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LITERATURE, LINGUISTICS & CRITICISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reproductive tourism: A poetic inquiry

Heather Walmsley^{1*}, Susan Cox¹ and Carl Leggo²

Abstract: This paper employs poetic inquiry as a form of interpretive and aesthetic inquiry into the meaning and experience of reproductive tourism. The context is an ethnographic study of the fertility services industry in Cancun. Drawing upon interviews with the owner of a medical tourism company and a doctor who runs a large fertility clinic, we adopt varied strategies of poetic inquiry as a means of listening deeply to the stories of participants. In particular, we ask who gets to tell the story, how is the story told and why does it matter? This is profoundly personal and political work. As the poems and our reflections on them reveal, we remain uncomfortable deriving any straightforward scholarly conclusions but rather see ourselves as engaged in work that is intended to be both critical and creative.

Subjects: Health & Medical Anthropology; Sociology of Science & Technology; Bioethics; Reproductive Technology Medical Sociology; Health & Illness; Research Methods - Soc. Policy; Poetry; Sociology of Health and Illness; Health Law and Ethics; Sexual and Reproductive Health

Keywords: poetic inquiry; arts-based research; infertility; reproductive tourism; cross-border reproductive care; surrogacy; medical tourism; egg donation; Cancun; cities; poetry; ethics; point of view; storytelling; narrative; found poetry; erasure poetry; commodification of the body

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Heather Walmsley is a qualitative researcher whose work entwines literary arts with bioethics, political theory and anthropology to understand societal and ethical transformations of emerging health technologies. Heather was a Banting Fellow at the University of British Columbia from 2012 to 2014. A graduate of the 2016 SFU Writers Studio, her poetry is published in *Emerge* 16.

Susan Cox is a qualitative researcher/ethicist and professor working in health research and interdisciplinary studies at the University of British Columbia. Her work on the arts in health research aims to open up new ways of co-creating and mediating our understandings and experiences of health and contemporary social life.

Carl Leggo is a poet and professor at the University of British Columbia. His books include: *Lifewriting and Literary Métissage as an Ethos for Our Times* (with Erika Hasebe-Ludt and Cynthia Chambers); *Poetic Inquiry* (co-edited with Monica Prendergast and Pauline Sameshima); *Sailing in a Concrete Boat: A Teacher's Journey*.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The phenomenon of “reproductive tourism” is an emerging hot topic. Scholars and journalists are discussing the economic, political, social and ethical implications of medical advances in human reproduction. This paper focuses on the fertility services industry in Mexico. One interview was conducted with a doctor and CEO of a fertility clinic in Mexico that provides IVF and egg donation to a large number of international patients. A second interview was conducted with a leading figure in Mexico, who has business interests in both medical and reproductive tourism. In responding to the interviews, we each wrote poetry. We then reflected on the process of writing the poems, and engaged in a collaborative discussion as we asked questions like: What can poetry contribute to complex and urgent public and scholarly discussions? What new kinds of knowledge, dialogue or understanding can poetic inquiry generate? Who gets to tell the story, how is the story told and why does it matter? This research is both critical and creative.

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of “reproductive tourism” or “cross-border reproductive care” is an emerging hot topic within the social sciences and within the global news media. The technological production of human babies, the “exotic” travel (often by the wealthy, often to Southern or less developed nations), the radical societal shifts and ethical challenges that arise: these are nectar for foraging social scientists and journalists alike.

And for good reason. The “fetal citizen” is emerging as the defining site of struggle for the fantasy of a national future, according to recent research on Chinese birth tourism (Wang, 2017, p. 271). Egg donation and surrogacy can command hefty fees in the United States, where the practise is legal, leading to deep concerns about the commodification of female bodies and the engineering of children as products without genealogy (Almeling, 2011, p. 82; Spar, 2006, p. 175). In India, research illustrates that surrogacy challenges the old dichotomy between production and reproduction, as “women’s reproductive capacities are valued and monetized outside of the so-called private sphere” (Pande, 2017, p. 274). Paradoxically, it also reifies them:

When reproducing bodies of women become the only source, requirement and product of a labour market and fertility becomes the only asset women can use to earn wages, women essentially get reduced to their reproductive capacities, ultimately reifying their historically constructed role in the gender division of labour. (Pande, 2017, p. 274)

New political lines are being drawn in response: pro-choice feminists and the Catholic Church find common ground across Europe, lobbying in a strategic alliance for a global ban on surrogacy by the United Nations (Momigliano, 2017, p. 272); other feminists support the right to surrogacy on the grounds of gender equality and gay rights. And emerging technologies promise perhaps greater controversy. As mitochondrial replacement, for example, becomes available in certain countries during *in vitro* fertilization, the production of ethically controversial “three-parent children” (using eggs from a mother and a donor, and sperm from a father) is a likely future driver of reproductive travel (Castro, 2016, p. 273). This technique enables women who carry a mitochondrial disease to have children without passing it on. It also results in a germline (inheritable) change in the DNA of a female child and all her female descendants.

What can arts-based research contribute to these complex and heated public and scholarly discussions? Specifically, what new kinds of knowledge, dialogue or understanding can poetic inquiry generate?

