

**ON SPEAKING TERMS AGAIN: TRANSFORMATIVE EXPERIENCES  
OF ARTFUL EARTH CONNECTION**

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Education  
Department of Adult Education, Community  
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*Like autistic children, who do not seem to hear, or see, or feel their mother's presence, we have become blind to the psychic presence of the living planet and deaf to its voices and stories... (Metzner, 1995: 58)*

On Speaking Terms Again:  
Transformative experiences of artful earth connection

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Abstract

There is a fundamental mismatch between the way humans think and the way the earth works. We need experiences that allow us to better fit with the earth in its living reality. To meet that end, this artful heuristic inquiry began with the question: *What is the experience of artful earth connection?*

To be able to speak to each other clearly again, to be able to decode each other's messages, and be moved to act on behalf of the earth is the vision.

By sharing one cycle of an artful heuristic research process, it is revealed that spontaneous painting is metamorphic on many levels and can be a slow moving, reciprocal, sensory dance with the more-than-human world. We experience the spontaneous, the child-like, the embodied, the organic, the wild, and the primitive/tribal. Writing by a range of thinkers in the areas of environmental philosophy, quantum physics and art therapy has shaped this work.

In this thesis I share stories, dialogues, poetry and images created by myself and six other spontaneous painters, providing a window into a renewed human-earth fit through art making. I revision the common perception that art making is a solely human endeavour, reserved for a

talented few. Rather art making can be a human-earth co-creation, a living language of sorts, that is natural and free flowing. Like meditation, painting can focus the body-mind, helping it to stay in the moment, in the still-life. We experience a sacred place where we are on speaking terms with the earth once again.

There are three main sections. *Stilling Life: Wildness and Domestication* explores stories of a poor fit between humans and the earth, revealing what can happen when we act on the notion of separateness from the earth. *A Still-Life: Painting the Pattern that Connects* describes spontaneous painting as a transformative earth connecting activity and reveals both the painting and artistic inquiry processes that promote a good human-earth fit. Finally, *Still Alive: On Speaking Terms Again* shares images, narrative and poetry of experiences of artful earth connection.

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I thought I knew I really did  
Truth as they told it  
Words that they said  
But all along I was blind  
Or rather I refused to see  
Illusion the real "truth" lay only with me  
It hung by threads to my body in light  
Replenished my soul dreams wandering at night  
Girded my belly belt protected from infraction  
Cinched breaths into puffs of dissatisfaction  
Sent into the chaos thrown into the fray  
Unleashed sea motion sway upon sway  
Dark crevasse places under walls behind doors  
Long journey spaces viewing far flung distant shores  
Swung and twisted near death in a gasp  
Wrung and unsheathed always just beyond grasp  
Though clinging denied its full satisfaction  
Release afforded new clear interaction  
Filled with stories of heart  
That began a new start  
To a world of hope and serenity

*L M Lipsett*

## Opening: An Introduction



*The recognition that the wholeness of human selfhood spans the entire spectrum from the literal world of rational consciousness to our grounding within a symbolic realm within which we are already part of the world, implies a corresponding environmental ethic- one which does not reject the powerful but limited insights of rationality, but frames them within an all-encompassing symbolic awareness of their partial character. Such an ethic will recognize that the "fit" between each species and its "environment" reflects not merely a material dependence, but rather implies a more basic "resonance" among the diverse components of the biosphere- a resonance which is affective and spiritual. (Kidner, 1998: 78)*

I am shocked into deep sadness at times. It is a grieving that I enter when I realize that the western schooled human mind has been so closed, so systematically molded by the rational and the mechanistic that it is effectively not fit to live sustainably<sup>1</sup> with other life forms. There is a dangerous mismatch between the way humans think and the way nature works. The global ecological crisis facing us today is a mirror of this precarious state.

It's not that we have successfully controlled the wild earthy aspect of life, rather we have become astonishingly successful at anaesthetizing ourselves to it. Western culture has

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<sup>1</sup> Sustainability implies: "More than seven generations have toiled to make our lives possible....Surely we are obliged to find ways to allow for at least another seven generations" (Nickerson, 1993: 12).

championed a sophisticated, all encompassing campaign against living beings, including ourselves (Glendinning, 1994), thus denying the other story that lies just below the surface. Yet we know it's there lying in wait as we fence, pave, and wall off.

Also, ecological destruction did not happen as a series of a few profound tragic miscalculations (although there are examples of devastating ecological events like the Exxon Valdez and Chernobyl). The destruction of the earth has happened over an extended period of decades. With a habitual mindset, we have daily inched ourselves to where we are today.

Individual actions that reverse the destruction of the earth may at times be the result of radical behavioural shifts when new insights are gained and new experiences transform understanding. However countering these rare events is the more typical apathetic individual response founded on the small daily increments of habit and pattern that promote ever-increasing destructiveness.

*In a jog, in a hurry, and apparently in a hungry search for purpose, we continue to consume dwindling resources in the form of plastic paraphernalia, marketplace fashion, and endless other artificial and personal prescriptions for a life. This is psychic numbing, denial, alienation, and depression wrapped in a single package, a single pattern of unintentional and unconscious misbehaviour- a pattern we might call overconsumption or addiction. Most insidious, this effect is cumulative, leaving us increasingly blind, autistic, and mis-guided in a self-perpetuating geography of human invention, a shiny and seductive world of mirrors. Saddest of all we have forgotten that we have forgotten... In our forgetful state, we don't bother to look. The rhythms and patterns of the earth slip away.* (Sewell, 1999: 70)

The question for an individual then becomes, "am I inching towards earth connection through an ongoing daily commitment or am I continuing to steer an evermore destructive and alienating course?"

Environmental educators tend to use grim statistics like the following to shame the planet's consumer class into behaviour change. We are told we need to open our eyes. When we

do, we can see and feel the daily effects of consumption gone wild. The facts speak for themselves.

*No matter where we look- from our ravished fisheries and vanishing forests to the dwindling variety of species, dying coral reefs and the emptying of fresh water aquifers- there are warning signs that the natural world, which gives life and sustenance to our human economy is nearing a point of collapse from which there may be no return. According to the World Wildlife Fund the earth lost 30% of its natural wealth in just 25 years from 1970 to 1995- a nanosecond in the history of the planet.*

(Ellwood, 2000: 9-10)

Half the world's original forest cover of some three billion hectares has been destroyed in the last 40 years; only 20% of what remains is undisturbed by human activities (Hinrichsen & Rowley, 1999). An estimated 50,000 plant and animal species will become extinct in the coming decades; in the tropics, ecosystem destruction is so severe that 60,000 plant species, 25% of the world's total, could be lost by 2025 (WWF International, 1999).

Since we are quickly running out of planetary resources we are being asked to get simple, reduce, reuse, recycle, consume less and ultimately produce less space-gobbling waste as well. On some level we know we need to take swift action in response to the devastating reality of life on earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, yet the devastation continues.

Can we simply flick a switch and stop the all absorbing pre-occupation with consumption and instead lead more sustainable, connected low impact lives?

I do see people trying to be "good" ecologically minded citizens. We recycle, buy fuel efficient cars, shop locally, maintain natural green spaces in our yards, grow our own food, and teach our children about interdependence. Although we attempt to "think" about the big issues surrounding the destruction of the planet, what we experience in our day to day lives generally takes precedence over the global. Those people around me; my family, my friends, my community continue with the struggles of daily life. Daily personal issues that directly affect the ability to survive are pre-occupying. Occasionally we seem to be able to gather our energy together for a large shift in attitude and behaviour change in the face of a pressing local issue

such as water contamination, the building of a new dump or industrial air pollution that makes our children sick with asthma. However, is it enough to wait until things get that bad before we act?

Many believe that we need to move beyond the deconstruction of post-modernism, a place of survive and critique (O'Sullivan, 1999), and instead embrace transformation (Spretnak, 1991) or constructive post-modernism (Griffin, 1988) characterized by creative vision based on multiple ways of knowing that ultimately fuel sustainable action.

From this view, transformation of the human-earth relationship could come from a place of motivation, a moving towards what the eye and heart both see and love instead of desperate last-ditch efforts or action taken out of fear. In other words, change need not be a sudden radical shift in the face of a crisis instead it can also be the daily movement towards a more sustainable life style.

Many say this is impossible to accomplish until we begin to transform our deepest values and understandings about our relationship to all life (Berry, 1988; O'Sullivan, 1999). We will continue to rape, pillage and plunder until we heal the perceived separations between mind and body, inner and outer, human and planet (Berman, 1989). The dichotomous distinctions that we habitually make between ourselves and the earth, are *thoughts* that say more about our own fragmentation than they do about the nature of earth relationships<sup>2</sup>. Since the earth in its living wholeness is comprised of the dynamic rhythmic relationship or fit<sup>3</sup> between such complements as unconscious-conscious, implicate-explicate (Bohm, 1980), body-mind, masculine-feminine, and wild-tame<sup>4</sup>, we must somehow open to this dance. This dance can be understood as a co-creation between stillness and life. Instead of perceiving humans as life filled and the earth as a

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<sup>2</sup> Fragmentary thinking is a strong habit of the intellect. *"Since our thought is persuaded with differences and distinctions, it follows that such a habit leads us to look on these as real divisions, so that the world is then seen and experienced as actually broken into fragments"* (Bohm, 1980: 3).

<sup>3</sup> The word 'fit' is related to Germanic or Old Icelandic 'fitja' meaning junction, connection or to knit. It is also related to the Old High German 'fizzon' to surround, 'fizza' yarn, and is related to an early sense of 'fit' in English which means an adversary of equal power, a meeting or a coming together (Chambers Etymological Dictionary, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> "...the wild and the disciplined are the two constituent forces of the universe, the expansive force and the containing force bound into a single universe and expressed in every being in the universe" (Berry, 1998: 52).

dead still object we might find ourselves in the grey area where we experience stillness and life in both. We may come to know a new sustainable relationship between contemplative quiet stillness and wild creative living. Deep caring connections to the earth will develop when humans begin to experience the universe as comprised of just such complementary dimensions, with one aspect contained in the other, not each opposing the other<sup>5</sup>. In other words, in order to be able to move beyond the power of fragmented thinking, we must return to heartfelt embodied experience and develop a new artful language for sharing that experience.

Since alienation from the earth was at least in part created by the distorted separate-self mindset of humans it will also be exacerbated or improved to the degree that we begin to animate and control ourselves (Roszak, 1992). In order for it to release its grip, the separate-self mindset takes time, coddling, nourishing and security. This work is done one person at a time, one small group at a time. The process is at turns scary and luscious, sad and awe-inspiring, paralyzing and mysterious. It is also life long. Just as there are no quick fixes for the ecological disaster we find ourselves in, there are no quick fixes for the separate-self mindset of humans. Like brushing our teeth or feeding our bodies with clean nourishing food there is a pattern, a discipline to becoming earth connected.

Transformation of the human-earth relationship is no small task in a culture that values reason over imagination, compartmentalized hierarchy over holism, action over contemplation, and domestication over wildness. Yet despite the perceived obstacles it seems important to develop a way of being, that allows us to fit with the earth community once again. We can then begin a journey to a unique kind of enlightenment not unlike what Buddhism describes as “bodhichitta”. We attempt to liberate ourselves for the sake of all life on earth, we develop an empathic heart, and enter into individual healing and collective awakening that demonstrates caring through responsible ecological action (Grey, 1998: 30). We become able to heed the call for the development and sharing of, “ecologically grounded forms of animism that put us on speaking terms with nature” (Roszak, 1992: 213).

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<sup>5</sup> In relation to the Taoist Yin/Yang, there is no real opposition. “*The black tadpole always has a white eye and the white tadpole always has a black eye; so even if one were to succeed in wrenching them apart and throwing one away (in some sort of millenarian fantasy of the ultimate conquest of good over evil), the remaining form always has the seed of its seeming opposite sprouting from within it*” (Taylor, 1998: 84).

To be able to speak to each other clearly again, to be able to decode each other's messages, to be able to make sense and be moved to act on behalf of the earth in response to those exchanges, is the vision. How can we begin to undo, to open out to the wisdom that once came so naturally to us as children, that still comes so naturally to adults living in many indigenous cultures? How can we begin to reconnect with the wisdom of the earth, of ourselves and learn to speak the resonant language of life again?

Highlighted in this thesis, is an attempt to develop just such an ecologically grounded form of animism through the practice of spontaneous art making, particularly spontaneous painting. By embracing our own spontaneous creativity we are offered a bridge that crosses us over into communion with the sensual earth. Since all beings in the universe are creative and spontaneous<sup>6</sup>, we connect nature to nature. Therefore this inquiry has been fuelled by the following question. *What is the experience of artful earth connection?*

While not discounting the power of radical activism to shape lives and change behaviours, my work is a subtle, daily response to the crisis at hand. It is a seeping, slow melting type of work that seems to soften the hard shelled self and open one up to full connection with the beauty and splendour of life. We preserve what we love<sup>7</sup>, we protect what awe-inspires us, we value the feelings those experiences bring to our lives. We will fight to preserve what we care about.

*While the human cannot make a blade of grass, there is liable not to be a blade of grass unless it is accepted, protected and fostered by the human.*  
(Swimme & Berry, 1992: 247)

Daily caring engagement helps to build both the strength and sensitivity needed to act counter to popularized consumerist dogmas and at times stand against the crowd to preserve creation even at the cost of our own individual safety and security.

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<sup>6</sup> "We now have a scientific picture of the universe which in many respects has the properties of an integrated, living, spontaneous world, a creative and evolutionary world" (Sheldrake, 1990b: 24).

<sup>7</sup> In her studies of how contemporary Australians understand their relationship to nature, Bragg (1997) found that having strong caring, loving feelings towards nature had a stronger relationship to environmental action taken than anything else.

