehand) tend to receive answers of a ‘textbook’ kind (I.e. yes or no responses). Though on the whole, the results of my first interviews are rich

and detailed, there are numerous occasions where it would have been advantageous to let the respondent assume control of the direction of the conversation, instead of trying to keep my hands on the reins.

Regarding the interview as a contextually based and mutually accomplished story (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), I make a sustained effort towards employing an open-ended and conversational interviewing style, with the purpose of diminishing my power and control over the interviewing process, and ensuring a greater space for casual story-telling (Foley & Valenzuela, 2005). Following Robertson (2001), I agree that “the impulse of story can sometimes occasion an eloquent return of the dream” (p. 29), a return that prompts a further engagement of fundamental desires. Preparing prompts for these interview sessions, I try to accomplish the conceptual shift spoken of by Chase (2005), which involves thinking of the interviewee as a narrator in their own right, and which offers “the subject a chance to shape the interview” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, p. 94). On one occasion, I actually forgot the prepared list of prompts at my apartment, forcing myself to recall the questions on the spot. Not surprisingly, this turned out as one of the strongest, and succinct, of my interviews. Rather than presupposing that interviewees have answers to researcher’s prefabricated questions, or asking for a “formula story” (Loseke, 2001), I emphasize, “that interviewees are narrators with stories to tell and voices of their own” (p. 660). Working in such a manner, admitting the problematic and contradictory nature of all data, figurative or not, is no doubt a challenge, but if I wish to grasp how people create meaning out of the events of their lives, and use this material as the discursive and semiotic bases for my research, then I also need to be open about inviting such stories to flourish in the first place.

b) Group Meetings

At the heart of this study is a concern for meaning making in reading as an activity of social construction. I follow from the prompts of Le Guin (2008), who writes of:

The shared experience of books (as) a genuine bond. A person reading seems to be cut off from everything around them, almost as much as someone shouting banalities into a cell phone as they ram their car into your car—that’s the private aspect of reading. But there is a large public element, too, which consists in what you and others *have read*. (p. 34)

And as Dara (one of HAM’s members) mentions, “Every reader brings the sum of whatever they are to it” (D, I-1, p. 5)¹². Reading in a social circumstance is thus always composed of multiple and intersecting acts of rereading; both of the texts at hand, and of those resonant representations at work in the constructions of subjectivity. When analyzing the results of HAM’s group meetings, I am concerned with the manner in which these gatherings generate, through their approaching of textual constructs, qualities of resistance and creativity in alternate modes of perception, and how their meeting space functions as a landwash site, drawing unconventional associations through shared spontaneous dialogue. Approaching rereading, once again, through the insights of Barthes (1974), where, “Those who fail to reread are obliged to read the same story everywhere” (p. 16), HAM’s interpretive activities function through engaging multiple and simultaneous readings of an otherwise ostensibly single text, intertextual mingling where there is no primary reading, and approaching texts through their writerly qualities,

¹² For the purposes of this study, the figurata will be referenced in the following manner: (1) The respondent’s pseudonym, (2) The data source (I.e. Group meeting: GM-1 or GM-2, Interview: I-1 or I-2), and (3) page number.

requiring a reader's interventionary and creative abilities in the generation of meaning itself. Importantly, these writerly attributes also function in a doubling sense, where not only are the material texts interrogated as writerly constructs, but the meeting space of HAM also performs as a writerly text itself, as a text that the members write *on*, and simultaneously write *from*.

Spontaneity in speech, which I was fortunate enough to observe in HAM, is an important attribute of a landwash location, and functions in the dialogue of a crowded house, where around each corner, through each door, and under each floorboard is a new conversation. And as, "a crowd can be exhilarating" (Tuan, 1997, p. 63), and, "out of the crowded room a haven of warmth and tolerance is created" (p. 65), peeking out of the floorboards, I caught fleeting winks and grimaces at a table with a book at the centre. The labour that is accomplished when HAM meets is similar to Willis' (1990) "necessary symbolic work," where social communication functions as the seeding of fertile ground, and where imaginative activity takes root, becoming actualized in the broadening of subjective possibilities. This potential as 'perruque,' where "order is *tricked* by an art" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 26), is brought, through body and speech, to the folds of an intersubjective creative struggle, where new modes and occasions of self-recognition evolve from an awareness of others, and in processes of everyday meaning making.

Having read the books myself, and though treading the line between participant and observer, I clearly fall more sharply on the latter side. Although my comments are few, the members of HAM are receptive to them as from a fellow reader, though clearly, my temporary position as outsider is obvious, not in the least because of my recording device, which unfortunately, because of the surrounding noise, is placed obtrusively in the

centre of discussion. Although the tape recorder ensures that words are caught tangibly, in their moments of actualization, it emerges as an imperfect recording device, as an interference in an otherwise 'natural' state of affairs (which anyways, can never, in itself, be caught). Nevertheless, I make certain that those in attendance approve of its employment, and thankfully, I receive their unanimous verbal assent. For their individual interviews, however, I do have the members sign ethical release forms.

Through transcribing these meetings, it emerges that any purely quantitative assessment of their trajectory would be no more than a mere 'flattening out,' as each moment of utterance, though placed in a series, follows a uniquely indefinite and irreducible logic. In short, this exercise in creativity is utterly shot through with the present. I therefore treat such dialogue as "case-history", where "The events described carry their own meaning," as opposed to "autobiographical narration," where what matters most, "is the order and veracity of the events described" (Steedman, 1992, p. 120). While in St. John's, I also keep a personal journal, and it is to this narrative and fluctuating device that I now turn.

c) My Journal

While the journal I keep in St. John's is, admittedly, no professional affair, it exists as an attempt to emotionally situate my navigations through new types of experiences, and to capture some uninhibited and spontaneous reflections, which might have otherwise dissipated. At times, such impulsiveness leads me to



compose rambling and open-ended questions, relating tangentially to the books I'm reading: "In biography, how does an author's self differentiate/negotiate between its nuances? What fictions are created to sustain a self that is/is not the same as the self that is writing?" (September 12, 2007). At other times, I make mundane observations that immediately bring me back to the moment: "In an old creaky house, even my most regular routines seem suspect" (September 20, 2007), or "Hiking up Signal Hill, it was not long before I let Baba run off her leash. She would just stand there facing the wind, putting her ears more flush with her head, and closing her eyes only slightly to block the breeze" (October 1, 2007). For a couple days I got held up, unexpectedly, with the question of memory's influence, an issue that refused to leave my thoughts: "But actually, this way of thinking, correlation, is plagued and problematized by the fact that always associating a phenomena with what it resembles strips it of its individual authenticity, since people, places and things are always so in their own right, and not by virtue of their categorical similarities to other things that exist in the world" (September 28, 2007).

And sometimes, I make an attempt to bring my meanderings back to my research: "For reading, an awareness of such influence is less problematic than with things 'in the world,' but are their manifestations as ideas, concepts and relationships any less real? Indeed, is not the activity and ability to construe them according to *who we are* what actually *gives them life*? ...Or moves their influence and emphasis, in the first place? (September 29, 2007). At times, I have no idea what I'm on about, while at others, I labour with some crucial issues: "I struggle against a tendency within myself (that I know follows a certain tradition) to mythologize and romanticize facts of everyday life in Newfoundland (I.e. Fishing boats, and the poetic placement of fishing nets left to dry in

the sun). Okay, that's one thing to acknowledge, but another...Why do I struggle against this?" (October 5, 2007). And then, there is the festering spontaneity of poetry:

What is that creaking of the door like a little boy's stutter?
What is that tickling of the branches
Like a rhythmless tapping of the toes?
Typing out some form of code
For which there is no cipher
For which there is no one home.

As research always "involves a complex politics of representation (wherein) the socially situated researcher creates...those realities and representations that are the subject matter of inquiry" (Cheek, 2005, p. 641), so as to not be blinded by academic theory at the expense of lived experience, the underlying purpose of my journal is to instil an embodied autoethnographic component to my research. Also, to situate myself in more than just the realm of 'the social,' I also envision myself as a *spatially-situated researcher*, "paying attention to the dynamics of discourse—with sociality as one the vectors passing through" (Robertson, personal communication, 2008). In my writing there is thus a de-centring of 'the social,' positioning language as a shifting conceptual field, which contains within itself multiple folds, sieves and rips of meaning. I thus locate my personal and emotional experiences in Newfoundland alongside, and as constituent of, the larger social issues that I am exploring (Olesen, 2005). Through such narrative involvement, which admits my role as a 'conversation-maker,' I am also making an assertion about, "the interaction of message and aesthetics, process and product, the individual and social" (Jones, 2005, p. 783). As I am necessarily linked to my research through language, as "a constitutive force" that constructs one's subjectivity in ways that are historically and locally specific, (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 960), the results of my experiences are narrativized as a spatially situated "interactive performance" – in a specific setting, and for a precise

purpose (Chase, 2005, p. 267). This journal is also a statement about the importance of the mundane and the everyday, transient thoughts and feelings that are sometimes wiser than those that emerge from deep deliberation.

2. Descriptions of Analysis Used; ways of walking as a *witness*

As the HAM Interest group¹³ is small in number, though receptive to possible growth, there was no need for methods of purposive sampling in the selection of research participants. Thankfully, all the presently active members of the group were willing to meet with me, and were amenable to my observation, and slight participation, during their group meetings. In coming to terms with the negotiated representations of medical practice, health and the body in literature and poetry, the members of HAM participate within a multifarious engagement with language, ideology and social practices, and produce meaningful stories through their intermingling of negotiated subjectivities. Each of the members, in describing their involvements with HAM, use language to position themselves subjectively in their relation to the surrounding world. In analyzing the transcribed interviews, I pay attention to how the language used represents, “a deliberate attempt to take hold of the confusions and contradictions with which they (are) presented and to synthesize them” (Steedman, 1987, p. 31). Since all I have now are the words, “All words, nothing but words” (Steedman, 1992, p. 7), I must look at the words themselves, and the social structures through which they are enunciated.

¹³ Within *The Saltwater Chronicles*, HAM was initially located by Robertson (PI), as one of about twenty reading groups who came forward and announced themselves in response to a letter sent to the editor of *The Telegram* (St. John’s, September, 2004), asking for book clubs interested in sharing their stories and reading experiences to contact the PI.

In response to the fact that categorical resources always include codes of “embedded commentary (and) assessment,” Peräkylä (2005) has written that, rather than functioning solely as organizational tools, “categories are not...neutral resources of description” (p. 874). In organizing the categories, themes, and patterns that emerge in the *doing* of my research, special attention is given to locating references that the participants make to the relationship between themselves, their world and their reading experiences (Way, 1998), and the ‘meaning’ that emerges from such considerations. ‘Meaning’ is here proposed as an always-mediated substance (by memory, social spaces, the researcher’s influence), since even, “The organization of texts, the arrangement and ordering of documents...is itself an act of interpretation” (Steedman, 1992, p. 4).

After reading over the transcriptions, and reflecting on the extent to which my involvement in the process of *figurata* collection actively influences the results, I proceed to organize, through colour coding, certain of the segments into initial categories. Though useful in organizing the material, and according to the overall aims of my research, these initial groupings are only temporary stopping points, and in no way represent an irrevocably binding and final selection. I admit that any analysis of *figurata* is always a messy and ambiguous process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999), and that it involves the implementation of categories that may themselves shift over time. The initial categories are:

A) *Individual reading practices and personal histories*, with the sub headings:

- i) Personal information
- ii) Personal history in HAM
- iii) Preconception of book clubs, and possible past involvements
- iv) In regards to the character of openness in the group
- v) Pleasures derived from reading in HAM

- vi) In regards to personal reading practices

B) *Medical school and Medical Humanities*, with the sub headings:

- i) Medical student problematics
- ii) The program at Memorial
- iii) The value of the humanities in medicine

C) *The structure and usefulness of HAM*, with the sub headings:

- i) The structure of HAM's activities
- ii) Description of the unique qualities of HAM
- iii) In regards to the inner composition of HAM
- iv) In regards to the literary texts
- v) The proclaimed purposes of HAM
- vi) The proclaimed accomplishments of HAM

While these initial categories serve to organize my material into accessible amounts, it leaves many elements of my research questions unanswered, and importantly, makes it difficult for me to incorporate the material culled from the group meetings, which is essential, as it describes the members in an environment that encourages both sociality and spontaneity, qualities that, on the whole, can be lacking in the interview process. While it is undeniable that we both find and create ourselves in works of art, we also transfigure, which signifies an agency, these same works into visions of ourselves, both as individuals and social groupings, and both past, present and projected. With these gaps in mind, I establish categories that more adequately involve issues of desire and the formation of subjectivities in reading, the qualification of HAM as an example of cultural studies work, and the negotiations and intersections that are made in regards to discipline, place, and ideology. The revised coding scheme is thus:

A) *Desire, Subjectivity, and Reading*, with the sub headings:

- i) The member's personal histories, and the cultural practices in which they engage (Mostly for methodology section)
- ii) Motivations for social reading (and opinions regarding book clubs)
- iii) Pleasures derived from social reading (including that of resistance)
- iv) How social reading impacts upon reading practices, and fosters creativity

B) *Intersections of Discipline, Place, and Ideology*, with the sub headings:

- i) The problematics of the Memorial medical student
- ii) The values of Medical Humanities
- iii) Newfoundland and reading

C) *The Doing of Cultural Studies*, with the sub headings:

- i) The purposes that HAM serves, as an inbetween space of dynamic, intersubjective recognition (Musical HAM)
- ii) What's in a name? HAM as Interest Group
- iii) The arrangement and trajectory of the group discussions, and issues of accessibility and location
- iv) Gender and reading
- v) The selection of, and approach towards, individual works
- vi) The accomplishments of HAM

These categories also involve the theoretical understandings of poststructuralism and cultural studies in a more interwoven manner, forcing the movement of theory, as a reflection on applied practice, to emerge more fluidly in the context of my research findings. Furthermore, these categories have been revealed through a sustained and sensitive interaction with the *figurata* itself, and are thus a means of allowing the substance of the findings to contribute in their own illumination and classification, rather

than adhering solely to preordained formulations. The following section looks more closely at the participants in this study, and the texts through which they stroll.

3. Description of Setting, Participants and Literary Texts; neither here nor there

I set off towards campus on a bustling day; a blue sky dotted with racing clouds. Walking from my apartment on Pleasant, and in a city whose boundaries I have not yet fathomed, Memorial University seems literally out on the edge of town. From the angle at which I arrive, cross-patterned lush hills, highway intersections, walking trails and flowing streams frame the campus. Though I had met with Karen the previous week, the self proclaimed ‘instigator’ of the group, I still have no idea what to expect. Nervous that I will be probed for the depth and intent of my research, I prepare a brief script formalizing my purposes, as I know I have the tendency to ramble when speaking. Naturally, I never touch this script, and it remains hidden, folded in the pages of *Paula*.

a) The School and the Pub; folds of place

Having given myself ample time to reach *Bitter’s*, I take a few minutes to *witness* the medical school, a building removed slightly from the bulk of Memorial, though connected directly with a teaching hospital. I am always impressed with the psychic imprints that literally exude from the insinuating affective qualities of edifices, which are promoted subjectively, and of course, are felt most powerfully through first impressions. The walls themselves convey a subtle metonymic sterility, perhaps through the schemes of crème paint that unobtrusively remind me of the waiting room crevices in Montreal’s Hôpital Notre Dame (and naturally, this may be a madeleine-like influence, held broadly over those things, in the crevices of our memory, which recall moments of ‘home,’

'youth,' 'strife,' etc.). There are the swinging doors that I feel compelled not to open, as if doing so would reveal autopsies in action, a sight I personally don't anticipate approaching other than through books and movies. Even when washing my hands in the bathroom, I look in the mirror as if I have stolen the glance, and my reflection itself looks immediately guilty—suffice it to say I feel as if I do not belong in these unnavigatable corridors.

Once in the medical library, objects again appear highly familiar, though specialized to a stream I can only dance around. Such unfamiliarity, however, also encourages a heightened awareness, compelling me to notice things that otherwise I might have easily ignored. Once, in a hospital waiting room, I noticed the point on the arm that a man rolled his shirt cuffs to (just below the elbow...the cuffs themselves were about two inches thick), and this sight, in its utter banality, I recall almost every time I roll my cuffs. On my second day in St. John's, I spend an hour or so strolling at Mundy Pond with my dog. My roommate laughs when I tell her of my absorption in the place, and that my being "smitten with Mundy Pond," is not something she would have expected, as she always thought of it as a "sketchy place," to which she wouldn't give a second thought. Compared with her learned and historied knowledge, I move with the exuberance and solitary trail of a young child, who, "so imaginative in their own spheres of action, may look matter-of-factly on places that to adults are haunted by memories" (Tuan, 1977, p. 33). I have no history of this knowledge or its place as one of the many "names that stalk" (Chambers, 2006, p. 32), and so for me it is simply a body of water with a peaceful nature, lacking a prior history or a preconceived historical narrative. An awareness of this lack, while in many ways unavoidable, is an important tactic for subverting a researcher's tendencies

towards *understanding*. Having snapped my photos with a regard only for the present, I became one of, “those ignorant of the past and of the significance of these places, seeking a memento of what they had discovered” (p. 33). It is only now, as I write these words, that I recognize how close I was to, “the challenge of the curriculum of place” (p. 30).



I am the first to arrive in *Bitter's*, and it appears a cosy concern, with an atmosphere that, I assume, is designed to stimulate both the intellect and the palate. It seats about forty people comfortably, with a large television screen at one end tuned into a boxing match and later to soccer, and the bar set up at the other, with a kitchen in back. Since it is on the ground floor, and on the periphery of Memorial, its location is accessible and easy to find. The seats themselves are crafted with a dark grained wood, and cushioned leather pulled taut by hexagonal rivets. Though I am early, the pub itself is not empty. One group in particular, of about a dozen people, seems to be celebrating a reunion of some sort. I imagine they are a class from 1957, though of course, I could be wrong. Their animated conversation drifts in and out of my recording, a peril of public documentation. Luckily, the bar takes credit cards, and so I set myself up with a pint and wait for the members of HAM to arrive, one hand flipping through pages I am too anxious to read, and the other determining the shape of my seat's rivets.

b) The Participants; collaborators in reading

Though the participants in this study come from disparate educational, professional and geographical backgrounds, they all share a common interest in the inherent possibilities that exist between our corporeal and artistic natures, and that such dimensions of our subjectivity should be distinguished not as contrastive, but instead, as existing in a state of dialectic symbiosis. In the interests of protecting (or at least veiling) the identities of the participants, I have applied pseudonymic names in place of their real ones. I will here discuss some of the pertinent details of the individual members of HAM.

When I initially began my search for a suitable reading group in St. John's, I contacted Karen through the information provided on HAM's webpage. As Karen and Dr. Robertson had communicated in the past, I was already aware that Karen expressed an initial interest in the overall project. Her supportive and enthusiastic reply arrived almost immediately, and explained that, though the group was not composed of only medical students (as was my initial assumption), the members would more than likely be open to my attending a couple of meetings. She writes:

We have two historians (professors), an English professor and poet, a humanities Master's student, a history Master's student, a woman who used to work in community health, but is now retired and "just" loves the intersection of art and medicine...and a few medical students. So I'd say you'd be likely to get some good, reflective interviews out of us. I don't think they'd have any issue with you coming. We're a pretty laid-back bunch. (Karen, personal electronic communication, July 26, 2007).

In general, this email set the tone for those that followed, and since Karen seemed to speak for the group as a whole, I assumed that she could be considered as an organizer, or spokesperson, though as I later would figure out, these roles were never so clearly delineated. However, since Karen does refer to herself as HAM's 'Instigator,' and admits to performing many of the group's clerical activities, I will continue to refer to her in this capacity, and to the other members of the group as 'Collaborators.' Though such language may, perhaps, assume a tone of unnecessary hostility, since HAM's 'inbetweenness' admits to a multifaceted nature at its core, I understand this group as operating, in their interdisciplinary cultural work, through the lens of a protracted intellectual struggle.

Karen (The Instigator): Originally from Alberta, Karen completed her undergraduate degree in Zoology and Oncology, and her Master's degree in Evolutionary Biology, with a special emphasis on the seabird. This latter focus originally brought her to Newfoundland and Labrador, eventually settling permanently, with the intention of working as a Seabird Biologist. Then, as she acknowledges, she "sort of came face to face with this thing, I don't know if you've heard about it, but its unemployment in Newfoundland" (K, I-1, p. 21). Faced with a lack of employment opportunities in her field, Karen began working as a freelance journalist for the CBC, eventually becoming a full time employee, a post she held for six years. In 2004, she began her studies in medical school at Memorial University.

Karen is also the author of two published novels, and one book of poetry, which I was lucky enough to be in St. John's to attend the launching of. Though upon meeting Karen, it hardly surprised me that her interests would germinate to artistic output, she acknowledges that, " I didn't really set out to be a writer or anything like that. I don't

really know how it happened actually (laughter). Kind of oops” (K, I-1, p. 2). While in St. John’s, I had the opportunity to meet with Karen on two occasions.

Bridget (Collaborator #1): Though originally from St. John’s, I actually met Bridget in Montreal, and only about a week after my first correspondence with Karen. Bridget’s initial email reads:

Hello there! I have recently moved to Montreal, and was a member of the reading group you wish to study in Newfoundland until I moved here last month. I am currently pursuing a fellowship in Adolescent Medicine at the Children's Hospital through McGill University. I thought it might be interesting to touch base with you because I, too, am in the very initial process of designing a research project that looks at the transformative power of art in medicine (particularly adolescents). It may be mutually beneficial for us to meet! (And it's more convenient than traveling to Newfoundland!) Contact me anytime! (Bridget, personal electronic communication, July 30, 2007).

Though our first meeting was not recorded, and was more a discussion than an interview, Bridget offers a unique perspective on the activities of HAM, as one of the rare class of medical students whose academic background is strictly in the arts. Having received her Bachelor’s degree in English literature, she hopes to apply her passions in this field to her work in paediatric medicine. Since Bridget completed some of her initial medical work in Fogo Island, she offers a glimpse at outpost communities in Newfoundland and Labrador, and the possible uses of reading that exist among such isolated populations. Upon returning from St. John’s, I was able to meet with Bridget a second time, and under slightly more formal circumstances.