This paper is the third and final in a series of three collaborative explorations of this question, by three researchers—Heather Walmsley, Susan Cox and Carl Leggo—in relation to reproductive tourism. Our work draws upon ethnographic research conducted by Heather, as a SSHRC Banting Postdoctoral Fellow in Sociology at the University of British Columbia from 2012 to 2015. This research involved review of scholarly and gray literature, observation of online patient discussion forums and industry marketing and media discourse and a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with diverse stakeholders in the reproductive tourism industry conducted primarily in Cancun, Mexico. The research was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia and included provision for participants to consent to our use of their interview materials to create found poetry.¹

Our first paper documents a collaborative exploration in the use of three specific techniques of found poetry (erasure poetry, free-form excerpting and remixing, and free verse) and an iterative process of reflective commentary, in response to observational “data” from discussions in the “Travelling Abroad for IVF” discussion forum on the Canadian website www.IVF.ca. (Walmsley, Cox, & Leggo, 2015, p. 251). Our second paper again involves the production of found poetry and reflective commentary, this time in response to the audio recording of an interview with a woman who frequently donated her eggs to clinics in Cancun, Mexico (Walmsley, Cox, & Leggo, 2017, p. 275).

This final paper draws upon poetry written in response to two ethnographic interviews. One is with a fertility doctor and CEO of a clinic in Mexico that provides IVF and egg donation to a large number of international patients. The other is with a leading figure in the tourism industry in Quintana Roo, Mexico, who has business interests in both medical and reproductive tourism. Heather circulated both audio recordings of the interviews and written transcripts of the recordings.

Who tells the story—of Cancun, of medical tourism, of international reproductive travel? Whose story is it? Who gets to narrate history? These were some of our concerns in writing the poems and reflections that emerged. We imposed no formal rules or requirements. Instead, we asked, how do we tell these stories? And how *could* we tell these stories? Consequently, the poetry we produced varies from erasure poetry with strict adherence to the original text, to free verse involving an imaginative conjuring of ghosts. Finally, we asked *why*? Why do these stories matter? Why talk about reproductive tourism at all?

The paper comprises three poems, one written by each of us in response to one or both of the interviews. The reader is invited to listen to us reading our poems aloud (see materials that accompany this article) since breath, emphasis and tone all assist in bringing the work off the page, imbuing the written word with an ineffable feeling of engagement. Each poem is followed by a reflection, on the process and purpose of writing. These are followed by a collaborative discussion section. In our reflections and discussions, we each draw from our different, yet complementary, scholarly backgrounds. Heather reflects on the intention of the poem itself, the language choices through which it manifests and the potential of a critical poetic ethnography. Susan addresses the challenge of empathy and compassion in research, investigates her own positionality as a white, feminist, happily childless, woman and speaks to the capacity of the poem to hold complexity. Carl speaks to the potential of the poem as a space of paradox and ambiguity, on the writing process as a space of learning to listen both attentively and imaginatively.

2. Poetry and reflections

2.1.

*Cancun*²

Heather Walmsley

Cancun, village impoverished strung from the fibre of cactus infertile soil spun into rope by Dupont	hear the ghosts of the fisher wives
City of tourists dug from the white sand ocean dream aquamarine glammed into <i>Brand of the Decade</i>	hear the ghosts of the hotel dead
City born to serve breeds a new people Mexican Russian Korean sweat of sixty-seven nations	hear the ghosts of migrant hope
City of sickness wields a scalpel hips and knees and plastic faces bariatric bellies fat laced	hear the ghosts of unloved chins

City of healing
boasts blueprints budgets permits for
Wisdom Gardens
a place to *build, research, record* hear the ghost of Chilam Balam

City of embryos
sucks eggs, ovaries of hot young
fertile local
chicks on a list, height, weight, eye shape hear the ghosts of human love

City of bodies
disgusting like the animal
outraged donors
it's a trash my eggs so bad pay hear the ghosts of gift exchange

City of last hope
lures IVF adventurers
lugging sluggish
sperm barren wombs white-picket dreams hear the ghosts of stillborn lungs

City of research
woos me—rich uncharted terrain of
women enslaved—
I dig for stories, scoop up pain wield the ghost of a child enchained

2.2. Reflections on writing Cancun

I begin writing this poem “Cancun” in 2016. I listen to an interview I conducted two years earlier, with an important figure in the medical tourism industry in Mexico. As our voices entangle, memories arise. I recall my nervousness, trying to navigate, in beating rain, *en español*, to an office address whose syntax I did not understand. I remember my baffled cab driver. Circling in puddling confusion. Wet clothes. A sodden umbrella. Worrying. That I was visiting a powerful and busy man. That he would not talk to me about egg donation, about surrogacy.

I recall this man’s graciousness and generosity, his pride in his country, his delight in mine. His humour. My long list of carefully pondered questions, hastily shelved. For, as he told me, I must first understand the history of the Riviera Maya. I recall gratitude, scepticism—for his time and thoughtfulness, at his narration from a position of patriarchy and prestige. Who gets to tell this story though, to narrate this history, I wonder? It is hardly my tale to tell.

I listen and I hear a story of inexorable growth and progress. How it flows through, how it shapes, a city. I learn of ever-bigger attempts to develop the economy of a difficult to cultivate agricultural land. To assert the primacy of instrumental “scientific man” over “nature.” To find the raw materials. To grow the economy. Fishing first. Then relaxation, in beach hotels, propelled by cheap flights. Then international surgery, faster and cheaper than elsewhere. Now remedies for infertile bodies—IVF treatments, donor eggs, sperm, surrogate wombs for hire. Soon *Wisdom Gardens* will be built, a new world-class medical city.

