

Notes From a Captive: On Improvisation, Ethical Communication and Being Held
Hostage

By

Zanne Cameron © 2009

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS
In
PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

We accept the thesis as conforming to the required standard

Phillip Vannini; Thesis Supervisor Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

April Vannini; External Committee Member Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Joshua Guilar; Internal Committee Member Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Phillip Vannini; Thesis Coordinator Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Joshua Guilar; Director Date
School of Communication & Culture
Royal Roads University

Abstract

This existential phenomenological research paper is undertaken to explore communication where responsibility to the other is paramount. To do so, the researcher immersed herself in two settings: a jazz duo, and a not-for-profit community day program, which provides care for the developmentally challenged in their senior years. The research is driven by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, which is echoed in existential theological and philosophical examinations of human ethical responsibility. Converse to western ethics that privilege the “I” and assume the other is a limitation on self-preservation, Levinas believes “I” is the hostage of the other (Levinas, 2001, p. 133). This kind of ethical communication is responsive, improvisational and more than a little like jazz. Levinas, existential philosophers and theologians all discuss the role of creative capacity and dynamic potential in ethical engagement, in “being” and “being-with” (Levinas, 2001; Nancy, 2000) others. In these explorations, individual capacity, combined with an awareness of moral obligation to others—to be good persons (Christians, 2002)—provides a jazz like opportunity for creative engagement; a dynamic and potent possibility that demands awareness of and attentiveness to the other, but which is open-ended.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....ii

Table of Contents.....iii

Notes from a Captive.....1

The Crystal.....4

Beautiful Blue Eyes.....5

First Friday.....8

Greetings.....12

Mama-you.....15

Saturdays—Who’s Working Today?.....18

Sunday—“Big Guy, Big Guitar”.....21

What’s it All About?—Conclusions-Beginnings.....25

Method.....30

References.....35

Notes From a Captive

The terms of my captivity—which is expected to last a very long time—have allowed me to communicate to you my experiences as a hostage. The negotiations for this, if I am to be honest, were largely the result of a growing awareness that I have been kidnapped since birth. It may seem strange to you to consider, but until I chose to embrace my captors—to recognize them—I didn't realize that I was a hostage.

Here is my confession. My captivity is driven by a golden rule—I want to be a good person. This is the essence of my captivity. It is my essence. I am always a hostage. So are you. The potential of our mutual imprisonment is creative captivity. By myself, I am air in the lungs of a Diva; the notes I sing, linear and modal (*is this freedom?*). Imprisoned each note I sing is contextualized by the sound of you and contextualizes the sound of you. Imprisoned we are a jazz ensemble, forever improvisational. We are like birds singing inside the sound of the world (*is this freedom?*).

Being with my captors is like reinterpreting a song—a jazz rendition, ever improvised, ever new, and with each encounter I come to new creative terms with the melody, my voice with the voices of others.

These notes are simply black ink on the page, dormant and yet so potent. In the beginning, there is only this. Seeing the notes, not knowing the sounds that I, you, we and others make (this is their history). I have only my voice, my experience and my context with which to sing them forward. At first utterance I leave what was written behind. I have no other choice, but to leap off the page with those who hold me captive, unless I choose ignorance, silence.

We are all of us both prisoner and jailer. Possible, potent, sounded, imperfect, (*so profoundly imperfect*), and when the last reverberation fades, the sounds I make with others, the sound we made, and what was heard, is only memory, part of a collective past, waiting for re-discovery, re-interpretation, re-creation.

These words un-encountered are black marks on a page, a musical score, a potential, a possibility. This is the essence of my existence. I exist, in myself—like notes on a page, un-encountered, but I am bound in the chains of recognition-recognizing, listening-being heard. I am both sound and response and an opportunity to these. I am potent.

These words, these notes written during my captivity—fulfilling my obligations to others, were undertaken for many reasons, but mostly to see if I am capable of this, of fulfilling an obligation to another human being.

My deepest obligation is to recognize that you are my prisoner too—this is my life's test—to see myself in you. Have I fulfilled my obligations, will I continue to do so? I open my mouth to sing black marks on a page. I tap the keys on my computer.

A, B, C, D, Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol. It is marvelously imperfect, isn't it? It is free jazz, a cascade of rehearsed technique, everything we know and don't know, unleashed, in the moment of the marvelous letting go, the reinterpreting of the notes on the page with you. To be good *with* you—our sound becoming. I love this. It terrifies me. I love you. You terrify me. With one screaming dissonance, you can obliterate me. Please don't; instead sing *with* me.

When jazz swings, it swings. There is just no getting around it. This is what I want for us. I want us to *swing*. If it is only an entering into rhythm together, a mutual tapping of feet, of feeling a rhythm, of letting it go, sharing the journey—making the journey together. Heart

beats—your heart beats my heart. We are our own heart dancing together. *Bump, boo da, boh da, doo way. Ah, bump, boh, daddy-oh, bomp, doo bay.*

I have not had to give up anything for this right to convey my perceptions of the nature and quality of my captivity. Nothing other than my freedom, which may have been a false perception all along.

For so long I thought my freedom was something inherent to me—some kind of singular possession, like my skin, or my face—something to protect and nurture, as though it were my own child. But as soon as I recognize that you have a face—at that very moment of recognition of you as someone, of your humanity—I recognize myself in you. Perhaps there are other ways to be that are not so dependant upon being free.

So, in my captivity, my relationship to freedom has changed. The relationship between freedom and captivity is not, as I previously thought, like the relationship between near and far. My freedom is more like listening to the ocean, or to the rain, or the wind; indecipherable, engaging, deep and potentially dangerous. Listening to you, being with you, is like listening to the ocean. Our relationship is engaging, indecipherable, deep and potentially dangerous. And so for you I sing, like a bird singing inside the sound of the world.

Believe me! I wish I could claim indignant rage at these captors of mine. It would be much easier to walk away to my own heart beat. But I cannot. I am bound by my own existence, the sound of myself, my notes in our (your) song. (I am bound to your freedom, not mine). I have been captive so long that my freedom when they (you) are gone seems a pretence, a Quixotian gesture of defiance against what I know is real.

Still, I miss you. I miss, I must admit, feeling as though our connection, our love, was like my freedom, something of mine. It was easier then.

It might be frightening for you, but my captors tell me that if you wish, you can enter this prison with me. This I leave to you. The door they leave wide open, but these walls are strange, they are like walls of sound—like walking in the rain and hearing the ocean in each drop. The sound of these walls is deafening. Once you know they are there, you can't claim ignorance any more.

The Crystal

There once was a beautiful crystal that was lost and then was found again. The crystal was chipped, and cracked and flawed. It was a very old crystal—it had taken thousands of years to form. A family to whom it belonged had become familiar with how it danced a rainbow of colours when the sun shone, and how in the moonlight it shimmered an incandescent silvery-green-blue. To them the crystal was a broken thing, heavy, and damaged—something that could have been beautiful, could have been valuable, but was not. They did not value the rainbow and the shimmers. They could no longer hear it singing incandescent shimmers to them.