Gail (Collaborator #2): Although she was not able to attend either of the HAM meetings for which I was present, Gail graciously met with me on one occasion, and when asked what brought her to where she was, she explained, “I’m here because I’m from here. I’m a St. John’s townie through and through, and I’ve always lived in St. John’s” (G, I-1, p. 3). She also grew up surrounded by book clubs, having attended one as a child with her mother, which she eventually would join as a member herself. Gail recently completed her Master’s degree from Memorial University, on historical changes in nursing education in 1960s Newfoundland.

Cathy (Collaborator #3): Cathy is a Professor at Memorial University, with a joint appointment in both the faculties of Medicine and History. She is part of an emerging division in the Faculty of Medicine called *The Division of Community Health and Humanities*, and teaches classes on Book History, Medical Communications, and women’s history in the medical profession. Cathy’s initial education was mostly in English Literature, though her PhD work ended up in the field of Book History, and more specifically, on the history of medical literature. Some of her past research concerns itself with Canadian self-help medical literature (pamphlets, flyers. etc.) from the nineteenth century to the 1920s, and as she explains, “I’m interested in the history from the bottom up” (C, I-1, p. 15). Having recently moved to St. John’s in 2005, and though she is relatively new to the artistic community of the city, Cathy is actively involved in a number of artistic organizations. I met with Cathy once during my stay in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Alan (Collaborator #4): Alan’s primary appointment at Memorial University is in the Faculty of Medicine, through cross-appointed with History. Alan’s intellectual

background began in Science and Bacteriology, but then shifted to the History and Philosophy of Science, to his PhD, which was in the History of Medicine. Originally from Glasgow, Scotland, Alan worked in Washington D.C. just prior to coming to St. John's, though he also previously lived in Ontario. As he mentions about his affinity with Newfoundland and Labrador:

Withstanding the weather, which gets some people down, but born and raised in Scotland, the climate doesn't bother me, and the landscape is familiar. So in some respects, I have connections between North America. Yet, there's certainly an old-world tradition that I feel fairly comfortable with, and they serve lots of Guinness. (laughter) (A, I-1, p. 2)

As an historian of medicine, Alan is responsible for teaching the one and only class, required for all incoming medical students, which deals exclusively with the concerns of medical humanities. Introducing literature and other cultural works as they relate to medicine, in a similar way to that of HAM, he encourages in his students an integration of the humanities and medicine, which, "at least in first year (works) to offset some of the other structured, didactic, multiple choice, 'use this part of your brain only' type questions, and to think there's other things out there" (A, I-1, p. 7). I met with Alan once during my stay in St. John's.

Dara (Collaborator #5): Dara is a Professor of Literature in Memorial University's Department of English, where she teaches various courses on poetry, literature and writing, from a local, national, and international perspective. Her current research interests include inquiries into poetic form, and poetry from Ireland, Newfoundland and Canada. Her past research has included interpretations surrounding the works of Samuel Beckett,

analyses of poetic influence of the Irish diaspora in Newfoundland and Labrador, and appearances of the Beothuk motif in Newfoundland literature. Originally from Lake View in Conception Bay, Dara is a former editor of two leading Newfoundland literary journals.

Though Dara works professionally at the university level, she considers herself, “as somebody in the arts, as well as in the academy” (D, I-1, p. 2). Indeed, Dara is an acclaimed writer who has released four volumes of poetry to international acclaim, and has won numerous awards for her writing. As Dara writes of her interests, which straddle at least two fences:

I’m a professor in the department of English. I’m from a place about thirty miles from here, and I’ve had the good fortune to be able to return to the culture that I grew up in. I’m a writer. I’m a poet, and obviously I’m clearly on the humanities side. I’m more on the *H* side of HAM than on the *M* side, though I have an interest in literature to do with health, and the body. (D, I-1, p. 1)

Since Dara, as a writer and a professor of English Literature, is not officially associated with the Faculty of Medicine in a teaching capacity, she brings to the landwash nature of HAM a formally tangible quality. Though as she herself attests, this partitioning of interests should never be stressed as a strict delineation:

I don’t think you should overemphasize the divisions. There are members of this group who are quite sensitive to matters of aesthetics too...(and) to nuances of language. Every reader brings the sum of whatever they are to it. (D, I-1, p. 5)

c) The Literary Texts; books whose borders bleed

As the two HAM discussions that I attended revolved ostensibly around individual pieces of literature, it is important that I discuss their most resonant qualities, especially in

the context of medicine. Though the purpose of this present study is not to engage in outright literary criticism, it is apparent that different modes of address will have different effects on different groups of readers, and it is therefore interesting to note the various ways that the members of HAM will take up or resist the texts at hand, according to their narrative and poetic trajectories.

***Paula*, by Isabel Allende**

To read the admiring comments on the dust jacket of Allende's *Paula* (1996) is to be immersed in the adjectival qualities of her unique breed of 'magical realism.' The book is described as a "soul-baring memoir," with "amazing anecdotes," and, "intimate secrets...whose straightforward acceptance of the magical and spiritual worlds," will, "seize the reader like a novel of suspense." It is praised by various reviewers as, "beautiful and heart-rending," and suffused with a, "narrative magic," that is "vibrant with strange lands...(and) pulsating with an unbearable love of words." In a tone that is "spellbinding," and "flawlessly rich," Allende is described as not only being able to evoke magical qualities through her writing prowess, but as actually being a magician herself. It is not surprising, then, that reading her work becomes a sort of cathartic experience, a venturing into a world unknown that requires a 'letting-go' and suspension of disbelief on the part of the reader.

The dilemma, however, is that Allende's material, though evocative and ethereal, is also a subjective retelling of circumstances that are strictly historic and non-fictional, a blending and border-crossing that renders "the delineation between fact and fiction obsolete" (Dulfano, 2006, p. 503). *Paula* comprises a series of interwoven plots, and as it is written in a style at times memoir and confessional, and at others, autobiographical and

semi-fictional renderings of emotional trauma and grief, Rodden (1997) writes, “Perhaps even Allende herself is unsure of its genre” (p. 3). The memoir/novel opens with an address to Paula, Allende’s daughter, who has fallen into a coma. In describing to her daughter the reasons for her present endeavour, Allende writes, “I am going to tell you a story, so that when you wake up you will not feel so lost” (p. 3). The story she describes is her family’s history, from the Basque country of Spain to the characters of Allende’s Chilean lineage. What is important here is that this historical account is directed to an unresponsive Paula, and is infused with a hope that one day she will wake, a hope that is interrupted on numerous occasions by the reality of medical intervention.

By the second part of this book, Allende’s hope is dwindling, and though she repeatedly recants such statements, she testifies that, “I am no longer writing so when my daughter wakes up she will not feel so lost, because she is not going to wake up. These are pages Paula will never read” (p. 205). Although she continues to write about Paula’s life, her medical environment, and the doctors that surround her, the book also assumes a more directly autobiographical approach, following Allende’s career as a journalist and writer, and the tumultuous years of Salvador Allende’s overthrow. In many ways, *Paula* functions as a healing narrative; where writing performs the establishment of a presence, as a means to fill in (though not replace) the absence of a personal loss or void, in this case Allende’s daughter. The book ends with Paula’s death, and in a scene of an especially visceral nature, in trying to enunciate her grief at a death that alters the sequence of generational descent, Allende writes, “I drop to my knees, tear my blouse, ripping off buttons, and with my arms opened into a cross and my breast naked, I scream your name, Paula” (p. 324).

HAM's central criticism of *Paula* is not directed towards the nature of Allende's mourning, since to analyze such a process in clinical terms would be to disregard to deep pain and sorrow of grief. Instead, their analysis is towards the authenticity surrounding Allende's motivations for writing, and the manner through which she uses her daughter's death as a narrative ploy in the telling of her own story. In this context, the group uses the narrative of Paula to discuss a number of issues, including the politics and morality surrounding representations of loss, the uses of autobiography as a mechanism for grief, and the dynamics of appropriation when artists use non-fictional representations of death in their work. But in their discussion, they also "visit in the face of death," using *Paula* to revisit personal experiences of mourning, and in this way, "visiting," which describes what we do in the landwash, "is a way to mourn, a way to remember, a way to grieve and a way to go on" (Chambers, 2006, p. 34).

For some members of HAM, Allende's work is critiqued as egocentric and self-obsessed, an evaluation that clashes directly with the veneer of credibility in Allende's sorrow. As Dulfano (2006) writes, "(Paula) is the articulated excuse for writing the book as well as...the text that must be ineluctably considered before Allende's own story surfaces. However, like a palimpsest, Paula's text must be erased, or more accurately, transcribed upon" (p. 497). This is not to say, however, that this issue is one of simplicity, since as DeSalvo (1999) argues, "Allende's work shows how creative writers use writing as a way of healing, of transforming despair into understanding...(and) how writing that springs from intensely personal motives can be useful to others" (p. 39). From this perspective, motivations that might be classified as self-centered are not necessarily negative, since their effects can nevertheless impact positively onto the reflections and

experiences of other people. Even though *Paula* does open the discursive floodgates to a plethora of conversational topics, HAM's overall reading of Allende's work is one of resistance and potent critique. In this sense, it is interesting to examine the uses that literature can serve, even if there is resistance in the particular reading experience. As resistance is one of the use-values that HAM achieves among its members, it is important to assess the ways that literary form may act here as a conditioning factor, and provoke important discussions surrounding the limits, or threshold, between self and other (Robertson, personal communication, 2008). As *Paula* itself moves between genres, breaching a number of literary tropes, it can be the formal aspects of such a reading that, in part, provoke and materialize this particular affect. In many ways, Allende's use of language and mode of address forces a constructive breakdown in her reader's reactions.

Although HAM's process of book selection, as nebulous as it is, will be discussed at a later point, it is worth mentioning that while Gail suggested Allende's work, she did not take part in this discussion. Although the reception was not wholly disparaging, that the book had no one to 'champion' its worth made for a noteworthy dynamic.

***Quick*, by Anne Simpson¹⁴**

¹⁴While Simpson and Allende, as authors, are accorded significance insofar as their *situation of writing* enters into HAM's discussions, and though the presence and influence of an author has sometimes been regarded as a limiting effect on reading's trajectory, this may not always have to be the case. In a discussion of the medical humanities, to query "the stirring of an indifference: What difference does it make who is speaking?" (Foucault, 1984, p. 120), is to propose, from the outset, that the person speaking operates within an institutional and disciplinary framework of some kind, and that questions of both a medical and literary nature, and where they intersect, depend in some part on the fulcrum of semiotic selection and linguistic choice, and how readings always move in a network. So, in admitting that the author, "is a certain functional principle, by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses... (and) by which once impedes the free circulations, the free manipulation, the free composition, decomposition, and recomposition of fiction" (Foucault, p. 119), I also emphasize that literary fiction figures into the body of the reader,

Each of us is a threshold for the other to pass through (Simpson, 2007, p. 88).

This lack of an outright advocate, however, was not the case regarding Simpson's *Quick*, which was initially put on the table by Dara, though also enthusiastically admired by the other members. Throughout 2004, Simpson, who is responsible for initiating the Writing Centre at St. Francois Xavier University, held the temporary post of the Medical Humanities artist-in-residence at Dalhousie University. During her time there, she encouraged medical students to look at the human body from a fresh, and poetic, perspective, a task she herself takes up in *Quick*. Since Simpson also has a background in visual presentation, it is not surprising that her book is suffused with a concern for the poem as architectural structure, and one whose meaning exists, at least in part, in the way it is laid out on the page, or through the use of extra-lingual textual elements, such as bold lines sectioning off the script, or a boxed text overlaid, as interruption, on top of another. The provocations of literary form on the reading formation¹⁵, though with obviously

and how the reader thinks about and imagines *body*, in a way no author can ever anticipate in full. How we think about 'the author' is especially significant in relation to how we conceive the limits of reading and the literary imagination; though the author may be there in a reading (though of course, not all readings require an author), she in no way sets limits that cannot be transcended.

¹⁵ Paying attention to "what it means to resist or submit to the excitability of ideas" (p. 2), and through a discussion concerning the impact of form, mode of address, and structures of affect in reading experience, McConaghy and Robertson (2006) remind us that, "language effects carry meaning, but they also implicate unthought material—provocations that are both its conditions of possibility and its self-subversive blind spots" (p. 4). In readings that act as provocations, and in a query that asks "How is provocation useful to understanding?" (Robertson, 2006, p. 170), the authors also point to the elements of a reading that indicate a struggle, and that, "in breaking the hold of a text's belated address, the reader is challenged to find the points of resistance and to discover that against which the writer (and it reader) are resisting" (2006, p. 5). Such indications, as a grasping at the knowledge of "the song beneath the text" (Robertson, 2006, p. 174), outline a grammar of unconscious desires in reading, through which readers in collective circumstances effectively bump into the folds of form, and each other.

different effects from *Paula*, are nonetheless also an important factor in *Quick*.

Thematically, Simpson's poems convey a concern for hybrid zones, with an emphasis on shifting boundaries, both in regards to life and death, the elements in nature, and of mythical characters crossing to the netherworld. Through these moments of ceaseless shifting, the poems themselves enact a measure of fluctuation, drawing attention to the multiple, and moral, dimensions of possible perception. One example of this is in relation to Simpson's poem about *The Visible Human Project* (p. 70, see Appendix 1), which she presents as a series of spliced boxes of text, referencing the intricacies of a murderer's spliced body displayed in cyberspace, and which encourages among HAM an engagement with the ethical issues of assigning immortal status to a murderer.

Simpson's text, though concerned with the human body throughout, and at times, in a uniquely biological way not referencing sexuality, also makes explicit reference to the work of paramedics, and to words such as *amygdala*, recognized within the medical community, but not immediately without. Towards Simpson's work, the members of HAM display an outright willingness to engage, and an awareness that a poem exists as a living thing, but which lives through the lives of its readers. The interpretive practices of HAM's members are immediately open to the possibilities of a poetic text; the vagueness, the discerning of voice in poetic diction, and the multiple meanings that words convey. Their tasks of reception are thus full of enthusiasm, and an eagerness to learn from each other. In fact, because of Dara's place in the University, many questions are posed to her *as* a professor of literature. Since two of the members (Karen and Dara) are also published poets, there is a tendency to regard the text actively, in relation to the act of writing, and not simply as it has been written. The conversation in HAM moves briskly, from Frye's

Anatomy to Burton's, and from Wyndham to Gaston Bachelard. Throughout this conversation, it is interesting to note the dynamic way that a poetic text gets taken up by the members of HAM, and the discursive differences that exist when the effects of a book's consumption are genuinely appreciated. Even though, as Karen mentions to Dara, who admits she was initially worried about the text's reception, "Well, that's okay. Hate generates discussion" (K, GM-2, p. 30).

Having introduced the members of HAM, and the texts that serve as their prompts for discussion, the following section deals more succinctly with the substance of the interpretations themselves, and in the first place, how notions of reading desire are communicated in language, and how the members construct their enunciations surrounding their personal use-values of HAM.

Bearing Witness

Desire, Subjectivity and Reading: articulating the use-values of HAM

In approaching the dialogues of HAM, and its members' transcribed interviews, I am looking at the ways that language is used to describe this particular site of reading experience, as, "an 'art' which is anything but passive" (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxii). Through squeezing out my own associations with the text, focusing on, "the divergences in the ways people acquire, read, and use books" (Radway, 1997, p. 23), I perform this work in 'small bits,' rather than large trajectories. Along with Steedman (1987), I agree that the subject, "who arranges the pieces of her life...with...*words* (in Steedman's case written, in my case spoken), arranges them in a highly deliberate way" (p. 31), and as a researcher, it is incumbent upon me to show consideration for these acts of deliberation,

and *witness* the nuances held in their arrangements, as “the elaboration of desire” (Robertson, 2002, p. 199), captured at the very moment of utterance.

Each of HAM’s members insist on the informal and casual nature of the group, and that the group’s activities are inextricably marked by difference; from mainstream medicine, from book clubs, and from the overall, “dailyness of things” (K, I-1, p. 17), a difficulty illustrated by Bridget through the prevalence of a, “get yourself through the day, and do what needs to be done” sort of attitude (B, I-2, p. 3). Yet, how the members describe such difference reveals that, more than simply a site of informality, the uses of HAM are complex and interwoven, and, “The tactics of consumption, the ingenious ways in which the weak make use of the strong...lend a political dimension to everyday practices” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xvii).

In looking at how the use-values of HAM and its readings are articulated through language, I consider their positioning through the following system of headings and sub-headings:

1) Dwelling, Marking and Confusing

- a) *The Gambler’s Desire*
- b) *Weaving and Marking of Conspicuous Cultural Difference (...tapping into the momentum of informality)*
- c) *Immersion in the Poetics of Text (and the laughterly Slippages of Humour)*

2) Branching and Looping

- a) *Reading as Territorial Expansion*
- b) *Inducing the Loop*

3) Forms and Structure

- a) *Resistance, and Legitimation of Artistry in Medicine*
- b) *Sussing out Literary Form, and Measures of Authenticity*
- c) *A Measure and a Structure of ‘Sensible’ Counter-Normalcy*



1) Dwelling, Marking and Confusing

A feathery cold passes

Between cedars.

Standing, I glance at the shape

I made lying down. Body that is no longer body

but the skin of a wish. How do we get up,

Walk out of ourselves?

-Anne Simpson, from *Winter* (2007, p. 49)

Under her fingers there's marram grass, blade-thin, and a straggle of beach pea. Further away: the skull of a deer or a dog, nestled in sand. The piece of driftwood, where she's resting her head, is nothing more than a bleached bone. There's no telling what makes her cry. Look at all those women, wearing deep blue saris, leaning this way and that, in the ocean. Thousands, row on row. Are they moaning or praying? They're trying to tell her something.

-Anne Simpson, *Beach* (2007, p. 74)

In approaching the articulations of readers, including those concerned with the counting and touching of grains of sand and snow, and the picturing of bones as pillows, it is important to recognize how, “every literary description is a view” (Barthes, 1974, p. 54). “That the speaker, before describing,” Barthes continues, “stands at the window, not so much to see, but to establish what (s)he sees by its very frame: the window frame creates the scene” (ibid., p. 10). Thousands of women in “deep blue saris...row on row,” framed in from the litter of driftwood and bleached bones...writing here on reader’s reading experiences, from the tattered frames of poetically induced saris and “the skin of a wish”—I’m in the landwash as much as they, and as Long (2003) notes, we “move back and forth between using people’s remarks as windows into the text...and using the text as a window into people’s lives or various aspects of the cultural and social lives we live together” (p. 145).

a) The Gambler’s Desire

The rabble really do play a very dirty game. -F. Dostoyevsky, from <i>The Gambler</i>	Several of HAM’s members make reference to the fact that, though they each hold degrees of personal investiture in regards to HAM’s objectives, the group’s early activities, as a founding myth, were proposed as a conceptual progeny, or “brainchild” (G, I-1, p. 17), of Karen’s multifaceted and industrious nature. Gail refers to HAM as “Karen’s baby” (G, I-1, p. 16), and of course, this description makes reference not only to a moment of birth (though quite possibly to the necessary mess of it all; the corresponding afterbirth that runs parallel to the birth itself), but that throughout a child’s
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life there exists a special, indescribable connection between parent and offspring. Following from this relationship is a sense of duty, responsibility and guidance, and as Alan acknowledges Karen as “the driving force, as she is with so many things” (A, I-1, p. 2), attributed to Karen are the grasping palms over the symbolic reins of the horse that is HAM, and the ability to rev up the engines of discourse, put them in park, or shift to reverse. Dara also refers to Karen’s interests in both the arts and medicine as, “The germ of HAM” (D, I-1, p. 1), attributing to HAM a biological and symbiotic origin, and as a natural part of a spontaneous process, perhaps that of the curious mind.

Karen herself, though she doesn’t see in HAM’s configuration a structure of hierarchical positions, does acknowledge her distinct role in the group as the one who dings the bell at the wrestling match, makes sure the ring is clear and the opponents are ready in their corners, but then steps back to watch the match ensue:

I don’t really often have to step in, but I do feel like I need to be the one to focus the conversation...I do feel like I sort of have to say, “Okay, so let’s start, here’s what we’re reading,” and...it just requires a little ringing in the bell, and then people are into it and talking...But if there were a time where the conversation lagged, or I thought someone was shying away from weighing in, then I would feel like it was my job to bring them in, and just keeping the thing on the rails. (K, I-2, p. 5)

In relating HAM’s movements to those of a train, as an instrument of rhythm and transport that builds momentum as it moves, a metaphor that is not surprising given her personal history in Alberta, where trains generally run parallel to major highways, Karen situates herself in a versatile position, both in the steering role of conductor, with her eyes set fast

on the destination, and also of the worker in hickory-stripped overalls, bent over the glowing coal with a pallor of ash on her face, but smiling nonetheless. Such ambers, after all, bring heat and warmth to the body in the prairie passages of a long, cold winter. In facilitating the poaching within this space, Karen says: “It’s grunt work, but somebody’s got to do it, and it’s not hard, it’s just a matter of doing it” (ibid.).

From its very beginnings, HAM was fantasized as an interdisciplinary gesture, and a means of conceptual transport across the fields of medicine and humanities. As a textual community of dialogic articulation, HAM is situated as, “an essential means of putting group-based experiences into words” (Fuller, 2004, p. 10). As Karen describes, the idea initially came about through a casual suggestion proffered to her by a professor: “Well, why don’t you start a reading group?” (K, I-1, p. 5). In her reaction to this idea, Karen reveals the preliminary use-values¹⁶ of HAM, as well as two important attitudes prevalent

¹⁶ For the concept of ‘use-value,’ as it relates to subjectivity, I refer to Marx’s succinct formulations from the first few pages of *Capital* (1990). In general, use-value is understood as a qualitative dynamic, and refers to the way in which a ‘thing’ meets the conditions of human need:

- 1) “The usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value. But this usefulness does not dangle in mid air” (p. 126).

It is worth remembering that usefulness is not something determined in a social vacuum, but that properties of a ‘thing’ become triggered through its relation to other ‘things’ (p. 149), and (just as in the dynamics of Johnson’s Cultural Circuit) by its surrounding social embeddedness, towards and from which it is located.

- 2) “Use-values are only realized [*verwirklicht*] in use or in consumption” (p. 126).