“A culture, we all know, is made by its cities,” said poet Derek Walcott (1992) in his Nobel Prize Lecture. This city, Cancun. It is active. An agent of progress. It seeks its place, a central place, as the protagonist in my retelling of this story, my own particular narration of this history. It becomes the “he.” Or is it “she,” or “they”? Cancun, at first is passively *strung* and *dug* in my emerging poem. And then they get some guts, some skill, some ego, some trickster qualities, some wily ways. We need some feisty, boisterous verbs now. Cancun *breeds* and *wields* and *boasts* and *sucks* and *lures* and *woos*.

I'm writing an erasure poem, or I thought I was. I should include words from the original text. One cannot do erasure, "sous rature," in the Derridean (1987 [1974]) sense, without some glimpse of the original text. A revisionist history requires attention to the original. They aren't very poetic though, these words we spoke, in office chairs chilled by air-conditioning. I want fibre and sweat, the hawking beat of the street, surgical scalpel and belly fat. I want the sounds of *chicks* and *lists* and *hips* and *permits* running through the lines like a fisherman's rope. I keep *Brand of the Decade* and *build*, *research*, *record*—for their specificity and half-rhyme, for the rhythm of these words juxtaposed.

Listening carefully, I remember other voices, other interviewees. They pop out of this man's statements, asserting their own take. An infertile female academic, longing for a child. A young single mother, donating her eggs to pay school fees. Treated *like an animal*. Her fee, *a trash*. Visually evocative words.

Poetry, said Walcott (1992), "conjugates both tenses simultaneously: the past and the present, if the past is the sculpture and the present the beads of dew or rain on the forehead of the past." I imagine this poem as a historical collage, a repetitive conjugation of many pasts. I imagine all the absent voices. Try to conjure the city's ghosts.

There was the buzz and hum of a fishing village in the evening, men bringing home the catch. Crushed by concrete. There were men with crooked oversized noses, women with triple chins. Lopped off. Reshaped. into the perfect body parts of the late capitalist American Dream. There were terraced pyramids, ornate palaces decorated with serpent mouths, complex Mayan societies, mathematics, astronomy, prophecy, supernatural communication. Trodden by tourists, on a schedule. Finally, there are girls' ovaries, hyper-stimulated. Self-ownership, bartered, with clinic recruiters in Starbucks. If you're beautiful. Eggs, produced on demand, for a price. If you're beautiful. In and out the clinic backdoor please, so as not to be seen.

Once conjured, these ghosts insist on staying. Offset. A persistent refrain, an insistent chorus, on the right side of the page. They want you to strain your ears, to pay attention. For they are rarely heard. As I read this poem aloud, I play with volume, whisper.

"Disembodied, the poem provokes longing," says Jennifer Moxley, in *Fragments of a Broken Poetics* (2010, p. 266).

Its incorporeity is inscribed in myth: the severed head of Orpheus adrift on the Aegean Sea. Though separated, the head continues to sing. The song it sings is either a lament of exile from the body or a celebration of freedom from its material prison, depending on the direction of the winds.

And somehow Cancun has become a lament, a poem about loss, grief. It has become a gentle container, for the shadow. For the discarded, cut-off, abandoned, repressed, jettisoned parts, of the whole. Of the city, of the culture, of global ethics and technology, of each one of us. These parts are the ghosts and they are crowding in. They are wailing hard. "Sorrow is a sustained note in the song of being alive," writes Francis Weller (2015, p. xxii), in his remarkable book *The Wild Edge of Sorrow*. In "a world rapidly being emptied by a never-ending hunger for more" (2015, p. 7).

I am hoping poetic inquiry will offer a path in, to help me understand reproductive tourism. Hoping the poem can be a possibility, for pursuing a critical poetic ethnography. That the poem can be a sharp and flexible needle, to weave knowledge at the radical methodological edge. To bring me into conversation with the "sticky engagements" of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's *Friction* (2005), an ethnography of capitalist acquisition and protest in the Indonesian rainforests. With Sarah Pink's embodied attention to place and materiality, her entanglements of emotion and multi-sensoral knowledge (2009, 2008, 2011, Mejia & Pink, 2017). With the cultural poetics of Kathleen Stewart, in *A Space on the Side of the Road* (1996) in the ruins of West Virginia coal camps, in *Ordinary Affects* (2007).

“She gazes, imagines, senses, takes on, performs, and asserts not a flat and finished truth but some possibilities (and threats) that have come into view,” writes Stewart (2007, p. 5), of the poetic ethnographer. Of the poet too, she could be writing.

What better place for a critical aesthetic engagement with a radical technology than a literary space so independent of technology? An oral art that is not imprisoned by the dictates of capitalism and the growth economy? Poetry, writes Adrienne Rich (1993), can “evoke and catalyze a community or communities against passivity and victimization.” It can “recall people to their spiritual and historic sources.” It can never be high technology. And lest we forget, poetry is also “the last gift economy,” said poet Claudia Rankine, about *Citizen* (2014) in an interview with *Guernica* magazine (Sharma, 2014). What better place than a poem, ethically, to be weaving a ficto-critical tale, about science and instrumentalism and the creeping commodification of the human body and spirit?