The crystal could only tell them its story in shimmers and rainbows, stories of how it had once belonged to a Cree chief who had found it, coughed up by the earth, embedded in the muddy reeds by the river and how he had treasured the crystal as an omen of good fortune. And when he died, the crystal had wandered the prairie plains in the pocket of his daughter, the princess, who sang when it danced in the light, and who would whisper prayers to it in the shimmering moonlight. How she had given the crystal to her favourite child, and how that child had, when she was hungry and tired, sold it to a trader for a wool blanket and some molasses and tea. The trader had given the crystal to his wife, who was needy for sunlight—and who kept it in a drawer. Her daughter found the crystal one day, and thought it was pretty even though it was cracked and chipped. She kept it for many years, as a memory of her childhood. But, gradually

she became blind to its shimmers and deaf to its dancing rainbow. She grew old, and the crystal lay forgotten in a corner of her closet. One day she moved with her family, and simply left the crystal behind.

Oh, the crystal was sad at being left behind, but this is how the world is. The crystal had only cracks and flaws and rainbows and shimmers, and what are these when there is no one to witness its shimmer and dance?

Eventually the crystal was found, all covered in dust and grime. The old man who found it thought it was beautiful and so he took it home with him to show his other children. And the crystal danced with him and with his children. It danced and sang in rainbows and moonlight the songs that it knew: the songs of the princess and her shimmering prayers, the sighs of the trader's wife, and the laughter of the old man and his family. It danced the loneliness of the dark closet.

The old man died, and his children died and the crystal was lost, and then found, and then lost and then found again, and again. Each time it was found, it danced and sang with all of its light, as it had and would always dance, for any who chose to listen past the flaws and chips and cracks, to see its beauty; it sang rainbows in sunlight and shimmers by the moon, it danced the loneliness and darkness; it danced and sang the stories and the light of all those who had treasured it, those who had given it away and those who had left it behind.

Beautiful Blue Eyes

We are sitting in West Edmonton Mall. It is Friday afternoon, the fourth Friday of my volunteer engagement with L'Arche Edmonton, an organization that I have volunteered with for approximately three years. I've just expanded my commitment to them to include working on Fridays in their day program, in part to facilitate research for my thesis, and in part to see if I can sustain and deepen this relationship. To commit in this way is a big step for me.

I am sitting with Alex. We are in the food court next to Galaxyland, a gaudy amusement park in the mall. It is crowded with people who are, like us, sitting at plastic tables, eating fast food—pizza, hamburgers, chicken fingers, pop, coffee, French-fries, donuts—with plastic utensils. I have a coffee from Second Cup, and Alex has a hamburger, coffee and fries, with lots of extra ketchup packets. The food court of West Edmonton Mall—North America’s largest shopping mall—is the ultimate disposable environment, the ultimate in teeming urbanity, the ultimate contemporary environment of consumption and waste. Despite the crowds, everyone is a stranger; people take note of only those they came with if they notice anyone at all. Hundreds stream through by the minute—employees with name-tags juxtaposed by de-individualizing work uniforms, shoppers with bags of the morning’s bargains and splurges. I look at the people coming in and out, but when I meet their eyes, I look away. Just as eating in the food court isn’t about tasting the food, this is not a milieu in which one typically looks for meaningful engagement with others—one doesn’t ask for the recipe from Taco Time.

The food court at West Edmonton Mall is a sensory overload. The smell of hot sugar, fat, chocolate, meat, and fried everything, co-mingles with each kiosk’s particular brand of bad coffee. There are bells clanging and ringing, and life-size cars painted in shiny plastic colours—red, green, orange, black, purple—hang from the ceiling, emblazoned with decals and flashing taillights—as if the brightly lit neon signs of the fast food joints—Pizza Hut, New York Fries, Orange Julius, Taco Time, Mr. Wok, Dairy Queen—are not enough.

My task is to be with Alex who is eating lunch while the others in our group have gone for a walk through the mall. Alex eats s-l-o-w-l-y. It’s just his way.

Alex’s facial features are distorted. His ears are big, his nose is squished, and his lips are chewed and scabbed from biting them compulsively. He has a few self-inflicted scabs on his

head, which he also picks at compulsively from time to time. Some of the people around us stare, but they look away when either I, or Alex, meet their gaze. Alex looks strange to those who do not know him.

I can't tell if he finds the stimulation of the lights and noise too much, or if he enjoys them. He is not whooping; whooping is a sign that he is enjoying himself. He is jerking and shaking—sort of a full-body shudder—behaviour that I am not used to seeing. I am a bit worried, in case the stimulation of the place is too much for him. I ask him if he is all right, but he doesn't respond. I can't seem to capture his attention. So, I wait for him to capture mine. Instead he takes one French fry, dips it into some ketchup, and s-l-o-w-l-y raises it to his mouth for a bite. I take this as a sign that he is okay.

Alex doesn't speak in words. He uses some sign language, and gestures, or sometimes he will grab you by the hand to lead you somewhere to try to make you understand what it is he needs you to know. He whoops and shrieks when he is happy. Often he will use his eyes to try to beam understanding into you. They are a wise choice for communication. Alex has beautiful, piercing blue eyes. He is not using them to talk to me right now; instead he is looking all around at the flashing lights.

So, we sit and I sip my coffee and Alex eats one bite of one chip at a time in between looking at the flashing lights and shaking. Every now and again he brings his gaze away from the lights to me. "Alex, are you okay?" I ask again. He doesn't tell me, he turns his gaze back to look at the flashing lights, and shudders.

After a while I notice that Alex is no longer looking at the lights. He is following something else with his eyes. I am relieved because he has stopped shaking and reacting to the flashing lights and bells. All of a sudden he lets out a whoop, and leans backward from his seat,

towards the aisle. He raises his hand and smiles. He is looking directly at a passerby—a woman. She smiles back at Alex and then at me, and walks past, acknowledging us with a nod and a wave as she passes.

This is when I realize what he is doing. Alex is trying to capture people's attention as they walk into the food court. Like a fly-fisher standing in a stream of leaping trout of all shapes and sizes (oh, if they would only bite!), Alex is fishing for smiles. And this is how we spend the rest of our lunch together. He looks at me only when he is taking a bite of something, or a sip of his coffee. We raise our cups for a "cheers" a couple of times. Other than that he spends the entire lunch break scanning people's faces as they enter the food court—trying to hook their attention with his eyes, so that he can wave hello. In the forty-five minutes that we are there, Alex whoops two more times: two more souls of the hundreds who have passed by choose to see his beautiful blue eyes, and return his gaze and smile. He is very happy when they do and patient when they do not. Like a good fisherman, he receives and throws their smiles right back into the stream of teeming rainbow-trout-people.

First Friday

If you wanted to find hard evidence of the power of eye contact as a means of connection, or perhaps the verity of invisible darts emerging from ocular orifices to strike you in the heart, it would be in the company of the core members¹ of L'Arche. In the group I volunteer with, many of the members have an extremely limited capacity for traditional speech due to a variety of severe developmental challenges. These people use wonderfully rich ways of communication that demand attention; gestures, sounds, body language, touching, (tickling, hugging, holding hands, hitting)—and their eyes.

¹ In the L'Arche community, the developmentally challenged are called core members, their caregivers are assistants, as a volunteer with the community I am a friend.

Annie does not speak very much—a few words, now and then, and since she has gotten older, she has lost much of her mobility. I have known Annie casually for a few years—I am fond of hugging her—she likes to cuddle. Annie calls you with her eyes and by reaching out with her arms. It is crazy to say it, but I think I can hear her when she calls me this way. This kind of hearing takes a bit of development—a kind of peripheral awareness that core members are so good at developing in their friends and family: a worker in the day program calls it listening with your heart. So many times I look up and find Annie looking directly at me, calling me in her special way. A psychologist might suggest that I simply check in on her frequently because I enjoy her so much. But I swear she calls me with her heart, directly through her eyes. Annie can cry out, she can scream in pain, or cry when she is sad or afraid—she can and does keep her whole household up all night from time to time. But, Annie does not scream for conversation at the day program. She simply looks at you until you respond.