It is only through its movements in an applied social reality that HAM has a use-value for its members. For there to be a *use-value*, it must of necessity apply to a *use*. The language employed to describe HAM will be taken, thus, as describing subjective use-values of a particular social formation. These use-values are understood neither as absolute nor according to the strictures of a moral arrangement (I.e. either/only right or wrong), but instead, as infinite and changeable, and possessing qualities that can best be understood through the imperfect applications of language.

among the group's members—an apprehension towards the popular notion of book clubs, as well as a willingness to allow for the necessity of risk and ambiguity in reading practices of a social nature:

At first I thought, “Ewww. No, I’m not into clubs and stuff.” But then I thought, “Well, who knows, right? I’ll give it a shot,” and so I sent out an email...and two medical students replied out of 240. And I thought, “Well, who knows? Okay, that’s good enough” (K, I-1, p. 5).

It is interesting to note the slitheriness of her response to this suggestion: “Ewww,” though of course, these are reminiscences, and her use of this ‘word’ is only important insofar as it is used to describe her experiences in a deliberate fashion. I inscribe it with three w’s, since Karen drags the word out (the type of nuance that repudiates the success of transcription), but really, the word cannot be spelled correctly, since it is not a word, but exists more along the lines of a purely physical noise—the cracking of knuckles, the crackling of fire, a grunt or a wheeze. It squeezes itself into linguistic corners. How do you spell a cough, a hiccup, a stutter? Where does the stutter end and the word begin? All attempts lead down into failure. “Of two bodies in contact, which one possesses the frontier that distinguishes them? Neither. Does this amount to saying: no one?” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 127). But it is worth asking; what is it about the idea of a ‘club’ that prompts such a physically visceral reaction? And just as a cough might be followed by a ‘Pardon me,’ Karen reflects for a moment and admits risk: “I’ll give it a shot.”

To allow for the shapeless contours of ambiguity in reading is not a simple matter of choice among comparable alternatives, but especially in the field of medicine, involves a realignment of values, and an assertion ‘against the grain’: that in the trolling of

impulsive moments, novel possibilities might emerge, and that, “Sly as a fox and twice as quick, there are countless ways of ‘making do’” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 29). Through an awareness that, “Messy is always already what is there” (Palulis & Low, 2006, p. 49), it is an engagement of the landwash that knows full well that the range of possibilities, left in the wake of the tide, can never be known entirely. One of HAM’s use-values, then, is in providing a space to pursue options in reading, and promoting in its readers a quality of openness, characterized through a willingness to lose or a willingness to profit. I will title this use of HAM *The Gambler’s Desire*, as “It is only at the last moment, when everything is passing toward a conclusion, at the critical moment of danger...that a gambler discovers his trick of finding his way around the table, of reading the table” (Benjamin, 1999, p. 297). Since, “In medicine...you don’t want to speak up and have the wrong answer” (K, I-2, p. 4), undertaking such risky readings, and valuing a sense of being lost as a possible path to worthy interpretation, are not common approaches, however naturally they may appear amongst the members of HAM.¹⁷

¹⁷ Tuan (1977) poses the question of being lost in space. I reiterate reading as the disjointed pinpointing of place within a space, as a murky plodding between space and place, and as an act of translation, and thus value the possibilities of being *lost* in reading as an act of translative necessity: “What does it mean to be lost? I follow a path into the forest, stray from the path, and all of a sudden feel completely disoriented. Space is still organized in conformity with the sides of my body. There are the regions to my front and back, to my right and left, but they are not geared to external reference points and hence are quite useless. Front and back regions suddenly feel arbitrary, since I have no better reason to go forward than to go back. Let a flickering light appear behind a distant clump of trees. I remain lost in the sense that I still do not know where I am in the forest, but space has dramatically regained its structure. The flickering light has established a goal. And I move toward that goal, front and back, right and left, have resumed their meaning: I stride forward, am glad to have left dark space behind, and make sure that I do not veer to the right or left.” (Tuan, 1997, p. 36).

Upon first hearing about the group, Bridget relates that as a first year medical student, “I wasn’t ready to go back into my arts background, and I really had to keep my feet on the ground in medicine” (B, I-2, p. 1). In effect, any attempt to merge her interests in medicine and art would be to risk drifting past an ethereal, netherworldly border at which, with her feet losing their grip on the sturdy soil of medical science, she might find herself in jeopardy, slowly slipping away through the shorelines framing her profession, where the confluence of the tidal flows of art and science meet. This is the danger of the landwash, the treacherous nature of the in-between space; while it can prop you up, allowing for new subjective revelations, it can also tear you down, provoking a fear of the forlorn—tripped and swept up in swells of the rising tide (again, see Figure one). Extending this binarial metaphor of an unyielding constancy held against a free-floating airiness, Bridget also says of HAM that, “It did lift me out of medicine, and it made me feel good that there were a bunch of people there who were like me, and were able to escape the whole hierarchy of medicine” (ibid.). With the poaching of social engagement comes risk, though for Bridget, this risk, which entails a certain ‘Kierkegaardian leap,’ also opens the possibility of escaping from a rigid idea of medicine, which is certainly reliable and steadfast, but only inasmuch—to risk a heavy handed association—as the meals in prison come regularly as well.

Alan also finds use, and pleasure, in HAM’s disposition as a site where, “What happens, happens” (A, I-1, p. 11). In his description of the group’s techniques for book selection, he describes it as a mostly haphazard and capricious affair, with, “Absolutely no method, and mostly madness” (A, I-1, p. 12). The fact that he emphasizes the ‘madness’ of the group, and juxtaposes it with ‘method,’ entails a certain jocular imperative, a

laughterly quality, which Alan both recognizes and cherishes. Such an imperative also recognizes the extent to which those in HAM, as ‘consumers,’ do not wish to simply be identified by the literary products they employ, and that between the person and the product, “there is a gap of varying proportions” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 32), opened up by the specific uses through which such products are engaged. Cathy also confirms this attitude towards textual selection, revealing one of HAM’s imperatives as fostering a spirit of non-competition: “Somebody has something, has an idea, or has a copy of something, and they say ‘This is good, why don’t we do this next time?’ and that’s what we do. That’s it!” (C, I-1, p. 9).

More than simply a basking in the kismet of reading’s chance trajectory, though, HAM is also characterized as a space in which certain risks are taken and even welcomed. Not the least of these is the fact that, as a site of introspection and intersubjective criticism, the candour in the discussion leaves people’s attitudes and beliefs exposed, and as anything left out in the untamed wild, it might get whipped in the wintry wind. In this way, the order of HAM is, “a sieve-order,” which is, “everywhere punched and torn open by ellipses, drifts, and leaks of meaning” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 107). Alan says, “I’ve taken my hits” (A, I-1, p.10), even though he also admits that there isn’t a real sense of competition amongst the group’s members (A, I-1, p. 11). That he refers to criticism directed towards him as “my hits” implies that they in fact belong to him, as if each member is apportioned a certain amount of self-censure, to which they must each publicly succumb to in turn, as a sacrifice to the ‘gods’ of conversation, or to the conditions of knowledge or life—as Nietzsche tells us, “Life is the condition of knowledge,” and, “Error

is the condition of life” (quoted in Felman, 2007, p. 46). Relating one of his ‘hits,’ Alan recalls that:

At the last reading we had, I was one of the only persons that actually kind of liked the book. And there was that wonderful phrase of Dara’s, that she thought I was a ‘generous reader.’ That’s fine, I can live with that...(since) the book did something for me, and though I admit I never quite got it finished...I was trying to pick up on that, and maybe that’s my reflection...that I look at it more as recreational reading rather than as ‘professional reading,’ where I’m...putting it through the meat grinders. Here I relax a bit more. (A, I-1, p. 10)

As a space that encourages relations in reading that are “completely serendipitous” (A, I-1, p. 12), Alan also sees in HAM not only *chance*, but in, “The very fact that I know I may have to bare my soul a bit” (A, I-1, op. 10), a *chance for* something significant to emerge in the passing and easily forgotten moments of HAM’s writerly text...as something that is, “constantly slipping away, something that can be neither said nor ‘taught’ but must be ‘practiced’” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 77), in the interstices of time when one’s guard is let down (or ‘taking a breather’), to flip the coin of the reading on its head...to stage a new plot, as antidote or palliative, out of the one already read:

A: Think of a sequel that will never be written, it’s called Isabelle, by Paula Allende...(laughter)...where she reads this...

D: That would be something...

A: ...and says ‘Well, I think what we have is your take on the situation. But look, you egotistical son of a bitch,’(laughter)...‘this is what you thought. I was a pawn for you and I did this...’

D: Being Judy Garland’s daughter...

A: Yeah, what happened to you over the rainbow? And we're not in Kansas anymore. So if you want, that might be the antidote.

Such self-censure is not always qualified as a patient lingering or an abrasive restriction either, and can actually provide for satisfaction in a space of ease. Cathy positions such an attribute in HAM as an alternative to the dynamics of a classroom, where as a professor, there is a certain pressure to interact frequently with students, and for the students' benefits, guide the discussion through deliberately placed probing and evocative questions. In the capacity to just relax and listen to others, Cathy makes it clear that:

That's where the pleasure comes in as well, where you can just sit there and say nothing at all, and not worry about it...which I always like to do anyway with students, but this way you're doing it without that other structure around it. (C, I-1, p. 9)

b) Weaving and Marking of Conspicuous Cultural Difference (...tapping into the momentum of informality)



implicates personal reading practices. As Karen says: “I can’t tell you the names of characters in my favourite book...but I can remember how it made me feel...and so its fun to talk to other people about books, who have a more systematic, detailed, and critical approach to reading” (K, I-2, p. 6).

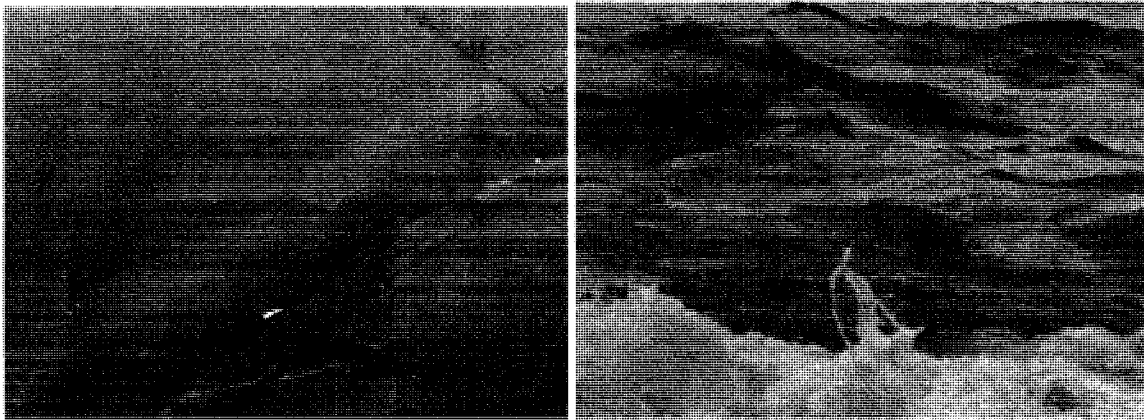
In this sense, it is interesting to note Karen’s use of water as a descriptive motif. In describing the unguarded nature of people in Newfoundland, she regards such a trait as a general decontaminant, that, “It’s just in the water here,”¹⁹ and that, “There’s a natural kind of interdisciplinarity about this place, because no one’s really too excited about boundaries” (K, I-1, p. 19). Water leaks, water pools, water drips, water seeps. Water freezes and cracks and laps. Water sustains and water kills. Of the apprehension that medical students feel towards joining HAM, Karen reveals that, “They felt like it was just one more thing in a sea of things to do” (K, I-1, p. 7).). This lack of boundaries is an important characteristic of the landwash, and water, as a fundamental force, both



nourishes human life as its drift simultaneously produces disorientation and catastrophe. By situating water as a constituent and guiding element that can be used to describe her experiences both in

¹⁹ When in Naples, I was told that the pizza there retains its distinct qualities because of the composition and taste of the water surrounding the city. It would be fruitful to compare the ways that geo-cultural understandings of water are used in subject positioning.

Newfoundland and in medical school, Karen positions the ocean as a unifying force amongst her varied activities—a possible means of grappling with subjectivity while living in Newfoundland. And indeed, based on my limited time in St. John’s, I can agree that the ocean, with its sounds, its smells, its birds and its mists, is impossible to ignore, and becomes an essential component underlying the fabric of the place, regardless of one’s perspective.



While water is certainly a great leveller in Newfoundland, there is no escaping the impact of death, the greatest leveller of all, on the substance of HAM’s discussions, and if there are many ‘walks’ of life, which use HAM as a point of convergence, is it also possible to ask if there is only one ‘walk’ of death? As health is always about a state of being apart from death, and “conjunction and disjunction are inseparable in them” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 127), health is always about death, and in this sense, there is no surprise that all ‘walks of life’ meet in the ‘walk of death,’ a subject that concerns HAM gravely. Through difference, then, represented metonymically in the ‘walks of life,’ as markers of alterity that remain unresolved, treading a slow and dancing circle around death, the conversations in HAM propel themselves forward. Long (2003) describes this quality of

the satisfying reading group discussion as, “the richness of a conversation that appreciates differences without needing to resolve them” (p. 146).

Karen’s use of the word “funky” is also revealing, and given HAM’s interest in issues of the body, it is amusing to note that the word ‘funk’ was once defined primarily in relation to the body’s odour, and the lingering smell of sexual intercourse. Funk music, which emerged through blending genres, is also concerned with corporeal and sexual energies (think *Cold Sweat* or *Get Up (I Feel Like Being A) Sex Machine*), as affective links to an imaginative (or even spiritual) artistry. Exemplified through a downbeat and bass rhythm that cannot be ignored, and a ‘groove’ that compels one to dance, the movements of funk usually revolve around the variances of a single repeated gesture; as the shared interpretations in HAM circle multifariously around a primary text (what Barthes (1974) refers to as the “stereographic space” (p. 15) of a “tutor text”), the chords of funk rewrite themselves through identical iterations that are nonetheless different, separate but similar—jarred insurrections of sometimes subjugated knowledges. Just like Karen’s early metaphor of HAM as a train, Fela Kuti’s half hour tracks would never gain the same momentum and command of the moment, were they only a few minutes long. Funk appreciates a release with restraint, an enjoyment of extremes and ritual (frenzied vocal deliveries, capes as costumes), yet also subtlety and improvisation, a ‘jamming’ within certain parameters, where instruments, as components of a whole, interchange their qualities, timbres, and tasks. To be read as a “funky” person is thus to be open to the influence of forces that ‘carry you away,’ a bodily energy that also allows for, as Karen puts it, “pretty spirited conversations” (K, I-2, p. 6). To provide a space for uninhibited corporeal readings, “implying a split, a cleavage” (Barthes, 1975, p. 47), where the body is

subject as well as object, can also be related to the use-value of exploration and interweaving of cultural and social difference—to engage alterity, and to pursue marks of difference and otherness.

As Dara indicates, the ways in which HAM's conversations are framed ensure their being deliberately set apart from their surrounding academic environment. Even though in the materials they read, and the overall thematic focus, the discussions bear some resemblance to an academic seminar (Alan notes that, "for me it's almost like a graduate course" (A, I-1, p. 4)), they are also fundamentally different, for as, "The seminar is inevitably connected with institutionalized learning, and grades" (D, I-1, p. 3), HAM generally lacks such a dynamic. No matter how 'casual' a professional seminar is, if conducted under the auspices of institutionalized learning, it bears the marks, or psychological imprints, of such association. As Dara illustrates, "distinct from the sitting down, the writing about it, or the lecturing to others about it," within the conditions of HAM, "the actual conversation is important" (ibid.), and not necessarily the conclusions that emerge. In this way, HAM's interpretative activities differ from more strictly 'professional' surroundings, since, "Whereas critics examine books as crafted texts to understand their inner working and justify evaluation," members of reading groups have a tendency to, "press books into service for the meanings they transmit and the conversations they can generate" (Long, 2003, p. 149).

Karen refers to the activities of HAM as a "free for all" (K, I-1, p. 4), and as a leaping, "from topic to topic (in a) stream of consciousness structure" (Long, 2003, p. 145), where what is free is sometimes a gift, and because we cannot refuse it, sometimes a responsibility and burden. Life, language and death are free for all, but not the ways they

transpire. Hunger is free for all, but not food. Desires are free for all, but not the means to fulfil them. What is free in a 'free for all,' then, is the appearance of something, but not so much their consequences and fallout. HAM is a 'free for all,' since it is assumed that imaginative play will occur, and that imagination is a free quality of the human character, which shapes the world, yet it also limited by the world that it shapes. The price for imaginative play in medicine is obvious, and though the capacity for creativity exists, as it is, "most often tethered to the nuts-and-bolts objectives-content-instruction paradigm" (Wear, 2006, p. 88), its imaginative applications are consistently hindered. Karen is well aware of this fact; that, "there is a right and wrong, and just like all the stuff you see in television dramas about medical school, it is all about humiliation, and if you give the wrong answer you will be humiliated" (K, I-2, p. 7). Wear (2006), in her criticisms of the cultural competency approach to medical education, also makes reference to this pedagogical attitude, in which, "culture comes to be viewed as content to be mastered, something on which one can be tested" (p. 95).

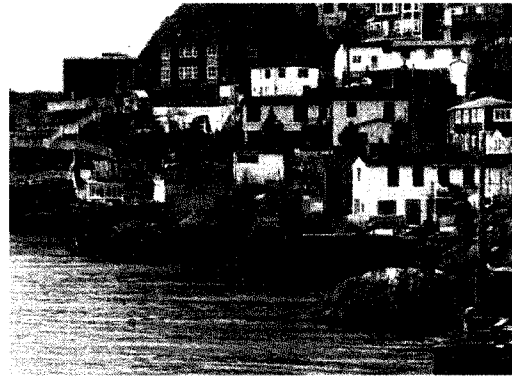
Within the weaving and marking of difference that characterizes HAM, though, there is an interest in publicly affirming the meanings that emerge through HAM's discussions, "achieved constitutively as a product of the dialogic situation of reading" (Ashcroft, 2001, p. 60). Such affirmation promotes a model of literary consumption that understands it as absolutely no waste of time, and as "a visible activity within the medical school...a declaration to medical students that this stuff is valuable" (K, I-2, p. 6). Within the first few minutes of our first meeting, Karen depicts HAM as a "loose knit group of people" (K, I-1, p. 3), a description that implies a design and a pattern, and that the group's intent follows from an established, if generally maligned, tradition of social

reading. It also suggests that the physical materials have been acquired and selected beforehand, and that the constituent elements (people, places, books...thread, colour, knitting style), though part of a plan, require physical and mental exertion to assume their final figure. What's more, since the 'looseness' of the knitting involves an awareness that the structure will stretch to fit the shape of whatever moves inside of it, this product's finality is never absolute, and though held together, it is in places only so, literally by a thread.

Metaphorically, knitting represents not only a product but also an activity, sometimes social and sometimes individual, from within the historically undervalued realm of 'women's work.' Though HAM's activities are not immediately gendered, they do come from a tradition of being undervalued. As already mentioned, Long (2003) considers women's reading groups as "counterhegemonic publics," which persist, despite being, "within a world (that) has remained doubly gendered, with troubling consequences for women" (p. 67). Understood apart from industrial work in the garment industries, knitting is usually considered a 'low-key' and gendered endeavour, and since it does not generally contribute directly to them, exists separately from larger economic structures. Whether undertaken on an individual or a social basis, knitting is conventionally associated with other activities, such as whittling, whistling and wandering, taken on with the sole purpose of 'passing' or 'killing' time. Images of the male whittler, however, are at least imbued with a healthy romanticism. As Long writes, "The solitary male represents a simplistic image of even high cultural literacy, whereas the image of the self-absorbed female devalues women even as it trivializes the notion of culture as soft and inconsequential" (p. 7). Karen's adjectival modifier, 'loose,' though, works to extend this

metaphor's traditional connotations, and to envision an expanded, and enabling, definition of knitting as an activity in the social world, not encumbered by burdensome delineations of gender or tradition, and to forge meaning directly out of such acts of 'killing.'

In Bridget's case, the acknowledgment of difference in the field of medical humanities is shown to allay and palliate the destructive effects of isolation. Recounting



her experiences working as a doctor in the remote community of Fogo Island, she explains that, "When I worked at the clinic...for everyone who came in, all their problems were directly related to the fact that they were on an island," and that, "everyone was depressed there, everyone was anxious" (B, I-2, p. 12). While such statements may appear to overgeneralize the destructive effects of isolation in outport communities, it is at least clear that through her use of such strong and unadulterated language, a significant element of Bridget's interpretation of the effects of isolation can most definitely be read as destructive. However, in reminiscing upon such depressive effects, she also admits to missing such a sense of being "trapped," since the all encompassing and surrounding nature of the ocean in Newfoundland, though it is pervasive, and "makes everything different" (B, I-2, p. 11), always stands for much more than simply a set of symbolic

prison walls: “And it’s the hills²⁰, and you always see Signal Hill, and you always see the ocean, and you smell it. I miss it. I miss that” (ibid.).



More than a prison, the water acts as a passage for a reading of the world, and of one’s place in it. It functions as a channel for international trade, but also for the drifting of thoughts, comparable to the outermost depths of any passionate and truly involved reading. It’s a conduit for a sense of confinement, while also for an incomparable freedom,



²⁰ In the case of St. John’s, *the hills* have more than just a visual significance. In fact, after only a couple days in St. John’s, my calves ached. *The hills* of the streets of St. John’s shape the bodies of its inhabitants in such a way that the aching and stressing of muscles becomes a means of recognition of place. Tuan (1977) writes on this as well: “The feel of a place is registered in one’s muscles and bones. A sailor has a recognizable way of walking because his posture is adapted to the plunging deck of a boat in high sea. Likewise...a peasant who lives in a mountain village may develop a different set of muscles and perhaps a slightly different manner of walking from a plainsman who has never climbed” (p. 184). Rereading is thus also a ‘getting used to’ the contours of a particular text, and a shaping of the muscles necessary for its slopes.

and what's more, it brings the physical possibilities of the landwash, which we, as individuals, must engage to reap the benefits thereof.

And of course, the surrounding waters have also served as a conduit for more than simply the objects of the landwash, such as the European settlers and fishermen who arrived centuries ago, and the behemoth pieces of ice from Greenland and beyond. As I wrote in my journal, I also experienced a sense of this ubiquitous quality while walking around St. John's, a city surrounded by water, and where, "The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 103), a lack that HAM also presupposes:



Everywhere I stand, it seems this city offers me a vantage point that is forever dissipating, and not in the sense of a vaporous disappearance, but a dissipation of a presence that spreads itself far and thin, veering towards a democracy of vision not prisoned and anchored to angles of geography, or heightened lookouts of knolls and cannons. From here I can watch the fog as it descends and rushes towards me. The fluorescent pennants over the car lot on Kenmount road signal its massive force. I am riding straight into the face of the fog.

