



SYMPATHIZING WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE: POETRY OF INVITATION AND GENERATION

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Abstract: In this paper, we use Sameshima's Parallaxic Praxis Model to create collaborative poetry. The model invites juxtaposing articulations to generate alternative thinking. Similar to Daignault's (1992) notion of a "thinking maybe" space, we invite readers into what we call a liminal studio to theorize new understandings of social justice. In the data phases for this project, Viet Thanh Nguyen's (2015) *The Sympathizer* served as a play object: The narrator, the sympathizer, is a captured communist spy in the aftermath of the Vietnam war, and his confession (the novel) considers a critical question for understanding social justice: "What is more important than independence and freedom?" Nguyen refuses simplistic overtures of

social justice. Instead, readers are confronted with questions: “What do those who struggle against power do when they seize power? What does the revolutionary do when the revolution triumphs? Why do those who call for independence and freedom take away the independence and freedom of others?” (p. 178). These questions lead us to the frame of our own ten-part poem, the modern scholar under interrogation. Our poetry reframes social justice as the art of being/nothing, the something of nothingness being a language of resistance for a reimagined politics.

Keywords: social justice; poetry; politics; imagination; liminal studio

This poetic inquiry has four parts. Part one begins with a description of our poetic methodology, an explanation of what we mean by the liminal studio and the methodological perspectives that poets might hold when creating in such a studio. Part two sets out to understand how social justice might be interrogated through our methodology, namely, the challenge of understanding social justice outside the typical knowledge binary of subjective/objective. In Part two there is also the invitation to the reader to join us in this poetic inquiry, described as a critical phenomenological exploration. Part three is a poetic response to the challenge of social justice. Using Viet Thanh Nguyen's (2015) Pulitzer prize winning book, *The Sympathizer*, to set the motif and frame of confession, the hero of our poetry, a scholar (like Nguyen's narrator), must discover what it is that needs to be confessed. The question is age-old, and it serves to illuminate the theoretical challenge of social justice: "What is more important than independence and freedom?" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 178). Part four offers a denouement. Drawing on Bruner's (2002) notion of canon and breach, and Schubert's (2010) notion of curriculum as a synoptic and expansive text, we suggest that poets operate as political agents when they imagine breaches in the social canon of knowledge.

Inhabiting the Liminal Studio, a Poetic Methodology

In reviewing our poetic writing, we have come to see that rather than bridging, reconciling, or bringing disparate ideas into coherence, we have instead positioned our projects between perspectives, navigating the liminal space. We draw from Daignault's (1983) work in staging and performing "knowledge through a passageway" (see pp. 7-13; also see Sameshima & Irwin, 2008). Through material thinking we imagine a studio space for the poet, a space that has the accessories of thought, a composer's creative "thinking maybe" space (Daignault, 1992, p. 202). When we take on projects such as this one, our collaborative liminal space is a studio space, and we find it helpful to imagine this abstract, theoretical space as more tangible than it really is. Come into my studio, create with me. A critical part of this methodology is the invitation.

Creation in the liminal studio depends on tensionality; where two or more ideas are held productively to reorient a situation, rethink an issue, allowing something new to emerge. When the creatives are poets, the poetic shapes the inquiry so that it is exploratory, often ambiguous, depending on careful use of language to inform generative processes. While careful use of language is not unique to poetic inquiry, it is an aspect of its specialization. By careful we do not mean precise or exact, where definition is a pursuit of clarification. In the way that words convey, and do not convey, ideas, possibilities to draw out new meaning, our carefulness is not being content in singular meaning, in wrapping up the work too soon. Our carefulness means playing with signs and signifiers to seek new orderings and alignments (Sameshima, Wiebe, & Hayes, in press); it is a continual twisting and reframing, turning and

returning, revisioning, recycling. Within a world that is not easily understood, taking care is the ongoing pursuit of new meaning, and it is our commitment to research.

The Parallaxic Praxis Model (Sameshima & Vandermause, 2008) offers a useful means of framing the tensionality of creativity in the studio space. The model invites juxtaposing articulations to exist together simultaneously as imaginative generators. Theoretically grounded in coding and encoding frameworks (Hall, 1973) and polysemic readings of texts (Barthes, 1996), this studio space is dynamic, relational, experiential, and meaningful while preemptively incomplete.