And this poem now, these ghost cries, are teaching me. Frankly, I’ve been tearing my hair out—trying to weave a rational argument, through the ontological choreographies (Thompson, 2007) and tissue economies (Waldby & Mitchell, 2006) the bio-regimes and the reproductives (Nahman, 2016). An argument that can hold the complexity of technologies, policies, mobilities, with the interwoven longings and the pain.

I start to see that the production and consumption of emerging reproductive technologies are really, like much frenzied human activity, just a complex web, of people running. From loss. From grief. From death.

I don’t want to be in this poem. And yet I am sucked in. The researcher, lucky in her own fertility, driven to leave her own country and fly her children to this one, to investigate the flow of power, the plight of women, within this industry. The poem demands that I inquire much deeper. Into the ghosts that drive my own life choices, my work. Into the role of the marginalized, as high-value resource, within the sociological and bioethical economies. Into the losses, all of our many losses.

“Our personal experiences of loss and suffering are now bound inextricably with dying coral reefs, melting polar caps, the silencing of languages, the collapse of democracy, and the fading of civilization. The personal and planetary are inseparable,” writes Weller (2015, p. xvii). “The accumulation of losses are pressing on our psyches and demanding that we engage the multiple sorrows that are enfolding our world and our lives.” These losses, these accumulating losses. These are our possibilities. Our threats.

As I finish this poem, I remember Cancun. Tourists flash phones in bikinis, eat French fries by the pool. Iguanas lounge on the old Mayan stones of El Rey. Cabs speed through downtown rain. I wait in clinics, writing notes about the shining floors, water coolers, Spanish magazines. Billboards sell ruins—Tulum, Coba, Chichen Itza. Tears slide down the cheek of a woman longing for a second child. Anger surges in a woman recounting the pain, of extracting her eggs, the indignity, of her pay. Explanations slip into justifications, marketing speech.

A poem cannot hold it all. But maybe it can smash open a little conceptual space in Cancun, the poster city for the growth paradigm? Dredge up a few ghosts between the jet-skis and surface glint of sun on wave, from the shadowy ocean depths? I invite you to hear the possibilities, that might emerge, from an imaginative listening, to their sorrowful refrain.

2.3.

Marketing Man

Susan Cox

I'm a marketing man
the international patient is an information hunter
in Mexico it's more important to know who than how
the golf people
the diving people
some segments you are milking.

We are the intelligence unit
we give them a little briefing
we care about the overall experience
every way to satisfy the person
we befriend the person
pick him up
take him to the pyramids
take him diving.

Money is important
and a person that comes with promises?
They're not having any business with that guy!
we work with doctors that make you feel they care

Going to a country to have a surgical thing is not easy
any operation is a risk
those who come for stem cell treatments
most of them are desperate
so we value that people have the courage to come here.

I met Doctor [inaudible]
he seems like a very good man
we got mothers calling saying he was a top physician
one lady wrote her testimonial
said "I had my honeymoon and my baby
at the same time."

I'm a medical concierge

[I've] had Muslim customers
they ask me for a translator in Arabic
they ask me that the translator be a man not a woman
they ask me for a hotel room not facing the swimming pool
so they would not
see other people in swimming suits
and they ask me to help them get a visa.

You have to set the principles and values that you honour
our idiosyncrasy is one of becoming friends
the human touch is what we like most
the ability to transmit hope and warmth
it is a developing product.

Mexicans are incredibly noble people
beyond your expectations
if a woman understands and takes a risk

says “I will help you”
“here I am”

“[I] will do that for you”
— this one in a million —

if a person does that out of that love,
because they became friends, as they say,
they understood and everything,
I understand.

[A]long time ago

Mexican people from different classes

came from long families

they valued big families

and they’re sad when people cannot have [even] one

A woman that is now twenty-five

probably her mother was one out of ten

and they’ve seen their mother carry

five

six

seven

eight

nine children

so [if] the opportunity comes and they can help,

they will do it.

I think it is the most beautiful thing.

But if they don’t know the people, and

they’re going to be paid,

they’re going to be put in a place

that is not dignified.

I personally am not for it.

We are owners of our own time.

2.4. Reflections on writing *Marketing Man*

This found poem was constructed from verbatim phrases taken from the transcript of an interview Heather conducted with a highly influential medical tourism agent. As the poem attests, this man performs a range of services for clients who come to Mexico, from many other places in the world, for fertility treatments. He is, in his own words, both a marketing man and a medical concierge, eager to both attract lucrative segments of the infertility market and ensure that each and every element of his clients' comfort is catered to. Yet, as the interview and poem progress, he reveals himself to be more complex than this. He is not just a slick marketing man or eager concierge willing to do anything to please, though he does at times appear this way. He has a deep and abiding sense of values that he seeks to reconcile with the work that he does. It was therefore important, in creating this poem, to show the complexity of this man's thinking and the contradictions that make him so human.