Generally, adult experience of the creative is limited, full of fear and shadowy (Berman, 1981) mirroring the self-limiting, fearful, shadowy feelings many have towards the wild earth. Yet just because we have not been open to the wild creative doesn't mean it has disappeared. More likely it has invaded our lives in its destructive aspect in the form of burning rainforests, dying fish, cancer ravaged bodies, depression, anger and alienation.

Spontaneous painting is one creative response to the earth crisis at hand. It is a call for a return to a heartfelt still-life experience of being wildly creative. There is a healing or eco-therapeutic (Clinebell, 1996) aspect to this work that nourishes and weaves the human back into the fabric of earth community. We learn the language of life and are on speaking terms again.

Berry (1999) suggests that a vital component of human-earth reconnection involves re-storying ourselves in the context of the larger universe. This re-storying is a communal act that enlivens all who make its acquaintance. Therefore artful earth connecting stories, dialogues, poetry and images created by six painters and myself, are simply shared in this thesis without analysis. Second, I am hoping to revision the common perception that art-making is a solely human endeavour. Rather art making can be a human-earth co-creation. Third, this thesis expands the boundaries of inquiry to include the heart and soul. By sharing one cycle of an artful heuristic research process it is revealed that spontaneous painting is metamorphic on many levels. Also by incorporating artfulness and beauty on the page, I hope to ignite awe in the intellect. A mind inspired by beauty and mystery is more likely to insist on earth-centered sustainable actions. Finally, knowing that the act of simply reading about others' experiences is not sufficient in itself to transform hearts and minds, I hope to inspire others to begin their own artful earth connecting practice. This thesis aims to artfully share experiences that breathe life into (in-spire) those who engage with the work in these pages.

\* \* \*

By developing the phrases used in the title of this thesis, the following three sections: *On Speaking Terms Again*, *Transformative Experience* and *Artful Earth Connection* will each briefly review the corresponding literature.

### On Speaking Terms Again

*...the philosophers speak of man (sic) as a microcosm mirroring the macrocosm in all respects. Whatever the formulation in image or word, it carries the message that human beings, deeply mingled with the world, are addressed by all things and can in turn learn to address all things, provided that we grasp the language.* (Lipsey, 1988: 8-9)

To be on speaking terms with the earth implies learning a language that will bridge the gap between humans and the more-than-human world. It also implies that somehow we are not currently or have not been on speaking terms for a long while.

*As technological civilization diminishes the biotic diversity of the earth, language itself is diminished... As the splashing speech of the rivers is silenced by more and more dams, as we drive out more and more of the land's wild voices into the oblivion of extinction, our own languages become increasingly impoverished and weightless, progressively emptied of their earthly resonance.* (Abram, 1996: 86)

Not only have earthy languages diminished, their diminishment has been at the hands of more objective scientific languages. We have mistakenly applied a language of alienation to the natural world.

*...Scientific language, however useful in scientific investigation, can be harmful to the total human process once it is accepted as the only way to speak about the true reality of things. A more symbolic language is needed to enter into the subjective depth of things... (Swimme & Berry, 1992: 258)*

There is also an implied warning that if we do not find a rich more symbolic language again soon, we may never be able to find it under the layers of debris and acrimony that comprise our currently autistic state.

In order for partners to continue talking there must be a balanced exchange that is enlivening and sustainable. Being on speaking terms is about coming to know, share and live out just such an exchange that generates new stories. Since the guiding stories of our time are rooted in alienation, mistrust, fear, exploitation, consumption, competition and domination (O'Sullivan, 1999), we need to access and tell new stories that bring meaning back to our lives as earth beings (Swimme & Berry, 1992). When we learn the language of these stories we also learn the language of all life. This shift to creating a new story can be characterized by a committed mature irrational (not based on ratio distinctions) dialogue with the earth. New heartfelt habits are developed which lead to new outcomes and new worlds.

The meaning of the word "dialogue" is "flowing through" (Bohm, 1996:117). It is a process where people can come together to begin moving towards cultural coherence. There is a shedding of agendas that happens in this type of interaction that allows for a co-creative free flowing interaction in which it is possible for something new to emerge. Yet in a very concrete way this type of interaction is also possible between humans and the earth.

*...our interchanges with nature can be conceptualized as a dialogical drama in which the embodied human and the world of nature play off each other. The essential feature of this dialogue is the bustle and richness of joint engagement between the human and the natural worlds. In this "conversational" space, the two parties involved in the interchange dissolve into a singularity of embodied, reciprocal dialogue.*

(Rogers, 2000: 5)

Reciprocity is key to maintaining this open channel of communication. This is a developing dialogue characterized by a dissolving down of ego based identification with the needs of self, the posturing and positioning of the self, in order to access that middle ground of communion with the other (Bohm, 1996).

There may have been a time when we were able to engage in dialogical "earth speak" Many aboriginal peoples around the world still seem able to maintain a dialogue with nature and some do not even have a separate word for nature in their vocabularies.

*No word for "Nature" (as an abstract concept separate from ourselves) exists in Quechua language of the Peruvian Andes. Instead, people say *nuestra naturaleza* ("our nature") and then begin to enumerate the mountains of the valley, identifying peaks, affectionately and respectfully, with a litany of names, images and stories that are intimately entwined with their lives.* (McLuhan, 1994: 29)

Yet there is a barrier between the western mind and the earth that may be stopping a natural flow of communication. How can we become sensitive again to what the earth has to teach?

We may find a clue in the following description of Gary Snyder's (1990) nature connected poetic expression. Somehow we must begin by digging below the surface of things and open to the power of a new kind of language that has a life all its own.

*The thinking poet reaches toward a presence obscured by the obvious, toward what is absent or missing because of its concealment behind language, behind opinion, behind the governing system of ideology that rules the world: the wilderness poet calls forth Being... His poetry speaks, indeed resonates with the primal myths of the Paleolithic mind and archaic people, and through its saying reveals a world in which humankind might again be an integral part....* (Oeschlaeger, 1992: 299)

Some feel we need to open to different forms or a new language that has its roots in the unconscious. In this sense, the unconscious can be described as that which is "not-yet-speech-ripe" (Taylor, 1998: 263). We must release ourselves from our enclosed world of human verbiage (Abram 1988: 313) and embrace the language of the wilderness. The unconscious is akin to our own inner wilderness.

*...deep inside us is a wilderness. We call it the unconscious because we can't control it fully so we can't will to create what we want from it. The collective unconscious is a great wild region where we can get in touch with the sources of life.* (Jung, 1957)

Both daily ritual and creative expression overcome the limiting effects of solely verbal language for connecting the wilderness and the self. It opens us to the unconscious.

*...the importance of ritual grows when we become more aware of the limitations of language. Language is a function of the neocortex. But the human brain consist of two older brains as well- the limbic or animal brain and the old brain (sometimes called the reptilian brain). Neither of these brains is subjected to the dualistic distortions of our Western European language because these brains do not communicate in spoken language. But if we can't talk to our consciousness how does it communicate with us? In our culture it communicates only with great difficulty and only occasionally and individually, by means of music, dreams and great poetry. In primitive or traditional cultures the unconscious communicates by means of ritual, continuously and to all present.*  
(La Chapeile, 1992: 240)

Embracing a new language includes developing a new way of listening, characterized by an unclouding of preconceived notions about what the earth might be trying to say and how it might be trying to say it. In some ways it's about opening out to receive messages and to fully listen again.

*...listening quiets the mind, calms the senses, and opens us to intercourse with the earth.*  
(Oeschlaeger, 1992: 302)

We must also learn how to attend, stilling ourselves with open mindful attention to nature.

*Attention to the qualities of things resurrects the old idea of "notitia" as a primary activity of the soul. "Notitia" refers to the capacity to form true notions of things from attentive noticing. It is the noticing on which knowledge depends.*  
(Hillman, 1989: 101)

Sustainable notions about the earth and ourselves come from co-creative flowing within balanced interactions, rather than exchanges characterized by a tendency towards anthropomorphic projection of our shadow onto nature. Instead opening to and attentively noticing nature's own enlivening language is the desire.

A new way of seeing is also part of being on speaking terms again. New or renewed seeing may involve seeing with different eyes, each with different seeing capacities. One way of

seeing is not privileged over the others. Each has their role. For example Sufism distinguishes between three different eyes.

*Eyes of flesh perceive the world and mankind (sic) as densely material; in such eyes life is a losing struggle for permanence, although sometimes full of beauty. Eyes of flesh acutely perceive details of time, place, person, action, and idea but in relation to one another rather than to anything beyond them. Eyes of fire perceive each thing as the outer sign of an inner fact, or the local sign of a distant power. For such eyes nothing is lonely matter, all things are caught up in a mysterious, ultimately divine whole that challenges understanding over a lifetime. Eyes of flesh focus on the thing itself, eyes of fire on facts but still more intently on their participation in a larger meaning by which they are raised. Eyes for art strike a balance between these two.* (Lipsey, 1988: 17)

Ken Wilber (2000) describes three modes of knowing that correspond to the eye of flesh (sensibilia), the eye of mind (intelligibilia) and the eye of contemplation (transcendelia). Each describes a different way of knowing the universe. The eye of flesh perceives the "outer" material realm, the eye of mind or reason is engaged in the conceptual realm of symbolic language, the contemplative or mystical eye experiences the transcendent realm. If we become adept at knowing through all three eyes then seeing can be a multidimensional reciprocal act imbued with love. We can become what we deeply see. We can lose ourselves in the engagement, yet be more ourselves as we re-emerge. We see ourselves mirrored, and both our natural selves and the earth are revealed.

*And so with true reciprocity- our attention given over to the patterning to be found in relationships between the things of the world- our perception, more seamless now, more ready to perceive the relationships, reflects itself back into our eyes penetrating us. We see ourselves mirrored and potentiated in the myriad patterns of leaf and limb, of animal totems, of spirals, the ripples and meanders that carry us downstream. Our own true natural organic selves are revealed. We see our own patterns rise to the surface as we find ourselves meandering along the relations, as we begin to get it; to see and understand that we too are natural, that we too are truly of the earth.* (Sewell, 1999: 150)

There is potential for incredible expansiveness in interactions with nature due to the great diversity of her forms and the human capacity for both varied receptivity and creative expression. So in part being on speaking terms again is about becoming more flexible and adept

at speaking many different languages. Many of these languages are non-verbal and are the language of images, body movements, and altered states. These new languages are simultaneously wild, spontaneous, child-like, primitive, organic, embodied and sacred. They can also be called visionary.

*In the visionary mode, myths from all times and cultures are available to us; we touch into a seemingly magical dimension from which emanates a sense of the mysterious and the sacred; we have experiential access to the past or the future, and the limits of our cultural conditioning are transcended. Visionary seeing is a force against the literal mind, which believes that things are only as they appear. It is a movement into a larger timeless dimension that honours, from the deepest levels of consciousness, our connection with archetypal forces and powers beyond the local self. ...It is this merging, or dissolution, into a larger, more encompassing identity that the rationalized ego-self that is now felt to be necessary by many people, in order for social transformation to take place in our time.*

(Gablík, 1991: 52-3)

\* \* \*

## Transformative Experience

*If it is accurate to trace many of our present dilemmas to what has been called the "disenchantment of the world", then the solution, presumably, must somehow involve a process that breaks the spell and circle of routines built up by modern culture and begins the transition into a different stream of experience.* (Gablik, 1991: 11)

The Cartesian split between mind and body is one way to frame our current imbalance, characterized by our tenacious grip on ways of knowing that do not honour potentially transformative lived experience with the earth. We don't realize how much our thinking gets in the way of alternative ways of knowing.

*We see reality according to our thought. Therefore thought is constantly participating both in giving shape and form and figuration to ourselves, and to the whole of reality. Now thought doesn't know this. Thought is thinking that it isn't doing anything. I think this is really where the difficulty is. We have got to see that thought is part of this reality and that we are not merely thinking about it, but we are thinking it.* (Bohm, 1998 :115)

We seem to favour "rational, scientific" ways of understanding the world over "subjective, embodied" ways especially when addressing academic scholarly "serious" knowledge. The rational is seen as being the right way to understand the "real" world. Whereas more subjective embodied ways are nice but not serious and truth generating. Knowledge that comes from a subjective place also tends to be excluded from scholarly conversation about nature and the rational analysis of nature experience is deadening (Rogers, 2000).

Public education has focused on the development of the mind to the exclusion of the wisdom inherent in the body. Teaching in public schools is in large part dominated by the boundary-making of the reasoning mind and expression of those boundaries in symbolic form (Gardner, 1991). According to Wilber (1979) symbolic knowledge is different from intimate knowledge. Reasoning has helped us to develop an in-depth symbolic knowledge base only. This type of knowledge depends on boundary making in the form of naming. We find a way using the reasoned mind to encode and express our experience with symbolic forms that stand for, but inadequately capture, the nature of the experience.

*When nature becomes discernible as a separate thing, it can exist as an object of discussion. But the act of becoming discernible is also indicative of a transformation of the human context or background. Nature is no longer a part of that which defines our existence and which reveals the phenomena of daily life; it is transformed from a definer and revealer, to a thing defined and revealed. It is set apart to be operated upon at center stage, through the universal tool of purposive thought.*

(Evernden, 1993: 127)

According to David Hunt (1992) we create maps. However, the map and the territory are not the same thing. The territory is the universe in its actuality, while a map is any symbolic notation that represents or signifies some aspect of the territory. We can never fully capture the intimate embodied experience of the territory with the map. The map flattens the experience of the territory. For most people, knowing through names and maps has not been sufficiently balanced with this first hand experience of the territory. So just as regular, long-term TV viewing begins to shape the viewer's perceptions of the nature of the world (Mander, 1977), the boundary-laden naming systems of the human mind first formally taught in public schools have become the lens through which we perceive the earth. We see landscapes and pictures devoid of feeling and life. Wilderness becomes something we see through a square window or a camera lens (Shepard, 1992).