(Personal Journal, September 23, 2007)

While Bridget frequently mentions the alienation and isolation she experienced as a medical student, there is a dynamic parallel that can be drawn between her uses of reclusive expressions of subjectivity as a student, and also as someone from Newfoundland, as something that's "just totally pervasive in everything you deal with when you're on an island, and especially when you're from an island" (B, I-2, p. 11). There is also a freshness in Bridget's recollections; as she only recently left Newfoundland, those things she took for granted while living there are only now making an appearance through her life in Montreal, though as a lack. Just as she experiences an artistic sensibility that is so deep-rooted it affects the very manner in which she approaches her role as a doctor, she also speaks of an, "island mentality, or an island sensibility," and that thinking from such a conceptual space, "just sets you apart, always" (B, I-2, p. 11). Such a spatial reading contributes to a kind of, "metonymic skid," in our experiential perceptions of the world, with the remnants of some city block, some metal fence, "adding to its new neighbour some new trait, some new departure" (Barthes, 1974, p. 62).

Speaking from Montreal, there is a sense that her remnants of this life on an 'island' persist metonymically, since they are, "so unconscious, and so much a part of who you are," and though she recognizes the lasting impressions that living on an island has had on her life, she still asserts that it is a fundamentally unknowable force, and that, "I don't think anybody would be able to express, or recognize" what it actually consists of (B, I-2, p. 12). For Bridget, the marking of such difference, and the recognition of isolation is not an area of subjectivity that can be dealt with adequately by the limited concerns of medical science, occupied principally with the treatment of the *effects* of

medical ailments, and not the poetics of space—the subjective consequences of ambiguous spatial emplacement, which can lead to what Ashcroft (2001) refers to as, “a sense of displacement, of the lack of fit between language and place” (p. 153). In recognition that, “maybe literature and reading are more important in a place when you’re trapped” (B, I-1, p. 2), and that in Newfoundland, “You can’t leave if you want to, so you’re stuck there at least for a little while” (B, I-2, p. 3), such a space as HAM functions to provide a reprieve from the alienating effects of isolation, whether geographically, or in terms of the rigidity of academic disciplines.

As with each of HAM’s members, Alan valorises the group’s discussions, in the first place, as an informal site: “It is informal, and that’s the first thing. There are no rules. There is no constitution. There are no expectations” (A, I-1, p. 4). Though this term, ‘informal,’ is tossed around quite a bit, it is worth exploring what its usage actually implies, and what it says about HAM’s dialogic functions. To begin with, portraying HAM as informal is establishing it as a site *apart* from the conventions of the academic world. Furthermore, in defining HAM against what it is not—somewhere in which expectations and norms of behaviour are established beforehand, Alan is also implying that, while HAM is not a part of the academic establishment, it is nonetheless filtered through, and purposely deviated from its customs: “There are no exams, there are no expectations, and if people turn up that’s great, if they don’t, there’s no agenda, no attendance. So it is...very informal and unstructured, but...there’s a certain momentum that seems to keep it going.” (ibid.). At the heart of HAM is this contradiction, that, “Within the frontier, the alien is already there, (a)...sabbath of the memory, a disquieting familiarity,” where it’s, “as though delimitation itself were the bridge that opens the inside

to its other” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 129): It is not where its members study and it is not where they work, yet at the same time it very much is, and from this incongruity emerges a set of diverse forces that acts upon HAM as an energy, a veritable indwelling impulse of the landwash.

An essential function of this informality is that, in conversations at least tangentially related to medical issues, people are drawn together in ways not ‘normally’ encountered in a typical academic or workplace environment, but as poachers poaching in diverse spaces, and playing with text as a landwash ‘arsing’. As Long (2003) writes, “One reason these groups can be playful is that they are not held accountable for their interpretations in the way that ‘professional readers’ and their students are” (p. 145). The veneer of care encountered in most professional surroundings is consequently stripped to its bone, as people face one another in a psychological state of undress. Alan attests to this distinguishing facet of HAM’s discussions:

Given the nature of some of our readings, which have looked at what it is to be a patient, what it is to be a physician, what it is to be sick, what it is to be ill...it’s quite likely that we as a group, and as people that are relatively strangers, have probably discussed more personal things than we might normally have in a student professor relationship, for example, or a colleague to colleague relationship. (A, I-1, p. 4).

However, it is a tempered informality. Instead of relating to people as functions, duties, or vessels of opinion, in HAM, individuals are approached in a ‘personal’ way, though always faintly tinged by an impulse to buttress intellectually: “In some respects we’re footnoting our statements. I guess we’re academics and scholars, and we just can’t get out

of that straightjacket” (A, I-1. p. 10). But even though this containment persists, HAM does provide sufficient breathing room, and a bit of space to fill the lung’s cavities in an otherwise tightly woven garb, and this is an important function of the informal momentum. Though it may not be connected to the spiritual world as a straightjacket of the Jack London type²¹, it serves its members well: while it does get into “some of the softer, fuzzier, warmer, aspects of what scholars, and poets and authors try to say” (A, I-1, p. 5), it does so with the firmness of authority provided by a stable intellectual backdrop, necessary for its member’s impulses as professional learners. This textual meeting place is a compromise, disparaging emotionally-driven aspects and relations of social reading, through referring to them as ‘soft’ and ‘fuzzy’ (infantilizing terms reminiscent of teddy bears and dollhouses), yet also simultaneously deeming such characteristics as fundamental to a key aspect of the reading experience—an experience that is always approached and problematized as multifaceted, multivocal, complex, messy and ambiguous. And once again, such compromise isn’t affected in terms of absolute understanding, but as a dynamic that is constantly reworked, through an honesty that, though hesitant, is nevertheless confronted.

This friction between the purely informal and the structured also bears a burden not usually encountered in the classroom. Though it has “cut the ice a bit faster” (A, I-1, p. 5), ploughing-through the denseness of a mutable liquid, it’s a mediated encounter that affects the arc of our reading practices—where we stand when we read, and how we stand

²¹ I here refer to London’s *The Star Rover* (1999), a beautiful testament to the enabling powers of the imagination, in which a prisoner straightjacketed in solitary confinement wills himself to learn astral projection. He writes, “In the jacket in San Quentin prison...I could not create this knowledge out of nothing. This knowledge and the facts I have related have but one explanation. They are out of the spirit content of me—the spirit that, unlike matter, does not perish” (p. 154).

towards what we read—leading HAM’s members to purposely contemplate how much of themselves, and their readings, they are willing to reveal publicly, and inscribe on the textual plane of HAM as addendum. Alan phrases such an obligation in terms of trust:

No matter how informal it is, and no matter how much I can trust my colleagues around the table, I am aware that I may have to come up with an opinion, and that perhaps I have to go through a bit more of a self-reflective process. How much am I actually going to bare my soul, or reveal that? (A, I-1, p. 10)

Such contemplation reveals the ‘informal’ as a not entirely anarchic space, and as ‘free for alls’ come with sometimes-costly consequences, contemplating the ‘personal’ through the folds of a text is more than simply a literary enterprise, but also a psychosocial liability. However, as HAM’s members are ‘self selected,’ the plunder of such poaching is plenty.

In speaking with Cathy, it’s apparent that HAM, through its establishment of a space that promotes tapping into the momentum of informality, also provides a dialogical energy with which to dwell along the borderzones of cultural difference. Though Cathy generally finds that the members of HAM agree on the most salient points of their readings, “conversing at a pretty common level of understanding” (C, I-1, p. 4), when this is not the case, rather than the conversation breaking down (as a victim of ‘groupthink’), it instead broadens itself to a spacious perspectivism, widened to incorporate degrees of otherness, as a democratic doling out and eating up the pieces of the cake that is HAM. Within such a borderzone, there is, “the theoretical and practical problem of the frontier: to whom does it belong? The river, wall or tree *makes* a frontier. It does not have the character of a nowhere that cartographical representation ultimately presupposes. It has a mediating role,” and furthermore, it “creates communication as well as separation” (de

Certeau, 1984, p. 127). As Cathy talks of the democracy inherent in the inclusion of different ‘medical specialties’, I can’t help but picture someone reading out the specials on a menu at some strange all-you-can-eat textual buffet:

We share the different perspectives, and that’s where it’s really good...having different disciplinary perspectives to bear on the topic, and that includes medical specialities. If we have different students at different stages of their medical careers, or ones who have graduated...they have different perspectives as well, because they may be...paediatricians...or orthopaedic surgeons, and as the readings are medically oriented, they can come at it slightly differently. (C, I-1, p. 4)

The sheer measure with which Cathy mentions the word *different* (six times alone in the above paragraph!), speaks to the importance of context and alterity in HAM’s activities. Such inclusion of dissimilar perspectives not only allows that, “as these points of view jostle for attention, interrupt each other, and counsel caution about the confident assertions of the other” (Radway, 1997, p. 13), they will necessarily bring a distinctive interpretive vision to their reading, but also that each of these visions, through their intersections, parallels, divergences and convergences, are equally valid. Long (2003) also notes how, “readers enjoy finding something they can recognize or feel close to...but they also enjoy exploring what is strange and different, which they can also learn from” (p. 177).

As with Karen, Cathy uses the descriptive motif of water to illustrate such a viscous and tolerant site, in that, “there’s the freedom to discuss things with some fluidity” (C, I-1, p. 9). Even though those members who show up to the group’s meetings will be different each time, “and that includes medical schedules, because they may be off

somewhere doing their residency” (C, I-1, p. 4), this use-value of weaving and marking difference emerges through such moments of unpredictability, a mode of reading that, “really is at the level of response,” involving, “immediate reactions” (C, I-1, p. 7), which depend exactly on who it is that’s shown up. Such a level of social reaction ensures that such openness in reading is a practice of *becoming*, and which can be transported elsewhere: on the street corners, in reading patient’s charts in medical clinics, in generally looking to other people for questions and answers, and in seeing one’s youth in the patterns of the night sky. This movement that is always *becoming* while it moves is thus never *becoming* in stable sense. It distributes reading as a grappling with the intrinsic variability of truth claims and subjectivity, where “truth always, already, forever, depends upon everything” (Sumara, 1997, p. 237).

c) Immersion in the Poetics of Text (and the *laughterly* slippages of humour)

When involved in ‘spirited’ discussion, there is the tendency to “sputter off into other topics” (K, I-1, p. 14), an association that reminds me immediately of the uses of the ellipses by Louis-Ferdinand Céline, and of course, the fact that Céline was a doctor makes his writing practices all the more apt. Such drifting situates the reader as neither, “*here* or *there*...one nor the other...associating texts like funerary statues that (s)he awakens and hosts, but never owns” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 174). While reading, one gets the impression that life is lived as on the page, with hardly a moment to rest, and that, “some days in medicine...no matter what you do, nothing is good enough” (K, I-1, p. 2). The act of sputtering is related to that of spitting, the release of a foamy discharge from the mouth in moments of either excitement or drowsiness—a sometimes necessary action that in most

cases is considered rude, not unlike the lingering smell of ‘funk.’ A sputtering sentence is like a man walking home after a night of hard drinking,²², wherein, “to walk is to lack a place...(and) is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 103). As Felman (2007) writes that, ““stumbling over words like

What I thought before the etymology

Hanged is a word that allows it to be stuck, suspended, but never quite comfortable. As a stutter sputters and spits itself out some part of it still clinging deep inside the folds of the mouth.

To say that someone’s been hung arranges itself as clean as a sterile circle immobile as a body frozen in photo. To say that someone’s been hanged suggests a hastily scrawled chalk-drawn outline washed away in the rain —diffused into the mixture of street salt, dog droppings and newspaper shreds.

But still a clinging presence attending to you, when your eyes are pressed closed. Taut to the inducement of tears as a sound so pervasive it effaces itself.

Drip, drip, no drop (drip)

cobblestones’ is, in one of Baudelaire’s definitions, the nature of the poetic act” (p. 123), the text of HAM is thus written in an abstractly poetic way. Sputtering allows for difference, it allows for the crack in the pavement that, “causes one to slide...outside the realm of meaning, outside the terrain of knowledge” (ibid., p. 122), and is always a surreptitious leaking, a spilling beyond established boundaries, where participants, “talk (themselves) out, and say ‘Okay, what do we want to talk about next time?’ and then it all starts

again” (K, I-1, p. 4). Sputtering also affects realignment, as constituents not traditionally associated, if shaken and stirred up randomly, can be made to face one another; like a bleached bone and a rusted-out motor silently embracing on the ocean’s shore. Bridget

²² Once, while living in the neighbourhood of Hochelaga-Maisonneuve (in Montreal’s East End), I walked my dogs at about nine in the morning, and upon returning to my apartment there was a man, obviously drunk, trying to fit his key into my front door. I told him it wasn’t his house. He sharply turned his head and looked at me obliquely, as if he could see me through the edge of his eye. He then continued on down the street, walking tipsily and tripping over his own feet. Such a walk is a sputter.

recognizes this value in her work with anorexic youth, as she says, “I want to shake them up a little bit” (B, I-2, p. 2), since beyond the fact that they lack energy from not eating anything, Bridget feels that these adolescents are simply bored, and can use some novel stimulus, helping them to focus on something other than just their bodies. Such detonations also move against a propensity towards seemingly restful idleness in learning, a “tendency in education and life to censure excitation and find comfort not in our ability to create excesses, but in our abilities to return to composure as stasis” (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 12).

For a topic to sputter, the conversation in which it has arisen must already have holes, and is a dialogue, not a diatribe. But a bubble is also a sputter of sorts, and bubbles grow until they burst, left to dissipate in the surrounding air. In fact, humour is such a dissipating and scattered bubble, and through its slipping and sliding, “constitutes not only an assault on knowledge but also an assault on power” (Felman, 2007, p. 124). A bubble’s burst is never necessarily violent, though, and, “if laughter is, literally, a sort of explosion of the speaking body, the act of exploding—with laughter—becomes an explosive performance in every sense of the word” (Felman, 2007, p. 124). In HAM’s meetings, words and phrases are often pronounced in an explosive and unstable way, “the object that makes thought bump against itself and thus take on a name and a shape” (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 8), which I deem a *laughterly* quality:

A: But I wonder, and I’ll make a bit of a leap here, which may seem insensitive, but I’ll do it anyway, no matter how generous I might be...(Laughter)

A: Of course I’ve never been called generous, I...

D: You are a generous reader in this context.

K: Oh, I thought you said generalist. I was like, ‘Oh Dara, that wasn’t very nice.’

D: Generous.

A: Oh, I am that too, yeah, all over the map...yeah, I heard the pause in her voice...but we're all...we're Anglo Saxon...

D: I wrote that down, there's a problem with my Anglo Saxon sensibility...

A: That's where we're gonna go here, because...

D: Except that I'm Gaelic, and so are you, so its...

A: Yeah, which means that...

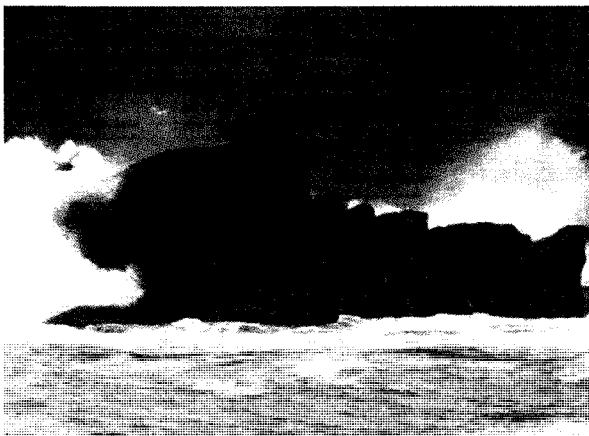
D: That means that we can do and do. We can be all over the place just like that.

A: One of the slimmest books in the world is the 'Scottish Guide to Joy.'

(Laughter)

(GM-1, pp. 15-16)

And wherever the 'meaning' of such conversation lies, drifts, or mellows, as, "meaning skids, recovers itself, and advances simultaneously," throughout the inevitably interstitial lurching of humour, "we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one" (Barthes, 1974, p. 5). In this way, the



performance of the *laughterly* in HAM, in the brush strokes of a writerly text, "is not simply (an) act of provoking laughter, but also that of tripping," and while such stumbling may be pleasurable in the pause it provides, "it is also, and

especially, a subversive act" (Felman, 2007, p. 123).

The potential for humour to enter into HAM's conversations, slippery-like and devious, is also apparent in the group's name. While it's true that it's easy to remember, and reflective of the group's range of interests, it also points to an absurdity and light heartedness, and an imperative, "not to take yourself too seriously" (D, I-1, p. 12). As

Dara points out, “you also have to think of ‘hamming it up,’” (ibid.), which implies a jocular, vaudevillian, and knee-slapping attitude towards reading. For Dara, as such humour slips between boundaries, and seeps past borders in a fractured, fracturing and multi-perspectival way, it “really is about seeing different sides to things” (ibid.), and moreover, that, “there’s something about the spirit of curiosity and inquiry that...goes very well with the spirit of humour” (ibid.). Insofar as it affects, and splices, our vision of the world, the hybrid and humorous multivocality of a liminal social reading is also, “what challenges individual members’ preheld notions and allows them the possibility of new epiphanies about literature and life” (Long, 2003, p. 147). To regard both humour and curiosity as spectres and ghostly figures is fitting, as they transport us, usually stumbling or at least non-linearly, between categories of being, whose origins and endpoints are never so clear. Felman (2007) speaks of “the residual smile of humour” (p. 131), and like the quotes on a chalkboard, erased but still faintly present, the tracing of a grimace remains a vaporous, pleasurable and enduring ethereal imprint. Not unlike the boulders of the Newfoundland shoreline, beaten down by the pummels of the saltwater surf, we can always read a history of footprints and hoofmarks in the curves of the text that our eyes and body pursue. And what’s more, the suggestions of humour and curiosity both work to overpower our bodies in a real sense, one in the form of a ‘burning’ inquisitiveness, and the other as an unrestrained hysteric. Though the name itself, HAM, apart from what it represents acronymically, will take on different qualities for each member, Karen admits that its origins are actually a bit harebrained in nature as well:

I was trying to come up with a name, and so I was playing with the concepts of humanities, art, medicine, literature, the body...and I love Dr. Seuss, and it sounds

like, ‘Oh ham, *Green Eggs and Ham*,’ so we seriously got called HAM because I was able to rip off Dr. Seuss, and the *Green Eggs and Ham* character to make the posters. And because it’s corny, right? (K, I-1, p. 21)

In terms of her own reading practices in HAM, Karen acknowledges that she comes to it, “as someone who has a big pot of candy in front of them” (K, I-1, p. 5). Regarding reading as a form of consumption is, of course, not uncommon, but the specific ways in which Karen describes her consumptive acts are. Assuming that Karen takes the eating of candy to be a pleasurable activity, staring longingly into the depths of a silver bowl filled with toffee, chocolate and all types of powdery solids, relates most definitely to desires of a childish quality—an “omnipotent desire for the good feed” (Robertson, 2002, p. 200)—where, “anything that can be grasped is grasped or put into (the) mouth for more intimate acquaintance; fear of fire and water has to be learned” (Tuan, 1977, p. 23). Moreover, it relates to desires not concerned with the aftermath of eating—the cavities, the calorie intake, and the bulging waistline, which generally fall squarely in the world of adults—but instead, to the pleasures of the moment, and, “the emotional cadence of the book” (K, I-2, p. 6), “in which desire is always in excess of the capacity of objects of knowledge to satisfy it” (Robertson, 2002, p. 199). It also relates to those purely pleasurable and childish impulses of the body that persist beyond the years of childhood, wherein, as Barthes (1975) writes, “the pleasure of the text is that moment when my body pursues its own ideas—for my body does not have the same ideas I do” (p. 17). These appear in the figure of an “anti-hero,” who, in enduring, “contradiction without shame” (p. 3), is “the kind of reader who just gobbles everything in” (K, I-2, p. 6), and participates in active over-joy, overabundance and over-consumption; the cheerful ‘gobble-gobble’ of the

indiscriminate consumer, whose concerns rest most assuredly with the impulse to, “get our teeth into something” (C, I-1, p. 3), a ravenously deconstructive and carnivorous approach to the written text. Though of course, teeth are also used to ground down seeds and herbs, and as readers, instead of those in HAM positioning themselves as vociferous renders of literary carcasses, they could instead be agriculturalists of a more tenacious and patient breed—grafters of old growth and new promises, keeping a close eye on the botanic nature of reading events.

Still, in the way that eating such copious amounts of candy remains a symbolic and metaphorical activity, the idea of it is mature—as an overabundance which itself appears unimaginable, and unlike a bottle of wine, a bowl of popcorn, or a box of doughnuts, exists only in memory’s recesses. Most children will have experienced the task, and eventual chore, of eating candy on Halloween, and as their teeth hurt from the sugar, their jaws ache from the chewing, and they sit bloated and incapacitated, they are nonetheless satisfied, as if they’d run the course of some important though painful ritual. As adults, an important quality of such a pot is that we must restrain ourselves from eating it all at once, and in fact, some of the pleasures of eating candy come from this very restraint: from allowing the sugar to seep slowly into the buds on our tongue, tasting the individual granules of chocolate as they separate from their essence, changing from solid to liquid. Some of this pleasure, then, is in knowing what *could* be had, the sweetness that *could* be tasted, without actually indulging.

In contemplating our possibilities, we engage in a sensual erotics of reading and identification, for as Long (2003) writes, “readers may desire immersion rather than analysis to form the kinds of connections with a book that can allow it to have the weight

of reality in their imagination” (p. 152). For if “reading is active, an act of attention, of absorbed alertness—not all that different from hunting...or from gathering” (Le Guin, 2008, p. 37), then it is also a matter of selection, for one cannot survive solely on the dregs. In HAM, such a pleasure emerges through the use-value of an *Immersion in the Poetics of Text*, a pleasure through restraint that is truly a form of ‘give and take,’ of acknowledging one’s desires (to revel endlessly in the words of a poem), as “a sense of boundaries dissolved” (Radway, 1997, p. 114), but also taking the necessary precautions to ensure that one does not get totally ‘carried away,’ as this would be to risk disappearing into the oblivion of individuality—to ignore the social qualities of reading, and of scrawling the writerly text:

D: I’m just wondering if she’s trying to set up implicit parallels between the bee and the woman, and attempting to, not exactly humanize the bee, although the bees are spoken of from the perspective of the ‘bee’s bee,’ as if being observed by a scientific observer, with the wings, and as if this is going to be a detached scientific, clinical observation. Is that, is that...?