Ethically, I struggled with how to portray this man so that he can neither be condemned for commodifying the friendship of his people and country nor condoned for being a principled player in what is a ruthless industry. He is a kind of crucible wherein the values of a vanishing world are both romanticized and exploited. He makes a living selling Cancun as a destination. He has business interests in IVF tourism, which is built on poor women's reproductive labour. He also reveres women for bearing many children and for offering, in the context of friendship, to help infertile couples. It is this ideal of friendship as a model that, in his view, dignifies practices that are increasingly being offered in an impersonal context for the sake of economic gain. There is, however, no going back to a noble long ago world where, if such a place ever existed, women were content if they had a big family.

As a white feminist woman who has since past the age of childbearing without feeling any regret that I am not also a mother, I feel precariously positioned in relation to the subject matter of this inquiry. On the one hand, I deplore the way in which the reproductive industry has capitalized on infertile women's desperation to achieve control over their inability to engage in reproduction. On the other hand, I believe with mid-wife and political theorist Mary O'Brien (1981) that the relations of reproduction are central to the organization of human social and political endeavours. The physical labour required of women in reproduction and related activities must be accounted for in terms of its contribution to material production but also, more significantly, in terms of its vital contribution to the overall connection and integration of all human endeavours. Not having experienced the agony that I understand many infertile women to feel around their inability to conceive, I am grateful but perhaps ill-equipped to appreciate the lengths to which some feel they have to go in order to exhaust all possibilities to have a child. It is however still more incomprehensible to imagine how this need can be reconciled with the "choiceless choice" (Katz-Rothman, 1989) faced by poor, Mexican women who are trying to feed their children or pay school fees by offering up their bodies for egg donation.

The more that I read and reread the interview transcript, then massaged the sequence and placement of the phrases that put meat on the bones of these conundrums, the more I came to feel that there are no answers. Poetic inquiry, to my relief, does not demand or indeed even really condone this possibility. It holds us to a different and perhaps higher standard as we try to narrate the story. Unlike traditional social science and its burdensome expectation that salient research findings will yield defensible conclusions, poetic inquiry suggests that the best that we can do is reveal the complexity and ambiguity of our subject of analysis, allowing the listener to identify and contemplate layers of questions as they arise. To do this, we must reflect carefully on who we are and how this shapes what we say, and how we say it. We must simultaneously be both storytellers and listeners, closely attuned to the interplay between the two.

These considerations about poetic inquiry come to me in hindsight as I now reflect on how I went about creating the found poem *Marketing Man*. For the first draft, I compiled phrases that I had highlighted on a printed copy of the transcript. These phrases caught my attention on repeated

readings because of their explicit and sometimes colourful identification of the constantly shifting perspectives of the medical tourism agent. I initially preserved the original sequence of these phrases and did not add or delete anything. The second and third drafts involved playing with the sequence of phrases and reflecting on how they could be most effectively combined to tell the story. I allowed some minor deletions of repeated words and also experimented with insertions of words using square brackets to note this, as in normal conventions for transcription. I also played around with line breaks, punctuation and spacing to define specific topical elements or themes and begin to indicate the feeling of shifting perspectives. I was not sure whether or not to alter the grammatical structure so that it would read more smoothly but decided in favour of doing so as it conveyed more effectively the poise and confidence that this man seemed to emit. The form of the final version of the poem is all over the page, which seems to me to be an appropriate structure. The eyes have to travel across the page and back as the perspective shifts. And the ears have to imagine the voices of others, unnamed but lurking in the margins.

Poetry is a river; many voices travel in it; poem after poem moves along in the exciting crest and falls of the river waves. None is timeless; each arrives in a historical context; almost everything, in the end passes. But the desire to make a poem, and the world's willingness to receive it—indeed the world's need of it—these never pass. (Oliver, 1994, p. 9)

The story of this man and his self-made position within the reproductive tourism industry is not black and white. He is complex and confusing, apparently supporting IVF with egg donation for international clients, and yet also attempting to humanize women's oppression. He does not appear to believe that the ends justify the means as he advocates for a way of being that eschews the hard contours of purely economic transactions. Yet, the world in which such a way of being might have been possible is vanishing before his very eyes and he is knowingly at least partially responsible for this. In the volatile world of 2017, this should give us all pause to stop and consider our own complicity in regimes that often seem beyond comprehension much less control.

2.5.

Doctor

Carl Leggo

I don't have a problem
I sold my stocks started my own private practice in Mexico City
it's a thing in Mexico
not many physicians have this kind of experience
this clinic was built top to bottom specialising in medical tourism
most of our patients are from abroad last year we brought in like 300 patients
we haven't done any advertising yet
in Mexico there's basically no regulation it doesn't exist anything goes
I really consider myself to be the right thing to do
we don't want to get into that it's too complicated its illegal here
we have a variety of egg donors here in Cancun
in Mexico you're not allowed to pay for any bodily parts
so that was in a good place, but it's also in a bad place
we run a trading thing it's more an ethical issue
we don't want to take advantage of her
we just don't tell them anything we just get them in draw the blood
just ask me whatever you want
in Mexico it's not legal it's not illegal it's not forbidden
but in Tabasco you have a law that makes it legal
it's not really our problem, but we ...
we're not doing surrogacy, we're doing IVF
if you want to do it the right way, the right way is going to ...
because it's very tricky

well I have a good enough practice here and we're doing well
it's quite an effort to put a clinic like this I want this to work properly
the people behind the shadow
the problem is basically the same thing, we need a law
they're people that just want to do their work
then comes the change in government and everything starts from zero
there is no law
we have like our own rulebook, done by us, not by the government
we're dealing with patients, not with machines
you're not buying a car
Cancun is a tourist destination
the area is not good for agriculture
they're going to do a reality show
how are we doing, may I ask?
we were going to be focusing in service and we're still ...
if we want to get bigger, we would do some marketing
you always get mad patients, always
I think we're doing a pretty good job might be always room for improvement
I will just introduce you to the girls and that's it
it's good it's a good thing for everyone