“Zanne, Annie is calling you.” David, the manager of the day program calls my attention from the crafts I am doing with another core member. It is my first Friday volunteering and I have made myself busy setting up paints and crafts for people, making a mess, and generally getting in the way. I look up and indeed she is. She is looking right at me; reaching out towards me. Her look is just like something out of a romantic movie—you can almost hear “*I am calling yooooo—oo—oo—oo—oo—oo—oooo.*” I gladly respond.

I kneel in front of her wheelchair, and she holds me close *and begins to sing to me.* “ahhh,aaahhh.” It is a non-melodic sound, a guttural utterance, but she is singing, just loud enough for me to hear. I sing back, just loud enough so that my voice resonates in her body—my head is against her chest. The song is between the two of us, our private conversation. This intimacy has never happened between Annie and me before.

I begin to hum “Amazing Grace”, to see if she will sing along—to see if we can sing a song together, and she begins to match pitch with me and holds me even closer. My eyes are closed, and it feels to me as if there is nothing else but the two of us in this moment, in this exchange. I let the melody quietly stretch out until it is lost, so that she can find my pitches and match them as best she can with her own, and I just hum, a sort of amazing grace doodle and she doodle-hums with me. We embrace each other completely in this song, without words, without melody, but with so much comfort and connection. It feels to me as though I am receiving pure unfiltered love and welcome. I try to hold back the tears, because I don’t want anyone to see how vulnerable I am. I am lonely, and like a lot of lonely people, I protect myself in modern day urban life—I spend most of my time alone, engaging peripherally in my community. I am vulnerable to Annie’s open-hearted, inclusive, heart-felt gesture.

There is a line in a jazz standard, “*I give you my hand, but my heart will be in it,*” (Coots & Lewis, 1934) and in this environment gestures such as holding hands, making eye contact, hugging, speaking, are terribly genuine and intentional. Human interaction is not tempered by intellectual, social restraint. I am overwhelmed by the intimacy, by the heart-felt human engagement of which I am now a part.

I am *vulnerable*.

It is a month of Fridays later, and I am sitting next to Annie. She is having trouble staying awake, and it is not good to let her sleep too much in the day. I don’t want to physically jar her, so, I quietly lean close, put my arm around her shoulder and sing softly, softly in her ear, a song I know she knows—it is a L’Arche favourite, often sung at gatherings and in prayer circles. I think that if she recognizes the song, she will want to wake up, so I sing very softly:

“...you are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy, when skies are grey...”

and she perks up a little bit—but doesn’t open her eyes completely. So, I keep singing quietly, into her ear, so that the song is just for her:

“...you’ll never know dear, how much I love you, so please don’t take my sunshine away...”

then she begins to hum, ever so softly, with me, ... “aahhh, aahhh,” pressing her cheek into mine; but she keeps her eyes closed, so I indulge her, and sing it again, and a few more times, until she opens her eyes. When she does, I kiss her gently on her forehead, brush back her hair from her face, and offer her some juice. She can’t hold a glass, so I hold the straw to her lips to see if she is thirsty.

When I was a little girl, I used to sleep in. My sisters were older than me, and I would lie in bed, pretending to be asleep, until after they were gone to school. I remember the sun coming through the bedroom window, falling across my sheets and pillow, making a patch on the floor, while I waited for my mother to come and wake me up. And she would always come in—it was our special ritual. My mother would wake me by kneeling by my bed, gently twirling her fingers through my hair and singing quietly in my ear:

“Lazy Mary, will you get up, will you get up, will you get up,

Lazy Mary will you get up so early in the morning...”

I would keep my eyes closed for a few rounds of Lazy Mary and at least one kiss.

I sing to Annie, a song that is familiar to her, but I sing it with the memory of my mother’s intention and the feeling of my little girl heart, hopeful for a special, gentle waking. I sing to her, *with* her, and for both of us.

Greetings

It is my third Friday volunteering in the L'Arche day program. I walk in the door, apprehensive, and feeling guilty. I am late. I phoned earlier with a message that I might not get there until ten. I feel guilty for being late, for letting work be more important than my volunteer time. My mind races through a hundred excuses. I'm sorry. I couldn't avoid it. My client needed something. Volunteering is a commitment I want to be able to keep, but it has been tough for me to negotiate the day off. My clients don't know that I am doing this—I am afraid they will think I am not serious about work, so I often clear emails, do a bit of work before I head into L'Arche for the day. When I get home, I check my emails, work for a couple of hours, and put in an extra bit of work on the weekend if necessary. Fair trade. This week, I was caught with a deadline for an article that I was unable to complete the day before. I had to do some revisions and then send it off before I left to volunteer.

Once the thesis is done, I am afraid that I may not be able to keep my volunteer commitment. I am afraid of what that means about me and my ethics, what that will mean to the connections I have begun to make—what does it mean to leave people to whom you have made a commitment, people such as these, people for whom permanent relationships like those of mother, father, sister, brother can be less permanent than for many of us? What does it mean to tell them that you can't come anymore? Many of the people in the day program have been abandoned by their families or rescued from overcrowded institutions. Their care is so consuming. Their vulnerability is on the surface, ever-present and demanding. And many people like me, volunteers, drift in and out of their lives. People who want to do good, to feel good, to be good people, come to them to fulfill our own greediness for “being good” and then, when the

commitment feels too much, or we feel we have done enough, or we want to “be good” in some other setting or for a multitude of other reasons, we leave.

I turned down a full-time job with L’Arche, because it could not pay enough. Because I have to pay my mortgage, I have to earn enough money, I have to make a living, I have to take care of my own family. I feel a failure for not being able to figure out a way to make it work. I feel that I am not such a good person. So I give them Fridays for the duration of my thesis, and hope that I can legitimize keeping the commitment without jeopardizing my ability to earn a living. I tell myself, I am not wealthy. I do not have a husband, or anyone to share expenses with—but even as I say this, I know that these are excuses. There is commitment and there is commitment. If being good is about honouring commitment, a kind of hostage situation, then to L’Arche I am a lousy prisoner—always escaping, returning only when it is convenient for me.

On my way to L’Arche the voices of many of my peers go through my head. They think I am a sweet person, but that a more important endeavour for me would be to sit on a board, or to be working for a “bigger” international cause—such as saving women in Afghanistan, or children in Africa. The people of L’Arche—citizens of my community—are only a few blocks away. They are not as newsworthy, or as resumé worthy as other others. Working with L’Arche is similar, my friends think, to my jazz commitment—singing in a duo with a jazz bassist, completely for the joy of it. “You don’t have a cd?” they ask. They don’t understand why I do these unnecessary things when I have to make a living and build enough savings with which to retire. Their voices and the voices of a society that compels me to “take care of myself,” go through my head as I walk to L’Arche from my home, only a few blocks away.

It is almost 10:30 and I ring the doorbell. Ben answers, “Can we go for lunch tomorrow?” I hear him asking, before the door is fully open.

“Sure we can,” I tell him, as I enter.

“What time?” he asks, following me while I hang up my coat.

“Lunchtime?” I offer.