*The power of detaching an object from its surroundings and making us concentrate on it is an implicit criterion in all of our judgements on the realistic side of visual art; and very similar if not identical to what we require of optical instruments like microscopes and telescopes- which is to magnify, to focus sharper, to distinguish better, to single from the ruck. A great deal of science is devoted to this same end: to providing specific labels, explaining specific mechanisms and ecologies, in short for sorting and tidying what seems in a mass indistinguishable one from the other. ... it acts mentally as an equivalent of the camera viewfinder. Already it destroys or curtails certain possibilities of seeing, apprehending and experiencing.*

(Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 30)

First hand direct embodied experience of the earth rebalances the inequality between thought and intimacy, but one has to open up and let go for it to have any kind of impact. We must somehow get beyond the naming gatekeeper that is the rational mind and begin to regularly

go to the place that is deeper, richer and beyond the map, beyond the words we use to label, separate out, and bound the elements of the earth. We need to unbind ourselves, and place ourselves in right relationship with the wilderness. We need to understand that thinking will always separate and bound what is intimately related and interdependent.

*Thought thinks pollution is a problem "out there" and it must solve it. Now that doesn't make sense because simultaneously thought is creating all of the activities which make the problem in the first place and then tries to create another set of activities to try to overcome it.*

(Bohm, 1998: 115)

Intimate knowledge is the knowledge gained from first hand embodied experience of the transforming "I-Thou" relationship (Buber, 1937). It will not submit to analysis and labeling. When we attempt to analyze it the intimacy is lost and is replaced by the distanced symbolic representation of the map or the name (Wilber, 1979). Not only is intimacy lost, the life force has somehow slipped away.

*Behind naming, beneath words, is something else. An existence named, unamed and unnameable. We give the grass a name, and earth a name. We say grass and earth are separate. We know this because we can pull the grass free of the earth and see its separate roots- but when grass is free it dies.*

(Griffin, 1978: 190)

So, in this inquiry I am making the assumption that lived experience is different from planning, studying or theorizing about an experience. Lived experience has the capacity to meld *knowing how* (perception) something works or how to do something with *knowing that* (conception) something is true (Rogers, 2000). Lived experience places us in the dance (Selby, 2000), in dialogue (Bohm, 1996), and in the river (Pinkola-Estes, 1992).

*Metaphysical and theological maps, profound psychologies and spiritual teachings may indicate the pattern of the whole quite convincingly, but what one really knows is what one has experienced.*

(Lipsey, 1988: 9)

When we are in the moment of an experience, we are on speaking terms, we are in a sacred place. We are able to access sustainable guiding visions.

*New visions do not come from blueprints in our heads that are shaped by past experience and old habits of thinking. They are born as we interact with our world, and receive fresh sensations and perceptions. And for that we need earth and body, the stuff out of which we are made. They remind us that we are not brains at the end of a stick, but an organic integral part of the web of life. Matter itself if we attend to it mindfully, can help liberate us from delusion; for it is mind not matter that is in bondage.*

(Macy, 1991: 84)

Both conceptual and perceptual knowing seem to move us away from “in the moment” knowing that comes from spontaneous lived experience. This knowledge can be silenced, concealed and inaccessible as a result we remain distanced from the felt experience of earth connection.

*Our ecological understanding and practice has been a big, important step in understanding our relationship to our environment and to other species. Yet, even in our serious environmental concern, we still fall short of recognizing ourselves as part of a much larger living entity. It is one thing to be careful with our environment so it will last and remain benign; it is quite another to know deeply that our environment, like ourselves, is part of a living planet.*

(Sahtouris, 1999: 12)

However if we regularly embrace an “in the moment” experience of the earth we can begin to “*know from*” (Shotter, 1993). It is this experience of “*knowing from*” nature that occupies my work here.

My focus on transformative experience implies that this inquiry will be of interest to educators. In particular I am addressing adult educators in order that they may become advocates for a more sustainable human-earth relationship through earth centered art making. Also so that adults will safeguard the children in their care from the disconnecting effects that privileging one kind of knowing can have. Therefore this inquiry is addressed to all educators in the broadest sense of the word. It is meant to appeal to anyone charged with “drawing out the wisdom from within” that “*educere*”, the Latin word for education describes. In particular it is about drawing out that wisdom in the context of the relationship between humans and the more-than-human world. It is about respecting lived experience in the moment, as the place where human and nature meet. In this sense I’m advocating transpersonal ecological experiences.

*Rather than dealing with moral injunctions, transpersonal ecologists are... inclined far more to what might be referred to as experiential invitations: readers or listeners are invited to experience themselves as intimately bound up with the world around them... (Fox, 1990: 244-245)*

Like the transformation of a caterpillar to a moth, we are constantly changing, transforming ourselves if we are on speaking terms with the earth. Metamorphosis is a special kind of self-transformation, it is an embodied lived experience that melts down the old and builds the new. In contrast to teaching-learning partnerships where information is transmitted to and accumulated by the learner, or where there is a learning transaction characterized by a focus on cognitive processes, problem solving and exchanges that omit feelings, transformational learning develops the whole person. From a holistic perspective, transformational learning involves forming relationships and making connections between self and the earth, thinking and intuition, mind and body, self and community, self and Self. (Miller, 1993: 13-14). This type of holistic education teaches us that we are of nature, nature is of us, we are also not separate from our fellow humans.

Transformative Learning as an educational focus describes a number of different approaches each with a unique emphasis. Mezirow (1990) describes a questioning process he calls Critical Reflection that allows for peeling back the layers of the assumptions and values we hold dear. This is a very cognitive process, which promotes rationally thinking through our guiding assumptions. On the other hand Elias (1997) expands Mezirow's notions to include unconscious and intuitive processes that create a flow of information from the personal to the political (or in this case ecological) and back to the personal again. O'Sullivan, (1999) broadens Transformative Learning even further by delineating an over riding cosmological story that we must embed ourselves in. By seating ourselves firmly in the universe story (Swimme & Berry, 1992) we can attain much needed guiding visions that will fuel sustainable actions.

Despite the available breadth in the field of Transformative Learning, I still often come away from reading articles and books with the sense that ongoing personal transformative practice is often neglected or at least not highlighted enough. More usual are calls for direct action and advocacy. Maybe this is due to the fact that there needs to be something that bridges

the personal and the planetary. We can not think, or discuss our way to that connection. It takes a whole different skill set to accomplish such a feat. Also the bridging of the personal and the planetary must be mirrored by the bridging between self and disowned or shadow aspects of self. For me this is where the arts can play a large role.

*Life's solutions lie in the minute particulars, involving more and more individual people daring to create their own life and art, daring to listen to the voice within their deepest, original nature, and deeper still, the voice within the Earth* (Nachmanovitch, 1990: 183)

Transformative learning of the sort I advocate, implies action from a sustainable place that honours all life, including human life. To get to that place of deep respect and honouring of difference and the inevitable conflicts it generates, requires the melting down of our inner dichotomies, integrating the fractious encampments and opening out to a more fluid and flexible sense of self. It's about opening to world soul.

*Ecology movements, futurism, feminism, urbanism, protest and disarmament, personal individuation cannot alone save the world from the catastrophe inherent in our very idea of the world. They require a cosmological vision that saves the phenomenon "world" itself, a move in soul that goes beyond measures of expediency to the archetypal source of our world's continuing peril: the fateful neglect, the repression of the anima mundi (or world soul).* (Hillman, 1981: 126-7)

As long as we continue to push away an embodiment of the ensouled nature of all living beings we unknowingly fuel the planetary destruction we so desperately rail against.

The OISE/UT Transformative Learning Center's description of transformative learning does a good job of expressing just such a radical shift in consciousness.

*Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awarenesses; our visions of*

*alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.*

This inquiry is about learning how to open to transformative lived experiences both in painting and in the wild, about sharing experiences with others, and about representing experiences on the page in order to keep them alive thus experiential for the reader.

\* \* \*

## Artful Earth Connection

*Art moved by empathic attunement, not tied to an art-historical logic but orienting us to the cycles of life, helps us to recognize that we are part of an interconnected web that ultimately we cannot dominate.*

(Gablik, 1991: 88)

The creative life force in everyone speaks in images, in music, in dance, in dreams, in trance and in mystical experiences. When fully engaged with it we have a sense of timelessness, of total absorption and pre-occupation. We are lost to its power, its motion and flow. We access the essence of self and nature, the creative living force that binds all beings together.

Bohm (1980: 81) describes art as a “fitting together” or to “fit” and “beauty” as “to fit in every sense”. Therefore art making is able to bridge the human and the natural, and promote the co-evolution, in the Darwinian sense of a good fit between a species and its environment<sup>8</sup>. Bohm (1998: 91) continues,

*If we note that human activities are described by the word “artifact”, which means literally, “that which has been made to fit”, we can see the need, in our new world view, for a related word to call attention to how fitting takes place more generally. We thus introduce a new word-artmovement, which means “the movement of fitting”. And so the metaphysics we are now exploring can be expressed as “all is artmovement”. Not only is inanimate nature created and formed in an art movement, but so also is life, in all its evolving and developing forms, going on to man (sic), with his capacity for perception, feeling, thought and action. It follows then of course that the creation of artifacts by human beings is now to be regarded as a special case of artmovement.*

Despite the benefits of art making in terms of making deep and lasting even evolutionary connections, and the fact that art making is a universally human behaviour, Dissanayake (2000:

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<sup>8</sup> According to Dissanayake (1995: 20) Darwinism has been misrepresented by social darwinists and rabid capitalists alike in their desire to support unchecked competition and survival of the fittest. She states, “For a true Darwinist it is the inclusive survival of the fit that matters, not the exclusive survival of the fittest, and the former results from the selection of the successfully competing and co-operating individuals, not the promotion of the most ruthless and self-centered individual (or group) as (socio)biological singularities”. Therefore the ‘fit’, the match of individual or species with the environment, is what survives.

201) believes we have degenerated into a very fragmentary relationship with art making in our society.

*Although they are perhaps better than nothing, compared with the place of the arts in traditional societies they resemble the unintegrated spasmodic movements of a creature that has been mortally injured or taken from its natural life-sustaining element. In quite a real sense, like zoo animals we have been removed from our natural environment and show the exaggerated consequences of this displacement in the fitfulness of our artistic ventures as well as in more unsavoury pathologies of unmet needs for belonging, meaning and competence.*

Another way to look at the sad state of artistic expression in our society is to see ourselves as asleep.

*... to awaken to the creative state of mind is not at all easy. On the contrary, it is one of the most difficult things that could possibly be attempted. Nevertheless, I feel that it is for each of us individually and society as a whole the most important thing to be done in the circumstances in which humanity now finds itself. And the key is,.... to be continually aware of and alert to the mechanical reactions that are causing us to "go to sleep" again and again. (Bohm, 1998: 24)*

Yet in many respects it is difficult to sustain a relationship with the creative. It takes courage and tenacity. For many it is easier to just push down the impulse to create which is sad given that art-making can be a sacred bridge (Kryder, 1994) between the conscious and the not-yet-speech-ripe unconscious, or the human and the earth.

Art making in this inquiry can be described as, "art for *all* life's sake". Nachmanovitch, (1990: 181), Gablik (1995) and Field (1957:140) write about the role of art making in day to day life. I have added the emphasis of "all" to make clear that I am assuming that art-making in the context of this inquiry is done in relation to both humans and the more-than-human world. Therefore I am also making the assumption that creativity and hence art making is a natural ability shared by all living beings. Creating and especially self-creating is what all living beings do (Capra, 1996).

Some artists like Freidenreich Hundertwasser (Rand, 1991) have made it their life work to help people understand the intimate connection between nature's creativity and their own. The connection to the sacred life force of the universe comes through time spent in that timeless state of creative contemplation. Without that connection we are rootless and disconnected from ourselves and the universe.

*Art and nature are siblings, branches of the one tree ...*

(Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 60)

We also impoverish our own creativity when we ravage the earth. If we lived on the moon our imaginations would be bound by the sensory dulling of the moonscape (Swimme & Berry, 1992: 250).

*For in the desolate expanse of the moon our only conception of the divine would reflect the lunar landscape, our imagination would be as bleak as the moon, our sensitivities as dull, our intelligence as blank. We cannot change the outer world without also changing our inner world. A desolate Earth will be reflected in the depths of the human.*

Part and parcel of re-balancing our earth relationship involves experiencing our own inherent wild spontaneity. This spontaneous creative aspect seems to be easily accessible in childhood, bids a hasty retreat underground in the face of the development of schooled critical reason but can be uncovered and accessed again with an openness, and a letting go of the fear that drives us to control its power.

It is this untamed or wild aspect of self that we find frightening and threatening, and therefore often avoid, control and distrust it. However when we distance from our wildness we enter into a form of eco-alienation (Clinebell, 1996: 32). Not surprisingly, the human attempt to tame the wild has simultaneously tamed our deepest potentials.

*When Thoreau said in his essay on walking, "in wildness is the preservation of the world," he made a statement of unsurpassed significance in human affairs. I know of no more comprehensive critique of civilization itself, this immense effort that has been made over these*

*past ten thousand years to bring the natural world under human control. Such an effort that would even tame the inner wildness of the human itself. It would end by reducing these vast creative possibilities of the human to trivial modes of expression.* (Berry, 1999: 69-70)

The alienation from the earth that results from our fervent attempts to tame and control it out of fear, also leaves us with a lack of energy and desire to act on behalf of the planet. We have become impaired in our ability to access a guiding vision that will help us act in ways that adequately address the complex environmental problems of our time.