2.6. Reflections on writing Doctor

I composed this poem as an erasure poem. As I read the transcript of Heather's interview with a Cancun doctor who runs a clinic specializing in reproductive services, I highlighted sentences and phrases that sparked my imagination and resonated in my ears. I then composed a long list of those sentences and phrases. Next, I deleted more words. In this erasure poem, I carefully adhered to the original text. So, I added no words or punctuation. I changed no words. I listened carefully to the voice of the doctor, and I sought to hear his hopes, concerns and plans.

The doctor is well-educated. He is the CEO of a fertility clinic. He is committed to serving people and to making a profit. The doctor impresses me as generous and friendly. He is operating a business, and he wants to be successful, but there are many tensions, including ethical, professional and legal challenges connected to the services he offers. I hear that tension again and again in the interview. So, in the erasure poem "Doctor," I clearly selected sentences and phrases that speak to the ethical conundrum that the doctor lives daily in order to highlight ethical challenges.

Nevertheless, perhaps the biggest issue of ethics that emerged for me in this process is my own positionality in the research. I did not meet the doctor. I have read the transcript of an interview that Heather conducted. What right do I have to respond to the doctor's words? What understanding of the doctor's fertility clinic can I realistically or reasonably claim? Like Ted Aoki (2005), I am seeking "a clearer vision of a different research reality" (p. 110) informed by "critical competence" (p. 133) that creatively explores "an open landscape of multiplicity" (p. 207) including "a place named *and*, a place of lived tension between this and that" (p. 300) which is always "a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence" (p. 317) and hopefully "a generative space of possibilities ... wherein ... newness emerges" (p. 318).

As a researcher, I am committed to honouring complexity, asking questions, acknowledging tensions and challenging answers. In poetry, I linger in language, imagination and stories in order to inquire about lived and living experiences. In my research, I know I will always be concerned about issues of appropriateness and appropriation; I will always be concerned about butting in where I do not belong, but, at the same time, I will continue to explore Aoki's "space of paradox" because ethically that is all I know.

Like Lorri Neilsen Glenn (2011), “to write poetry, I have learned, is to enter a long, never-ending conversation” (p. 108). In my poetry, I am always seeking to engage in conversation. I am never at home in the kind of expository language that declares, asserts, argues, defends and proves a thesis or perspective or conclusion. I want to engage in discursive practices that open up possibilities for ongoing conversation. Poetry is a practice of language and discourse, a practice of writing and speaking, a practice of interpreting and knowing. Above all, poetry is a practice that understands with the poet Margaret Avison (2002) that “there’s too much/of us for us to know” (p. 51). According to Avison, words “map a long long travelling/beyond experience even” (p. 69).

In my poem “Doctor,” I am not claiming that I understand the doctor. My poem is intended to be a response to the interview with the doctor, an interview that Heather conducted. I will almost certainly never meet the doctor, and I will not likely ever know more of his story than the few snippets I have in the interview. If the doctor read my poem and commentary, he might not agree with anything that I have written. He might protest that I have understood little, perhaps nothing. My goal is not to respond to the doctor’s story with veracity or validity or verisimilitude. Instead, I am entering “a long, never-ending conversation” that will not likely engage the doctor except as a character in a narrative I am spinning. Margaret Atwood (2002) recommends that “going into a narrative—into the narrative process—is a dark road. You can’t see your way ahead” (p. 176). Atwood also notes that “poets know this too; they too travel the dark roads” (p. 176). Everything about reproductive tourism involves travelling dark roads. Everybody involved in reproductive tourism has stories of desire, disappointment, sadness and hope. Reproductive tourism is a complex tangle of economic, political, cultural, ethical, social and personal stories.

I am always acutely conscious that I am a privileged Canadian professor who is never going to know very much about reproductive tourism. Nevertheless, in my poetic and ruminative responses, I seek what Hélène Cixous (1998) calls the “voice of poetry-philosophy, to think with or, in any case, to sing with; to inscribe, to play on, to strum the contradictions and the world as tragedy” (p. 37). While I do not think the world is only tragedy, and while I do not think my poem “Doctor” is only about tragedy, I am eager to sing and “strum the contradictions.” I embrace the contradictions while acknowledging the mystery, the unknown, the silence.

When I wrote “Doctor,” my intention was to evoke a little of the voice of the doctor. In no way was I hoping to be exhaustive. I only wanted to evoke a little of the complexity of the doctor’s story. As Lorna Crozier (2002) understands, “the poetic space is so short and so charged that ... we use image and metaphor and music to tell the story. And what doesn’t get said, withholding, becomes as important as what’s included” (p. 145). Erasure poetry works with deletion or exclusion even more than insertion or inclusion. The reader needs to read between the lines, to listen to the resonances among words, to feel how what is there is haunted by what is not there. Like Barbara Kingsolver (2002) recommends, “when you find yourself laughing and crying both at once, that is the time to write a poem” (p. 234).