A: “Worker, 27 days. Female Caucasian, 43 years” (Simpson, 2007, pp. 52-53).

D: Yeah, and then I’m wondering...

K: 27 days sounds very menstrual.

D: I think it might be that...I don’t know how long they live.

A: So instead of a busy bee, it’s a bitchy bee. (Laughter)

K: So anyway, it’s humanizing, or womanizing the bee, and ‘bee-izing’ the woman, trying to make all of the words.

D: I thought she was ‘worker-izing’ the woman.

A: Yeah, because the worker’s going to be a drone, which is asexual, or just a male that’s not going to be doing too much.

C: ...the mother, with all the works that she’s doing.

D: Yes, but...it really isn’t about her working. It’s about her flitting about, and moving, and exploring. I think of multitasking.

K: Oh yeah?

(GM-2, pp. 18-19)

Though each of the group's members finds in HAM a relaxing and informal atmosphere in which to engage literary texts in their hybrid abundance, Cathy is also concerned with an immersion in the poetics of a different type of textual arrangement—the artistic community of St. John's. This particular motivation for reading in HAM is described by Cathy as a purposeful venture, related intimately to her overall expectations as a newcomer to Newfoundland and Labrador:

This reading group, for me personally, fills part of what I thought I was coming to, and...it's connecting me more to the literary culture here, which is...spectacular...and this is one way for me to participate in that, and get to know the writers very quickly; their names, their works, and it may not be a specific reading here, but the discussions around them might refer to other works by Newfoundland writers. (C, I-1, p. 20)

Like any social immersion, the communal elements of HAM rub off on Cathy, marking her as artistically inclined. However, not only does such marking occur through the accrual of dialogue and knowledge about a literary community, but also through a direct emplacement within a desired social milieu, and for Cathy, HAM's impulse and creative energy, "kind of fans out...into that literary community" (C, I-1, p. 20). And although Cathy worries that such an admission about HAM will "make it sound like its not enjoyable" (C, I-1, p. 20), it is a pleasure and a use like any other.

Through imagining herself as a subject, moving in concert with the impulses on which a 'fan' operates, not unlike the wind that moves the waves, Cathy positions herself,

through language, with the dishevelled and productively erratic nature of a particle of dust, blowing ever so slowly across the hardwood floor. There are cracks and corners and protruding nails, but there is a spatial aspect to this metaphor as well: as one bunch of dust meets another they entangle, little bits that are separate become indistinguishable. As the lonely dog hair that bunches with lint, it no longer is what it was but becomes something new, a collective whose physicality emerges almost out of nothing—the organic nature of the social endeavour. Cathy allows a sense of unknown journeying into her readings, etching out her own textual inscriptions as she moves within those of a *Book Arts* community: “We have a local group that I am tangentially involved with...(through) my own research in teaching the history of the book...So I now see the various artists that may be painting, and creating books out of wonderful papers” (C, I-1, p. 22).

2) Branching and Looping

WHAT I LEARNED OUTSIDE: *Apis mellifera* (Worker, 27 days)

Like this. (What is knowing but a dance?) Round, round. The comb, a compass for my pointing. Let me tell you how the honeysuckle opened; how I climbed into its quivering. I would have stayed longer, drinking the flutter of each thing. Where? Go exactly in this line, diagonally. Keep the sun on your right (even if it's cloudy). I'll turn and show you again.

Like this. Honeysuckle—

-Anne Simpson, from *Bee and Woman: An Anatomy* (2007, p. 54)

a) Reading as Territorial Expansion

As the interests of HAM's participants are at least partially determined by their concerns as academics, of the purposes they interpret the discussions as serving, the

functional parameters of knowledge acquisition, as a tendency to flow in the cracks where the waters seep, do remain significant. But this is not an, 'empty vessel,' 'tabula rasa' proposition towards learning, but one that looks to the in-between, to the cracks, and builds on the remainder. As Cathy notes about HAM that, "it's helping expand my horizons in a little way" (C, I-1, p. 8), it also treads to the edges of things, where the sight-



line ends and the world dips away—shared hallucinatory glances over the cliffs of perception. As HAM is consistently positioned as independent from the hierarchies of knowledge in mainstream medicine, these acquisitions take on a

broadening and interdisciplinary quality. Although reading activities are still situated as arenas of fascination, such concerns are not really involved with an immersion in textual poetics, but instead, with the use-value of '*Reading as Territorial Expansion*,' an interdisciplinary inclination built on the consequences of shared learning. Such an expansion also relates to what Radway (1997) calls, "The *promise* of reading," described as, "its pledge to take us elsewhere, most particularly to a future not yet known" (p. 360).

As Alan says:

I'm reading things that I would probably never have read, and I'm introduced to different sources that I was unaware of. So I would like to think that, as a researcher, and a scholar, and a humanities type person, we have a natural

curiosity, and so I'm finding new territories I didn't know. So that's one of my pleasures.

Alan approaches reading in HAM as a territorial adventure, in which he positions himself as an always-curious seeker—not of truth, but immersed in the freshness of foreign fields, of prompts for further learning. Although invested with a genuine affective pleasure in the shared reading experience, Alan's use of language also reveals that his personal pleasures are derived from readings that lead elsewhere, that “engage in the world outside a text” (Wear, 2006, p. 97), and that are set about, in an informal site of liminal poaching, to expand his present range of conceptual vision. I will name this impulse *periscopic*, as the use of the word ‘sources’ indicates an ever broadening practice of reading, one that literally takes it all in to use it all up. Its imperative is *use*, though a use that builds on itself, producing not so much in the way of actual refuse. In one of HAM's meetings, Alan enunciates this ambiguous impulse, considering the impact surrounding one of Anne Simpson's poems, entitled *The Visible Human* (See Appendix 1):

A: I was surprised to find this, *The Visible Human*, because it does speak to me.

C: You had already been teaching this, right?

A: That's the curious part. What struck me with this, first of all, is I immediately identified with it, and then I was intrigued by the physical layout, because the actual physical layers have a direct relationship to what she's talking about. And if I understand it, what it means to me anyway, her bottom line, her take-home message, is one that I also made in an article that I have coming out...so I thought it was very fascinating that we thought the same thing. The “Visible Human Project” is actually a real project. This guy was a murderer. He was executed, and he then was frozen and sliced, and made into this dataset, as it's called. And each of these little boxes is, I think, to represent the different slices, the cryosections.

D: Slice of life...

A: ...In more ways than one. So, this is pretty nasty stuff. What he did, and then what he did, and then what he did...I mean, this guy was a clumsy killer. But what had struck me, if I understand what I think, or what I took from it, is that this guy has got immortality, but he was such a nasty son of a bitch. Yet, he continues, because we actually do know his name, and the person that he murdered we don't know...and assuming that someone who did these nasty things should be obliterated, yet he continues, and he continues, and he continues. (GM-2, p. 9)

What stimulates Alan's incursion is an 'identification' with the poem's subject, the moralities of permanence surrounding bioethics in cyberspace, about which Alan has also written about in his own academic work. The form of the poem, however, also triggers a reader's reaction, and Alan notes the way this structure works on him: that not only language, but also the placement of language, impacts on reading experience. To split words into boxes, re-enacting the cybernetic splitting of a human body...to speak what the words do not say...and to investigate the blank spaces outside the boxes' borders. He later continues:

A: Why this spoke to me is the whole Gunther von Hagens *Body World* exhibit...and I've just done this essay on his work, and embedded in my footnote: "After all, we even know a little about the male criminal who became the basis of the 'Visible Human Project,' whereas with all of von Hagen's specimens, von Hagen signs them as the artist, and we have no idea who the specimens were." And so the anonymity...where's the exploitation, where's the newsworthiness? And you do the nasty stuff, you'll get immortality, but the person that was done in is gone. (GM-2, p. 11)

This proliferation proceeds to a distinct sphere of popular entertainment, where science and commerce meet, holding contradictions under strain with no resolve, and in which the physical manipulation of bodies (real bodies, not duplications in cyberspace), ostensibly used to further scientific ‘understanding,’ evades the question of exploitation and abuse. Alan works with detailing (and derailing) the rhetorical functions of language as a stabilizing ethical device: by naming a body as ‘specimen,’ its anonymity is assured. The signing of one name, the artists, makes a claim to ‘Art,’ and is thus enshrined as unapproachable, and the cutting out of another, the specimen, makes a claim to ‘Science,’ and is thus also enshrined as unapproachable. Footnotes are left to deal with the rest. And later:

A: The other thing that I was going to mention is that this is the one criminal that she’s writing about, but there’s another ‘Visible Human’ who’s a woman, she’s a housewife... from Maryland, who has no name, but this guy has a name, Christian, middle and surname. So there’s a gender issue going on here. (GM-2, p. 12)

This conversation expands. For every detail spoken, for every name enshrined in remembrance, even if only through controversy, countless others are eluded. In the leaps of such impulsive forays, Alan eludes the burden of resolve, and instead, opens up questions that lead to even more—patterns of inconsistency. It may be a messy process, but so be it, and sometimes it is the imaginative clash of apparent opposites that breeds a slight remainder. As Cathy comments, the textual meeting place of HAM provides its members “with a way of spreading out in our discussion about things, and just sharing our knowledge at a very humanistic level” (C, I-1, p. 6).” Like Bachelard’s (1994) enveloping conception of the bird’s nest, where it functions, “as a sort of downy coverlet for the baby bird until its quite naked skin grows its own down” (p. 93), those in HAM stride through

such a woodland, touching all types of branches, spreading out through each conversational fold, and like melting butter on bread, ideas seep on in through the flour and seeds. And if it is the ‘human’ element that is being sought, whatever this is, Alan’s use of language suggests that maybe it’s in the remainders of conversation and contradiction that we should look for further ‘truths’ about the human condition—between two speaking voices, and through the utterly mundane and banal:

A: We could do something creative here. Remembering back to how you would read this because its concrete, if you could imagine you’re reading this as a poet. I could read in parallel, or a background sound, the following: “The Visible Human Male data set, released in November 1994, consists of MRI, CT, and anatomical images. Axial MRI images of the head and neck, and longitudinal sections of the rest of the body were obtained at 4mm intervals. The MRI images are 256 by 256 pixel resolution with each pixel made up of 12 bits of gray tone.” Now aren’t we being a bit dismembered here? “The CT data consist of axial CT scans of the entire body taken at 1mm intervals at a pixel resolution of 512 by 512 with each pixel made up of 12 bits of gray tone. The approximately 7.5 megabyte axial anatomical images are 2048 pixels by 1216 pixels, with each pixel being .33mm in size, and defined by 24 bits of color. The anatomical cross-sections are at 1mm intervals to coincide with the CT images. There are 1,871 cross-sections for both CT and anatomical images. The complete male data set is approximately 15 gigabytes.” (From www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/visible_human.html) Now, if that isn’t the ultimate reductionism, then Christ knows what is.

(Laughing) But still, there’s a human being here somewhere.

D: Yes, and like a refrain of self-invention, though self is elsewhere. A refrain, I guess, just an echo, a trace, really, but the idea of self too, and the notion of soul. These notions appear in her thinking, and they seem startling, almost...So, I guess all I’m saying is that in these various poems she is interested in that ‘quickenings,’ that impulse towards whatever is not physical, is not concrete. (GM-2, p. 15)

Dara also speaks of reading in HAM as a generally pleasurable activity of expansive potential, but more specifically, from a knowledge that, “the world is so big, (and) books are so many,” that a “commonality of reading” (D, I-1, p. 4), is an unfortunately exceptional affair. For Dara, these two uses of HAM are interrelated, that: a) “You make the pact that you will read the book that the others have recommended,” and b) “To learn about new books from other people” (ibid.). Though Dara admits a certain dissatisfaction with the term ‘club’ as being fully representative of HAM and its affairs, the construction of a ‘pact’ in a circle of readers, at least for me, harkens back to teenage secrets and whispers in tree forts, that what makes sense down in the landwash might not even just above the shoreline, and that, “Whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers (and) it changes along with them” (de Certeau, 1984, p. 170).

Even now, when squinting at clouds from the tall grassy fields on a windy summer day, what brief and mutable thoughts we can have! Peering out from the rusted armaments of Fort Amherst (see Figures 2-3), I think on gunners smoking their rolled cigarettes, and what of those stairs that lead straight down to the ocean? Like de Certeau’s railway cars, which stand as models of inert and illusionary incarcerative machines, the rusting cannon, “seems monumental and almost incongruous in its mute, idol-like inertia, a sort of god undone” (1984, p. 114). Out of each book, readers creates their own ‘sense,’ and through agreeing to look at a single text with others, this ‘sense’ becomes a shared and common enterprise—a temporary way of valuing the world that can never be recreated. As Dara acknowledges, it is an act of seeing, and reading the world in a way that, “I would not have discovered on my own” (ibid.).

b) Inducing the Loop

Alan frequently reiterates that HAM's readings resonate for him through their ability to move between disciplinary boundaries, and beyond their immediate conditions of reception. I title this use-value *Inducing the Loop*, an affair of tidal proportions, as Alan enunciates one of HAM's functions as a perpetual process, which conveys the breadth of meaning from one location to another. About the discussions themselves, Alan says that, "if I try and recall my questions over time, I probably do try to bring it back to the notion of how this work might relate to medical practice...to becoming more empathic, as a medical student or physician" (A, I-1, p. 5). Long (2003) also appreciates this connection, as she writes of the discussions in reading groups as, "a lens that reveals the books under discussion ...(allowing) participants to reflect back on their lives as well. In these conversations, people can use books and each other's responses to promote insight and empathy in an integrative process of collective self-reflection" (p. 145). By describing this tendency in terms of 'bringing back,' Alan suggests a form of reclamation in the movement of meaning, as a way to transport objects from one shoreline to another, from the depths to the heights, as if he is searching for the route of something (an idea, a method, a story, an anecdote, etc...) that begins in medical practice, is refracted through the lens of artistic representation, and then comes back to the field of medicine; an entity that performs a conceptual transformation through its very own mutability, at once alterable and altering:

A: No matter how you disagree with it as literature, is this a way to communicate as a mother, a parent, to an offspring, just to let something go, and start talking? Isn't there a clinical observation that people in comas can hear?

K: People in comas...

A: ...can hear, in other words, if you keep talking, somehow the message gets through in some way...

K: It's like the question, do babies feel pain? You think they do, but how do you absolutely...

A: But, would this not give...if you had a choice, as a parent or a loved one, sitting in the hospital, waiting for the specialist to rush by, or you said, look, go in there and just talk your life story. What the hell would someone do? Is there some clinical application to this?

D: I wouldn't suggest that they read this book, but...(Laughter) (GM-1, pp. 18-19)

As “a spin-off that was never a goal” (ibid.), like the antic dangers of a car doing doughnuts in a gravel lot (we're not all trained professionals...driving on the text of a 'closed course'!), Alan considers his own experiences and teachings as a conduit for HAM's readings, conveying them to his position as a medical professional and an educator: “Although we don't have running objectives, intuitively I try to bring it back to asking what's the payoff from this in a teaching parameter” (ibid.). Indeed, his objectives are not 'runners' in a strict sense, border crossers in the desert, carrying things from one discrete location to another, but are instead traipsing hoboes, stopping in for a meal here, and taking a drink from a flowing stream over there—following the road wherever it leads, though always with a hunger in the belly, and a burning sense of home and place:

I wouldn't at all be surprised if in some of my formal teaching...I might draw on material that I learnt the week before. So in that way, it almost completes the loop, even though I didn't do it consciously. It informs some of my thinking on what I teach medical students about professionalism and good doctors...and having said that, I probably realize that it is having that feedback that is good for me, better for me, and different. (ibid.)

For Alan, the meaning of reading in HAM comes through a pedagogical imperative that cherishes what's different; as a loop that's always chasing it's own tail, forever in a process of *becoming*, and which in its movement, will never *become* in the subjectively crushing sense, expressed disdainfully by Ibrahim (2004b) as, "a condensed moment of historicity, (and) an inscribed repetition of convention" (p. 78).

As a member of the faculty who is concerned with broadening, and making relevant, the significance of medical humanities in the medical school curriculum, Alan also perceives in the informal nature of HAM an opportunity to catch glimpses of life as a medical student that otherwise remain hidden to professors. Speaking of this prospect, he describes it as, "an insight...into the workings of some of the med students, and how they perceive things, both positively and negatively, as teaching, their programs, and so on. So I pick up information...by osmosis" (A, I-1, p. 3). The choice of *osmosis* as a descriptor implies a diffusive process of border-bleeding, and a system of mutually reliant self-regulation.

Gail describes this application of reading as a "tying together" of experiences—a forging of experiential rope out of frayed literary ends, which involves, "extrapolating on what we've read into our own lives, and putting that back" (G, I-1, p. 11), like forcing a learned way of walking on new and untested ground. As different types of *rope* form a single thread in HAM, the polyphonic nature of their mingling is apparent, yet never a deterrent to productive dialogue. Gail is also concerned with the potential future impact that HAM's readings can have for its members, as pockets of nibbles to chew on in the future, in asking, "What can we take from this that a) either we recognize, or b) we could hope to recognise in the future, to remember, use and think about" (ibid.). The lessons

learned and questions asked, as reflective manoeuvres, are therefore not only important in their immediate context, but also in the range of projected circumstances in which HAM's members may be found. Bridget also qualifies the importance of such conveyance, describing the practice of medicine as, "a self-regulated profession, and if no one thinks about it, then it's not really regulated. And I think it's good to explore medicine in that way. It's dangerous that so many doctors don't ever think about these sorts of things" (B, I-2, p. 12).

Ideally, an important element of medical practice is as a possible site of reflection, or at least, in its ability to incorporate reflective capacities. Such an element, however, is far from an everyday occurrence; a tendency that Alan believes should be re-evaluated through artistic intervention. Especially given "the stronghold, some might even say stranglehold, that medicine has on society...we have to, not push back, but at least sit back, and look at what artists have to think about what is good and bad about healthcare" (A, I-1, p. 6). As an informal site, where reading is sometimes referred to as a 'listening' rather than a 'reading,' HAM provides a forum in which to 'sit back':

A: It's telling a story, and it's telling all the bits of biography, like *Moll Flanders*, or whatever. It's 'let me tell you about my life, I was born here...' and its adventure after adventure after adventure, and somehow it all fits together, and its just not one damn thing after another. It unfolds, and somehow you feel that you are listening to it. You're reading it less than you are listening to it. Does that make any sense? Now, I didn't feel quite like I was listening, but I was being told a story. And I became the person listening, who obviously was the other main character, who could not listen, or could not hear. (GM-1, p. 3)

To practice reading as an act of listening, which of course, is never a passive endeavour, becomes a way to allow a dialogue with otherness into the heart of one's own reflective

capacities, an empathic and always-unresolved dialogic mode provoked by the conversational stirrings in HAM. For Alan, the employment of such a model is more a necessity than a choice, as he considers that, “a necessary part of any civilization (is) to sit back and reflect on what it is it’s doing, and what it’s not doing well” (A, I-1, p. 6). Such fractured listening is, thus:

Like a telephone network gone haywire, the lines are simultaneously twisted and routed according to a whole new system of splicings, of which the reader is the ultimate beneficiary: over-all reception is never jammed, yet it is broken, refracted, caught up in a system of interferences: the various listeners seem to be located at every corner of the utterance, each waiting for an origin (s)he reverses with a second gesture into the flux of reading. (Barthes, 1974, p. 132).

This enabling of a reflective capacity, in its incorporation of a spliced-through otherness, relates to the use-value of *Inducing the Loop*, an inconclusive arc of social reading. Since Alan considers such enabling as “a mirror admittedly refracted through someone else’s perspective” (A, I-1, p. 6), his dialogic onus is placed not only on doctors, but also on artists, as probable outsiders to the appeals of mainstream medicine. He states that:

The artist has a duty and responsibility, and also the pleasure at times, of being able to sit back and observe, as a fly on the wall, and have a critical perspective. Even if he or she sees good things being done, they can still be critical of the insensitivity...the screw-ups...and the messes that go on. (A, I-1, p. 7).

That a fly’s eye contains multiple lenses is no revelation, though positioning the artist as a fly implies interpretation as an activity without finality, with no, “final nomination,” and

no, “discovery and uttering of the irreversible word” (Barthes, 1974, p. 132), since spying, through the fly’s eye, is always a multiply and glisteningly refracted event.

Approaching these refractions in the classroom, as “a counter balance to the biomedical model” (A, I-1. p. 6), Alan retools HAM’s monthly encroachments for an alternate forum, and in this way uses, “some of the impulses of book clubs with the readings” of his students (A, I-1, p. 7). Though Alan does not necessarily conflate his understanding of ‘book clubs’ with the activities of HAM, their impulses are nonetheless related. In a classroom setting, such borrowing of book club impulses might involve taking a medical character from “a popular media example,” such as the lead doctor on the television show *House*, “who really is a nasty person, but yet, would he be a good doctor?” and juxtaposing him with the character in Robertson Davies’ *The Good Doctor*, “who listens, is empathic, and all the rest of it” (A, I-1, p. 8). It is a matter of developing relations, and seeing the differences in modes of reasoning, though they may not be compatible, as sites generative of productive tension. Within the discussions that might ensue, where students engage with their classmates about their own experiences as patients, contemplating their past, present, and projected identities, the point is “to play one off against the other...and to try to come up with some composite...which is not to say, ‘this is the ideal model,’ but what are the components that might be used?” (ibid.). Such an activity, directed at first year medical students, and taken from a page that relates most directly to the impulses, momentum, and energies of book clubs, is also a remarkable example of cultural studies criticism in pedagogical practice, wherein we might, as Hebdige (1996) puts it:

Strive to open ourselves up to that which is just beginning, that we become more flexible, more sensitive to difference, that we become alert to the dangers of speaking from a position of unacknowledged mastery, or ‘speaking for’ a universal subject, for history and challengeable truth, that we become in other words, and most especially, alert to the possibilities inscribed on the other, hidden side of crisis and decay. (p. 89)

More than just for the sense of adventure, Alan’s chief purpose in developing strategies that help students tap into their reflective capacities is survival—a perpetuation of the inconclusive loop. Like the pressing movements of the tidal flow, such a loop allows for regeneration and newness, avoiding the risk of stagnancy and death in still water. For those medical students with artistic inclinations, “if they’ve been playing piano for twenty years or whatever” (A, I-1, p. 9), rather than the medical humanities, as a practised cultural studies, being involved only in the promotion of a space to develop and promote ambitions of artistry, it is Alan’s hope, “to keep some of these kids alive” (ibid.). It is also, following Long (2003), a performance of, “creative cultural work, (enabling) participants to articulate or even discover who they are: their values, their aspirations, and their stance towards the dilemmas of the world” (p. 145). As no one lives on bread alone, Alan recognizes that to kill a person’s interests and imagination is, in a very real way, to kill a crucial part of that person as well. Through this perspective, HAM is involved in a project that sustains life itself.