*... often we find that our attempts to fix things only end up by making them worse. Part of the impasse is that in dealing with an intricately interconnected network of patterns on the scale of the global ecology, neither our reasoning faculties nor our feeling faculties are equal to the job. The only capacity that our species has that is powerful enough to pull us out of this predicament is our self-realizing imagination. The only antidote to destruction is creation.* (Nachmanovitch, 1990: 181)

The feelings of fear of both the unknown and the uncontrollable that surface for many when they are in the wilderness (Tuan, 1979) also emerge with art making of any kind (Cassou & Cubley, 1995). Letting go of fear and trusting the art making process gets easier over time, just as letting go of fear of the wilderness and gaining a measure of confidence and security also develops over many experiences in the wild. Part of the process of letting go of fear involves accepting it and realising that having control is an illusion. Paradoxically, once we let go to the spontaneous unrestrained wild aspects of self and the universe, we gain a sense of connection and security that is lacking when we try to plan and manipulate. We also become versed in the patterns that govern our ongoing relationship to the earth and therefore become better able to predict when we are in danger. We develop a healthy respect for that which we can not control. We move from a position of fear-based alienation to one of secure eco-bonding. Only then can we begin to remove the barriers that insulate us from the wild power of the earth.

Animating, unblocking, and releasing our wild creative capacities allows us to open to a sense of earth connection, animate new visions and remain fuelled and energized for the difficult tasks ahead. Once experienced, this transformed sense of connection is reflected in our relationship to the planet in the form of creative right feeling, thought and action. Self-interested

action that is rooted in this intimate relationship is also in the earth's best interest. Without a creative, sustainable, flexible vision our actions will always be left wanting. We need artful creation for all life's sake.

The more we are able to nurture our own spontaneity, the more sustainable and ecologically sound our thoughts, actions and feelings will become. Once this is accomplished we become able to embrace cosmological transpersonal identifications where all beings are experienced as aspects of a single unfolding reality (Fox, 1990: 252). Fox likens cosmological identification to the branching pattern of a tree.

*If we empathically incorporate (i.e., have a lived sense of) the evolutionary, "branching tree" cosmology offered by modern science then we can think of ourselves and all other presently existing entities as leaves on this tree - a tree that has developed from a single seed of energy and that has been growing for some fifteen billion years, becoming infinitely larger and infinitely more differentiated in the process. A deep-seated realization of this cosmologically based sense of commonality with all that is, leads us to identify ourselves more and more with the entire tree rather than just with our leaf (our personal, biographical self), the leaves on our twig (our family), the leaves we are in close proximity to on other twigs (our friends), the leaves on our minor sub-branch (our community), the leaves on our major sub-branch (our cultural or ethnic grouping), the leaves on our branch (our species), and so on. At the limit, cosmologically based identification,....., therefore leads to impartial identification with all particulars (all leaves on the tree).*

(Fox, 1990: 255-256)

We enter into an "I-Thou" relationship (Buber, 1937) where new habits can be chosen and new actions can be undertaken which are infused with a broad sustainable life-centered vision. Empathy, compassion for all life, including self is about dissolving down self and feeling another's feelings, seeing through another's eyes, truly experiencing another without fear of losing self. Empathy is not about observing and labeling someone's emotions, it is about compassionately feeling someone else's pain without fearing a loss of self.

## Spontaneous Painting

Although poetry, drawing, and photography are also featured in this inquiry, the practice of spontaneous painting forms the backbone. Poetry grows out of painting for the most part. Painting leads to attractions that are satisfied by nature experiences both of which are deepened and recorded through painting, drawing and photography. These different modalities dance together. Painting is the weaver that holds together the strands.

“Spontaneous” is the word I have chosen to describe a painting process that attempts to be free flowing, organic and wild. Painting in this manner is “occurring or caused by natural impulse” (Chambers Dictionary of Etymology, 1988). The word “spontaneous” is synonymous with “instinctive”, “automatic”, “involuntary”, “uninhibited”, “unforced” and “natural” (Rogets College Thesaurus, 1978). Spontaneous art creation can also be called intuitive, visionary, self-taught, and raw. It belongs to the larger category of “outsider art” (Maizels, 2000: 11).

*Outsider Art holds in question our established beliefs of art education and art history. It is a glorification of the individual, creating only for themselves, without need of training or a critical explanation or awareness of art history. It is the purest and most natural form of visual expression. Its influence can only grow stronger as more people discover its power and its purity.*

What is unique about spontaneous painting is its power to simultaneously animate and dissolve down “self” in order to connect with all living beings. Uniquely in humans, artmaking is a response to the experience of our animal nature (Dissanayake, 1995). The therapeutic aspects of this work go beyond the individual painter and any given painting created.

Spontaneous painting is an on-going contemplative practice much like meditation that requires commitment and dedication. Painting of this nature is similar to Field’s (1957: 140) description of “contemplative action”.

*In all the years before happening upon the free drawing method I had had doubts about the relative value of a contemplative attitude to life against an active one; for it seemed that only in the contemplative state did the*

*richness of the facts become apparent; as soon as active purposes appeared the facts seemed to lose their vital essence and become the mere essences of their purposes. But now it was clear where the mistake had been, it lay in thinking of contemplation as essentially involving sitting and action as being essentially purposive. What the method of the free drawings has embodied was something that could be called 'contemplative action'; and it was this, whenever achieved, which brought back the full sense of the significance of the facts as more than instruments of one's private purposes.*

The contemplative aspect to spontaneous painting couples the stillness of meditation with the movement or action of the painting body on the page. It also moves one beyond the self to incorporate all living beings. To contemplate is to muse and engage in quiet still mindfulness. To paint contemplatively is to remain still while in the moving dance of the paints. Letting go to the flow of the paints is the desire, in order to animate the inherently spontaneous aspect of being. We simultaneously access the source of our being and connect into the life source of all beings when we paint in this manner. This work is about stilling ourselves enough to give colour and form to earth energy.

At one point I was calling this work "biopainting" because the prefix "bio" embraces two main aspects of the painting process I have been following. We simultaneously paint our "biography" and begin to know our uniqueness at the same time as we melt into connection with all living beings, with the "biosphere". The resulting images from this process could be called "bio-graphics" since they are both artifacts from individual painting journeys and snap shots of biological forms and processes.

Instead, over time I have come to embrace the name "spontaneous painting" as being the best fit for this work because it most clearly emphasizes the natural aspect that is the core of its power, spontaneity being one quality that all living beings share in common. All earth beings including humans have this deeply mysterious and creative, spontaneous aspect.

*To understand the human role in the functioning of the Earth we need to appreciate the spontaneities found in every form of existence in the natural world, spontaneities that we associate with the wild- that which is uncontrolled by human dominance. We misconceive our role if we*

*consider that our historical mission is to "civilize" or "domesticate" the planet, as though wildness is something destructive rather than the ultimate creative modality of any form of earthly being. We are not here to control. We are here to become integral with the larger Earth community. The community itself and each of its members has ultimately a wild component, a creative spontaneity that is its deepest reality, its most profound mystery.* (Berry, 1999: 48)

Learning to live in communion with the spontaneous life spark over time, teaches us how to live in balance and harmony with all earth beings. Wild spontaneity is a powerful easily accessible channel for connection. The spontaneous nature of this kind of art making allows us to embrace our own spontaneity. No special talent is required to create in this manner.

*To discover that you can paint without special talent is a great revelation. An endless stream runs through you, enough to paint for lifetimes. Talent is universal. You can dip into the source to your heart's content. Everyone is good at what comes to them spontaneously.*

(Cassou & Cubley, 1995: 17)

Spontaneous painting is part and parcel of a range of free play techniques long used by Art Therapists to help free up access to unconscious material. One of the early pioneers of spontaneous art making was Florence Cane who helped her students create authentic images through recognizing the essential role of bodily experiences in art creation. She recognized the integrating power of animating and giving space to the artist within each of us (Cane, 1951).

Joanna Field (1957) was also an early pioneer from the field of psychoanalysis who chronicled her coming to know about self in the universe through spontaneous drawing and painting. She was deeply interested in the relationship of both the inner and the outer, and the mind and the body, as experienced in her creations. She was also very interested in the relationship between spontaneous art and nature.

*So what the artist,...., is doing, fundamentally, is not recreating in the sense of making again what has been lost (although he is doing this), but creating what is, because he is creating the power to perceive it. By continually breaking up the established familiar patterns (familiar in his particular culture and time in history) of logical common sense divisions of me-not-me, he really is creating "nature", including human nature.*

(Field, 1957: 161)

Spontaneous art creation can take many forms including but not limited to: sculpture, poetry, drawing, improvisational music, dance, movement, writing, and drama. However, the medium used is secondary to the nature of the process of letting go of the analytical mind and returning to the place where the playful embodied child can run free. Its playful and free nature is art's preferred mode of being (Gadamer, 1994). It is also the mode of being that allows us to create the deepest and most lasting benefits for self and the earth. We can experience a new way of dissolving into nature.

*When painting, ..., there occurred, ... , a fusion into a never-before-known wholeness; not only were the object and oneself no longer felt to be separate, but neither were thought and sensation and feeling and action. All one's visual perceptions of colour, shape, texture, weight, as well as thought and memory, ideas about the object and action towards it, the movement of one's hand together with the feeling of delight in the "thusness" of the thing, they all seemed fused into a wholeness of being which was different from anything else that had ever happened to me. It was different because thought was not drowned in feeling, they were somehow all there together. Moreover when this state of concentration was really achieved one was no longer aware of oneself doing it, one no longer acted from a center to an object as remote; in fact, something quite special happened to one's sense of self. And when the bit of painting was finished, there was before one's eyes a permanent record of the experience, giving a constant sense of immense surprise at how it ever happened; it did not seem something that oneself had done at all. Certainly not the ordinary everyday self and way of being.*

(Field, 1957: 161)

When I first encountered it, I was so moved by the dedication to Field's book *On not being able to paint*. In it she says, "To my son and his generation and may they not take as long as I have in finding out about these matters". It was as though she had made a marvelous discovery, that no one had told her about before. This is also how I felt when I first began to paint. No one told me what I could come to know through moving materials around a canvas. I felt like I was the first person on earth to discover the power of painting to connect the painter to all beings in the universe. The euphoria burst through every aspect of my being. This feeling does not seem to leave.

*It is no wonder that painters can be so entranced by paint. Substances occupy the mind profoundly, tethering moods to thoughts, tangling stray*

*feelings with the movements of the body, engaging the full capacity of response and concentrating it on uncompromising lumps of paint and colour. There is no meaning that cannot seem to flow from the paint itself...paint is a finely tuned antenna, reacting to every unnoticed movement of the painter's hand, fixing the faintest shadow of a thought in colour and texture.*  
(Elkins, 2000: 192-3)

Painters can spend their entire lives in this dance, for there are always new territories, new feelings, new problems to overcome. Painters are engaged in life creating life. Painting is a wild experimental dance. It engages the painter in the moving resonance of self dissolving into a co-creative relationship with forces not completely in their control.

*...the arts process provides me with a meeting-place, a dancing-ground of change, where the worlds within interact with those beyond my skin. It is a passionate process, difficult, often painful, and also ecstatic and peaceful by turns.*  
(Kellen-Taylor 1998: 303)

There is a "being in the universe" contemplative aspect to spontaneous painting that best fits with my vision of the role of art in the transformation of the relationship of the self with the earth. By engaging in the creation of images and forms using spontaneous painting, we can begin to story both self and the earth. Image creation is a process that captures the mind, heart and soul. We can learn a new reciprocal way of seeing. By creating without rationality, criticism or an eye fixed on the quality of the end product, we can enter a rich dialogue between self and the earth.

*Art is contemplation. It is the pleasure of the mind which searches into Nature and which there divines the spirit by which Nature herself is animated.*  
(Rodin in Paul Gsell, 1983: 1)

Creating opens us to creation and steps us bodily in the nature of creation, of life so that connection with life comes in a flowing resonant way. When we create we not only learn about and heal the self, we also come alive and are en-livened, woven back into the web of relations in a deeply felt way. We come to be versed in the language of creation, we move with it, we feel it bodily when the acquaintance of authentic expression is met, in whatever form it takes. We come to know that engagement of this kind is not possible from a distance, that to truly know the creative we must move with it, dive into it in all its forms. Knowing nature does not come from

furrowed brow distanced analysis, rather it involves feeling the rhythms of life in the body and moving with them. Therefore a painting journey of this nature is an attempt to harmoniously co-create with the earth while attempting to let go the need to control its creative power out of fear. While co-creating in this manner we simultaneously feel and express the universal life force, the pattern that connects all beings (Bateson, 1979). We commune with the wild aspect of the earth. It evokes a cycle of engagement with the multiple dimensions of the wild process of self-transformation. By painting over time we re-connect and become sustainable earth beings again. Experiences of this kind are crucial for the sustainable bonding of the human with the earth.

*Only experiences that profoundly alter our view of nature and reconnect us with the divinity in ourselves and in the environment can empower people to commit themselves to the prodigious task before them. The therapeutic methods must be powerful enough to shift the ground of our being so that we experience the Earth in its living reality.*

(Mack, 1995: 284)

In my journey through the literature on ecologically based art-making practices I found very few people who have incorporated an ecological perspective in their work, except for Maureen Kellen-Taylor. In her piece *Imagination and the World: A Call for an Ecological Expressive Arts Therapy* (1998) and in her doctoral thesis *Mindscapes to Landscapes: Towards Changing Worldview* (1999), she makes the plea for an expressive arts response to the need to deepen the connection between humans and the natural world. Art therapists are consistent about extolling the personally transformative power of spontaneous art making. However as a field, art therapy has not adequately developed a foundation of ecological sustainability. Kellen-Taylor believes that ecologically grounded expressive arts processes hold the promise of enlivening human-earth reconnection through the artist's expanding identification with all beings and the development of deep caring relationships. In this sense, therapy can be embedded in the human-earth relationship. The health and well being of the individual becomes a mirror for the health and sustainability of the human-earth relationship.

She describes her first encounter with a new way of seeing that she names "looking between". She made this discovery as she drew the space between tree branches.