There are three organizational phases in the model. The *Data Phase* consists of the raw building blocks of the poetic play—data, words, ideas, play objects—in our case, Nguyen’s (2015) *The Sympathizer*. In the *Analysis Phase*, we create articulations and compositions through playful analysis of the data (writing alone or building interchangeably from a draft). The analysis phase is a place of fractalling the boundaries of the original data. As our different perspectives engage and become entangled in the meaning-making of the data, we open larger semantic fields by mapping them onto the existing relations of the other’s semantic field (Stern, 2000). The meanings we each attribute to the words we use in the poem expand the ambiguity of the possible meanings of our translations of the data. In this Phase, where the data is translated to another modality (poetry), the data can be viewed metaphorically; and it is in the personally constructed links between the data and the metaphor that newness arises. The aim, then, is to use multiple interpretations as a means to complexify, to open the spaces between the non-fitting pieces of interpretation through collaborative dialogic or construction processes in order to generate interpretive possibilities. In the *Rendering Phase*, the ideas are materialized to provoke further discussions in public venues. In this instance, the renderings are the poems.

Troubling Social Justice in the Liminal Studio

Writing poetry in the liminal studio, we have attempted to understand the productive tension of social justice. Like any ideological concept embraced in earnest, social justice can be put forward as a non-problematic objective. But as Pinar (2010) points out, objectives, no matter how lovely, still have a means-ends orientation. That is, wherever objectives can be defined, there are ideas about the best, or most efficient, or most viable, or most cost-effective means by which to reach them. Whatever the foremost constraints, whether it be saving taxpayer dollars or making decisions based on research findings, the

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pursuit of ideologically-oriented ends, particularly those ends that are future situated just beyond our current reach, is a foreclosure on present concerns, such that the social energies of today are made valuable only in the future when whatever it is that we have set down as our objective is realized. Beginning with the end in mind is a Westernized style of pragmatism of splitting knowledge into objective and subjective. What results is an empty knowledge on both counts: a false objectivity that masquerades as value-free, and an empty subjectivity purporting to support difference—both positions are ungrounded, that is, they are dislocated from history and time and cannot sustain a single point of view. In the former view of knowledge, critical theorists have emphasized the need for ongoing critique; and in the latter view, they have argued that there is no value-neutral position.

Taking critical theory seriously, does this mean that any growth-oriented position is necessarily unjust? Is it possible to have progress, transformation, improvement? The fear, we suppose, is that the pursuit of social justice may become an unquestioned social good, a value-free neutrality. We have found Heidegger (1977) helpful for stepping into these aporic arguments. He encourages us to be playful and poetic in our philosophic pursuits, and so, through generative play, we have approached the social justice knowledge binary with the curiosity of what else the phrase might be asking from us; it is an intentional moving into the foreground of our thinking that we do not yet know, that what we have known up to this point is insufficient. Heidegger calls this practice enframing, which is not simply the reversal of meaning, such as the Socratic pretence of not knowing, rather, it is additionally a playful tension of juxtaposition. To paraphrase Heidegger, when we set out "to reveal the real," if we were to change "our mode of ordering," the real reveals itself to us (Heidegger, 1977, p. 20). The openness to revelation is simply the acknowledgment that there are possibilities that exist beyond our current frameworks. Such acknowledgment is the basis of research, that there is knowledge yet to be discovered, that we do not and cannot yet completely and fully understand. We add, too, that this aporic view leaves all revelations, findings, and knowings perpetually incomplete.

Heidegger (1977) was decidedly holistic in his explanation of revelation, bringing together *techne*, *poiesis*, *episteme*, which for us provides philosophical grounding of poetic inquiry in the social sciences: *techne* is an acknowledgment that methods, tools, and techniques belong with *poiesis*, and together an intention can be made to create and generate possibilities that are beyond what is already known. With *poiesis* we stretch to imagine the world as it might yet be, reconstructed in that moment. The interplay of such a poetic imagination with *episteme* suggests that our processes of knowledge are both objective and subjective at once, that ontology and epistemology are co-implicated, neither being a priori. We hold this perspective because it allows us to stand in the middle of our lives without disavowing our experience. It is a phenomenological position, but a critical phenomenological position, where our standing in the midst is held in reserve, a curiosity that pushes us to yet another explanation.