Cathy is quite consistent in distinguishing HAM as a site of professional and functional engagement, but through which, “it opens up other possibilities” (C, I-1, p. 20), and where, “the text is the focal point often for the issues that we can explore” (C, I-1, p.

5). Because of the book on the table as a ‘focal point,’ as, “a center of felt value” (Tuan, 1997, p. 138), where parallels meet in the site of the lens and then converge or diverge, the conversation is never solely about medicine, though it always comes back to such matters. The texts, both that of HAM as well as the books that are read, function in a simultaneously doubling role. On the one hand, HAM exists as a diversionary tactic through which to speak of medicine in a different and unfamiliar voice, as a means to *get outside of* medicine to *speak of* medicine. Cathy speaks of this role when she describes HAM as “a way to get them (medical students) away from that environment (medical school), and get them out and chatting” (C, I-1, p. 6). Chatting implies the noise of chatter on radio frequencies, where the blabber of mundane conversation assumes hefty weight, and nonsense is written discretely and sensibly. On the other hand, as a representational textual mode, the books of HAM offer artistic viewpoints other than those normally encountered in the ‘everyday’ of the medical establishment. They present alternate means of approaching reality, and of questioning the taken-for-grantedness of medical knowledge, a space to “bounce professional ideas around” (C, I-1, p. 18), in a room with four walls, and a text at the center.

As a ‘professional’ site, where, “it’s not just reading a novel because it’s on Oprah’s list or something like that” (C, I-1, p. 16), Cathy defines HAM against other popular structures of social reading, which she describes, “in quotation marks, (as) a ‘reading group’...(and) open-ended with no real focus” (C, I-1, p. 17). Against such a lack, HAM’s definite focus allows for the loop of medical issues to impact constructively on the participant’s experiences as readers, patients and doctors. The loop, for Cathy, comes back to real life experiences, both pedagogical and otherwise:

Sometimes we take the discussion further and say, ‘Would this be a good thing to introduce first-year medical students to? Is this something that would be useful within a curriculum?’ So sometimes it becomes purpose-driven, and in other words, we’re not just reading for pleasure. (C, I-1, p. 7)

As an educator, Cathy also seeks in HAM what I will call a fair degree of *pedagogical ammunition*, and which she refers to as, “material for teaching...(which) provides me with more examples of things that I might be able to draw on quickly in a classroom situation” (C, I-1, p. 8). With regards to the social engagements of HAM, such a use-value assumes that the discussions will relate back to the context of medical school, that the understandings encountered will have legs. Teaching in the intersections of medicine and literature, as well as from the perspective of “history from the bottom up” (C, I-1, p. 15), it makes sense that Cathy also encourages her students to examine situations in medicine from the point of view of those undergoing treatment, and through the insight of artistic representation, to engage in, “experiential discussion...from the perspective of being a patient” (C, I-1, p. 5). For Cathy, the loop of learning is one involved with “professional perspectives” (C, I-1, p. 17), while also aware that, on the plane of possible perspectives, there are legs for travel.

3) Forms and Structure

*She’s a child in the house of her body. The doors
open and close,
open and close,
open and close,
daybreak to dusk.*
-Anne Simpson, from *The Singing Bowl* (2007, p. 38)

*Bones hold things up severely. A willow tree.
February. Concentrate on the tawny spaces.*

*Whether a monkey's paw is like, or unlike,
the human foot. A goat's hoof. Sing that
elegance. In the tree, drape the frost-thin
bodies of your ancestors. Call the crows.
Marry the bones you take down from the tree
at the end of the winter. Speak in a cloven language.
Unmarried words. A whiteness. Sere, frugal.*
-Anne Simpson, from *Skin, Bones* (2007, p. 72)

a) Resistance, and Legitimation of Artistry in Medicine

Though her pleasures derived from reading in HAM are sometimes of an affective nature, Karen also envisions the group as a site for troubling, “the trope of boundary” (Ashcroft, 2001, p.128). As most of the group’s members make a point of saying, the curriculum in medical school is most frequently directed towards a purely rational model for understanding the human body, and in such an atmosphere, being an artist marks you as subversive almost ‘by accident,’ as “a public sign of recognition not only of (a) virtuous...identity, but also of the burden imposed by being special” (Robertson, 2002, p. 201). HAM can thus, “be construed as one form of cultural constitution or cultural resistance” (Long, 2003, p. 145), and though sometimes such marks remain hidden, this is not always the case: “We’re not trying to be...anti-establishment, or anything like that. It’s just kind of an accident” (K, I-1, p. 10). Out of such ‘accidents’ comes a further use-value for HAM, *Resistance, and Legitimation of Artistry in Medicine*, a form of public affirmation and a practice of subversive conservation, through which, “If you played piano before medical school, to keep playing piano in medical school” (K, I-2, p. 6). But this task is not simply a matter of wishing it so, and as Karen regretfully remarks, “You have to look like a human being in order to get in, but then as soon as you start medical school,

those things are drummed out of you” (ibid.). Amongst some members of HAM, as a shared nostalgia, there is thus, “a common experience of feeling trapped in an educational script (they) did not write” (Robertson & McConaghy, 2006, p. 7).

‘Drumming’ here takes on qualities beyond those of the simply rhythmic, and moves instead into the territory of violence, coercion, and regulation, since, “subjectively,” as Tuan (1977) recognizes, “space and time have lost their directional thrust under the influence of rhythmic sound. Each step...is striding into open and undifferentiated space” (p. 128). It’s a place where the waves of the ocean are giant handclaps, and not the whisper of trickling drops. It’s also such a drumming that reduces the multiplicity of writerly performances, for as “the writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world,” in the face of the barrel beat, mistaken for the heart beat of a living thing, such a text is, “traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system (Ideology, Genus, Criticism) which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages” (Barthes, 1974, p. 5). A woodpecker, staking its territorial claims, drums its bill against a tree, breaking away, pitching away the outer bark, left for dead over the dust crumbling of forest moss. When Bridget speaks of attempts to reflect on her medical practice and the inner workings of human physiology, through introducing poetry in her classes, she regrets that, “I was trying, but I got beat down a little bit. I got tired. It was hard for anyone who’s a sensitive soul, and it beat me down pretty hard. The people are so cruel...to their patients” (B, I-2, p. 6). The incidence of such beating tends to distract from reflection on life and death, as, “soldiers who march to military music tend to forget not only their weariness but also their goal—the battlefield, with its promise of death” (Tuan, 1977, p. 129).

Such cruelty is one of the unofficial attitudes of medical school referred to by Wear (2006), which, “if the formal curriculum doesn’t deal with them directly, take up residence in the hushed (but often informally sanctioned) corridor talk among many students and residents, in the shorthand jargon they use to categorize particular kinds of patients...unlike themselves” (p. 93). Military drumming transforms the fractures of a collective into a single entity: the plush mallets of the bass drum bring about, and sustain, a single cadence of worn footsteps, and with a constant, recurring beat, everyone eventually falls in step. “Such repetitions,” note Robertson & McConaghy (2006) “beat at the heart of catastrophe,” as they observe in the writings of Sylvia Ashton-Warner, “a wound released in prosody that is a form of address, whose crying out asks us to witness a truth that the survivor herself cannot know” (2006, p. 6). Bridget says of the medical school environment, that, “It’s all very (hit) (hit) (hit)” (ibid.), as she taps her knuckles on the table, indicating a force, a sharpness, a regularity, and a ‘nowness’ to thoughts, *as breath*, a pulsating narrative that, “commands others (then, now, and always) to awaken to its imperative demand” (Robertson, 1999, p. 164). There is a semiotic trauma here in witnessing, and as Robertson (1999) asks:

When language is used in times of social and psychological crisis, how does that language always contain silences, struggles, and representations that may appear to be incoherent by very virtue of the fact that writers are attempting to assimilate or depict what is, in fact, an unassimilable experience (massive suffering, fear, and death)? (p. 163)

A confession can be beaten out of someone...to drum something into you...to drum something out. For Karen, this soldierly essence of medical school is at odds not only with her life as an artist, but also with her scientific nature:

It's very militaristic, and it's all about evidence-based medicine, professional protocols, all this kind of thing, and I didn't really come from this. I studied evolution, where it's all about diversity, and strength in diversity, so to come from that background to go into professional school, where your aspiration is to be just like the next guy is soul destroying. So to counter that with a group of people, and medical students, who see the value of *looking* at things, and not just getting sucked into this biomedical model...is just so refreshing. (K, I-1, p. 15)

Remarkably, the regularity of drumming as a unifying force (for there is power in such a surge), and as a dwelling in the positive elements of collectivization, is applied directly to HAM's organization, a caustic power turned onto its reiterative head: "To do that once a month, its like 'Oh, right, this is important. Oh, I'm not just hallucinating, like other people think this is important too'" (ibid.). Interestingly, the landwash has a clearing quality as well, and the laps of the waves, though violent, can also lull you to sleep. For even though Karen realizes in the 'beat' a destructive force, she also sees its productive potential, understanding the impulse on which it preys: that of dependability, and the internalized stolidity of the visible:

So now it is an activity of the medical school, even though very few medical students come to it. At least it is there to say that this is important in practice, not just in principle, and here, look, we do it every month. That's why it's so important that we do it every month. (K, I-2, p. 6)

In both of Bridget's interviews, she frequently mentions how the time she spent with HAM 'helped' her in a number of ways, providing her with a forum for substantive resistance as a mechanism of survival, against an academic environment in which she felt overwhelmingly alienated. Long (2003) acknowledges this potentially curative function of the book club, as she writes that, on a surface level, "reading groups resemble therapy groups and consciousness-raising groups" (p. 72). However, she also recognizes that reading groups, being "centrally focused on books and ideas," differ from therapy groups in some fundamental ways, and though, "they may engage issues of identity...their primary mission...centres on reading, the pleasures of the text, and normative conversations that consider both books and like experience" (p. 73).

Through her encounters with HAM, Bridget engages in a struggle of hope-production, and as such 'production,' never finally assumes the value of a 'product,' in that it only intimates itself in whispers, like the violence of crashing ocean waves...destroying and protecting the landwash, it arrives, "by accident, fleetingly, (and) obliquely in certain limit-works" (Barthes, 1974, p. 4). The scribbling in the writerly text of HAM, "an intersubjective creation that takes on the weight of reality, however ephemeral it may be" (Long, 2003, p. 144), certainly 'helped' Bridget, but in a way that cannot be located except in the *doing*, as unlike the books that (not) everyone read, "the writerly text is not a thing, (and) we would have a hard time finding it in a bookstore" (Barthes, 1974, p. 4.). For Long (2003), the substantive reality of the conversation, "comes into being because of the strands that comprise it, but it cannot be reduced to them, for it is out there, between or hovering above" (p. 144). In a tone of no uncertain gravity, indicating for me a purposefully heightened sense of significance and sincerity, Bridget

reveals that her readings with HAM—even as she says that, “I never really had time to read whatever we were supposed to—like maybe for ten minutes before I had to be there” (B, I-2, p. 2)—did provide assistance and support, helping her navigate the relationship between, on the one hand, a limited and specifically purpose driven approach towards the medical practice, and on the other, a more reflective mode of being a doctor. Even though she admits that most of the time she “didn’t get a whole lot out of the content,” being able to speak of medicine in the manner that HAM encourages, “did help” (B, I-1, p. 1).

A recurring theme in Bridget’s manoeuvrings of language, especially when speaking of the loneliness and alienation she experienced in medical school, is that of military combat, and conflict in general, in which she qualifies HAM as a “subculture” within the mainstream of medical students (one might also say a guerrilla force), and a ‘little army against the establishment of medicine’ (B, I-1, p. 1). Since all armies, regardless of their purpose or mission, share the feature of being a collective enterprise, whose energies are most commonly (though not always) exercised against the pressures of an outside threat, using and producing language that repeatedly positions HAM as an army, a minuscule military machine, means that for Bridget, the stresses and anxieties she endured as a medical student were of no small matter, and were encroached upon, in some way, by her readings in HAM, and the reflections they encouraged. Perhaps such collusion is also a feature of reading groups in general, since as Nafisi (2003) writes of her own experiences reading with other people, they “created and shaped our intimacies, throwing us into unexpected complicity” (p. 59). The question then begs to be asked: what were these pressures that Bridget speaks of, and how does she go about describing them?

By and large, Bridget's most persistent regret, both in the workplace and academic sites of medicine, is the compromise that she feels she is forced to accept as a doctor: between caring for her patients, and being able to perform the almost unbearable overabundance of tasks that need to get accomplished in a day. As someone who is also artistically inclined, Bridget is disappointed that her ability to write seems to depend solely on the limited time that she has to pursue such creative activities, which unfortunately, suffers from an almost total lack, and which she has had to defer in favour of the demands required of her as a doctor. As she relates of her everyday experiences, "I'm in the trenches. I'm in the trenches. And I care about my patients too much to compromise their care, so I'm compromising this way" (B, I-2, p. 3), by not being able to adequately read and write about medicine, and reflect on her practices as a medical practitioner. Tuan (1977) also remarks on this space of dialogic reflection, as a means to curtail terror and sustain beauty:

The trough of dust under the swing and the bare earth packed firm by human feet are not planned, but they can be touching. Intimate experiences, not being dressed up, easily escape our attention. At the time we do not say 'this is it,' as we do when we admire objects of conspicuous or certified beauty. It is only in reflection that we recognize their worth. At the time we are not aware of any drama; we do not know that the seeds of lasting sentiment are being planted. (p. 143)

Bridget's use of the word 'trenches' once again makes reference to her role as a soldier, but this time, as one engaged in an almost faceless defence, and in a constant construction of provisional edifices, against a threat one cannot even see. In one soldier's account of fighting in the trenches of The Somme in the First World War, he remarks, in a

surprisingly commonplace way, that, “he who has a corpse to stand or sit on is lucky” (Stewart, 2008, p. 27), indicating that the furthest depths of emotional compromise are but a regular feature of ‘trenchwork.’ The profession of medicine (like that of teaching, which not surprisingly, also refers to being in the classroom as working in the ‘trenches’) is well known for the demands it makes on new doctors and nurses, and the fact that, metaphorically, it ‘eats its young.’ This same soldier also writes of the stopgap and dangerously plummeting nature of all work in the trenches, how, “men who are standing still or sitting down get embedded in the slime and cannot extricate themselves” (ibid.) In such an environment, the digging must seem a constant and grating necessity, for were one to stop digging for even a moment, the risks of stagnation and futility, too great for a young doctor, would only build exponentially. Bridget also experiences this sense that, even though her work may be necessary, its achievements are all too often temporary in nature:

I don’t have time to think about that, or reflect on it. I just have time to make sure some girl isn’t pregnant, or to make sure this kid isn’t living on the street somewhere, or make sure this kid isn’t going to die because she has an arrhythmia. You know, that sort of stuff. It’s just putting out fires all the time. (B, I-2, p. 3).

Since armies are important not only in times of war, but also in times of peace, soldiers and reservists are often called upon in the throes of natural disaster. They set about building trenches here as well, though of course of a different nature from those in European fields, in *hopes* of diverting the flow of the fire, or sandbagging, in *hopes* of rerouting the surges of floodwater. However, regardless of the activity involved, it’s most often to deal with the *effects* of disaster, rather than subverting, or even understanding, its

underlying cause. Looking at HAM retrospectively, Bridget is able to recognize one of its uses as effectively subverting the lack of time for reflection that she now experiences as a practising doctor, and the establishment of an introspective space for looking beyond the veneer of effects, or medical symptoms that are seemingly too late to reverse.

Alan also touches upon this temporary, and sometimes seclusionary, nature of trenchwork, where, “medical educators who assume a critical stance toward their work take on a role unlike most of their peers” (Wear, 2006, p. 89). He speaks of the limited and short-term effectiveness as a faculty member in the medical humanities: “I deal with medical students basically within the first month of their first year of medical school. That leaves another four years after that, so I think over time my voice is going to get drowned out” (A, I-1, p. 8), and though he shows his students that approaches to medicine are multifarious, like any other rumblings underneath the water’s surface, no matter how loudly he might scream, naught more than a mostly muted bubble will emerge.

For Bridget, one encouraging consequence of her conceptualization of trenchwork is the bond that develops among people isolated apart from the wider world, in those muddy and dodgy ditches, and with only each other to trust. The world of medicine is certainly a trench, but for the existence of humanities in medicine, there must also be a series of sub-trenches. As a self-defined member of, “the outcasts of medicine” (B, I-2, p. 4), which is a term she uses to describe HAM, Bridget expresses that, because of her artistic nature and background, she is generally more sensitive to the emotional needs of patients, a sensitivity that brings responsibility, and a concern that most often get pushed to the wayside. As a combatant in a struggle that she unexpectedly finds herself in the middle of, an engagement she neither created or expected, Bridget nonetheless maintains

the resolve that, as a medical student, “it was my mission to bring arts to our medical school” (B, I-2, p. 5). Even though, as a student at Memorial University, she attempted to deal with these concerns by bringing in artists from the community to speak with her classmates, and producing poetry as a way to respond to medical issues, Bridget still felt, “so alienated in medicine, so alienated” (B, I-2, p. 3). HAM provided a space where, at least for a passing moment (with the temporality of a sinking ditch), Bridget was not estranged from her own artistic nature, and could express herself without disaffection.

b) Sussing Out Literary Form and Authenticity

Not surprisingly, as someone, “more on the *H* side of HAM than on the *M* side” (D, I-1, p. 1), Dara approaches HAM as a site for conversing about literature, and as it relates to her interests as a reader. She defines her, “primary interest in reading (as) aesthetic,” which involves looking at, “how well the writer, through language, realizes whatever it is I think the writer is attempting to communicate, and how fresh it is, how vivid it is, how authentic it seems” (D, I-1, p. 3). Dara is interested in sussing out, and dwelling in, those ways of talking that strike one as a flower in full bloom, momentarily arresting the walker’s stride, and for at least a second or two, meditating on the astonishing beauty that lies in the everyday. Or on the other hand, speculating on the captivating spuriousness of an author’s writing: “I wondered in some scenes whether it was a little too pretty...(and) even though she told us she felt this grief, something of the grit, the real difficulty of somebody dying, I didn’t get” (D, GM-1, p. 4). I identify this use-value of HAM as being a forum in which to discuss issues of *Literary Form and Authenticity*, and to which, “every reader brings (to the table) the sum of whatever they

are” (D, I-1, p. 5). It’s also a manner of reading haunted throughout by the shiftings of a lived space, and in an effort to make them more habitable, redeploying and refocusing objects of the text, arrangements which, “constitute a subtle art of ‘renters’ who know how to insinuate their countless difference into the dominant text” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxii).

In Dara’s approach to reading—shared in part by the other readers, and which has rubbed off decidedly on HAM—it is not enough for a reader to simply recognize that an author tackles the ‘tough’ issues of living and dying, but to take it at least one step further, and look closely at how such tackling is actually enabled through language. As Dara explains, even if an author’s depiction consists of, “factual details, (and) stretches of description that are particularly compelling simply for their content, I might be saying, ‘Well yes, but there’s something profoundly falsifying about how this is rendered’” (ibid.). By asking such questions, and positioning ‘authenticity’ as a shifting and contextually based concept, Dara speaks to what Long (2003) designates as, “an intriguing parallel between the composition of reading groups and what readers need in order to appropriate a book: a series of exchanges between sameness and difference” (p. 177). In a medical context, the importance of authenticity relates back to the interactions between patients and doctors, and far from authenticity being opposed to ambiguity, it is instead at the level of a reader’s ‘gut’ response, and how much they trust an author’s representations, a measure that differs, depending on what type of text is being read, and of course, under what circumstances.

In response to such renderings, Dara is also concerned with the influence of literary form, an “attention to structure, and the architecture of a book” (D, I-1, p. 5), investigating the manner through which textual form interacts with a reader’s

conceptualization of textual authenticity. Looking at the number of times that such an issue is raised in HAM's discussions, it is evident that Dara is not alone with such concerns, and that, "there are (other) members of this group who are quite sensitive to matters of aesthetics too" (D, I-1, p. 5). To have a sensitivity to something, however, is different from possessing the technical language in which to speak about it, and as Karen so modestly admits: "I really have no lexicon for literary critique...but Alan, Cathy and Dara do, so it's interesting, and educational to listen to them when they engage a text" (K, I-1, p. 5).

In HAM's discussion of Allende's *Paula*, such an inquiry is prompted by the tensions that exist between the multiple genres held within the book itself, for if a piece of writing is neither fiction or non-fiction in any absolute sense, on what basis can its authenticity be assessed? In this sense, *Paula* function as a borderline and frontier work, where "the frontier functions as a third element...an 'in-between' —a 'space between'" (de Certeau, 1984, p. 127). To look at how HAM's readers approach such a dynamic it is to witness a graceful and powerful stumbling against the trembling walls of a moving car, similar to Radway's (1997) characterization of books in the BOMC, which "vibrated productively with a tension" (p. 60). Authenticity is here regarded as it intersects at an affective level of subjectivity and textual form, and not through an adherence to medical 'fact,' or scientific 'objectivity'. Long (2003) writes of the connection between a reader's reflective capacities and identificatory desires, in that only if a novel, " 'feels real' can it enter in to someone's subjectivity with the power to provoke the kinds of reflection these discussants desire" (p. 152), and as Barthes (1974) puts it, "reading is not a parasitical

act...(but) a form of work...and the method of this work is topological,” and can entail a ceaseless shifting, “whose perspective ends neither at the text nor at the ‘I’” (p. 10):

D: I’m finding that her realization, her rendering of her feelings, and the language of the translator gets in the way of my believing.

A: Do you need the truth to make a good story?

D: But...you can take liberties with the truth...