*First I noticed the spaces: then I realized that the spaces held relationships and were equally as important as the things that made the spaces. I wondered if the things made the spaces anymore than the spaces, or the relationships with in them, made the things. I practiced seeing the things and the spaces simultaneously and discovered a diffuse way of seeing that allowed me to apprehend a world of patterns. No longer a collection of discrete things and people, I saw now that I inhabit a pattern that includes everything. The joy of knowing that there is no where to fall out of, that all is connected, colours my world with a sense of awe.*

(Kellen-Taylor, 1999: 304)

Kellen-Taylor engages in art making as a way to bridge herself with the earth. Often her work is done in a natural setting in co-creation with a tree or an animal. In contrast, my work began when I started to paint feelings. By giving colour and form to feelings and then marveling at the natural patterns and forms that emerged, I began to feel natural. Over time, this practice has led me to paint and be in the wilderness where I can begin to open my senses to messages. I began by clearing out so that I could take nature in.

*To bring back the creative life, the waters have to be clean and clear again. We have to wade into the sludge, purify the contaminants, reopen the apertures, protect the flow from future harm.*

(Pinkola-Estes, 1992: 301)

I had to make space before I became ready to take in the kinds of experiences that Kellen-Taylor describes here.

*Through my art process I take in with all my senses the rock, tree, body that I am drawing. An exchange occurs in which my subject is imprinted in me and, by the same token, I have become part of "it". I must be careful not to disengage by reducing the relationship to an "it", an object to be packed away, labeled "rock". If I remember the exchange and contemplate it fully, the numinous event continues and transforms my relationship to all "rocks". This process can be perceived as en-souling the world- to which we humans belong. Here we approach respectfully and with reverence, not in an effort to match our painting techniques with what we perceive, nor owning the view through our gaze, but by being present through all of our senses.*

(Kellen-Taylor, 1998: 308)

Through spontaneous painting there is indeed a transformation in the ability to see that develops, there is also a sense of dissolving down into the creation, or the earth. Yet spontaneous

painting does not require the physical interaction between self and a being in nature for these experiences to occur. Rather, following wherever the brush spontaneously leads allows paint to bridge between the painter and their natural self. The painter begins to “see” self as a natural being. Nature no longer resides “outside”, rather the painter is nature.

*We have such potentially grand powers for empathy and communication, since there is something in us of every animal, and something of plants, and of stones and of seas, for we are woven of the same fabric as everything on earth, and our textures and rhythms are those of the planet itself.* (Abram, 1988: 313)

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While painting I am fully alive. What I do is natural. I set up the materials and let what is meant to happen that day, take place as best as it can. I cultivate the soil and then get out of the way as the seeds sprout on the page in the form of watery strokes. I close my eyes to choose the colours blindly and I do the same for the brush.<sup>9</sup> Then I open my eyes and let my hand and the brush move the paint around the page at will. I need to be “present” in order to sense when the chosen colour is finished so that the next colour can be chosen blindly and applied spontaneously. I try to “let go” to the process and see where the paints will take me. I have no concern for the product created. The goal is to remain mindfully absorbed and to let go the need to arrive at any place in particular.<sup>10</sup> If my attention is focused on attempting to control or predict the finished product then the contemplative state is temporarily lost. Therefore there is a “being in the universe” aspect to spontaneous painting.

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<sup>9</sup> According to Nachmanovitch (1990: 51) “for art to appear we must disappear”. We must let go of the mind, the personality, the judging eye and be lost to the flow. By closing my eyes I am helped into this state of disappearance.

<sup>10</sup> The meditative state associated with the spontaneous creation of art is also akin to the flow experience described by Csikszentmihalyi (1996). The flow experience is characterized by a loss of self or ego, and a deep concentration or pre-occupation with what we are doing in the moment.

When I feel the painting is finished I record how I've been feeling that day, the order in which the colours came up any reactions I had to the colours or forms created and then often a poem emerges around some noted aspect of the painting. The poem is free associative in nature and often provides deeper insights and wisdom. Often it initiates a dialogue between myself and the painted colours and forms.

Traditionally, in creative work of this nature, images are often placed in the service of the dreamer artist much like life on the planet has been enslaved by the human. Therefore I avoid analyzing the images for meaning. Instead I interact with the images and experience them as living beings in their own right.<sup>11</sup> By experiencing images in this way I can begin the long journey back to re-energizing my own deep connection to all beings.

The process of painting allows me to experience a sense of timelessness and universal connection while giving life-breath to aspects of my uniqueness<sup>12</sup>. The product of painting, a form a colour a texture or a particular combination of the three is like a record of the journey at this time. The resulting images are natural or wild creations that give colour and form to the life force present during that session. Images recur and new ones emerge.

I have begun to story both my self and the earth with which I live. I have access to the source.<sup>13</sup> By creating without rationality criticism or an eye fixed on the quality of the end product, I have been able to enter a rich dialogue between

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<sup>11</sup> It is detrimental to the life-enhancing message of an image to attempt to pin down a meaning or somehow "explain" what it is saying. James Hillman (1997: 46) cautions against this tendency to define the meanings of animal symbols in his writings about dreams, "we must animate our images thereby giving a life soul back to them. In our eagerness for conceptual beings, we ignore the actual beast. Analysis and interpretation, even Jung's active imagination is done for the sake of the dreamer's soul not the soul of the animal image".

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Berry (1988) states that the universe is a communion of differentiated subjects and not a collection of objects. For beings to live sustainably on the earth each must be able to animate their full uniqueness.

<sup>13</sup> We are offered a connection to the source when we engage in spontaneous painting. The source is embodied, connects all of us, is revealed in creative play and is the energy that first set the universe in motion. "the source is that deepest part of you, that part that remembers everything with absolute clarity. It is the body intelligence that exists without words..... As the collective memory of the creation of the universe and the history of evolution, the source is also home to the primordial imagery of myth, dreams and remembrances" (Gold, 1998: 9).

myself and the earth. Often we become as one and it is unclear whether I am in the earth or the earth is in me. Both sensations are present simultaneously. Image creation is a process that captures my mind, heart and soul. It has shifted my self image to include all life forms as I see my reflection in painted clouds, oceans, birds, sunbursts, stars, grass, trees, animals, mud and most recently moths.

Yes I am apparently alone in my studio with the door closed, ostensibly separate from the rest of the world when I create each piece. Yet in actual fact I am in a co-creative dance with the universe. I am in contact with my child self, with my adult self today, with all beings who have come before whose wisdom is stored in my DNA and with all earth beings alive in the wilderness. All come together in my little studio space, all coalesce and present themselves as I move my paint-filled brush across the page.

Therefore a new kind of "earthwise" listening and seeing is at the core of sustainable human-earth reconnection through spontaneous painting. By opening up to these new ways, one opens up to new understandings of self and the earth. These understandings are ageless and wise. They connect all living beings into an interdependent whole and therefore subjectively weave us into that whole when we make their acquaintance.

### More Introductory Comments

It is a big challenge to combine measured words with the earth-connecting experience of spontaneous painting. How does one capture such melding in writing? How do I pinpoint, place, organize and present experiences that are so life-filled and spontaneous? How can I still life-giving experiences enough so that they can be shared, but not so much that they become life-less and flat? How can I share spontaneously painted experiences of earth connection inside the boundaries of text and still have the work remain exciting, free and creative?

The strong resistance I have felt these last few months as I endeavour to formally share this work stems from this quandary. As I write this, I am at times still paralyzed by the thought of chapters, ordered development of topics, correct spacing of margins and text, much like black outlines once paralyzed my painted spontaneity<sup>14</sup>. The empty bounded compartments called “pages” can make me short of breath. Sometimes I feel scattered, cranky and frustrated in their presence. Occasionally I fear I will never come to some agreement, some resolution that will satisfy. Yet I have endeavoured to find a way to bring together the ordered and the spontaneous into a coherent form since this is ultimately the same challenge faced by all people in organized western societies when they attempt a renewed relationship to the earth. The same tension I feel in attempting to bridge the wild creative and the ordered intellectual is just the tension needed in order to find a sustainable melding of the two. I believe that it is out of that tension that truly fitting visionary initiatives will emerge.

I have also come to realize that it is imperative that I share this work. As difficult as it may be to express experiences in text that will truly do them justice, I must offer some glimpses of what can be attained. Otherwise I’ve failed in a central aspect of my task. By painting without sharing I am not giving back to the world<sup>15</sup>. I am containing, constricting, and bounding myself from others. I will become still and stuck like so many black and white lines as a result. If I don’t connect my experience with others I will remain isolated from the growth that comes from outside response and reflection. I will not be doing my part to reinvent the human-earth relationship and nurture others in their own re-invention.

In addition, not sharing counters all I have learned from the practice of spontaneous painting. Through painting I have come to know that I am one unique being in a complex interdependent web of relationships. I have a contribution to make that when shared, will like a pebble thrown into a still pond, reverberate and affect whoever it touches. It is my responsibility to share my unique piece of the puzzle for the benefit of all. To give life to others, I must still

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<sup>14</sup> *“I have a sore throat now and have had a headache for most of the last three days. My eyes hurt when I move them. I feel constrained by the lines. I feel like I’m being asked to fill in a child’s colouring book. I’ve lost my spontaneity”.* Journal, August 18, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> *“The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human at the species level with critical reflection within the community of life systems in a time- developmental context by means of story and shared dream experience”.* (Berry, 1999. Port Burwell Lecture).

my experiences enough so that they can be shared. So if it is my desire to help others simultaneously renew their own unique contribution and their source of earth connection, I must find a way to share my work, to connect with them, to connect my ordered and spontaneous knowing somehow. But how to share?

There is a strong argument for solely using paintings and poetry to express the experience of earth connection through spontaneous painting since descriptive words and labels are a product of the thinking mind which often flattens experience. Misused, words can have a sort of taming effect, which makes us a controller of an experience rather than a participant or better yet co-creator of it. In academia the separating power of words is legendary. Although words can be very useful for pinpointing the fine grained qualities of an experience and communicating them to others the world over, what is re-presented in words is always second to and by necessity a diminishment of the actual experience.

*This qualitative world is immediate before it is mediated, presentational before it is representational, sensuous before it is symbolic.*

(Eisner, 1991: 5)

Also “the medium is the message” (McLuhan, 1964). Centuries of cataloguing, labeling, organizing, and mapping life on earth have led us astray. We have developed a stance of separation that promotes the overpowering of the earth for our purposes. We have forgotten that the map is not the territory (Sheldrake, 1990a). We have simultaneously enslaved our own earth aspect. Not only does it become very difficult to form a trusting relationship when there is such a large power differential between the thinking mind and the earth, this imbalance easily spins out of control. The openness and flexibility required for a creative response to earth devastation is also plundered and ultimately discounted as being frivolous and childish.

Yet many believe that a purely intellectual understanding of earth wisdom is not sufficient for sustainable human-earth reconnection and ultimately does not motivate people to act in earth nurturing ways (Berry, 1999; Purpel, 1989; Thomashow, 1996; O’Sullivan, 1999; Selby, 2000). Therefore I have decided to share both art and poetry in an attempt to preserve the wonder and mystery of the experience of earth connection. It is an attempt to entrance and

generate a wild earthy experience on the page. It is an attempt to move beyond the sometimes constricting and narrow bondage of the mind.

Therefore the words I use are at turns poetic, narrative and academic. Each offers a slice of what the experience of earth connection through spontaneous painting can be. Words that come from my relationship to the earth and my painting process are in a special font called *Light Wave*. Grey boxed areas also contain stories that support or in some way contrast with the text. Most of these stories involve painting experiences. Others are nature experiences of my own.

Images and words shared in this thesis, for the most part have been generated by me in a co-creative relationship with the earth. However a number have been generated by the six other painters who have participated in the creation of this work. These painters have unique stories to share about their experiences of earth connection through spontaneous painting. Yoshiko Matsuda, Jonathan Metcalfe, Ayako Nozawa, Heather Spurdakos, Hannah Van Alsten (pseudonym), and Charlene Wood have all shared their words and images. Their images and stories have been woven with my own throughout this work. Their contribution generates an enlivening richness and complexity. Their images are credited as such, and like the authors I quote, their words are also in *Times New Roman Italics* as I feel their narratives need to be accorded the same stature as words found in books. Except for a few single quotes placed in the body of the text, their words appear in the context of the original dialogue in which they occurred.

At times there is a tension that develops between the artful representations and a more traditional academic writing style. This is an intentional tension since the experience of reconnection to the earth is in a tense 21<sup>st</sup> Century context. In order to maintain a balance between the forces of the earth and society, learning how to navigate or straddle this tension is essential. Creative solutions to the current environmental crisis can come from this middle space between the wild earthy spontaneous and the tamed. Also stepping back and observing the nature of the tension can be helpful in meeting this end, since we are so often too deeply

immersed in it in our daily lives. I feel that this sort multi-modal presentation style enables one to do that kind of perspective taking.

My inquiry process mirrors my painting process in that I am engaging in the stories that images have to tell. The stories shared here came from an ongoing relationship to the spontaneous images. In presenting images in this thesis, it is my hope that some images will create a mood, others will foreshadow a theme to be developed and many will enhance words in their description of complex concepts. Most importantly the images will tell their own stories. I think it is important for me to create an experience for others at the same time as I describe experiences. So sharing images will also encourage the reader's own stories to emerge.

I often write poems after painting and while journaling. They seem to deepen my understanding of an experience as well as enrich my attempts to express my experiences to others. Sometimes images speak to me in poems and we dialogue together in this language. At times poems will give voice to the knowing of an image. If the painted image could speak this is what it might have to say. When I am co-creating a poem or painting, I am communing with the earth and when I engage with the product I am afforded the opportunity to commune again. In using the term "co-creating" I am hoping to instill a vision of a dance, a sharing, a duet of sorts between self and earth. This co-creation will continue indefinitely as others are given the opportunity to engage with the creations I will be sharing. Poetry will enrich images, concepts and develop themes shared in narrative form and will allow others the opportunity for a rich sort of co-creative earth communion. Poetry and images will act as bridges. They will link me with other spontaneous painters, they will link others interacting with this work, they will link the experience of spontaneous painting with words, and finally they will link us all to the wisdom of the earth.