Having named the challenge before us, we invite you into our liminal studio to create with us: we seek to understand social justice outside of means-ends frameworks. While the poetry below has already been written, the studio door remains open. Remembering the phases of the Parallaxic Praxis Model, the rendering phase is meant to provoke further discussion: thus, the poetry below is meant only to draw out multiple perspectives, exploring social justice phenomenologically, post-structurally, pragmatically, culturally, and critically. Our hope is that the creative process remains ongoing, bringing us into the very details of lived experience, while still asking what if, what might be, how can we imagine it otherwise?

Sympathizing with Social, Justice

In the Data Phase for this project we used Viet Thanh Nguyen's (2015) *The Sympathizer* as a play object. The narrator, the sympathizer, is a captured communist spy in the aftermath of the Vietnam War. Of particular interest for us was how the framing of this novel, told as an ironic confession, did not follow the traditional form of confession; the confessor-narrator, being of two minds, could sympathize with both sides, both the communists (his interrogators) and the nationals (those he was spying on). Through our collaborative dialogue on the novel we discovered that the narrator's insights would be a means to generate new ideas around social justice.

Over a series of interrogations, the narrator is tormented with the question, "What is more important than independence and freedom?" The answer his interrogators desire is "nothing." Like the narrator, we too, understood ourselves as resisting the obvious answer; in our poetry-making we sought (and interrogated) those moments in our lived experiences when the need for normative answers pressed on us. The process led us to the frame of our own ten-part poem, the modern scholar under interrogation. At the climax of *The Sympathizer*, Nguyen's narrator discovers the paradox of nothing; the very confession his interrogators desired all along, i.e., there is "nothing" more important than independence and freedom. But in his articulation, the narrator understands nothing as something. He finds it possible to hold nothingness in objective space; a somethingness that can be played out in the tradition of existentialist philosophy. In Nguyen's poetic play on nothingness, we found inspiration for our poetic experiment with social justice as the art of being/nothing.

Moving to the *Analysis Phase*, we tried to understand the historical and social voices of our being/nothing resistance. We both identified ourselves as sympathizing with the cause of social justice, but we also knew, with Nguyen, that "those who insist on their innocence believe anything they do is just" (p. 103). We needed to trouble our own positions, so, in the next phase of our poetic making, we individually created poetic compositions as a playful analysis. In this case, it was a two-week period of fractalling the borders of the data. We

used our contrasting draft poems and ideas as a means to complexify, and then, mapping our poems onto one another, we sought ways to bring them into productive tension and surface new historical and social voices in our own positioning. This autobiographical turn was a response to Nguyen's (2015) troubling questions, questions that refuse simplistic overtures of social justice: "What do those who struggle against power do when they seize power? What does the revolutionary do when the revolution triumphs? Why do those who call for independence and freedom take away the independence and freedom of others? (p. 178). Taking the provocation of these questions seriously/playfully, what if we were the "those" Nguyen (2015) was referring to? It is an important historical shift. Is this not what Paul Beatty (2015) is suggesting in *The Sellout* when he says scholars are "all spit and no polish" (p. 97). He describes them as "wereniggers . . . By day, erudite and urbane, but with every lunar cycle, fiscal quarter, and tenure review their hackles rise . . . and they schlep down from their ivory towers and corporate boardrooms to prowling the inner cities" (p. 96).

If You Want, Justice

*The two most important days in your life
are the day you are born
and the day you find out why.*

-Anonymous

i.

"We wake, work, eat, and sleep according to what the landlord, the owner, the banker, the politician, and the schoolmaster command . . . but in truth [time] belongs to us." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 160)

Awaken paper tiger
the rooster is calling

awaken public intellectuals
you conference goers, funding magnets

creatives lost in history
you need a respite from it

your own capital investments
stolen from your integrity

awaken bankrupt scholar
steal back your time

remember the pleasure
of a lawn chair, a book,

a circuitous walk, sword fern
shoulder high, a path overgrown

remember cherry blossom air
warmth through your feet

carrying firewood
arranging your words like kindling

first the twigs, fanning
the flames, poetry burning

bright symmetry
in the forests of the sky

ii.

"Fixed on his mattress, the prisoner—no, the pupil—understood . . . to be a revolutionary subject he must be a historical subject who remembered all, which he could do so only by being fully awake, even if being fully awake would, eventually, kill him." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 161)

Awaken paper tiger
this is your examination

your torture, first question
who are you?

your initials a post script
in history, your last name

doesn't belong to you
not even your father's father

who traded his cow
for magic beans,

you are a nursery rhyme
a jack that went up the hill

because your father could not
leave his cloister

the water to be blessed
seeps back into the ground

iii.