A: Yeah, but...we’re dealing with a form here that is textual and it’s written, and you introduced another tradition where it’s oral, and so perhaps we need different standards, because in oral tradition, where you’re taking an exaggeration, maybe it could be expected, you know...like, ‘The fish was this big (he holds his hands a foot apart)...and the fish was this big (he holds his hands three feet apart),’ and ten thousand years later, it was a whale that was coming in!

K: But the difference there is that’s factual exaggeration, and she’s exaggerating emotionally, like if someone...

A: There’s morality coming in here. You can exaggerate factually, but not emotionally?

K: Well...it doesn’t feel like it rings...

A: It doesn’t ring true?

K: I guess when somebody’s telling a fish story, you know it, and you’re willing to go along with it, but when somebody’s telling you emotional lies, you’re just angry, because they’re...That’s my feeling, I don’t know how to explain the feeling, but I’m more angry with someone telling me that they’re really feeling something, this...

A: The fish story is an exaggeration because it’s part of a genre, but this is just dishonest. (GM-1, pp. 14-15)

In HAM’s thematic interests in literature and the arts, which revolve around representations of health and the body, the questions are consistently asked: What *kind* of story is being told? *Who* is it being told for? *How* does the author say what they’re saying?

Are they convincing, or bothersome? Regardless of how these questions are posed, though, they're never simply about whether or not a book is 'good or bad,' "judged on the basis of formal aesthetic value" (Long, 2003, p. 149). Instead, they're immersed in a process of "observing motifs, repeated patterns, imagery, or the texture of language...the structure of it... the vision that relates to all of that, and how it relates to other works" (D, I-1, p. 5), or other possibilities manifest within the same work. In other words, how does the author manipulate the language to get across their 'vision,' what it is they want to say, and what do we, as readers, make of all this? :

D: In *Ceremonies of Water, Ceremonies of Fire* [Simpson, p. 5], he's dead, he died, and that's the death line. So I think that maybe he's under the line, after the breath, and it's ghostly. I like the grey type.

A: So this is ghostly?

MD: I think this is spirit, and same thing with the next one "There's nothing to be afraid of" (p. 8). He's speaking to her, I would say.

A: We're reading this, and the physical format of the printed page communicates that, but poetry is also read, so how would you communicate this as an author, as a reader, if you like?

D: Well, when you have visual poetry, if you were going to have that on a stage, and you were doing some staging, I think you'd have to have a screen or something...

A: So voice off?

D: Actually, you could do it by levels. If it were radio, I would do it, but if I had the visual possibility of a person there, I might have them walk by, or have a screen. (GM-2, p. 5)

And as in all things HAM-related, the focus here is not on reaching a conclusion, or achieving consensus, but on, "sitting down and having a conversation about particular works of literature," something that regrettably, and despite its apparent simplicity, "does

not happen so easily” (D, I-1, p. 2). As Long (2003) reminds us: “In a successful reading group, there is almost no need to produce an authoritative reading of a book,” and in fact, “this notion is almost inimical to the kind of conversation that reading group members value” (p. 147).

c) A Measure and a Structure of ‘Sensible’ Counter-Normalcy

For Gail, the ways in which she conceptualizes her relationship with HAM can best be understood in connection with how she illustrates the other book club of which she is a member, as her descriptions of either group often rely on the other as a counterbalance. As Gail enunciates the qualities of her other reading group, which she simply calls “book group” (and which I refer to henceforth as B. G.), as those of a more conventional example of a typical book club, I title this use-value of HAM as *A Measure and a Structure of ‘Sensible’ Counter-Normalcy*. While this function also could apply within the sphere of marking cultural difference, insofar as it questions the nature and purpose of HAM’s relation to popular notions of what a ‘normal’ book club is, it is a distinct subjective use. In the first place, I look at how Gail uses language to classify and describe her other book club, and how these descriptions figure into her conceptualization of what ‘normal’ is.

For each of HAM’s members, the procedure for selecting the group’s readings is understood as predominantly unsystematic, dependent mostly on chance and gamble. For B. G., on the other hand, there exists a systematic and deliberate selection procedure: “At the Christmas meeting in December...everybody puts in their selections for the coming year...and if there are more than twelve people at the meeting, we have a draw” (G, I-1, p.

2). The structures for selection are thus built right into the festivities of the group, and therefore, become a critical part of how they celebrate their social gatherings. In this group, it seems that the chosen books will undoubtedly become identified with the person by whom they were picked, and are thus invested with a high degree of individual concern, wherein the selection process takes on the appearance of a competition, even if the competition itself relies mostly on chance. Although the books in HAM are also offered up by individuals, and perhaps this is simply a reflection of its smaller membership, but it does not seem that HAM's members feel the pressure to personalize, to any large extent, their identification with the works at hand. It's more than likely that, since the books were chosen based on their merit as well as their associations with medicine, the issue of *taste* is not at the forefront, as it might be in a group without such a focus.

In B. G., intense scrutiny, whether literary or otherwise, is more of a burden than it is a pleasure, and as Gail explains, "because this is only once a month, and is supposed to be a joyous and recreational activity, they try not to make it require too much analysis" (G, I-1, p. 2). Going back to Long (2003), who writes that, "formal literary analysis is not usually privileged in reading group discussions the way it is in the classroom" (p. 149), such an attitude appears typical of many book clubs. Analysis is thus contrasted with joy, whereas in HAM, there exists an analytical and interdisciplinary tension that, according to Alan, is, "a pleasure, and healthy too" (A, I-1, p. 11). Dara also describes herself as a naturally inquisitive reader, an approach to the text that most certainly rubs off in HAM: "Metaphorically speaking, I'm a lean, mean reading machine. In other words, I'm really accustomed to reading analytically and critically" (D, I-1, p. 4).

To avoid the emphasis on analysis, B. G. places a number of rules on the types of books that can be chosen:

No non-fiction, and no short stories, because short stories are apparently very notorious for making people have such divergent opinions that the meeting is not pleasant...(and) since it's a little bit too much of a loose cannon...people get all over the place in what they want to talk about. (G, I-1, p. 2)

While this group, in its 'normalcy,' attempts to avoid conflict and the indiscriminate nature of a 'loose cannon,' HAM is exactly such an arbitrary firearm, allowing any type of genre to fall within its wake, from an episode of *South Park*, to a collection of poems. Moreover, this difference also incorporates the genre-flexible and genre-porous characteristics of the works themselves, a suppleness that Gail appreciates. As she relates: "One thing I like with HAM is that there's a mix of reading materials. I love non-fiction, so even if it's something like *Paula*...mingling sorts of hazy recollections and family history, it kind of *feels* like a novel too" (G, I-1, p. 6, italics added). To look at a literary work as complying strictly within the codifications of a single genre, with which it would need to comply to be chosen, as in B. G., would be thus to sacrifice the inter-genre, and deeply subjective 'feelings' of reading a novel *in* a work of non-fiction, or indeed, reading the poetry from within the descriptions of a medical chart. By avoiding such restrictions on genre, HAM allows for the transport of 'feelings' from one mode to another, whether across the boundaries of artistic composition, or of the disciplines of medicine and humanities.

In terms of where the meetings are held, B.G. congregates at its member's houses, and as Gail says, "People take turns, so I hosted in July, my mother hosted in August, and

there's somebody else hosting in September" (G, I-1, p. 3). This issue of assuming the responsibility of being a *host* in a private space, a practice common among many book clubs, actually speaks to the divergence of purposes that exist between Gail's two reading groups, the intentions of which are echoed by Karen:

The choice for a public space partly came from the fact that we were all kind of strangers when we started, so in having a group of people over to your home, there's a certain dynamic there, where it's like hosting guests, whereas to hold it in a public space, everybody comes to the same status, if you will, and you can just order what you want from the bar, and no one has to make any special effort to get there. (K, I-2, p. 3)

As the etymological history of the title 'pub' comes from 'public house,' it should be no surprise that, if a group of readers wishes to remain open and accessible to strangers, in that no one person owns or controls the space, the pub functions as a sort of social equalizer, with beer and wine as a social lubricant. It's worth remembering, as well, that *Bitter's*, though not a private space, is itself established by the members of HAM through its difference from the classroom, and as, "somewhere *in between* somebody's house, and being in an institutional or academic space" (D, I-1, p. 11, italics added).

In the plethora of HAM's spatial possibilities, the traditionalist nature of the public/private divide is itself far too rigid and limiting, and makes it impractical to think on the social uses of space through the transverse continuum on which it actually lies. 'Uses' of space, especially where people meet, are best understood by what de Certeau (1984) refers to as, "transverse tactics," which, "do not obey the law of the place," whatever this might be, "for they are not defined or identified by it" (p. 29). Such a divide,

which also assumes that the interests of ‘public’ and ‘private’ affairs are inexorably and mutually exclusive, also ignores the satisfaction one can get from the unexpected results of occupying a space ‘in between,’ and the extent to which, “people have to make do with what they have,” and that, “there is a certain art in placing one’s blows, a pleasure in getting around the rules of a constraining space” (ibid., p. 18). Though Karen admits that, “I think that we all feel happier if we’re in someone’s home,” she also concedes that, given the fact that HAM operates as a space through which people can come and go as they please, “it’s a lot easier to hold it in a public space” (K, I-2, p. 3). It’s “a lot easier,” then, based on what it is that HAM sets out to accomplish in the first place.

In regards to HAM’s discussions, Gail describes them a number of times not only as “sensible,” but also in grammatically exceptional or contrastive terms, as “more sensible” (G, I-1, p. 6), and “more serious than a lot of social book clubs” (G, I-1, p. 8). In general, Gail distinguishes between *the social* and *the sensible*, and understands her two reading groups as fitting predominantly into either one of these two categories. In B. G., the primarily *social* group, “other than getting together and talking about the books, there’s no theme, agenda...overriding motivation, or message we’re trying to get across to each other” (G, I-1, p. 6). For this group, the social aspects of the meeting are at the forefront, and as the women in it are all old friends, it functions as a deliberate sanctioning of a social space as a veritable friendship cove. This social nature, however, sometimes acts as a deterrent to people outside the group who might wish to join. This space’s intimacy, as it functions as a subtle restraint to those outside, also works in a divisive manner, where “it’s very difficult for a man to join,” and as Gail puts it, “many have tried and have run away after a meeting or two” (G, I-1, p. 8).

Since much of the literature into book club research focuses on the impact of gender in circumstances of social reading, I was surprised by the small amount it figures into how the members of HAM conceptualize themselves as readers. Though there are more women readers in HAM than men, unlike B.G., it is not a space from which men “run away.” As Karen notes, the impact of gender figures in HAM only, “in passing, if it has direct relevance to the story, or the play, or whatever we’re reading, but not in any formal way” (K, I-2, p. 1). As a driver on the road, and as a reader with a text, you see those cars that pass you, and those lines on which words are strewn. You focus on them, obliquely, as they pertain to your immediate movements, but as soon as they speed by, they are almost entirely forgotten, remembered only *in passing*. It’s hard to say what prompts this lack of focus on gender in HAM, and if within this group, it detracts from what Gail understands as the *social* elements of a book club, but for Karen, it speaks to the thematic concerns of the group, and how health is a universal phenomenon, regardless of gender:

We all have bodies, and we all are interested in health care as it pertains to us. So those issues, while they’re gendered insofar as men and women have different health issues, I think that the genders equally share an interest in health issues globally. So, I don’t think it (HAM) excludes anybody. I think it’s very inclusive as a result of that. (K, I-2, p. 2)

However, though there may exist this tendency to universalize the claims of medicine, the impulse to ‘humanize’ through reading, in medicine and other fields, is one that works through and from the subjectifying dynamics of sexuality and gender (Robertson, personal communication, 2008).

On the other hand, since book clubs are typically positioned in popular discourse as a gendered social phenomena, perhaps HAM appeals to both men and women insofar as it does not actually identify as a book club. Dara relates that, “I don’t think we even think of HAM as a ‘book club.’ There’s something about the word ‘club.’ It’s a ‘discussion group’” (D, I-1, p. 8). That there’s ‘something’ about the word ‘club’ implies the essence of an intangible difference, but a difference nonetheless. Though Gail takes care to mention that HAM’s distinction between *Interest Group* and *Book Club* is “not an identity struggle” (Gail, personal electronic communication, Oct. 19, 2007), there is no escaping that the term ‘book club’ (perhaps through the influence of Oprah’s Book Club, whose viewer/reader-ship depends mostly on a female audience), does suggest to many a certain type of reading community, which at the same time, in no way implies that book clubs are necessarily all the same, or are even similar. Dara herself confirms the prevalence of this widespread and established perception, observing that, “most of the people that have mentioned book clubs to me...(have) been women, and they’re mostly getting together to talk about fiction, and there isn’t a theme” (D, I-1, p. 8).

In B. G., since the social nature of the group’s discussion, as Gail puts it, “can degenerate into ridiculous chattiness” (G, I-1, p. 8), a purposeful and symbolic control is placed on the trajectory of the conversation in the form of, “an invisible conch, where whoever has it, it’s their turn to talk, and nobody’s allowed to make any counterpoints until everybody has gone around and said their main point, or their primary thought about the book” (G, I-1, p. 8). In describing such chattiness as a “ridiculous” endeavour necessitating a symbolic form of social control, the members of B.G. might agree with Tuan (1977), when he writes that, “art makes of feeling so that feeling is accessible to

contemplation and thought. Social chatter and formulaic communication, in contrast, numb sensitivity” (p. 148). Against this, HAM seems to thrive on just such moments of chatter, as a spontaneous voicing of multiple perspectives. For both HAM and B. G., though, the dynamics of conversation function according to how the members envision their individual roles within the group, a cohabitated space of textual endeavour, and how they measure their sense of comfort. In this way, conversation works as, “a provisional and collective effect of competence in the art of manipulating ‘commonplaces’ and the inevitability of events in such a way as to make them ‘habitable’” (de Certeau, 1984, p. xxii), and indeed, what is more commonplace than a reaction to a reading?

As Dara shares with me her personal estimations of the discussion surrounding *Paula*, she notes, in agreement with Long (2003), that what is crucial in HAM is, “the sharing of different perspectives...(and) that the ‘best’ books do not always lead to the best discussions” (p. 146):

I think that HAM, and this sounds like a mixed metaphor, was really ‘cooking’ that day you were there at *Bitters*. Even though it was a small group, and there were some problems with everybody having read all the text, I thought the discussion was lively, and that people had different points of view, different perspectives...The spirit of what I value in such a group was present that day. It was apparent that day. (D, I-1, p. 3)

And as a ‘spirit,’ a floating apparition from another realm, what is valued in HAM tends to be its conduciveness towards impulse and unfamiliar juxtaposition—a never knowing exactly what will happen next. For Gail, this lack of a conch is certainly apparent, since, “the whole freedom in the group is in letting people go on tangents, sometimes bringing it

back around, or just going for the rest of the night, and we leave the book, and don't get back to wherever we started" (G, I-1, p. 15). More than a centrepiece, the book acts as a starting gun, and as, " 'source' and 'center' are by no means *a priori* identical, a very productive tension can develop between them" (De Man, 1983, p. 82). Though there is a sense of mutual respect at the table, if there ever was a conch in HAM, it appears that it's long since been left on the beach.

Even if Gail contrasts HAM and B. G. as profoundly different types of reading groups, their relation to each other is not on the basis of an either/or proposition, and their *social* and *sensible* natures should never be understood in any pure and absolute sense, but instead as *measures of difference*. Even though B. G. has its emphasis on the social aspects of reading, this is despite the professional backgrounds of its members, and while HAM has more of an academic *sensibility*, its meetings are held in a bar, and its members are drinking beer.

As Dara enunciates, while she certainly appreciates the analytical exploration of literary form in which HAM engages, she still admits that, "The pleasures of HAM are the social aspect, so that you sit down with congenial, intelligent people, and you have a drink at the end of the day and talk about books. What's not to like?" (D, I-1, p. 4). For both groups, then, neither is totally what it *is*, nor can it be contrasted totally with what it *is not*. As with any kind of portrait, told in my words...their words...their words in my words...though all parts may be 'true,' insofar as "they are all part of the definition" (Barthes, 1974, p. 61), as with any brush stroked picture of any brush strokable thing, "even when taken together, [the strokes] do not suffice to name it" (*ibid.*, p. 62).

Lap, Crash, and Bluster

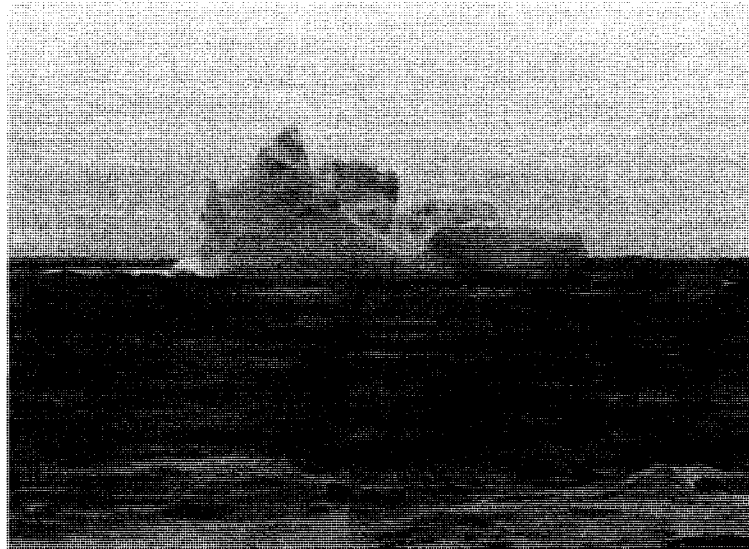
I
She's a Saltwater Monster,
this Greenland gal.

A rock of ancient ice
whose blue-veined waves
I will name by their tones
of lap, crash, and bluster.

They say that her tip
is only the start of her song.

II
She's done with us now.

All the staring and pointing
the child-eyed boat circling
has humbled the beauty
that once was her fury.



She's really letting herself go now.

Sending pieces of her bulk up the shore
where poachers they prod
at the dust of her body
listening hard for faint gusts of her roar.

I even got in there myself.
—Stuck my boot's heel on her
(Though I'm sure you couldn't tell)

“Like the ending of the life of anything...there needs to be ritual”

(Sumara, 1996, p. 243)

I

“We generally give our ideas of the unknown the coloration of our notions of the known. If we call death a sleep it’s because it seems a sleep outwardly; if we call death a new life, it’s because it seems something different from life. With small misunderstandings of reality we construct beliefs and hopes, and we love the crumbs we call cakes, like ragamuffins who jump around to be happy.”

-Fernando Pessoa, from *Always Astonished: A Journal* (1988, p. 111)

Pessoa, the Portuguese poet, is drawn to (and draws us into) a reading of the world that insinuates a heteronymic thumping of otherness in all our surroundings, in places, “where second and third thoughts dissipate” (Sumara, 1996, p. 5). Even footsteps are doubted and questioned, as though they have an import outside of their own ploddingness, or an origin other than that known and seen. Through infantilizing our assuredness, there is value in such astonishment, to a degree that it also promises the façade and the whispers of any and all possibility. Wavering over the unexpected tidal breezes and dangers of a precipice (as topological cliff or conceptual judgment), with the toes of the foot kneading softly on one side and the heel set firmly on another—the “obstacle of the overhang...(which) *makes operative* the very possibility of subjective experience and psychic reality” (Robertson, 2001, p. 27)—we could go either way, tumbling or jumping, and as a destiny depends on everything, it depends also on the conclusion that, “even errors can produce interesting side effects” (Eco, 1998, p. 52), and that there exists, “a twilight zone between common sense and lunacy, truth and error, visionary intelligence and...stupidity” (ibid., p. IX).

I began this query into reading experience from a reader's perspective, the vantage of a fractured self, and I dwell again (or still) within such interstices, glimpsing a unity of form only through the backyards and back alleys of subjective desire, shiftings that are only mirages. I positioned reading as a complex and fragmented landwash activity, and I have acted as collaborator in such fragmenting as well, chipping away violently at any one, overarching understanding of what reading *is*, or what it is that readers *do*.