“Lunchtime,” he affirms. “Are you working today?” he asks. “You’re not at your other job?”

“Yes, I am here today,” I say and follow it with a “Good morning,” as I head towards the kitchen to find David, the day program director so I can apologize for being late. But Ben has already walked away to ask someone else something. Within seconds of entering the kitchen I am swarmed by three core members; Cynthia, Mary, and Tracey. “Hello, hello, hello” they are saying all at once, and they form a circle around me. Mary gives me a hug, followed by Tracey, and Cynthia offers me her hands to hold. I hug them back, holding hands, saying good morning, good morning, hello, hello, hello. I hold back tears, because their welcome is so *welcoming* it overwhelms me, and I feel guilty for hearing the voices in my head. So, I hide the tears. I still don’t want to show my vulnerability.

“Oh, you look pretty,” I tell Cynthia, who has on a matching yellow sweater and pants. She does look lovely. Mary shows me her shirt—her mother gave it to her, she tells me (she tells me by saying “my mom” and pointing to her shirt). Tracey is pointing to the groceries on the counter. Friday is hot lunch day, and she wants us to make lunch together. Mena has seen me come in and is yelling for tea, one of the few words she uses—but she uses it with great effectiveness; “TEA, TEA,” she calls and Michael is calling me from the other room.

“Good morning, Zanne,” I hear him calling.

“Good morning Michael,” I call back from the kitchen.

“Can we talk privately later?” Michael asks from the other room.

“Sure,” I call back to him, but I don’t know if he can hear me. Ben comes in again, and he stands right in front of me (he is *such* a big man).

“Who’s not here today?” he asks. It is important for Ben to talk about who is and isn’t here today.

“I don’t know,” I tell him honestly.

“Jackie is at a meeting,” Ben tells me. “Jackie is not here today,” he clarifies. “Who’s not here today?” Ben asks again.

“Jackie is not here,” I reply, now that I know and can talk with him about it. Jackie works as an administrator for L’Arche, and Ben has known her a long time. When she is “not here” it is significant for him. “She’s at a meeting. She’ll be back next week,” I say.

But, I am here today, I think to myself.

I put on the kettle for tea for Mena, who is still calling, “TEA, TEA,” from the other room.

Mama-you

“Mama-Rose, how are you today?” Tina says to Rose, in the familiar, respectful way that west-Africans speak to older women. Ginny and Tina, who work in the day program, are both from Africa, and often call the older female community members “auntie,” or “mama.”

This day, Rose is not in a talkative mood, so she walks by, brusquely, unlit cigarette in her mouth, her classic northern Cree face in a full frown, itinerant, her eyes not making contact. She goes outside and smokes a cigarette without talking to anybody. Rose smokes with yoga-like ujayi intensity; she inhales the smoke deep into her lungs, holds it, and then exhales completely, with a bit of an upward flourish to curl the smoke. I am at the kitchen sink, filling up the kettle to make tea for Mena and Mary, and I can see Rose from the window. Her face is peaceful now.

My mother was a two pack a day smoker—completely incommunicative until she'd had her first smoke of the day, and sometimes not at all. Rose reminds me of my mother; moody, impenetrable unless she chooses otherwise, and when she chooses otherwise it is a gift.

When I first met Rose, a few years ago, she would come with Ben and I on a Saturday walk to the corner 7-11. We'd grab a coffee, a couple of treats and on our way back, Rose would often want to stop at the curb and drink her coffee over a smoke. We would sit on the curbside at the back of the 7-11, next to the garbage bin, drinking coffee, having a smoke and a conversation. We bonded quickly and easily, Rose and I.

Conversation with Rose is intense, even though her language is mostly indecipherable to me. From what I have been told from those who work with L'Arche, and from my own listening, Rose speaks a mixture of made up words, a northern Cree dialect, with a smattering of French and English, that I have never been able to grasp with any literal or traditional clarity.

But, when Rose speaks with me, it is so intentional on her part, that I cannot move aside of it. She demands full attention and attentive listening. Of all human conversation that I have, hers is the most like jazz. I don't try to understand her language, not literally—it is beyond me, just like the complex tonal theory of instrumental jazz bebop is beyond me; so, it is to her intention, and to her mood that I try to listen. It is truly improvisational. There is no logical beginning or end in the traditional way. We simply speak *with* one another. Rose likes it if you repeat her words back to her. I do, and add some of my own sometimes, or sometimes I sing—she likes this too. When she speaks, she pauses leaving me space to repeat and perhaps comment. It is like gospel music; a call and response method. Rose repeats until she feels I have heard her.

Often Rose will talk about her mother. She misses her, and misses her family whom she has not seen in a few years. “Mama” she will say, amid many words I do not understand, and

“mama you.” I miss my family too. I haven’t seen them in five years, and see my mother very briefly, once or twice a year.

Once, on a walk to the 7-11, I told Rose a story about how my mother and I would go for walks when I was a little girl and how we would lie on the grass in the park and make pictures out of the clouds in the sky. Later, when we passed by a park, Rose lay down on the grass, indicating for me to join her. She pointed at the clouds for me to tell her what I saw in them.

One Friday I bring in a picture of my mother as a child—my mother and Rose share similar, northern aboriginal cultures. I told her about the picture, and that I hadn’t seen my mother in a long time, and that I didn’t see my family anymore. I told Rose that I missed them. Rose nodded acknowledgement, “mmmm—hmmhmm.” Then she turned her attention back to her magazine, shutting me out.

Later in the morning, while I am painting Mena’s nails for her, Rose comes over to us. It is unusual for Rose to take part in the group; she usually likes to sit independently in a spot that we all take for granted is hers. She shows me her nails with a smile, and then she comes and stands behind my chair. She tickles my back a bit, and then she hugs me. I hold her hand and she leans her face next to mine and in my ear, she tells me something—“mama” is one of the words. I respond to her with the sound of the words she uses; I respond with her words, how I feel: I feel compassion, given and received, and understanding about what it is to miss a mother and a family so much. We two “mamas” have this loneliness in common. She ruffles my hair, and kisses me on the top of my head, like a mother would her child. For the rest of the day “Mama-Rose” is kind with me, giving me tickles, hugs, some conversation and a kiss or two.

I feel tremendous peace when Rose graces me with her conversations—these woman-to-woman, that are more like bird-to-bird, conversations that I don’t understand in the normal way

of understanding. I miss her and I feel guilty when I see her because I haven't made time to see her independently of the day program, and she often asks me to. I am so happy when she forgives me enough to talk with me and, she often asks, "Timonee [Tim Hortons] you," for me to take her for coffee. She gets angry when I tell her I can't, and pushes me away.

Some days she doesn't talk to me at all.

Saturdays—Who's Working Today?

Four years ago, I was working at a job where seventy-hour working weeks were the norm. It was the kind of communications job that was highly focused on marketing, and entailed the one-way messaging which is sometimes confused with, and labeled as, communication in the professional realm. It was an organizational culture in which I did not fit: hierarchical and competitive. I was also going through a very difficult divorce and fighting for unpaid child support. A substantial amount of my time was spent going from "come to Jesus" meetings with my boss ("Come to Jesus" was his term for meetings in which he gave directives and tune-ups to his staff: in one he authorized \$150K for me to use for an advertising campaign—advertising which he wanted to start in a week. It would be easy I was told—I just needed to hold focus groups to find out what people wanted to hear, so that I could then reiterate this information in the ads) to meetings with my soon to be ex-husband and our lawyers, in which I was immersed in a pile of mud flung so hard that any response I came up with sounded like futile gurgles from a rather inept, sucker-punched fishwife.