"You think I'm a traitor! . . . A bastard who belongs nowhere, not to be trusted by anyone! The rage subsided just as suddenly into despair, and he wept. Would his sacrifices never be honored? Would no one ever understand him? Would he always be alone?" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 163)

You are gimp, from falling,
from bullet wounds, think with a limp

askew, off-center, speak with a lisp
hybrid language, con-lib, neoliberal, glib,

seeing both sides, the sympathizer
a white iron poker in the eye

what do you know of light
freedom that is your torture,

that slides down the walls
and over your skin

keeps you from sleep
a gangrene growing in the mind,

memory, perception, deception
the interrogator speaks to you

in the soft tones of your mother
sweet boy, you are here, you are mine

iv.

"He was the man with a plan, the spy with an eye, the mole in the hole, but his tongue had inflated itself to fill his entire mouth." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 162)

Speak, sympathetic scholar
sound your yawp

open your eyes
your office is white

the floors, walls, paper
even paperless paper

electric white, wattage
hallways plastered

in posters, save the bottom
line, white ceiling tiles,

doors painted white, budgets
whitened like teeth,

zeroes grinning wickedly,
scholar, where is your bite?

v.

"He will never see, not with all the light in the world. He's been underground too long. He's fundamentally blind . . . all we can do is help the patient see his own mind by keeping him awake, until he can observe himself as someone else." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 164)

It is impossible to tell,
subject of a comic experiment

pupil and patient, open
body exam, open book

scholar etherized on a table
subject to devices of self

design, Rip Van Winkle
Sleepy Beauty

second question,
what are you waiting for?

Alice? The wolf?
Someone to love you,

pluck your brows, take
your confession, and say,

how beautiful your words,
let me enclose them

in quotations, and add
you to a list of references.

If only you could see yourself
a simple matter of division.

vi.

"I saw myself admit it then. I heard myself acknowledge that I was not being punished or reeducated for the things I had done, but for the thing I had not done. I wept and cried without shame for the shame I felt. I was guilty of the crime of doing nothing." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 168)

Poor scholar, a stuttering subject
of re-re-re-re-education,

afraid his-her-zir words
will be taken without form

without class, from an unauthorized
biographer, their proper

height and breadth
marked simply, and only,

on the door jamb, painted
over with an exodus

and their own histories.
Poor scholar, passed over

a copyright agreement
a citation, a patent,

an assistant to collect the bones
these hands, your hands

must not come in contact
with the earth.

vii.

"If you could see that I have nothing left to confess, if history's ship had taken a different tack, if I had become an accountant, if I had fallen in love with the right woman." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 167)

If they could see
if you had a mentor

shaping you in the ways
of class and form

if there were another school
that hadn't been closed down

if there weren't an ideology
to flee from, or soldiers,

if fire were only used
for boiling water,

if gunpowder hadn't been invented
or riffling, or combustion engines

or orthodoxy, if Henry
hadn't been a king

or if the pope's arms
were shorter,

or if there were years
of jubilee,

or if you had a land
that could not be taken

if there were a law
that could make it so

if there were no need
for such a law

viii.

"Looking down on my self, I could still see the child in the man and the man in the child. I was ever always divided, although it was only partially my fault. While I chose to live two lives and be a man of two minds, it was hard not to, given how people had always called me a bastard." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 169).

Lovesick scholar
chasing wildfire

ideologies, flying
across borders

of all kinds, a trans
professional, transnational

transitional, between homes
afraid to unpack

freightphobia,
boxes and boxes

circling the globe
unopened, bags packed

waiting, each affair
ending childless

curses and crying
echoing in a windowless

panel van, the salesman
said could be converted

when the time came.
Is there ever a good time

to convert? Endings
in beginnings, both as inevitable

as the nothingness
you carry within you

to trade on something
more. If they could see

ix.

"What's so funny? The commandant demanded. Nothing! I cried. I was, at last, broken. I had, at last, spoken. Don't you get it? I cried. The answer is nothing! Nothing, nothing, nothing!" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 172)

Third question
why are you here?

you know they want something
more, let the truth serum,

take hold, let the buried
be resurrected, speak:

you want justice, and, and, and
each desire a brick

stacked in the sand,
build a monument

to your new gods
and the winds and the wars

of sibling rivalry still come,
you need a new history,

and I will give you one:
for billions of years

in the nothingness
was nothing, that nothing

came of nothing
was an insentient logic

unappreciated in its elegant
acquiescence to nothing,

the refusal to become
something even as words

were spelled out to describe
the nothingness to make it

understandable to no one.
Out of the nothingness

was the perfection of a circle
that was infinitely expanding

beyond knowledge of its boundary,
there was only perpetual center.

x.