I regard all my poetry (erasure, found, lyrical, narrative, language-focused) as an ongoing effort to stand in the midst of experience. Like the word *metaphor* (from the Greek *metapheron*) which signifies the “carrying over” of meaning like a bridge joins one concept to another, or one place to another, or one story to another, a poem is an act of “carrying over” or transition or translation. In my poetry, I seek to understand experiences, my own and others, by building bridges from one experience to another. Nevertheless, I know I am not really building bridges or ways of carrying meaning. Like Dennis Lee (2002), I am mainly interested in “the nexus between what you know and what you’ll never know, something coming close to you and then dancing away. The poem flickers in the middle of those two movements” (p. 152). Like Aoki (2005), my poetry dwells in “a place of lived tension between this and that” (p. 300) which is always “a space of paradox, ambiguity and ambivalence” (p. 317).

From the perspectives of my many privileged subject positions, including poet, professor, father, papa, husband, I engage in writing poetry as a way of researching complex issues and experiences in order to learn how to listen both attentively and imaginatively. As Mary Oliver (1994) knows, “language is a vibrant, malleable, living material” (p. 91). In writing poetry, I enter into “a long, never-ending conversation” (Neilsen Glenn, 2011, p. 108), always filled with hope for meaning-making as well as meaningful living, but mostly just glad to be in relationship and conversation and searching, dwelling in the middle of what I know and what I do not know.

3. Discussion

3.1. *Who tells the story? Authorship, erasure, point of view*

“And when the woman with the multiple degrees says, I didn’t know black women could get cancer,” writes Claudia Rankine in her book-length poem, *Citizen*, “instinctively you take two steps back.” (2014, p. 45). The reader has no way of ascertaining whether this particular “you” in Rankine’s collage of racist micro-aggressions in America is herself or one of her interviewees. Rankine describes her lyric-documentary hybrid as “loosely anthropological,” (Kellaway, 2015) for she drew on the stories and feelings of around 25 friends, black and white, as well as her own. *Citizen* comprises a selection of specific and concrete individual experiences, and yet it portrays a system, a context, in which reader, writer and interviewees are all implicated. Rankine’s second-person point-of-view underscores this complicity.

In this, our own experiment in poetic inquiry, we write poems sometimes in first person, sometimes in third. We are highly self-conscious of our own positions as white Canadian academics, both tenured and junior postdoctoral, in relation to those—a Mexican doctor and CEO, a successful Mexican marketing man and a young Mexican single mother—who feature in our poems. Our goals are nonetheless remarkably similar to Rankine’s. We do not claim parallel experience, but we do look for places of connection and solidarity, as well as disjuncture. We do seek to understand what the words of our interviewees teach us about the twenty-first-century global economic and techno-scientific system that our species has created and in which we are all implicated. What they can teach us about the particularities and commonalities of being human.

Is it ok to manipulate the words of an interviewee in the way a poem might demand? What right do we have to tell the stories of another, drawing on the veracity of the first person “I”? Who gets the privilege of narrating the history of an industry, a culture or a city, all in transition? These questions resonate throughout and in many ways this paper is an exercise in working them through. “If the doctor read my poem and commentary,” notes Carl, “... he might protest that I have understood little, perhaps nothing.” As a white feminist woman, childless without regret, “I feel precariously positioned in relation to the subject matter of this inquiry,” writes Susan. “What are the ghosts driving my own work?” asks Heather.

And it is this self-questioning that takes us into the heart of what a poem can do. Into the complexity of lived experience, the tensions and ambiguities and paradoxes within which we all make our work and build our homes. In “Doctor,” Carl deliberately juxtaposes contradictory sentences and phrases to highlight the daily ethical challenges of running an IVF clinic for international patients. In “Marketing Man,” Susan selects the phrases that explicitly and colourfully evoke the shifting perspectives of the interviewee, words that allow “the listener to identify and contemplate layers of questions as they arise.” Heather chooses to write in third-person point-of-view, with Cancun as feisty protagonist, interrupted by a chorus of imagined ghosts, in a tragic-comic tale of economic growth and human loss.

Contrary to the expectations of much scholarship, none of our poems attempt to represent or tell anybody’s story, to argue or to conclude. These poems are all, to varying degrees, ficto-critical ethnographic tales. Just as anthropologist Michael Taussig once used the Gold Museum in Colombia’s

central bank, the Banco de la Republica, as a model (or a writing prompt) from which to develop *My Cocaine Museum* (Taussig, 2004), so we use interview transcripts to create our poems.

Columbia's Gold Museum tells the story of gold's mystery throughout millennia and yet is silent about "the ghosts of African slaves, who with their bare hands dug out the gold that kept the colony and Spain itself afloat for more than three hundred years" (Taussig, 2004, p. xvi). It is silent about the role of cocaine in shaping the economy, its "violence and greed, glitter that reeks of transgression" (2004, p. xi). It is in the writing of these silences that Taussig's literary museum begins.