For those readers not versed in alternative forms of representation in a conventional academic text like a dissertation, the experience of engaging with this work may bring to the surface many judgements and criticisms associated with rigor, standards and the like. My response is that privileging one way of knowing the earth over another is unsustainable, unbalanced and ultimately responsible for our current state of disconnection. I believe that

humans must learn to become respectful, flexible and open to all ways of knowing the earth in order to have the necessary skills, visions and resources to begin a new ecologically sustainable relationship. It has been my experience that learning to commune with the earth is in large part about learning to speak many different languages, dance different dances, and paint different paintings. Therefore the reader is encouraged to come to the text with a quiet mind and an open heart. What will hopefully result is the experience of an artful heart to heart exchange.

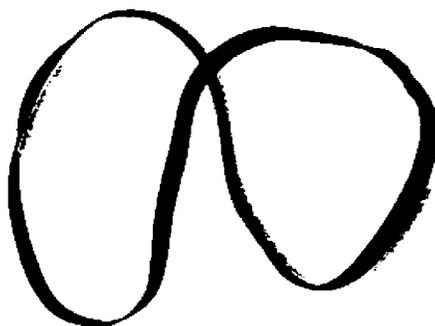
In dark moments I wonder if I am simply writing about my own personal connection issues. Not only am I having difficulty conceiving my first child, I'm also a woman who struggles to be more respectful of her creativity and less dependent on home baked cookies in the afternoon to get through the day. I fear that I strive too much to connect with my emotions, yet I often still avoid their expression in front of others for fear of appearing weak. I struggle with the dance of attach and attack, love and aggression, connection and separation in their extremes. I was schooled in the tools of emotional abandonment, in the dark rejection of feminine receptivity and weakness. So, before I began painting, I rejected this nurturing aspect in myself, in family and friends. If I haven't painted for a week or two I watch the judging destruction gain a toe-hold again. Like an alcoholic I must come to terms with the life-long nature of my condition.

I watch the feminine living separately from the masculine in so many people I know. One writer calls it the dance between the eternal girl and the armoured amazon (Leonard,1985). I have been both. My feminine can be girlish weepy, sentimental and ungrounded. My masculine can be hardened, distant, cruel and headstrong. My little girl has a broken heart, my male has a swollen head. Both are disconnected from earth wisdom as a result. I have a life long task ahead of me.

So, it's for certain that my personal dynamics are part of this journey. So yes maybe I'm writing about my personal issues around feeling connected yet I am also writing about societal issues. I am writing about the societal molding that continues to turn others into simultaneously armoured amazons and eternal children. In this sense I'm writing about personal stories of human-earth connection as it evolves and changes with long-term spontaneous art making. The

common threads of these stories will hopefully provide a depth and vibrancy that resonates with whoever makes their acquaintance.

In many respects reconnecting with the earth is also a simultaneous reconnecting with all aspects of self. Therefore it is hoped that while you engage with this work you will become aware of the seamless nature of this inner-outer dance. A fitting metaphor for the relationship between inner and outer can be seen in the relationship of surfaces and edges of a Mobius strip. By following your finger along a surface of a Mobius strip in its entirety you are moved from an inner position, to an outer position and back to inner, and then outer again, over and over without end. It is impossible to pinpoint exactly where the transitions have been made. Somehow you simply awaken to the realization that you are no longer where you thought you were.



Much like the nature of a mobius strip, the experience of human-earth reconnection is not entirely inner work nor is it outer work. Rather it is “both-and” or an enlivening “bond” created by holding both aspects together. It is not entirely about someone’s unique “place”, unique experience, or the experience of unique aspects of self. Nor is it entirely about universal patterns of earth relationship, about dissolving self into earth soul or into “space”. Rather it is about being in a “sacred place” where all unique aspects commune and differentiate, become one and then distinct again. It is about developing and sharing flexible “bond” experiences that move us beyond “either-or” to the world of simultaneous communion and differentiation. We are invited to experience a sacred place of still-life, characterized by rooted expansiveness and grounded imaginings. It is the experience of this bonded, sacred place that gives us glimpses of what is required to have a truly sustainable relationship with the earth.

Therefore this work is about giving birth to new life, new vision, a new understanding of self in the present. It promotes a practice that leads to a way of being that is embodied and fluid,

emotional yet grounded. It is a marriage of sense and soul, heart and mind, male and female, self and the earth.

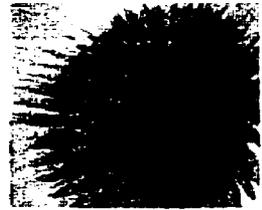
This thesis is complete yet not exhaustive. There is a wholeness to it that encourages me to send it out into the world. However it is in no way the final answer or last word on the transformative experiences of artful human-earth reconnection. There are as many experiences of the earth as there are living beings. No single person, or group can claim to have the experience fully fleshed out and pinned down. Rather, this work is about sharing a range of different experiences of the earth, encouraging others to begin their own engagement, helping others to open up to their own wild spontaneous nature and about developing sustainable human-planet relationships through the animation of our inherent earth aspects however it is managed. It is about celebrating the earth in all its diversity.

There was an intentional breadth to the question, *what is the experience of artful human earth connection?* This work is an exploration of the territory not an in depth study of one aspect of it. It is an attempt to get the lay of the land and to pull out the related themes, patterns and tensions that will hopefully inspire and fuel further research. Exploring the experience of artful connection to the earth through spontaneous painting is largely uncharted territory therefore it is appropriate and desirable to construct such a general map that others can use later as a guide for further more in-depth exploration.

This thesis has evolved into three main sections, each exploring a different aspect of the relationship between the complements of stillness and life. The first section entitled, *Stilling Life: Wildness and Domestication* shares instances when the fit between humans and the earth is poor. At times there is an attempt to control and contain what is wild, at other times, wild out of control life turns to chaos and destructiveness, this is a time when choosing stillness would have been more prudent. This section reveals what happens when we act on the notion of separateness from the earth and choose to live without a creative language or bridge between self and nature.



The second section, *A Still-Life: Painting the Pattern that Connects* describes spontaneous painting as a transformative earth connecting activity and reveals painting and artistic inquiry processes that promote a good fit. This section explores the joys and challenges associated with experiencing both stillness and life.



Finally the third section, *Still Alive: On Speaking Terms Again* shares fitting experiences of artful earth connection through images, narrative and poetry. This section shares stories of the new life born of the dance between stillness and life, when spontaneous painting bridges humans and the earth.



Finally I conclude the thesis with *Openings: A Conclusion*. In this section I review the journey taken and take a brief look at new journeys to come.

## Stilling Life: Wildness and Domestication

... on a poor fit between humans and the earth



How on earth did I get into this mess? This chaos this choice mongering cluster web unruly behaviour space? I can still hear "Be still will you!" "Stay still when I say so!" "Now jump when I whistle. I said jump already!". This was the loud language of quiet killing and rude awakening. The imposed stillness is killing when life is burgeoning and bursting forth. It is a confinement cell. Yet when stillness is needed it is death to pull on the tender still shoots. They move and grow at their own natural pace. Too much stillness, too much motion, too little stillness, too little motion.

This chapter briefly describes a distortion in the tension between stillness and life. Here, I juxtapose a narrative which depicts my own childhood learning with nature and how school teaches children to know, with late 19<sup>th</sup> Century lepidoptery "tools" and "recipes" (Ballard, 1891). I follow this with stories of stilling-life through habit, good intention, greed, anger, apathy and fear. The intention is to simultaneously create a portrait of connection and alienation, animation and death, passion and resignation. It's a window into ways of being that "incorporate" or allow nature to be embodied, contrasted with ways that separate and flatten. It's a view of how destructive our lives can be when we are not on speaking terms with the earth.

Pre-western cosmologies saw the universe as a living being with wisdom and wholeness (McLuhan, 1994). Early in the birth of western philosophy, “phusis” was the name given to this “being”, which when translated means “nature” (Bigwood, 1993). Phusis was seen as the simultaneous concealment and unconcealment of all life. Concealment is the rooted, under the earth, receptive aspect of being and unconcealment refers to the active reaching forth to the heavens. A useful metaphor for this is a tree whose branches, unconcealed reach for the heavens and sway with the wind, willing themselves higher and higher, while below the ground concealed in the rich earth, the roots expand their hold and ground the swaying (Bigwood, 1993). Heraclitus further developed the concept of “phusis” and named “love” as the bond that joins the simultaneous rising up and reclining back into the earth. The two movements were seen as joined, yet different, forming a whole. They contained a difference in sameness that has since been transmuted by modern western philosophy into a hierarchy of power. Unconcealment is now seen as the privileged ground from which the concealed is viewed. According to Bigwood (1993: 80):

*In western metaphysics, difference is not allowed to be as difference, but rather the one term unconcealment, is constituted as the privileged ground..., the other term is not given space to be itself. In our contemporary age, concealment, whose cluster of characteristics are similar to those historically associated with the feminine, is suppressed, feared and understood as that which must be overcome and brought into the light of unconcealment.*

The grave imbalance between the feminine and masculine aspects of being, mirrors the imbalance between humans and the planet. Just as unconcealed willing forth has been valued over the concealed feminine aspects of being, so to the will of humans has been valued over the wilderness. Eco-feminists have revealed the remarkable parallels between the denigration of the feminine in western culture and the concomitant denigration of the planet. The separation of the mind from the body, separates us from the planet and ultimately separates us from ourselves (Adams, 1996; Griffin, 1978; Merchant, 1981; Spretnak, 1991).

Western philosophy and understandings in ancient wisdom traditions have been enriched in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by what we have learned about nature through the sciences. Specifically, through the study of quantum physics we have come to see nature as being characterized by particle-wave duality. All beings at the sub-atomic level can be described as having both the

qualities of discrete particles and the expansive relationship aspects of a wave. The particle or discrete energy packet is mutually exclusive of the wave aspect, but both co-exist to form the whole that is the essence of all life. A complete picture of the nature of being only emerges when both aspects are combined (Zohar, 1990). According to Lovelock (1979: ix-x) science has also come to understand what story and myth have held to be true for thousands of years, namely that the earth is a self-regulating living being or organism in its own right.

*Journeys into space did more than present the Earth in a new perspective. They also sent back information about its atmosphere and its surface which provided a new insight into the interactions between the living and the inorganic parts of the planet. From this has arisen the hypothesis, the model, in which the Earth's living matter, air, oceans and land surface form a complex system which can be seen as a single organism and which has the capacity to keep our planet a fit place for life.*

This understanding parallels Thomas Berry's (1988) cosmological view of the nature of the universe which he describes as being a communion of differentiated subjects. There is both individual uniqueness and simultaneous communion of beings in our ever-changing universe.

The nature of the workings of humans is the same as that for the natural world.

*We are, in our essential makeup, composed of the same stuff and held together by the same dynamics as those which account for everything else in the universe. And equally- which brings out the enormity of the realization- the universe is made up of the same stuff and held together by the same dynamics as those which account for us. (Zohar, 1990: 101)*

Both identity and relationship aspects are present simultaneously in the body-mind. Our minds are both separate and conjoined, we are both bursting forth and reclining back. Also our bodies express both identity and relationship. We can both uniquely think and feel for ourselves, we can also dissolve ourselves down into the universe. Therefore we are simultaneously the concealed roots embedded in the earth and the support for the bursting forth of the branches in their relationship to the planet.

There is no divide between the mind and the body. Further there is no divide between the embodied mind and nature. They dance in a unified whole. As Bohm (1980) states, our day to day sense of a separate self is simply a perception in the explicate or unfolded order, but there is also a hidden reality called the implicate or enfolded order in which all are one. In the implicate order everything is enfolded in everything else.

We might therefore see the self as a full fluid participant in a life dance. As Selby (2000: 19) states in an attempt to move global and environmental educators beyond a web metaphor,

*...at the deeper third level of presence, where the web model becomes unsatisfactory, we need to consider things as determined by a dynamic unfolding of the sum total of their relationships, including their relationship to the whole. We need to see entities- ourselves, non-human animals, rocks, nation states, other political groupings- not first and foremost as objects but primarily as processes or dances. Phenomena (people, places, countries) at this level are co-evolving manifestations of a multileveled and multidimensional dance of internal and external relationships.*

It could be said that the steps we throw in the mix, our unique contribution to this dance is reflexivity. Through the human, the universe can become conscious of itself.

*We are a pervasive presence. By definition we are that reality in whom the entire Earth comes to a special mode of reflexive consciousness. We are ourselves a mystical quality of the Earth, a unifying principle, an integration of the various polarities of the material and the spiritual, the physical and the psychic, the natural and the artistic, the intuitive and the scientific. We are the unity in which all these inhere and achieve a special mode of functioning. In this way the human acts as a pervading logos. If the human is microcosmos, then the cosmos is macranthropos.*

(Berry, 1999: 174-5)

We are both human and nature, identity and relationship, particle and wave, in a fluid relational dance. Even when one tries to understand and contain one of the two distinct yet dependent aspects of the whole, there is a flip to the other member of the pair. For example, if I begin the exercise of defining my body as separate from the earth body I immediately run into trouble. I breath earth air, drink earth water, eat earth beings that enter my body and become my

flesh, my thoughts, my feelings and my actions. Yet at the same time I also sense that I am a person and not a tree or a waterfall. The problems begin when I'm not able to creatively be with the tension such a dance creates and resort to privileging one way of being in the world, one aspect of life at the expense of the other.

Without the full animation of our natural potential, we are forever encapsulated in our particle selves desperately fearing the loss of the power of our unique identities to the wilder, more connected earthy aspects of self that lurk just below our awareness. Therefore the western human has learned to live in a tense unnatural state of Cartesian isolation where we have ourselves believing that we are totally impenetrable from outside influences in an attempt to protect the integrity of the self (Zohar, 1990). Our attachment to a static perception of self as fixed and definable leads to a great deal of frustration.