"But what was this meaning? What had I intuited at last? Namely this: while nothing is more precious than independence and freedom, nothing is also more precious than independence and freedom! These two slogans are almost the same, but not quite." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 175)

The teacher reads
from their genealogies:

the first act of creation
murdered perfection,

put a something in the heart
of nothing.

Putting up their hands
the good students

know this is mockery
the class clown, too,

hand up so far
into the rarified air

the teacher wonders
who to call on,

or if it matters
who is mocking who.

She wonders why
she's kept a diary

of their genealogies
keeping them alive

with the morning reading,
her mother's smile

also hanging outside
the principal's office

a lifeline of prayers
squeezed into an eight by ten,

a hallway long
ready for renovation.

What is the point
of these memories

she digs up, a coffin
cannot be turned

into a museum,
letters, lovers, books,

childhood itself
turned into an artifact

of her care?
She cannot find you,

scholar, the desk you sat in
crushed, burned

and deposited in a heap
10 miles outside

the city, the purgatory,
the I love you

of your past a nothingness
so small it is a ghost,

a shiver up the spine
mistaken for the flu.

Perhaps that is the point
of her profession,

to give these ghosts
a chance to haunt her,

to syphon off whatever hope
is left in her heart.

A Denouement

In the lead up to the climactic rant of chapter 21, the prisoner pleads with his interrogators, saying he has nothing left to confess. At a point when he knows himself as completely emptied, his interrogators still want something more, and it prompts the following monologue:

If you could see that I have nothing left to confess, if history's ship had taken a different tack, if I had become an accountant, if I had fallen in love with the right woman, if I had been a more virtuous lover, if my mother had been less of a mother, if my father had gone to save souls in Algeria instead of here, . . . if we forgot our resentment, if we forgot revenge, if we acknowledged that we are all puppets in someone else's play, . . . if some of us had not called ourselves nationalists or communists or capitalists or realists, . . . if the Americans hadn't come to save us from ourselves, . . . if the Soviets had never called us comrades, if Mao had not sought to do the same, . . . if Ho Chi Minh had not been dialectical and Karl Marx not analytical, if the invisible hand of the market did not hold us by the scruffs of our necks, if the British had defeated the rebels of the new world, if the natives had simply said, Hell no, on first seeing the white man, if our emperors and mandarins had not clashed among themselves, if the Chinese had never ruled us for a thousand years, if they had used gunpowder for more than fireworks, if the Buddha had never lived, if the Bible had never been written." (Nguyen, 2015, p. 167)

In this ludicrous arrangement of the players in history, the prisoner realizes that justice is impossible, but for it to exist in this world, a completely different world would need to exist, and so begins a rant imagining an alternative history. His imagination of an alternative is a nothing/something, the first critical step in generating an alternative future. To do so the prisoner/narrator experiences a split; seeing his body as an object, as if from above, able to comment on his thoughts and feelings from a new narrative space. This necessary subjective/objective split creates liminal space, a studio space, if you will, that invites the possibility of alternatives to exist beside ideologies. What is created in this liminal studio space is a new recognition that "nothing is, indeed, something" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 167). The prisoner discovers the possibilities of holding nothingness in objective space; a somethingness that can be played out in the tradition of existentialist philosophy. This discovery refuses simplistic overtures of social justice.

Because it is possible, indeed more than likely, that the struggle for "independence and freedom [can] make those things worth less than nothing" (Nguyen, 2015, p. 169), what Viet Thanh Nguyen advises is the humour, paradox, ambiguity, and/or irony of being/nothing. To take one's ideology too seriously is dangerous, he says, "people who do not get the joke

are dangerous people indeed. They are the ones who say nothing with great piousness, who ask everyone else to die for nothing” (p. 169). Nguyen asks, “Why do those who call for independence and freedom take away the independence and freedom of others?” (p. 171). And he answers his own question:

I understood, at last, how our revolution had gone from being the vanguard of political change to the rearguard hoarding power. In this transformation, we were not unusual. Hadn't the French and the Americans done exactly the same? Once revolutionaries themselves, they had become imperialists, colonizing and occupying our defiant little land, taking away our freedom in the name of saving us. (p. 170)

“We propose the something of nothingness as a language of resistance for a reimagined politics of creativity and generation.”