This is when I met Ben. I had responded to an advertisement for a "person with dog" from a local branch of an international organization, L'Arche, which provides care in family settings, for the developmentally challenged in their adult and senior years. I had a dog, and was

a person, so I responded to the bulletin. I had recently read *Becoming Human*, a book written by the founder of the organization, Jean Vanier, which inspired me to make the connection.

I was told that Ben had difficulty on Saturdays. He didn't like to get out of bed unless he had something to do and he had mentioned that he would like to walk a dog. It was arranged that I would go over on Saturdays after lunch, and we would go for a coffee and take the dog for a walk.

"Are you working today?" Ben asked me on our first date.

"No, not today," I told him.

"Are you working on Monday?"

"Yes. I work on Monday."

"What time do you work on Monday?"

"Early," I told him.

Ben is quite tall—over six feet and probably weighs in around 240 lbs or so. He is a big man. He walks slowly and he is a bit wobbly, like a small child. His coordination and balance are poor. I was afraid of him. I'd also been told that he could lose his temper.

"Are you working today?" he asked me again after a few minutes of walking slowly as we negotiated the icy, February sidewalks on our way to the coffee shop.

"No, not today," I responded.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because it's Saturday."

"Are you working tomorrow?" He asked this after a few more minutes of silence.

"No, I'm working on Monday, though," I told him.

"What time do you work on Monday?"

“Early,” I said. “Do you work on Monday?” I asked.

“Yes. I do,” he said.

“Why?” I asked, interested in his answer.

“I have to work on Monday. I *have* to,” he repeated emphatically.

“Me too,” I answered, but the gusto in my response didn’t match his.

This was the extent of our conversation and it was repeated over and over, for the duration of our coffee and the walk home. I found it enormously peaceful and decided to return the next week. Perhaps it was because the experience with Ben was so starkly contrapuntal to my work place which paid me to produce so many words—words for the sake of promotion, to manipulate, words for words’ sake—and to conversations with lawyers whose adversarial paradigm relies heavily on the complicated use and interpretation of words, and yet manages to reduce all meaning to gain and loss, money or freedom awarded and taken away, and at times disregards the cost to human dignity.

I have learned, over these last few years, to cherish and respect this conversation between Ben and I. It is reflective of so much. It is the conversation that we have in between the spaces when we are with each other. Even after three and some years of coffee dates, with a few variations and additions, this elemental discussion of work and not working is always there. Ben has figured out that everyone is either at work or not at work. This is something everyone understands and so this is where he begins engagement with me and with everyone we encounter on our weekly coffee dates—clerks, passersby, servers—which have expanded to include a trip to a nearby diner for a hamburger, French fries and coffee. From there Ben moves to other essential things: Whether it’s a nice day, or not. Who is or isn’t here today. Who may or may not be here tomorrow. Who is not well. Who is away on holiday or at meetings. Who has gone away

forever. Whether the hamburger was good (it always is). Whether we will go for lunch next week and at what time we might go (we always go at lunchtime).

Ben and I never talk about “them” or “they” or the world at large. I am no longer afraid of him, even though I’ve seen his temper once or twice.

Ben’s birthday is a special day. If you ask him how old he will be, he usually will answer “eighteen,” even though, I am quite sure he is about my age—fifty. I imagine the two of us grown old and going to the diner together—maybe I will be as wobbly on the slippery winter ice as he, in the end. But Ben will still be eighteen, and as constant as the ground we both will have trouble walking on and the sun coming up tomorrow. He will have no difficulty maintaining our commitment, even after so many of the ethereal “possessions” that I perceive invest me with value and status are gone; my youth, my beauty, my singing voice, my physical and mental capacity, and my ability to earn a living. I am quite certain, if I maintain this commitment to my friend Ben, he will always want to know if I am working on Monday long after I am working at all, and he will still want to spend time with me to go for coffee and a hamburger and French fries.

Sunday—“Big Guy, Big Guitar”

The notes on the page stare back at me, mute and demanding, begging reiteration and re-interpretation. I can only make the sound I make, with you I make this sound and we make this sound. B, D, A, F#; these are the notes I have to somehow turn into the feeling and sound of a clear day. You begin, and I listen closely, you sound like a storm, like a rainbow, like northern lights, like sunrise. I begin too, I sing with you, here at the sunrise.

Each Sunday rehearsal starts with “Alfie,” (Bacharach & David, 1966). F, Eb, D, Eb, F—what’s it all about? Indeed. What is “it” all about? In Douglas Adams, *Hitchiker’s Guide to the*

Galaxy (2002), “it” is 42. This Sunday afternoon, “it” is the attempt to find something meaningful in this musical jazz duo in which I am one equal member. To play jazz is to engage, humanly, imperfectly, in the moment. What’s it all about? It is the moment we are in, moving always moving, to the moment in which we are about to be, driven by the notes on the page—the chart, in jazz vernacular—until we decide we’ve played the notes on the page in front of us, until we’ve exhausted our ability to be with each other in this song together. In this duo, I am smoke in Rose’s lungs, exhaled, singing, curling, resonating with the sound of the notes played by my partner. I am, we are, the notes on the page, re-performed, re-sounded, responsive, *with* each other, together, and together, until what we have made of these notes, until what we have made of “it” is done.

For two years I have been meeting on Sunday afternoons, to make music with a fellow musician and friend, Greg. Our duo is particularly challenging from a technical standpoint because of its instrumentation—acoustic contra bass and voice. The technical difficulty is further complicated because we are playing jazz—an improvisational musical form that demands spontaneous recreation. As Greg puts it, we do not do karaoke. It is a combination in which, as Greg often tells me—especially when I’ve made a gaffe—there is no place to hide. In a larger group there would be more horizontal voicing—88 keys on a piano, six strings on a guitar—in which to hide the little dips, flaws and cracks in my voice, or in his intonation, or the attempts at improvisation that almost, but not quite, make it somewhere. Jazz is not for the timid.

We have my two vocal chords and the four strings on his stand up bass. Like painters with a voluntarily limited palette, we create what we create with the hues at our disposal; we take the essentials—pitch, tone, dynamics, duration—and use my voice, the strings on his bass to make music. Our emotions, interpretations, limitations, knowledge, and our engagement inform

and expand us. Integrated, we are what each of us knows and doesn't know. Together we are more and less, human and imperfect.

Greg is a skilled musician—he has a comprehensive classical and jazz musical background and theoretical knowledge. I have been singing a long time, (my father played jazz piano, and had me singing *Misty* when I was five) and have taken introductory theory, lots of voice lessons, but can't claim to have anywhere near the theoretical knowledge that he has. I am, in this relationship, vulnerable. Greg's musical language in which he applies complicated jazz theory over the chord changes, shifts the tonality, to create new impressions from the notes on the many pages of music that sit in front of us—is very much to me, like speaking with Rose. It is a language that I don't know literally, but in which I have some of the pieces, pitch and dynamics primarily, and I can feel the intention, and to which I respond. The improvisational criterion for jazz demands an intense awareness—call it existential—in which one listens and responds in the same moment. It demands faith in your own musical being and it demands equal trust and faith in those you play with. It demands a release of control of the outcome. We are well rehearsed, but we do not play from memory. We play from our history and trust and knowledge of each other, we play to what we might possibly say together in any given moment. We write nothing down. Each song is a new exploration, a reflection. We have no musical possession but the moment we are about to create. Each of us is mutually significant; but this is not a give and take relationship. It is responsive, creative, exchange. It is what it is. It is.