"The task before us," writes Taussig, as ethnographers, "... is to become storytellers as well." For gold and cocaine have very real histories. But,

through their enchantment, their danger and beauty, they usher in a world of force and substantiality felt from within ... When in *My Cocaine Museum* I dwell on heat, for instance, or rain, or color, it is to that withinness that I am drawn. (2004, p. 315)

Poetry, we suggest, offers another way of writing the silences, the contradictions, in an interview, in a research project. Poetry, we hazard, if we pay close attention and work hard at it, may offer a path through the reductions of bioethics theory, through the complexities of a global reproductive economy, into this world of enchantment, of danger and beauty. Into force and substantiality felt from within.

3.2. How do we tell these stories? Vocal, carnal, heartfelt openings

In *Stylish academic writing*, Helen Sword (2012) reviewed the writing of eminent scholars in the humanities, sciences, social sciences and health sciences. She concluded that scholars in all the disciplines share "a commitment to the ideals of *communication, craft, and creativity*" (p. viii). Moreover, she learned that "stylish academic writers ... often play around with language" (p. 59), and "poetic interludes can be found in the research publications of nearly every academic discipline" (p. 166). Nevertheless, she expressed her concern that "academics in most disciplines have been trained to be critical rather than creative thinkers, with little opportunity for merging the two modes" (p. 167). She issued a challenge to scholars: "stretch your mind by stretching your writing" (p. 175).

We are committed to seeking new ways of researching and writing. In *The pleasure of the text*, Roland Barthes (1975) claims that "the text you write must prove to me *that it desires me*" (p. 6). Above all, Barthes calls for *vocal writing*: "a text where we can hear the grain of the throat, the patina of consonants, the voluptuousness of vowels, a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language" (pp. 66–67). Barthes does not suggest that meaning is insignificant, but he emphasizes the role of language in writing. Like Barthes, we attend to language and discourse. We are particularly committed to writing that calls out in creative voices. In responding to the data from Heather's interviews with the owner of several tourism businesses and the CEO of a fertility clinic, many researchers would focus on repeated themes, the essence of the stories or interpretations, but we focus on discursive possibilities for composing personal and poetic responses to the data. Above all, we listen attentively to the voices of the marketing man and the doctor, and we then translate our responses to their stories by carefully transfusing our voices into the ongoing conversations. We do not write from a perspective of objectivity and distance. Instead, we write personally and heartfully about our responses.

Poetry (from the Greek *poiein, to make*) creates or makes the world in words. Poetry is a way of knowing, being and becoming in the world. Poetry begins with attentiveness, imagination, mystery and wonder. Poetry invites researchers to experiment with language and to engage imaginatively with experience. The poet-researcher seeks to live attentively in the moment and to enter lived experiences with a creative openness to people and their stories. Jacques Derrida (1992) suggests that "every poem has its own language, it is one time alone its own language, even and especially if several languages are able to cross there" (p. 409). As we continue to collaborate, we learn together

how the individual, unique voice resonates with other voices to sing out in a choral concatenation like Barthes' (1975) "vocal writing" or "carnal stereophony" (p. 66). Daphne Marlatt suggests (2008) that a poem is "a series of openings" (p. 152). We offer our poems as openings for inviting and generating a steadfast commitment to "communication, craft, and creativity" (Sword, 2012, p. viii) in our research.

3.3. Why do these stories matter? Stories about all of us

With the current plethora of blogging, tweeting, YouTube videos and other popular digital platforms for communication, it is sometimes hard to know which stories deserve our attention. Is it because the format tantalizes us with juicy images we just have to have a peek at or lists that we can't help but be curious about—ten foods we should never eat, five ways to enhance memory or seven things kids talk about with their pets. Why does this stuff get our attention?

Poetic inquiry offers an antidote to the drip feed of such easily digested drivel. As Heather concludes at the bottom of her inspiring free fall through the history of the creation of Cancun, a poem cannot capture everything we might wish it to convey, but it "can smash open a little conceptual space" and "invite you to hear the possibilities that might emerge, from an imaginative listening." Just as finger-painting invites us to get messy as we dabble in texture and colour, poetic inquiry invites us to revel in complexity and contradiction, to become part of an ongoing conversation as it unfolds and infolds with our own lived experiences, sense of personal history and place in the cosmos.

For Carl, a deep sense of engagement through poetic inquiry inevitably leads to him finding himself "in relationship and conversation and searching, dwelling in the middle of what I know and what I do not know." He is discomfited, as all three of us are, by the idea of interpreting someone's story, of having not only a point of view that might simply be wrong but also adhering to the illusion of occupying some Archimedean space from which social science or ethics can and should speak. And so Carl does what poetry is so well suited to. He uses it to tell the story in a different way such that it is not just about right and wrong, victims and aggressors, the oppressed and the oppressors. There is no simple argument to make here.

Recognizing the lived experiences of another person is an acknowledgement of their humanity and individuality and of its relevance to us. As Tasker, Loftus, and Higgs (2014, p. 5) write, "the recognition that occurs within the experience of resonance may alert the reader to an aspect of their own experience or feelings, sensitizing them to thoughts and convictions or opening up different avenues of future thought." This comes close to expressing a conclusion. If we are open to imaginative listening, the stories told here about reproductive tourism are fundamentally about all of us as we struggle to understand how to make sense of a world that tolerates and reproduces deep-seated forms of social injustice even as it tries to humanize them.

Supplementary material

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