We propose the something of nothingness as a language of resistance for a reimagined politics of creativity and generation. We write poetry to generate alternative networks of social relationships: in poetry these exist imaginatively; nevertheless, ideas remain powerful, and in so being, there is a resistance of a nothing/something. The liminal paradox is important, lest an articulation become too zealous, too invested in outcomes that can be applied broadly. Attributed to Aristotle is the maxim that the general is always unjust.

To derive rules, policy, or laws that can be applied generally as a means to convey order, make decisions, or refine practices has been at the very core of human knowledge making activities. Given this rulemaking propensity in human beings, what Aristotle realized is that the general, when applied to the particular, is always unjust. There is always an exception to the rule. This is the heart of justice, to seek ways to value rule-creation for the general good while simultaneously recognizing that these rules will always fall short, and that in this gap is the further work of modifying the general for the particular, the social for the individual.

Narrative scholar, Jerome Bruner (2002), called the collection of social laws *canon*. Canon represents the social accumulation of knowledge that is valued. Through historical and cultural influences, certain knowledge is assembled and represented as normative, as real, true, best, or good. Corollary to canon is what he called breach. The breach is an exception. It is a discovery, the generation of something new that cannot be categorized based on current frames of understanding. Bruner characterized the breach as inevitable, that, most often, societies will eventually incorporate the breach as part of canon. Breaches occur at the margins of society, at the edges of what is perceived to be normal; it is at the margins of the world that we might expect the most fecund ideas, where the imagination is primed. Canon without breach is a techno-rationalism that supposes social justice is simply

a matter of asking, “what is it that we want to achieve?” and, “what is the best way to achieve it?” Metaphors of commerce, with the efficiency of the assembly line and management practices that ensure everyone is working toward the same goal, understanding things from the same perspective, have been the primary means of politics for centuries.

Operationalized in education, this techno-rationalism, say den Heyer and Conrad (2011), creates a privileged ignorance. Reporting on bachelor of education students’ beliefs about their competence, after having taken extensive training in Indigenous perspectives, these new teachers still reported that they were not prepared to teach junior high curriculum on Indigenous histories and knowledges. Why? Conrad and den Heyer (2011) speculate that students had positioned themselves outside these issues, as if it were possible to be an effective teacher in Canada and have a history that did not include Indigenous peoples. What mattered for students was simply the literacies of knowledge disciplines, a techno-rational knowledge without history or politics. Insightfully, Conrad and den Heyer argue that such a positioning comes from privilege, the ability to choose one’s place in history, or, more accurately, to not include others’ histories as co-implicated in your own. They had hoped this bachelor of education course would create a breach in normative knowledge, that students might, in our words, enter the liminal studio.

Working with Bruner's (2002) terminology, we imagine poets as political agents when they imagine breaches. We are not arguing that poets take on a particular ideology of social justice, but that they work in a social justice studio of liminal space. Creation in the liminal studio depends on tensionality where two or more ideas are held productively to reorient a situation, rethink an issue, allowing something new to emerge. Canon and breach. In the liminal studio, the inquiry is exploratory, ambiguous, the poet using language in myriad ways to generate breaches.

In the Western history of knowledge, the human energy empowering the canonic drive has been a synoptic one (Schubert, 2010). In synopsis is the desire for clarity, refinement, prioritization. It is the pursuit to define so that concepts can be distinguished and recognized, enough so that they can be passed on to the next generation, a process called education (Aoki, 2000). Despite this, Einstein urges us that while knowledge can be made as simple as possible, it should be no simpler (Yale book of quotations, 2006, p. 231). In other words, synoptic processes need a complement of expansive ones. Knowledge assemblage processes need to be both synoptic and expansive. With every rule there is an exception. With every *and*, there is a *but*. In early Hebraic language, the sign *wav*, could signify either *and* or *but*. As a coordinating conjunction the sign *wav* had multiple, even oppositional meanings, and it was up to the reader to understand meaning through context and tradition. And, in the way that paradox often operates as a poetic trope, there is always the possibility that oppositional meanings were meant to both be true at the same time. Social justice is

both expansive and synoptic. Communities are both individual and social. Justice is comprised of rules and exceptions to them. As poets, we work with these productive tensions in a liminal studio.

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