I bring Greg to L'Arche one Friday afternoon. I want to share our music with Rose, Mary, Ben, Mena, Tracey, Cynthia, Alex, Ginny, Michael, Annie, Tina and David and everyone. I want to see if what we do can connect to people other than the two of us. Greg and I sing about life, the universe and everything (Adams, 2002). But, can anyone hear us? Rose, I tell Greg, is

particularly discerning when it comes to music. If she doesn't like it, she will walk away. Greg does not know what to expect of this audience, which will be unlike any other audience we've ever played for—audiences who are familiar with certain prescribed behaviours and expectations of what an audience does when it is listening to jazz musicians.

I introduce Greg to the members. Alex takes Greg's hand to his lips, like a knight kissing a lady-in-waiting and gives him a kiss—this is his normal way of greeting. When Greg takes his bass out of its case, Mary and Cynthia walk over to him. They want to pluck the strings.

“Big guitar,” says Cynthia. She looks at Greg closely. “Big guy,” she adds. Greg is six foot four. “Big guy, big guitar,” she repeats a few more times, and plucks a few strings, and then she goes to find a seat.

While Greg tunes his bass, the members of the day program seat themselves in a semi-circle in front of us, our audience, anticipating. Greg is tuned up. I sit on my stool, and we begin with “Alfie,” (Bacharach & David, 1966).

“*What's it all about,*” I sing... and almost immediately Mary leaves her chair, and places herself directly in front of Greg and I, in front of the music stand, holding on to the rim, like a child standing at the counter of a candy store. She looks right at me, hopefully. I continue to sing—in the jazz tradition, once a song is begun, it does not stop until it is done.

“*Is it just for the moment, that we live,*” I sing, and I hold out my hand to Mary, and guide her to our side of the music stand—to face the notes on the page with us. She leans into me, and rests against my knee, and instantly our duo has become an in-the-moment trio. My arm around her shoulder, holding her hand, I continue to sing,

“*What's it all about when you sort it out, Alfie...*” and Mary joins in at the end of the phrase, in a pitch and a key all her own:

“AAaaaAhh.”

“Are we meant to take more than we give...”

“AAAHHH” sings Mary at the end of the phrase in completely imperfect, perfect harmony.

“Or are we meant to be kind, AAAAAHHH...” ... and we do not miss a beat, we sing “Alfie” together, the three of us.

Mary sings “Over the Rainbow” with us and then we begin “Sunny.” Greg decides to play a twelve-eight groove from the start, Mary decides she has had enough of performing, and so she goes to sit down and be an audience member. And Rose has decided to come up from her chair, (she has been sitting behind us all this time, in her spot) to dance.

“Sunny, yesterday my life was filled with rain...” and we, Greg and me and Rose, are grooving, and Mena is shaking her hands in the air (she wants an egg to make rhythm), Annie is smiling with her eyes, alert and reaching out her hands, and Mary and Michael are smiling, tapping their hands to another rhythm, but *with* us and it is good. In this moment, we are with each other dancing, singing, swinging, playing, and responsive with the music. It is *really* good.

Today, “it” is really good.

What’s it All About—Conclusions-Beginnings

“The first word of the face is, ‘Thou shalt not kill.’ It is an order” (Levinas, 1985, p. 85).

“Jazz is real. Jazz music it says, this is what we do and it’s beautiful. And it’s also terrible” (Marsalis, as cited by Burns, 1999).

When I was a young girl I was followed while I walked to a riverside park and then shot in the back of the head by someone who remains a stranger. Before being shot, I crossed paths with my would-be assassin. On my way to a familiar path, I passed directly in front of his vehicle

as he parked. Not knowing his intention, I thought so little of the encounter that I do not recall his face. A few minutes later, the bullet, fired from too close a range for me to hear, felt like pure rage exploding in my head, and as one part of me went dark another, outside of myself, made noise: I screamed. My voice lifted me out of the dark of unconsciousness and, eventually into the arms of a passerby. What I know from this experience is that my most basic freedom—the right to exist—lies in the hands of others.

Since then, I have spent much time looking for the opposite of that experience. Put another way, I get it about the first commandment. I get it in spades. I get my own capacity for anger, my own capacity for the utmost in abandonment of ethics, and the abyss of moral relativism. Believe me, I get how vulnerable I am. But if the first order is “thou shalt not kill,” then what *shall* we do? If we flip the first order on its head, it becomes: thou shalt create, does it not?

In the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, each encounter with the face of another exposes our vulnerability (Levinas, 1985), and thus ethical obligation to each other (Levinas, 1985, 2001; Pinchevski, 2005; Webb, 2006). “It,” the practice of being ethical in this lens, is not easy (Levinas, 2001). To accept this ethic is to see my own murderous and creative potential in the face of every other and to recognize the terrible and the beautiful freedom—the creative imprisonment—of what it means to be human. My interaction with L’Arche and my interactions in the jazz duo feel to me, very much the opposite of my walk in the park. Both are positive, although challenging, engagements in creative-imprisonment, in “being-with-ness.”

Alberto Giacometti, 20th century sculptor and café-mate of existentialist Paul Sartre, spent his career trying to capture the moment of recognition. His sculptures, some of them six feet tall and only a few inches wide, are an existential artistic acknowledgement of the most

basic pre-logos connection of human to human. Like Giacometti's artistic endeavour, our ethical responsibility is an artistic expression, it is beyond language—it is dynamic, transcendent, and embodied (Bernasconi, 1997; Webb, 2006). To engage this way is an open-ended adventure; each encounter is an opportunity to respond intuitively and ethically to what it demands of us (Boden, 1964; Pinchevski, 2005). It is an ability to respond, more than a responsibility, to difference (Pinchevski, 2005). In other words, the opportunity for ethical responsiveness is akin to the opportunity to create improvisational jazz. In these moments, jazz players, many who are incredibly virtuosic, practice an ethic of intense awareness of and responsiveness to the other players, regardless of their comparative technical ability (Berliner, 1994; Gioia, 1988; Sansom, 2007). Greg, my jazz partner, often stresses that our musical relationship, although unique, is not about either one of us per se. We each make sounds with an awareness of providing each other a platform for creative space and opportunity; our improvisations and harmonizations are responsive, collaborative (Sansom, 2007; Coleman, 2007), intended for each other, but more to create something outside of ourselves—the musical improvisational moment. Being with L'Arche core members is also like this, because relationships depend on open-ended understanding and intuitiveness. It would be very valuable to explore opportunities for jazz-like ethical engagement in environs where the opportunity is less obvious.

When speaking with long time members of the L'Arche community, both the challenges and the joys of working with the developmentally challenged were discussed. "It," this creative, dynamic, mutual connection, this listening with the heart, is definitely not easy. My commitment to L'Arche is small compared to those who live and work with core members on a daily basis. While my experiences have been very positive, I acknowledge that I am a good time girl. Like a grandparent or auntie, I swoop in temporarily for one day a week and then I leave. I have seen

bruises left behind by Ben and I know his distress when he has made them. I recall distinctly Rose's smashed bedroom window—broken in an episode of anger and frustration when she had been caught stealing. While relating my experience with Alex, who often will give me an embrace, the director of the program was surprised. "He hugged you?" she asked. Alex often strikes out at her. He has chosen to not like her, and she does not know why. To engage with the developmentally challenged is an engagement with not-knowing for certain. It would be valuable to research more deeply the challenges of mutual creative communication—mutual obligation and "being with" when it is hard to do so, when abandoning the safety of a position of strength is not easy. I have only touched on this aspect and wish to acknowledge the deep commitment of the L'Arche community to one another, to "being with" each other.

