



SPECIAL ISSUE EDITORIAL: USING POETRY AND POETIC INQUIRY AS POLITICAL RESPONSE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

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“Poetry taps into the universal through radical subjectivity. The poet’s use of personal experience creates something larger from the particular; the concrete specifics become universal when the audience relates to, embodies, and/or experiences the work as if it were their own words” (Faulkner, 2017a, p. 210).

Poetry and poetic inquiry can be an active response to social issues, a political commentary, and a call to action (Faulkner, 2017b). This special issue addresses poetry’s role as a creative art that is vital in the inquiry process and (re)presentation, a method and way to engage in important social issues. In this issue, poets and

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researchers use their personal experience as a way to speak to larger social issues; their poetry and poetic inquiry acts as a political response to offer cultural insight, advocate for social change and justice, and critique the false separation between science and art. The use of poetry as political statement is intended to evoke embodied responses and resonate with readers to have them experience the poetry as evocative mediators of, oftentimes, painful societal events and expectations and limitations, and to recognize and tell their own stories (Faulkner, 2009). The “political task” of poetry is “a visionary one, the work of making way for new worlds and words” (Fisher, 2009, p. 984).

Poet Jay Parini (2008) argues that poetry is political when poets “offer a kind of understanding that is distinct, as well as useful, by creating a language adequate to the experience of their readers. In this sense, poetry matters because it can waken us to realities that fall into the realm of the political” (p. xiii). You will find the poet researchers in this special issue using their poetry as inquiry inside the academy to change the way we think about and do our educational experience and our academic theorizing. Kristin LaFollette, in her submission “The Opposite of the Skeleton Inside of Me’: Women’s Poetry as Feminist Activism,” makes an argument for women’s poetry as feminist activism and writes poetry with provocative lines such as “When people ask who I am,/I say I’m the opposite of the/ skeleton inside of me.” Sean Wiebe and Pauline Sameshima offer us a way to use collaborative poetry as a “liminal studio” that “reframes social justice as the art of

being/nothing, the something of nothingness being a language of resistance for a reimagined politics” in their piece, “Sympathizing with Social Justice: Poetry of Invitation and Generation.” In “Follow Through’: Poetic Representation of Action Planning for Social Justice,” Christopher Daniel Murakami, Andrea Hawkman, Crystal Kroner, and Jo Anna O’Neill describe how they used critical reflection and poetic representation of student led protests for social justice at “University College” to support self-awareness and transformative learning experiences. Amber Moore uses critical poetic inquiry to make found poems that voice the often unarticulated experiences of novice scholars in “Blackboxing it’: A Poetic min/d/ing the Gap of an Imposter Experience in Academia.” Picking up the theme of unarticulated experiences in the academy, Esther Fitzpatrick and Mohamed Alansari use poetry clusters to interrogate their doctoral experiences, paying close attention to embodied experience, something that poetry as research method is particularly well suited for, in their piece “Creating a Warmth Against the Chill: Poetry for the Doctoral Body.” James Burford demonstrates the possibilities of poetry for connecting us and engaging us more politically in our academic work with “Sketching Possibilities: Poetry and Politically-engaged Academic Practice.”

Other authors use poetry and poetic inquiry outside of the academy to shape lives in meaningful ways by creating the narratives we need to advocate for social justice (Fisher, 2009). These pieces use poetry to interrogate social structures and engage audiences through the use of poetry as a “political voice” (Orr, 2008, p. 416). Camea Davis brings us inside a classroom where slam poetry amplifies the voices of urban youth outside of the classroom in “Writing the Self: Slam Poetry, Youth Identity, and Critical Poetic Inquiry.” In “An Inquiry into Self-Immolation as Social Protest,” Sandra Elaine Filippelli encourages us to seek Gandhi’s concept of *ahimsa* (non-violence) within ourselves before we try to use it in our communities in our pursuit of social justice. This looking inward to do work outside is echoed in Momina A. Khan’s “Unpacking Self and Silence: Looking Inward, Looking Outward, Looking Through,” where she writes poetry to “create opportunities for meaning making and insights as my stories and poems resonate for others...” and uses her poems to “inform, enhance, and deepen parents’ and educators’ knowledge and conceptualizations of an inclusive school community.”

Paula Gerstenblatt, Diane Rhodes, and Lida Holst show us how they use text poems and collage to work through difficult issues related to race in a community-university partnership in their work “Spaces In-between: Text Poems from Community Practice and Research.”

In an interview on PBS News Hour, poet Ocean Vuong argued that reading poetry is an act of political resistance. Thus, our lyric poetry, our narrative poetry, and

our poetry of personal experience is a political act; The act of writing, reading, and performing our poetry is political (Faulkner, 2017b).

“The reading of poetry is in itself an act of political resistance to the mainstream,” he said. “Particularly in this election cycle, where there is this great anxiety for certainty. What is your position? What is your stance? Why are you flip-flopping? There’s an anxiety of certainty and power and boldness ... But poetry acknowledges the true complexity of what it means to be human, which is that nothing is ever that certain.” (Vuong, 2016)

You can see this in a cento I composed using L. Shelly Rawlins’ work on the lyric and autoethnography in “Poetic Existential: A Lyrical Autoethnography of Self, Others, and World,” Les Delgado’s poem “Praye(red),” “Queer Emergencies, 5.26.17” by Colin Whitworth, Sheila Stewart’s poem in “Christ Would Break Your Tongue,” and Charlie Hope Dorsey’s “In the Dark.” I invite you to read this out loud before you drive into this special issue without a seatbelt. I am certain you will feel inspired to action, as I was, after reading the work of these poet/researcher/social activists.

Out of the Dark Tongue: A Cento

“Poetic discourse is quintessentially a site of personal and ideological struggle within the on-going cultural dialogue” (Strine, 1989, p. 26).

What would we do?
Folk with preexisting
brave new world
burning us up:
I wasn’t made for the violence of these tides.

Gray space is becoming poem
my grief, visible and invisible
I was tainted that day.
Any queer I know now is too late:
I’m that red.

Madre America, the girl that I love
that keeps my blood pumping
I’m the red in her accent
I am me, they and them:
I am full of love

feeling safe, little chance to assimilate
our blackness the dragon we call America.
I'm in the in/between
turning everything into poems:
Everything Except Mortality is Small.

Don't you dare call me Angel
master of this art
your celestial attendants can go to hell.
Our hope is to provoke:
discover through performance our shared anxieties.

Syllables raining over all the earth
like black girl magic
coming back...to put a spell on you
I refuse to be silenced.
I was practicing Foucault all night long:
poetry is a necessity.

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