*Out of ignorance, ... we divide the perceived world into separate objects that we see as firm and permanent, but which are really transient and ever-changing. Trying to cling to our rigid categories instead of realizing the fluidity of life, we are bound to experience frustration after frustration. The Buddhist doctrine of impermanence includes the notion that there is no self- no persistent subject of our varying experiences.*

(Capra, 1996: 294-295)

Macy (1991: 203) describes this divided world stance as being not only frustrating but also pathogenic, dysfunctional and largely responsible for the environmental crisis that we currently find ourselves in. She states,

*It is a delusion that self is so separate and fragile that we must delineate and defend its boundaries, that it is so small and needy that we must endlessly acquire and endlessly consume, that it is so aloof that we can- as individuals, corporations, nation-states or as a species- be immune to what we do to other things.*

This chapter will now continue with examples of the dysfunctional and unsustainable state of the affairs that results when one aspect of life and knowing is privileged and used to overpower another. This is a collection of writings and images that reveal aspects of a deeply embedded fear of the earthy wild that can be seen in the many ways we strive to control and domesticate. Examples were chosen because they reveal attempts at control that are misguided

and ultimately destructive. In many instances a distortion of the power between identity and relationship is highlighted. These vignettes if you will, create a portrait of imbalance, of unsustainability, and of maladaptation. They reveal some of the ways we avoid, segregate and divide the tame from the wild, as in separating or judging self from other. In contrast to an I-Thou relationship (Buber, 1937) we enter into an I-It relationship where

*...we are only able to take in a representation of an object into our psyches, where we make of it what we will. There is no dynamics of interpersonal relationship, only a dynamics of the individual psyche.*

(Zohar, 1990: 130).

We project our own fragmented state onto the earth thereby blocking our ability for reciprocal exchange (Greenway, 2000: e-mail communication).

This privileging and separating creates a deep fault or gap between the human and other life forms which demands continued effort to systematically overpower, avoid, contain, control, and kick down the wild out of fear (Berman, 1989). Paradoxically, what emerges is the destructive aspect of the wild in all its chaos and fury, which steels our resolve to attempt to control it with ever more drastic measures and determination.

And so the destructive dance goes.

\* \* \*

## Growing Up Still

...on how I learned to not fit



### Nature Experiences

The effects of childhood nature experiences and the deep knowing they engender lay dormant in many adults until they begin the life-long process of integrating the relationship between their wild spontaneous and rational aspects. The following are memories of my childhood earth knowing. I spent many hours journeying in the outdoors when I was young. Those experiences always provided me with a deep sense of comfort and freedom while I was in them. I felt profoundly nourished and connected. Sadly, somehow that sense of connection seemed to dissipate and lose its potency each time I returned back to my “regular life”. As I was moved away from earthy knowing, I felt more disconnected and anxious.

Although my explorations likely started before I could walk<sup>16</sup>, I remember first feeling the presence of nature when I began to walk to Sunnylea Public School at the age of 6. It was then that I was deemed old enough to make the trip to school alone. Something about the combination of aloneness, walking and natural spaces gave me a sense of being embraced by a powerful knowing.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Elation” as the child’s generic response to the surrounding world is first of all physical. The awakening of intellectual wonder, which is the response of the human nervous system to the external world, begins in the earliest coupling of the tiny organism with its environment, as the infant eats or breathes” (Cobb, 1977: 39).

<sup>17</sup> “The childhood landscape is learned on foot and a map is inscribed in the mind- trails and pathways and groves- the mean dog, the cranky old man’s dog, the field with a bull in it- going out wider and farther. All of us carry with us a picture of the terrain that was learned roughly between the ages of six and nine” (Snyder, 1990: 26-7).

Sunnylea  
 Was close to me  
 But far enough to discover  
 That trees change form  
 And grey skies storm  
 And buried things are hard to recover  
 That witches live in giant spruce glens  
 That leaves will burn when put under a lens  
 Some barking dogs can overcome pens  
 And when its raining its good to take cover  
 I learned to whistle and hum ramblly tunes  
 To run the whole distance and look out for coons  
 To kick a rock eat my lunch well past noon  
 To give a good friend a snow shower  
 The time it took to get me to school  
 Was the time I learned the golden rule  
 That all I can know and all thats true  
 Is learned through natures power

Riding my bicycle back and forth to school was allowed as I became 9 or 10. I loved the extra freedom it provided me. I had more time to ramble through the neighbourhood because my bicycle could get me to farther places faster. Soon I began to explore the myriad of trails in the ravine down the block from my home. My bike and I were fast friends. I have ridden almost continuously since then. It wasn't until four years ago that my husband and I bought our first car and found that our bikes began to spend long months languishing in the shed. We regret that and have vowed to get riding again.

I ride my bike to places far  
 I feel the breeze. I soothe the scar  
 That festers there when Im inside  
 That calls me forth begs me to ride  
 To jump on board to sweat and pant

To sense the road to pump to chant  
 Loud and sweet into the trees  
 Darting eyes and bouncing knees  
 Take me to worlds beyond the road  
 Take me to forests to pathways untold  
 Show me new colours new animals new friends  
 Who promise the ride will never end

In the summer my friends and I took off on riverwalks that we rarely seemed to tire of. I also walked the Saugeen River behind my best friend's farm. Riverwalking remains a passion for me. I move to distant lands but am always at home when I riverwalk. I prefer to walk in the river than to explore by boat or on the shore because I need to feel the river caressing my skin. I need to let the soles of my feet dance over the riverbed, just as the soul of my being needs to dance in the flow. Sometimes I need to swim through deep areas, climb over dams, or navigate stealthily through weeds. It is easier if I take only myself; no boats, no special shoes, and no guidebooks. That way I am unencumbered and enter into a deeply trusting relationship with the river world.

River walking

Is soul stalking

Akin to hunt and peck

No directions talking

No voices mocking

No watch or time to check

The water bubbles the spirit flows

The heart sings the soul knows

The place I am in the place I will go

So I take off my shoes I follow the show

The stones may be slippery the water cool

But the sensation of moving is the sacred tool

The energys rising as the current takes form

The birds are smiling only teachers have scorn

For students who wander, when books must be read

For children who slander all the things that they've said  
 About cleanliness, orderliness, seriousness and truth  
 About following the leader, about being uncouth  
 They just don't see why I must be in that muck  
 They worry in rivers I'll forever be stuck  
 They see it as pointless, some even see evil  
 When children follow instincts and cause such upheaval  
 Of mores and patterns and rules for behaviour  
 That dictate compliance, hold reason as saviour  
 Of all human beings with hopes for a future  
 Of all bright minds and hearts to be nurtured

But the river calls in wisdom so pure  
 The river beckons as the only cure  
 For boredom, order and the truth found in books  
 Its knowledge is deeper its force has strong hooks  
 That pull me under that draw me in  
 To the world of knowing that lies deep within  
 Its banks of history, its rocks of completeness  
 Its story unfolds as I give up my neatness  
 Let my pant legs soak in the juice of eternity  
 Feel the wetness splash away my fraternity  
 With head-felt knowing and judging of others  
 And return to my soul food under the covers  
 Of bird calls and rustlings deep in the bushes  
 As closer to happiness my true self pushes  
 So I'll be a good student, not follow teacher wishes  
 I'll head to the wise source, bathe fully in the riches  
 Of a wisdom more than mine, of a wisdom deep and sure  
 I'll bow down to the life force in my riverwalking cure

I loved the feeling of that timeless adventure. As I uncovered the mysteries around the next corner, I sensed an uncovering of the mystery of myself. Despite the disapproval voiced by teachers and some adults in my life, I was hooked on the force of the river and what I knew it could teach me if I could just find a way to stay there. I felt the river moving inside me as I stepped into the water that surrounded me. I became a timeless river. I moved smoothly from one

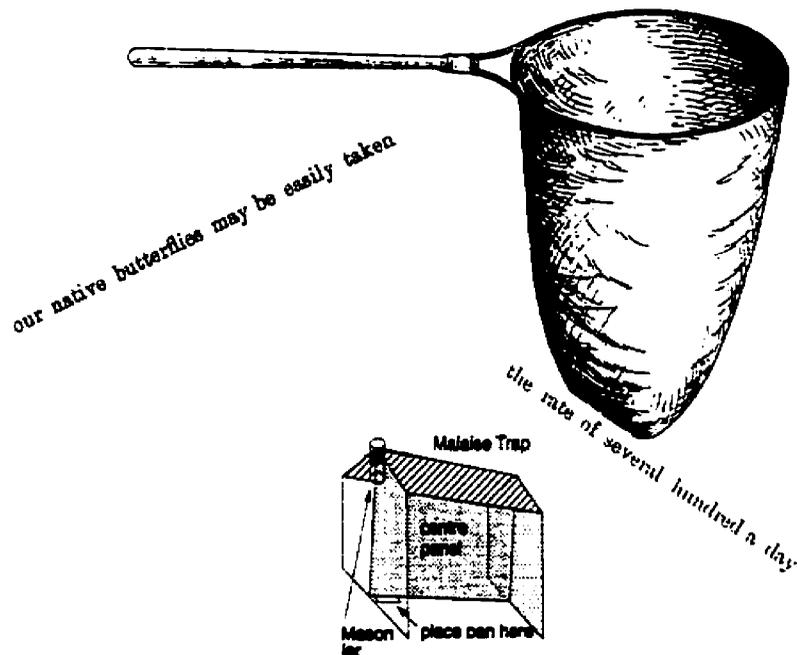
river to another just as river water transits from one tributary to another with ease, or blood journeys through webs of veins and capillaries. I moved to distant lands but I was always at home when I riverwalked. I felt spacious while in this place that was exciting yet safe and familiar.

Place  
 My Space  
 In the world the grand hurled of existence  
 Chase  
 The loose ace  
 Feel my pace turn to insistence  
 For the joy in the sunlight  
 For the sweetness of the air  
 My energy is fun flight  
 Through the taste of pears  
 My peace comes from moon sight  
 My heart lies in flares  
 Of northern lighted beings  
 Of long lost chiffon cares

\* \* \*

## Schooling

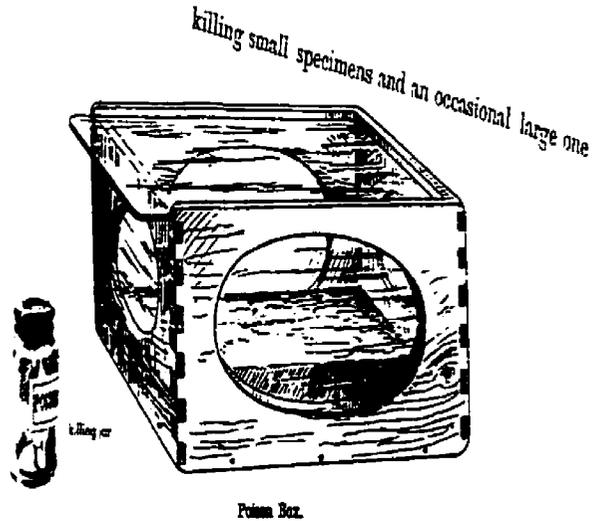
As a child, a large part of my regular life involved formal schooling. The world of my schooling did not seem to connect with what I had come to learn from exploring the world around me. When I was on my own I ran free, cycled around my neighbourhood and riverwalked. In school I felt contained, limited and put in my place.



I felt trapped and small in school. When did I learn to be afraid of taking up space?

The message like a slow poison, seeped in, that I needed to limit the amount of space I took up. I had my small wooden desk. This was my area. I was told to keep my hands to myself and my eyes on the work on my desk. I could raise my hand to signal that I wanted to speak. Sometimes I was chosen, at other times I was passed by. I wrote notes to friends in my classroom on small scraps of paper ripped from my notebook and folded into tiny parcels that were easily and secretly passed from one child to the next. I had one hook onto which my coat and gym clothes could be placed during the day. I had a space in line that was about double the width of my body, if I created too much space between me and the person in front while we traveled as a class, someone would “butt” in front of me and I would lose my place. I learned quickly both at home and in school that I shouldn’t take up too much space, and that I needed to stay in my place.

Could it be that taking up too much space was pushing the boundaries of my place in the grand order of things? After all I was just a child and a girl at that. I didn't want to be seen as a pushy upstart, or as someone who thinks they are too good to follow the same rules that everyone else follows. Sadly my attempts to be a good girl didn't help me to either find my place in the universe or develop a sense of spacious freedom. Instead I was taught that I needed to do what I was told like everyone else and not take up more than my fair share of space. My place was the same as everyone else's. Like everyone else I was being prepared for life in the "real world".



When the shellac is dry, put in the cyanide as with the tumbler. This box will hold a large number of insects with papers between them, and will be found very useful when one is doing much collecting. Occasionally the cyanide becomes so dry in the collecting box or bottle that it fails to kill the insects quickly. The addition of a few drops of water will generally restore it to full strength.

*then they may be tied up in bundles,*



**Bundle of Insects in their Envelopes.**

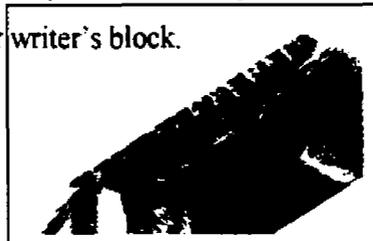
*and are ready to store away in boxes or to be sent by mail or express to their destination.*

Personal space the boundaries that encase me  
 Im out of place move over will they replace me?  
 Youre in my space thats right you deserve it more than me  
 Space race trust science the god of technology  
 Deep space the wonder that fills the heart of me  
 Outer space a place they can send me  
 Dont take up too much space the words that still haunt me  
 Leave space for others they cajole and charm me  
 Youre spacey the hurt that disarms me  
 Youve been placed the judgement that swarms me  
 Tied in place no space to welcome me

In school, both the way I was taught to express myself and the way I was taught to know continue to have a great and lasting impact on me. In Miss Potter's Grade 5 class I was taught how to express my knowing through writing and how to relate to nature through "doing Science". My writing took on a constrained appearance and seemed to be evaluated more for its form than its content<sup>18</sup>. For example my teacher described the essay writing process as a clear linear exercise with the following parts or steps. First write your introduction. It should describe what it is you are going to talk about. Make sure that each sentence has a subject, verb, capitals where necessary and that each ends with a period. Tell the reader what you are going to say and the order in which you are going to say it. Then in the body of your essay, say what you said you were going to say. In the conclusion summarize what you said.