During my time with L'Arche on Fridays, a phrase began to resonate, spoken frequently in words and gestures. "Can you help me?" The vulnerability of developmentally challenged human beings is immediately apparent, completely on the surface. Core members of L'Arche have no difficulty in asking for help. I am a contemporary urban Canadian woman. I do not like to show weakness—vulnerability. I do not ask for help. I do not like being vulnerable—but I, of all people, know I am vulnerable. We are all vulnerable, and we underestimate the power of our vulnerability to create possibilities for creative ways of being with each other.

In contemporary society we have professionalized all aspects of personal and collective vulnerability: poverty, hunger, addiction, bereavement are taken care of by agencies and licensed professionals (McKnight, 1995). This gives us the comfort of distance from those who may need us, and from our own need; we do not have to be hostages—even to ourselves—unless we choose.

Forty-two, ahimsa, the golden rule: This study is not an examination, nor an answer to how to be good. It does not profess to know what it's all about. This study is an acknowledgement that living an ethical life is challenging. Being conscious of our obligation to others, being singular-plural—*being with*—(Nancy, 2000) is difficult. It demands attentiveness, acknowledgement of personal vulnerability—a recognition of both I and we, often not deemed useful in a society of fast-food, plastic cars, and mediated empty experiences (Nancy, 2000). Contemporary “careless” (McKnight, 1995) society can at times, force us into dehumanizing roles, where we leave our real selves behind (Kondo, 1990)—like the uniformed, and name-tagged employees of West-Edmonton Mall, or myself in the lawyer's office—where being vulnerable or being creative is not valued. Whether it is in the workplace, as citizens of nations, or defenders of human rights, a phenomenological lens offers useful, non-hierarchical ways to examine human dilemmas. It creates an open-ended engagement—an imperfect, “communicative possibility” (Vannini and Waskul, 2006, p. 11), and offers possibilities for new, valid research perspectives.

I acknowledge that creativity and artistic privilege does not make individual interaction pleasant or right; not all musical relationships are like mine; on the contrary, musicians and artists are notoriously competitive, selfish, imperfect souls. I would, however, argue that situations, whether they be individual to individual, group to group, business to business, nation to nation, in which the potent capacity of creative, dynamic, mutual exchange is not present—where responsiveness is stifled or completely crushed—are moments of violence and also opportunities to take a step back from control, and listen deeply, listen for the sound of the ocean in the rain and perhaps let go of being understood and control to find possibilities, rather than force solutions. By denying ourselves the opportunity to walk *with* each other in times of great

difficulty and challenge, as well as in times of joy or ease—by burying our vulnerability in professionalized, linear social structures and analyses—we deny ourselves the best jazz of all: connection and dynamic understanding—the opportunity to not kill, the opportunity *to create*.

Method

“You are free, choose, invent.” (Sartre, as reprinted in Sample et al., p. 319).

This qualitative study was driven by the intellectual rigour and creative licence of phenomenology, influenced by the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, and discussions of the ethics of Heidegger’s “Dasein-Mitsein,” concepts of “being here” and “being with” as a creative potential for ethical responsiveness. It was also driven by the parallel qualities inherent in improvisational bebop jazz (Berliner, 1994; Gioia, 1988, Sansom, 2007). It claims the creative, heuristic “return to the self” and examination of my own history and experience (Moustakas, 1990) as valid data and opportunity for discovering new meaning.

The use of reflexive strategies that “let the heart in,” (Pelias, in Ellis et. al., 2008, p. 5) allow the researcher to be attentive to the multiple layers of perception, emotional response, and lived experience (Bochner, 2001; Kondo, 1990; Pamphilon, 1999) necessary to engage with the participants in this study. These methods are an “improvisational quest” (Humphreys, Brown, & Hatch, 2003, p. 6), and acknowledge the complicated nature of human experience. Embodied experience, an inclusion of music and the sound of everyday life (Van Leeuwen, 1999) and deep personal reflexivity are strategies to support research that at times constructs rather than posits what is (Pelias, 2005).

The writings of L’Arche founder, and philosopher Jean Vanier, other contemporary theologians and Christian ethicists informed and expanded my ideas of transcendent, ethical knowing before language, and individual creative responsiveness to the other, offering the

possibility that our responsibility to the other is both a dynamic and challenging process. It is much easier to “be good” if we simply tell or are told what to do (Boden, 1964; Christians, 2002; Vanier, 1994).

Like jazz, existential theology (Boden, 1964) rejects the literal, post-logos derivation of ethical absolutism and is somewhat countercultural (Angostino, 2003; Berliner, 1994; Boden, 1964; Webb, 2006). They are responses to 20th century societal developments—the perception of the world as fragmented, disintegrated, empty of meaning (Groenewald, 2004; Nancy, 2000). For Levinas ethics “arises precisely from the obligation of self to other, before understanding” (Bernasconi & Critchley, 1991, p. 85). In this light jazz, communication, and ethics are activities where one listens intensely and responds: intuitively, dynamically, and with intention.

Jazz in the bebop tradition is a deeply intellectual, sensual, and intuitive exploration of musical conventions that relies on improvisational re-interpretation/re-invention to play oneself (Marsalis, as cited by Burns, 1999; Berliner, 1994), while communicating with others. It is very “Dasein-Mitsein”—intensely personal, and ecstatic, and also other-aware (Nancy, 2000; Sorial, 2005; Sansom, 2007). There is perhaps no other art form in which there is so little distance between the artist and his work (Gioia, 1988, p. 68). Jazz is phenomenological, like the transcendent and sensual (Webb, 2006) philosophy of Levinas. It accepts an aesthetic of humanity and imperfection (Gioia, 1988).

Phenomenology claims that perception is more than causality; it is intentional and must be investigated experientially (Stewart & Mickunas, 1990). The basis for my research, jazz performance and volunteering with the developmentally challenged in the L’Arche community, are the phenomena of my own life, which is, “the only absolute data from where to begin” (Groenewald, 2004). For the last three years I have volunteered on Saturday afternoons with

Ben, a developmentally challenged adult male and ward of L'Arche, a non-profit society that provides community, home and care for developmentally challenged adults (Vanier, 1998). For over two years I have spent Sunday afternoons rehearsing with a talented jazz musician, Greg. In L'Arche, I am held hostage by the depth of the obligation that interaction with some of the most vulnerable of our society—the developmentally challenged—demands, and also enabled by their wonderful ability to form relationships (Vanier, 1998); in my Sunday rehearsals I am held hostage by the artistic collaboration of jazz improvisation which relies completely on the skill of my collaborator, myself, and our trust and ability to listen to each other. Rehearsal, and L'Arche engagement continue to be a new adventure—one that engages with the opportunity of saying, more than with what is said (Pinchevski, 2005). In this opportunity lies the dynamic potential and change inherent in “being-with-the-one-with-the-other” (Sorial, 2005, p. 87), and a definition in which a community is not closed (Nancy, 2000; Vanier, 1998). It is ever open, a mutual, responsive exposure to the elements.