II

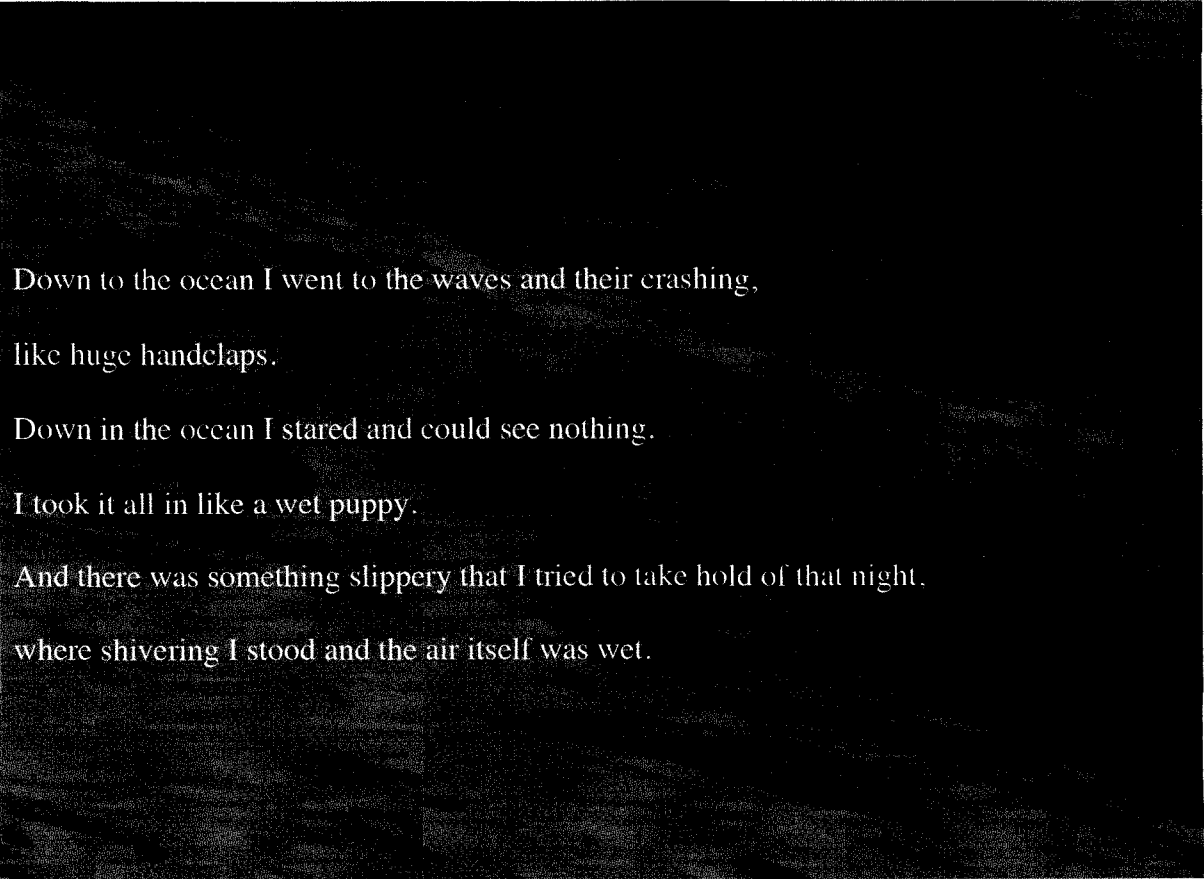
In their social engagements with literary texts, the readers in HAM construct a series of temporary and underground-routed edifices, in which to dwell in the folds of reading, and in reading's inevitable *other*. As a practice of medical humanities, they engage in a dialogue that, through the perspective(s) of arts, reflects and tidally loops back on the customs within the institution of medicine, and the role of doctors and health professionals within this context. They share stories of their everyday lives, and assess the impact of grief in talk. They laugh together. They engage in acts of rereading, where, "every new reading is a new invention" (Sumara, 1996, p. 242), squeezing out associations through which prior readings always fail to capture the field, and notions of *surplus* and *supplement* become inevitable functions of the social nature of their task, a risky business of reading fraught with both confusion and pleasure. The texts act as a veritable springboard for discussion—as a way to talk about life, and as a way to talk about literature. As a space in which texts are trod upon, HAM poeticizes the movements of reading; through starts and stops, sidetracks and passion, there is a supple and sinuous sumptuousness that persists in their reading practices—a dwelling in the shared

consumption and intimacies of a common text, a 'commonplace'. As a borderline endeavour, shaped by competing though constructive desires, which simultaneously cherish a space of alterity, and also malign such a space through its destructive effects, the readers in HAM shift between zones of normalcy and idiosyncrasy. Through the language that the members of this reading group employ, we can see what it means, "to allow the knowledge of an/other to touch the mind" (Robertson, 2001). Though it is true that, "the place of reading matters" (Sumara, 1996, p. 1), they create a *third space* of reading that is 'neither here nor there,' but as drifting relics of the landwash, sit still and then shift, are picturesque then lose all composure, implying one thing while meaning another. Of the shiftings inherent in any practice of reading, Grumet (1998) reminds us that, "it is this space that opens up between the self and the other that becomes the territory of the text" (p. 27). The situated nature of HAM also gives it a vociferous edge; located neither in or out of the academy, nor in a purely private or public space, but as an informal conversation by means of a driven purpose. With a suffused enthusiasm towards the landscape of Newfoundland and Labrador, HAM is a dynamic and writerly textual space through which readers construct cultural meaning in one register, and then make it speak in another. In this way, they are not only poachers but planters as well, cultivators and proud labourers of myriad literary pastures.

III

Adding to the ambiguity of reading is the matter of reading from a place. For the readers in HAM, this place is a dissipating gap of subjective desire(s), a pub, a university, a medical faculty, the city of St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador, etc, and like

everything else, their readings are from, and generate, the scribbings of a relational space. In appreciating the contested nature of subjectivities in space, Brathwaite, the Caribbean poet, proposes the concept of *tidalectics*, which stresses the fundamentally cyclical qualities of movement and mutation in island life, where the dialectical surges of tidal flow relate to the renewals, the hazards, and the adventures that inhere in the struggles of everyday life. Torres-Salliant (2001) writes: “Detached from Western teleological inexorability, Brathwaite’s *tidalectics* avoids simplification and distortion” (p. 243), and in this way, the landwash nature of HAM’s reading activities preserve genuine a sense of enduring and unfathomable possibility.



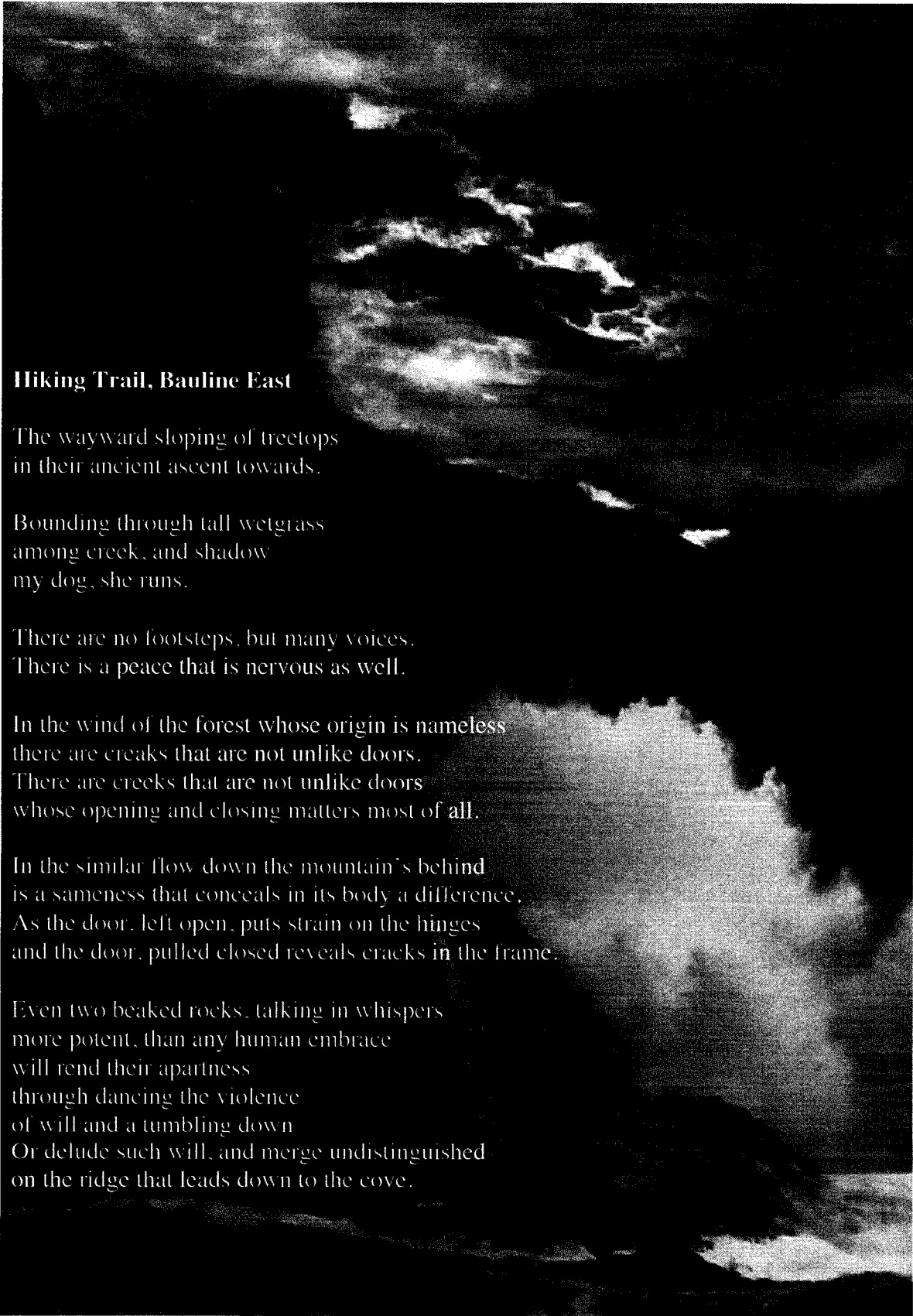
Down to the ocean I went to the waves and their crashing,
like huge handclaps.
Down in the ocean I stared and could see nothing.
I took it all in like a wet puppy.
And there was something slippery that I tried to take hold of that night,
where shivering I stood and the air itself was wet.

IV

The issue, then, is not only one of locating an otherness in the space of reading, but also in communicating and touching desire from within such a space of ambiguity and *writerly* ambition. In the field of education, if we can begin to remember such things about reading, then we can also reflect on the curriculum itself as an emergent and relational space of constructive alterity, wherein the experiences of the teacher and the student form an affectively integral part of curricular practice as a whole. If we accept Dewey's (1956) dynamic definition of the curriculum as, "the course of study met in school (that) presents material stretching back indefinitely in time and extending outwardly in space" (p. 5), along with Grumet's (1999) observation that, "curriculum is not merely the presentation of knowledge...(but also) a process of interpretation" (p. 235), then we can also acknowledge that as reading itself is forever bound up with the pulsations and processes of living life, that, "learning about the experience of reading...cannot be accomplished in the absence of inquiry into lived experience" (Sumara, 1996, p. 1). Dialogue among readers is here indispensable, and the accomplishments of HAM, enunciated through a series of interrelated use-values impacting on both individual and collective subjectivities, envision a sociality in shared reading that, "invites us to recuperate our losses," and through dwelling in the caverns and the wake of the waves, the lantern light of a spontaneously fictive world gives us, "the opportunity to reconsider the boundaries and exclusions that sustain our social identities" (Grumet, 1998, p. 27).

"The issue...is not only to motivate and empower students but," as Ibrahim (2004) puts it, "to enable them to locate themselves in time and history and at the same time

critically interrogate the adequacy of that location” (p. 128). Reading provides this back and forth, and the impulses of book club literacy, along with the emotive unpredictability of rereading, sets the stage for a renewed learning on life both as it is *lived*, and as it is *imagined*.



Hiking Trail, Bauline East

The wayward sloping of treetops
in their ancient ascent towards.

Bounding through tall wetgrass
among creek, and shadow
my dog, she runs.

There are no footsteps, but many voices.
There is a peace that is nervous as well.

In the wind of the forest whose origin is nameless
there are creaks that are not unlike doors.
There are creeks that are not unlike doors
whose opening and closing matters most of all.

In the similar flow down the mountain's behind
is a sameness that conceals in its body a difference.
As the door, left open, puts strain on the hinges
and the door, pulled closed reveals cracks in the frame.

Even two beaked rocks, talking in whispers
more potent, than any human embrace
will rend their apartness
through dancing the violence
of will and a tumbling down
Or delude such will, and merge undistinguished
on the ridge that leads down to the cove.

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Appendix 1. *The Visible Human* (Simpson, 2007, pp. 70-71)

THE VISIBLE HUMAN

Here you are, arms splayed like Jesus, on a deathbed in a glassed-in room with an IV and a plastic bag of poison,

about to be whistled into what's next: an elevator with an arrow pointing down. You, who freely gave

your body to the freak show of science. Your one great act consisted of robbing a man in Corsicana, Texas,

of a radio and microwave, after which you hit him on the head with a ten-dollar ashtray. It didn't kill him;

you had to stab him with a dull-bladed knife that bent on his chest. But that didn't work either, so you shot him.

Now the poison flows into the three-fold skin of your name – Christian, middle, surname – ending your life,

though your body goes on without you, like Snow White in her fairy-tale coffin. When they finish with you,

we can look into every corner, from the top of your head to the soles of your feet, not to mention

an appendix gone missing, single testicle. You were executed, frozen, sawn in four, covered in blue gel,

before they sliced you into thousands of pieces (each one photographed in colour cryosections) to memorialize

you in cyberspace. Now anyone can take the animated trip inside your body, descending all the way through

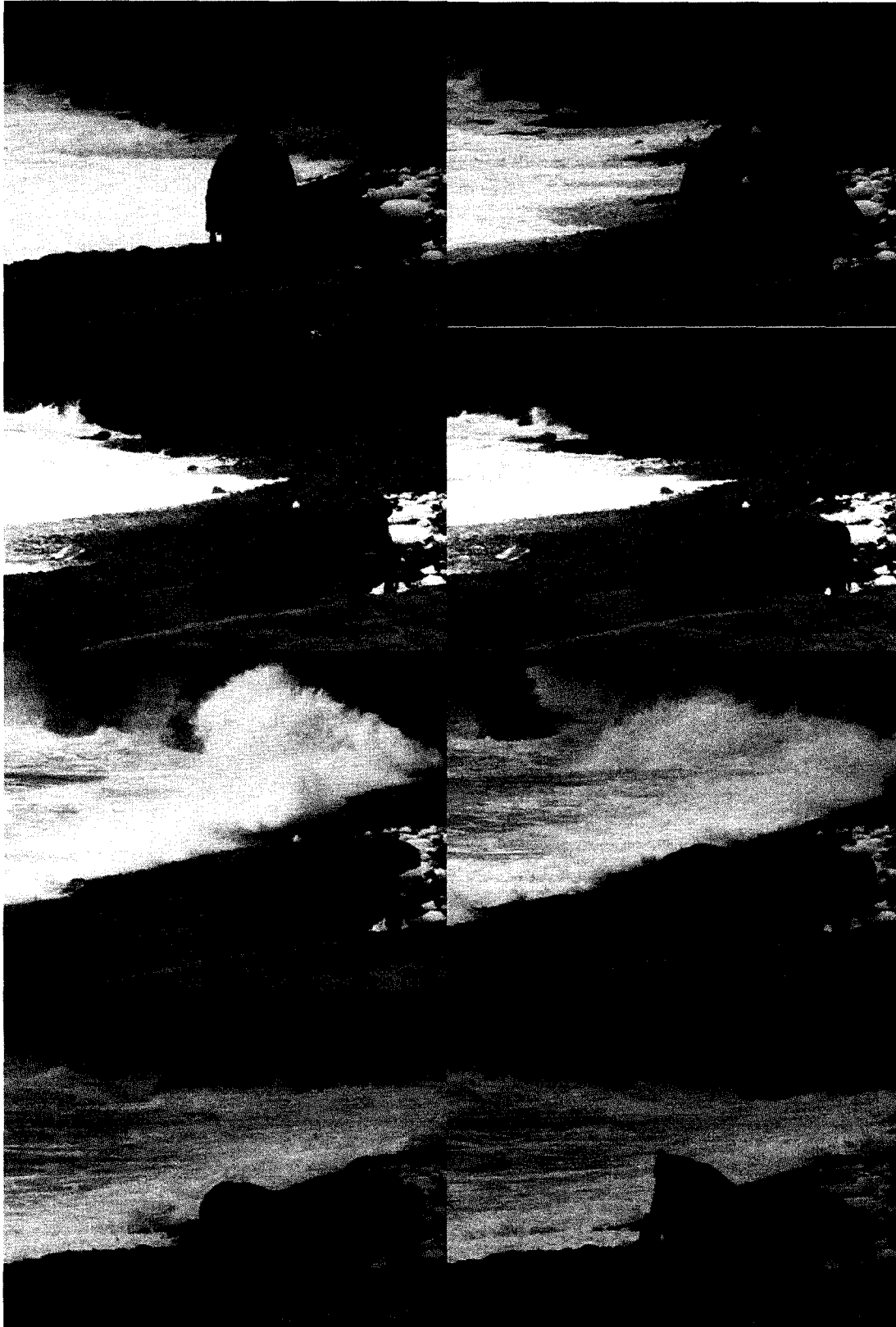
your brain and bones, the rest of the baggage. A final impression of a footprint remains on the screen after

it's over. That curving line of toes: a refrain of self-invention, though self is elsewhere. You've been turned inside

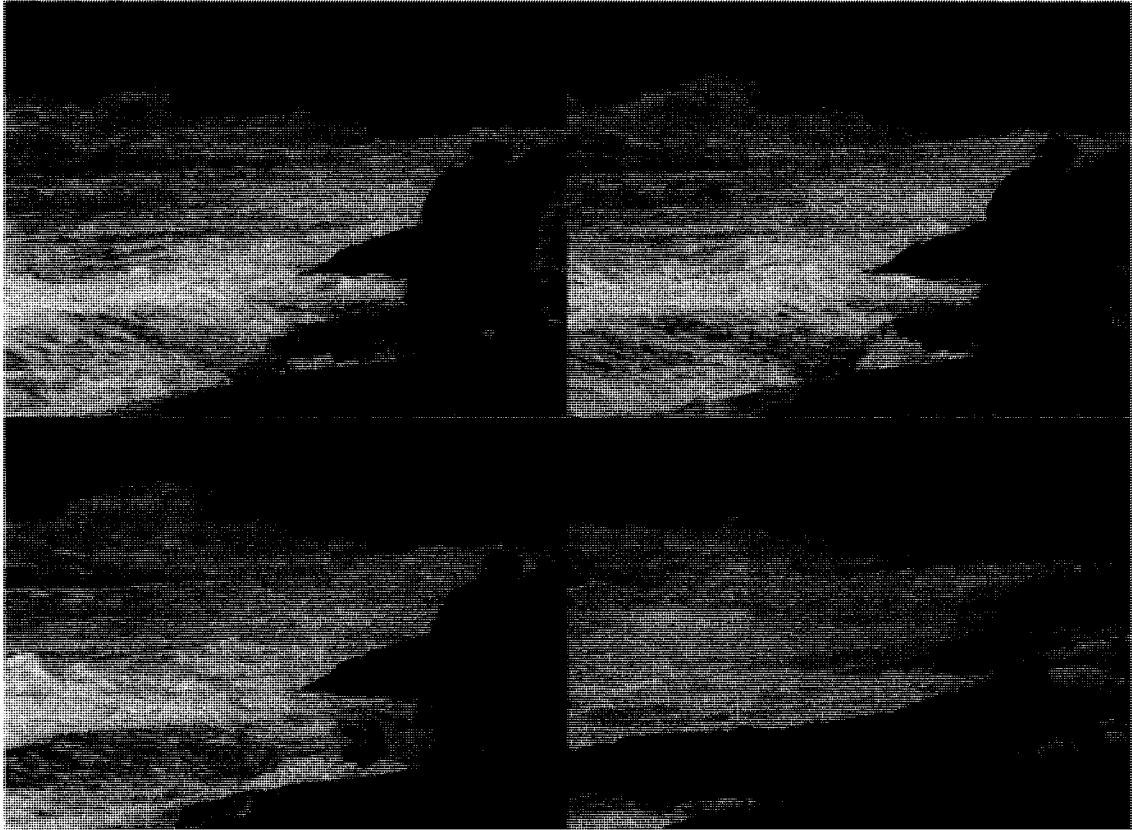
out: look how they've kept you going. But what are you doing here, anyway? You're meant to be nothing

more than cloud, scudding across air, pulled apart by a northeast wind. You're meant to be gone.

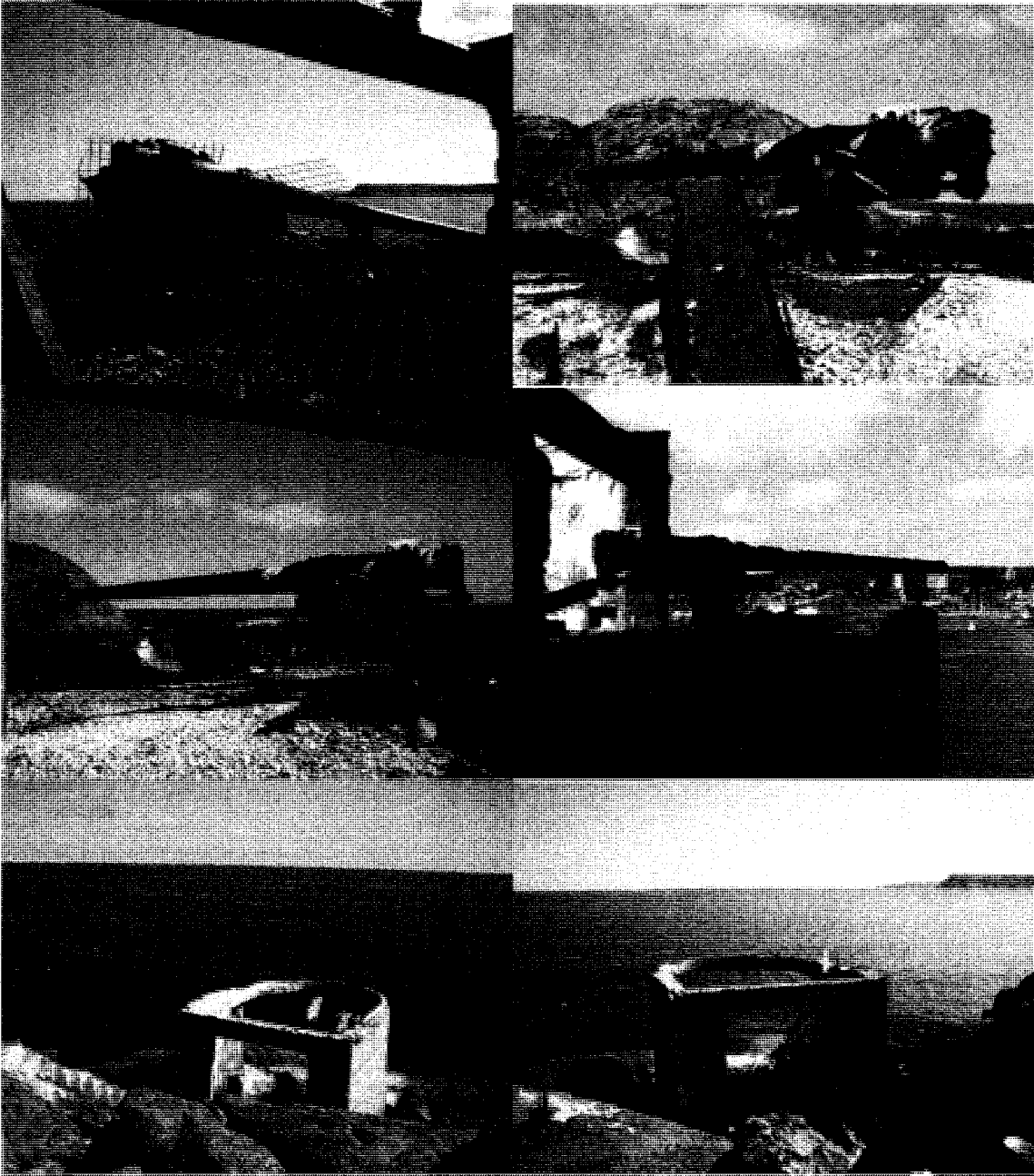
(Figure 1: The threat of the Landwash, May 10, 2008)







(Figure 2, Fort Amherst, Sep. 17, 2007)



(Figure 3, Fort Amherst, Sep. 17, 2007)