For the duration of the thesis, and beyond, I expanded my once-weekly Saturday commitment with L'Arche to volunteer one day a week (Friday) in their day program. I did this to avoid any assumptions that I may have built up from my longstanding relationship with Ben. The result was a particular deepening of this one relationship and my relationship to many others in the community. I am now a “named” member of their community. Naming is an intimate gesture within this community. Ben, for example took close to two years before he spoke my name. Now, he says it regularly—this is new, and significant. The challenge of how to continue the commitment lies before me, as does my further commitment and collaborations with Greg, my jazz partner, and friend. To maintain a personal and musical collaboration will pose difficulties, but we continue our intentional adventure in dynamic responsiveness, as we plan our

first public recital, and as we rehearse our particular brand of what we call “Satie-esque improvisational jazz.”

The data contained within my experiences, reflections and interactions with L’Arche core members and in jazz, are meant to be a creative engagement—a possibility, not a solution to dilemmas of existential ontology or “right and wrong” ways to be. The focus of the data is to reflect on the experience, freedoms, and limitations of ethical communication and being “held hostage.” Words such as “they” and “them” were carefully avoided to avoid hierarchical interpretations. Names were changed to protect privacy, and in particular, the privacy and identity of the developmentally challenged human beings, with whom I have permission from L’Arche to engage for this study. Often helping others is portrayed as a way to “get” a meaningful life—a kind of transaction, where the helper maintains a position of invulnerability. The developmentally challenged are typically objects of pity, and sometimes experiences with them are related with an over-simplified, rose-coloured lens. This research is not about helping, or giving back—it is about ethical engagement, a dynamic, creative way of being. Mutuality is central to L’Arche philosophy which is founded on the beatitudes—on the profound opportunities that engaging with our vulnerabilities and our perceived weaknesses have to offer us (Vanier, 1998); it strikes me as relevant that the founder of L’Arche also possesses a Doctor of Philosophy and Theology. We are all vulnerable. Intellectual, physical, or economic capacity does not alter this. The Executive Director of L’Arche has had opportunity to review the final report to ensure that privacy and integrity are maintained.

Phenomenological data are emergent, positivist analysis threatens the holistic integrity of the experience (Groenwald, 2004; Stewart & Mickunas, 1990), and so I have written intuitively, impressionistically, using memory, notes and creative performative methods to examine the

phenomena within. Phenomenology demands rich descriptions deeply embedded in the personal experience of the researcher (Kenzit, as cited by Groenewald, 2006, p. 11). In this light, artists' tools such as jazz performance, as well as narrative and creative writing were chosen as methods for analysis. As a singer, and writer—the daughter of a jazz musician, and journalist—these tools are also part of my own epistemology and experience.

The goal of this study was to reveal non-didactic, non-hierarchical methods of analysis and reflection about communication as a means to engage ethically—to “be-with.” Like any jazz performance this entails facing the notes on the page, and then a leap of faith.

References

- Adams, Douglas. (2002). *The Hitchhiker's guide to the galaxy*. London: Pan MacMillan.
- Angostino, M.V. (2003). L'Arche: The phenomenology of Christian counterculturalism, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 9, 934-954.
- Bacharach, B. and David, H. (1966). Alfie. Famous Music Corporation, as reprinted in the *Hal Leonard Real Jazz Book C-edition*. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation.
- Berliner, Paul, F. (1994). *Thinking in jazz: The infinite art of improvisation*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Bernasconi, R., Critchley, R., eds. (1991). *Re-reading Levinas*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Bernasconi, R. (1997). The Violence of the face: Peace and language in the thought of Levinas. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 23(6), 81-93.
- Bochner, Arthur, P. (2001). Narrative's virtues. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 7, 13-157.
- Boden, R. (1964). *Radical obedience The ethics of Rudolf Bultmann*. Philadelphia: Westminster.
- Christians, C. (2002). The social ethics of Agnes Heller. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8, 411-428.
- Coleman, Ornette. (2007). Pulitzer citation, retrieved January, 2009, from <http://www.pulitzer.org/biography/2007,Music>.
- Coots, F. and Lewis, S. (1934). *For all we know*. New York: Cromwell Music Inc.
- Ellis, Carolyn, et. al. (2008). Talking and thinking about qualitative research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 14, 254-284.
- Gioia, Ted. (1988). *The imperfect art*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Groenewald, Thomas. (2004). A phenomenological research design illustrated. *International Journal of Qualitative Research Methods*, 3, Article 4. Retrieved November, 2008 from http://www.ualberta.ca/~iiqm/backissues/3_1/pdf/groenewald.pdf .
- Humphreys, M., Brown, A. and Hatch, M. (2003). Is ethnography jazz? *Organization Articles*, 10(1), 5-31.
- Kondo, D. (1990). *Crafting selves: Power, gender, and discourses of identity in a Japanese workplace*. Chicago: University of Chicago.
- Levinas, E. (1985). *Ethics and infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, translated by R. Cohen. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University.
- Levinas, E. (2001). *Is it righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*. Jill Robbins, (Ed.), Stanford: Stanford University.
- McKnight, John. (1995). *The careless society: Community and its counterfeits*. New York: BasicBooks.
- Marsalis, W. (1999). Interview with Ken Burns. In *Jazz: a film by Ken Burns*, Burns, K. (Producer). [PBS Television documentary series] Washington: WETA productions, Transcripts retrieved January 5, 2009, from www.pbs.org/jazz/about .
- Moustakas, C. (1990). *Heuristic research*. London: Sage.
- Nancy, Jean-Luc. (2000). *Being singular-plural*. Stanford: Stanford University.
- Pelias, R. J. (2005). Performative writing as scholarship: An apology, an argument, an anecdote. *Cultural Studies: Critical Methodologies*, 5, 415-424.
- Pamphilon, B. (1999). The Zoom model: A dynamic framework for the analysis of life histories, *Qualitative Inquiry*, 5, 393-410.

- Pinchevski, A. (2005). *By way of interruption: Levinas and the Ethics of Communication*. Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press.
- Sansom, M. (2007). Improvisation and identity: A qualitative study. *Critical Studies in Improvisation*, 3(1), retrieved February 5, 2009 from <http://hdl.handle.net/10214/232> .
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. (1947). Existentialism as humanism, in Sample, Ruth, J., Mills, Charles, W., Sterba, James, P., (Eds.), *Philosophy: The big questions*. (pp. 313-321). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Sorial, Sarah. (2005). *Heidegger and the problem of individuation: Mitsein (being-with), ethics and responsibility*. Unpublished doctoral thesis. University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.
- Stewart, D. & Mickunas, A. (1990). *Exploring phenomenology*, second edition. Athens: Ohio University.
- Van Leeuwen, Theo. (1999). *Speech, music, sound*. London: MacMillan.
- Vanier, Jean. (1998). *Becoming human*. Toronto, Ontario: House of Anansi.
- Vanier, Jean. (1994). Letters of Jean Vanier to the friends and communities of L'Arche, John Sumurah, ed., retrieved, December 23, 2008, from: <http://www.silk.net/RelEd/ezinevanier.htm>.
- Vannini, Phillip, and Waskul, Dennis. (2006). Symbolic interaction as music: the esthetic constitution of meaning, self, and society. *Symbolic Interaction*, 29(1), 5-18.
- Webb, M. (2006). Eros and ethics: Levinas's reading of Plato's 'good beyond being.' *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 19, 205-222.