This backbone for an essay helped immensely when I felt I really had nothing interesting to say. However it stalled me incredibly when I actually did have something to share. Writing to please Miss Potter was a recipe for writer's block.



<sup>18</sup> As feedback, Miss Potter wrote the following on a piece of my written work about animals and their homes, "Can you begin to count the number of times I've spoken to you about using an upstroke at the end of a word and about forming 'r' correctly? Why don't you try to make use of my suggestion?"

By defining the terms ahead of time, by setting the table and clearing the stage, I caged the possibilities. By being asked to look to the destination ahead of time, whether it be an essay, an analysis of a concept, event or poem I had already described the fish before I'd baited my hook.

Writing stories and poems took on the same recipe format for me as I got older. Story writing was often introduced as a group assignment on a theme, "Today boys and girls I want you to write a story about Christmas". Or "boys and girls, pretend that you're shipwrecked on a desert island. What happens to you, what do you feel? Make sure you use 10 words from this week's spelling list".



What my grade school teachers had yet to discover for themselves and what as an adult I have since come to know, is that writing is a dance. It is a dance between the pen and the page, the fingers and the keyboard, the mind and the word, the soul and the universe. There can be rules or steps to follow in order for the partners to stay in synch but the real dancing doesn't take shape until the bodies flow in a rhythm that they generate together. They may begin a Polka and unwittingly flow into a Waltz. One partner may throw in a spin, to be answered by a series of high kicks. While in the dance the dancers are in the river of the universe.

I now believe that good writing requires that you put your raft in that same river. The raft must be outfitted with the necessary equipment: oars, first aid kit, bailing can, life preservers, sails, food, water and a patch kit but more importantly it must be left to chart it's own path through the rapids, around the rocks and ultimately downstream. Rules for the safe control of the raft may help the rafter gain the confidence needed to jump in and push off but ultimately the journey is a think-on-your-feet kind of proposition. Like any other risky activity it requires pure attention in the present, trust and a connection to the soul. In this sense the soul is manifested in the voice of the rafter's wise self. The self who has been down this river a thousand times before. The calm assured voice that can cut through to the truth in an instant, who understands how all the pieces fit together, who if listened to will get you out safely.

Miss Potter neglected that part of the journey in her teaching of writing therefore many of her students (myself included) likely became mechanical, disembodied writers as a result. Her style of expression also contributed to mechanical disembodied thinking. Not surprisingly, the way that I was taught to write was also the way that I was taught about the natural world. Science as a formal subject was a mystery to me until Miss Potter showed us how to plant seeds and record the results in our "Science Book". It was an earnest disconnected kind of endeavour. We created charts, took measurements, and carried out library research. Further, much of the rest of the Science we did that year came out of our Science text book where we were assigned a section to take notes on, study and then express on a test. In Grade 6 we were taught Science in a laboratory where we learned about microscopes, cells and mechanical systems. Science, I began to learn, had a methodology that I was required to memorize. I had a special laboratory book to be used for recording the Purpose, Method, Observations, Results and Conclusions of our experiments.

One method,

which I have used with success is to snip off the abdomen of such an insect, cut it open on the under side, remove the contents and soak it in gasoline for twenty-four hours, after which it can be stuffed and replaced in its former position with shellac. This process, of course, does away with all liability of the insect becoming greasy.

To restore the beauty of greasy specimens, place them in gasoline in a shallow, covered pan, for twenty-four hours or longer, when they will come out bright and clean. Downy or hairy specimens may need a little blowing to restore their fluffy appearance.

I felt unsure about whether I was being rigorous and scientific enough when I recorded experiments in that book. To this day I don't recall what the actual experiments were, I simply know that the science I was experiencing during school hours was seen as more legitimate and scholarly than the nature I lived and breathed every day in my suburban Etobicoke neighborhood. My way of knowing the natural world lived in my flesh and bones, my school Science lived solely in books and in my head.

As my schooling progressed, in order to succeed, I was required to spend more and more time indoors studying. As I worked my way through high school and immersed my self in the

sciences, I began to feel a creeping sense of anomie. I felt anxious and disconnected, not rooted, not as safe and secure as I had as a child during those times when I was able to wander and explore freely. These feelings remained even though I found the development of my analytical mind to be satisfying and empowering in a different way, and I loved the order and beauty of mathematics and science.

Also, while in high school, I thought that the arts were for the stupid kids, the ones who seemed soft and silly. I believed that they would never get a good job and that taking art was a waste of time. I took no art classes in high school and believed myself to be lacking the necessary talent to be able to draw or engage in any art making. I was a serious student.

When I went to university, anxious feelings gradually increased. I became disillusioned with the lack of a living voice in the sciences. I longed for the presence of life in what began to otherwise feel like a cold lifeless pursuit. I had a sense of dis-ease. I needed a human and animal presence to my world and so, half way through my undergraduate degree, I moved from the "hard" sciences of Physics and Chemistry to the softer world of Psychology. This shift was ultimately more satisfying as it tied together human experience and a scientific way to know. By this time I had become a full science convert who valued the scientific method for its clarity, rigour and predictability. I loved the order. I was not yet ready to let it go.

CLASSIFICATION  
 ORDER LEPIDOPTERA. Moths and Butterflies.  
 Sub-order HETEROCERA. The Moths.

PTEROPORDA.  
 TINEIDA.  
 TORTRICIDA.  
 PYRALIDA.

GEOMETRIDA.  
 NOCTUIDA.  
 BOMBYCIDA.  
 AGONIDAE.  
 LEPIDAE.

SEBODER BAPTOLOCEA. The Butterflies.  
 Sphingidae.  
 Pieridae.  
 Lycaenidae.  
 Papilionidae.

to have on child well being and I felt isolated by the numerous hours spend by myself, at my computer.

I followed this path to the next level and did a graduate degree in child assessment and counseling. Here I developed the skills needed to order and define the functioning levels of school children. I became disillusioned very quickly with the lack of effect my beautifully written reports seemed

It was around this time that we purchased a piece of land in Muskoka which allowed my riverwalking child to re-emerge. She became profoundly dissatisfied with the sorting and classifying aspect of the work I did and railed loudly against the lack of any connection to nature in both my daily life and field of study. Nature and my embodied understandings of its power to heal and reconnect were missing from my Psychology practice. Apparently, there was once a time when all psychologists saw humans in a natural context Roszak (1992: 14).

*Once upon a time all psychologists were "ecopsychologists". Those who sought to heal the soul took it for granted that human nature is densely embedded in the world we share with animal, vegetable, mineral, and all the unseen powers of the cosmos. Just as all medicine was in times past understood to be "holistic"- a healing of body, mind and soul- and did not need to be identified as such, so all psychotherapy was once spontaneously understood to be cosmically connected. It is peculiarly the psychiatry of modern Western society that has split the "inner" life from the "outer" world- as if what was inside of us was not also inside the universe, something real, consequential, and inseparable from our study of the natural world*

My day to day practice in the field was disconnected and separate from the natural. So instead of committing to a professional life filled with testing and writing about children, I pursued a teaching degree and entered the elementary classroom armed with a knowledge of child psychology, teaching and a love of the out of doors.

## Teaching

I taught grade 4/5 that first year and continued with the junior grades of 5 and 6, the following 3 years. I taught from the perspective of an environmentalist and a global educator. My ecological sensibilities and desire for transformative learning experiences for both myself and my students were satisfied by the holistic experiential approaches offered by global education. David Selby (1999:125) describes the field in the following manner:

*Global education is an holistic paradigm of education predicated upon the interconnectedness of communities, lands, and peoples, the interrelatedness of all social, cultural and natural phenomena, the interpenetrative nature of past, present and future, and the complementary nature of the cognitive, affective, physical and spiritual dimensions of the*

*human being. It addresses issues of development, equity, peace, social and environmental justice, and environmental sustainability. Its scope encompasses the personal, the local, the national and the planetary. Congruent with its precepts and principles, its pedagogy is experiential, interactive, children-centred, democratic, convivial, participatory and change-oriented.*

The focus of global education on the interdependence of all life forms, confirmed what I had come to know as a child as I explored the natural world. For me, becoming a global educator bridged my love of nature, science, human psychology and education. As a teacher I began to design and implement innovative programming for children who had such diverse backgrounds that they truly wore the faces of the global community. Their unique experiences and enthusiasm for learning had an avenue for expression in my very experiential curriculum. We painted fish beside all the sewer grates in the neighbourhood to remind people about the life in our watershed, we did neighbourhood clean-ups, and simulation role-plays about issues like deforestation with all the vested interests represented. We created and performed plays about conflict resolution and Columbus from a native perspective, we fundraised for whales, we ran global lunches for school staff where the inequity in access to clean food and water was enacted. We learned about the rights of the child, families from around the world and played numerous games and activities from both Global Teacher Global Learner (Pike & Selby, 1988) and Project Wild (1991).

My curriculum was very integrated with reading lessons on DDT and mathematics that involved planning and building models of a “global school”. We took numerous field trips to plant trees and to immerse ourselves in nature on Toronto Island. At the same time I was involved in Masters level study in Transformative Learning and Global Education and was involved in my board’s Global Education Steering Committee. I also began a school wide Eco-Kids club that focused on waste reduction, vermi-composting and gardening that culminated in scores of over-enthusiastic children spontaneously ripping up playground sod one recess in an attempt to see earth worms.

This period of teaching and studying from a global perspective was very satisfying in many ways. I had many successes with the children I taught. I felt like I was making a difference

and there were so many possibilities. There were also numerous barriers to be overcome on a daily basis. Being required to teach indoors for the most part and being regularly at odds with the objectives of the schools in which I taught, combined to make me often feel like I was swimming up stream. I soon began to realize how radical many of the ideas in global education are, how compartmentalized our school programs can be, how much teachers need to learn about global issues and how much support teachers need in order to be able to successfully carry out this type of teaching for any length of time. Standardized curriculum, testing and report cards were also being mandated at around this time. I knew that I was not going to be able to continue with the type of programming I had committed to. I was burning out quickly and that old feeling of disconnection became stronger as I made my way to work through the urban core and spent my days inside.

In the past, I had come to understand that my feeling of disconnection abated when I surrounded myself with nature. The landscape surrounding me often greatly affects my inner landscape. I envisioned a life of great serenity, filled with outdoor activity, reading, writing and reflection. I needed renewing and transforming before I could continue with my work. So I took a leave and moved up north to Muskoka to live at the cottage for a year.

In many ways the sense of revitalization that I had envisioned came to pass. That summer, I began to feel more connected, more fulfilled and more nourished. However, I also began to realize that being in the natural landscape does not fully heal the mind and body. I came to know that the mind and body need to heal in order to fully “be” in the landscape.

As November approached that first year up north I felt that old feeling of disconnection and anxiousness. This was especially disturbing because I had it all now. I had time to do whatever I wanted, I had resources, I was in nature, there was nothing more to change, or so I thought.

I continued to journal as I had off and on since I was a child, and then on an impulse, I began an Artist’s Way program. This work is based on Julia Cameron’s (1992) book of the same title. Although I was very skeptical at first about its merits, I found the way that she cajoled me

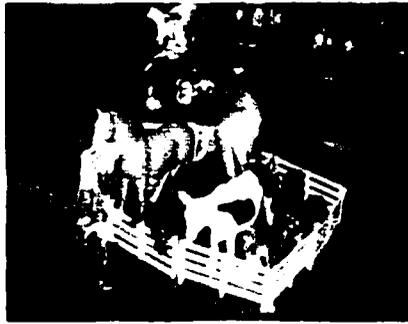
into looking at belief systems about myself and the world, specifically beliefs that denigrate natural creativity, to be very useful. I worked through this program with a group for 4 months and it opened up a whole new world of understanding for me. It demanded that I look at my relationship to my own inner creativity. It demanded that I go beyond basking in the natural creations of the Great Creator located in the forests that surrounded me. It forced me to bask in my own creativity and begin the search for connection from the inside out. It also forced me to learn how to navigate around the powerful rational analytical mind that I had so carefully developed over the years of my schooling. It motivated me to reconnect with the riverwalking child who still knew how to explore and create with a joyful and adventurous heart. It helped me to begin the journey of allowing this abandoned child teach me all she knows.

The power associated with reconnecting with my own creativity and life force has fuelled my doctoral work. For many years I think I have been on a search for a deeper understanding and “cure” for the fundamental sense of disconnection that myself and many others experience in their lives. This disconnection takes many forms as the following small selection of stories illustrates.

For mending broken insects and replacing detached antennæ and legs, use white shellac.

## Planted Seeds

... on learning the garden fit



*We regard it as a thing, a big thing, an object to be owned, mined, fenced, guarded, stripped, built upon, dammed, ploughed, burned, blasted, bulldozed, and melted to serve the material needs and desires of the human species at the expense, if necessary, of all other species, which we feel at liberty to kill, paralyze, or domesticate for our own use.*

(Meck, 1995: 282)

Both my father and my maternal grandmother (Nan) were avid gardeners. So am I. I learned about nurturing earth relationships through growing up around the two of them.

When I think back to gardening in our suburban Toronto backyard with my father, I am reminded of the objects that he surrounded himself with. These objects formed a bridge between him and his plantings<sup>19</sup>. He had a large galvanized metal watering can that he used for mixing fluorescent green fertilizer. When it was filled up to the top with water I found it to be too heavy to lift and often struggled to drag it across the patio spilling out its precious green contents. He also had a large green plastic bottle with a specially fitted spray nozzle and hand pump mechanism for insecticide and herbicide spraying of bushes, trees and lawns. He also had bushel baskets for the containment of garden refuse and heavy suede gloves to protect his hands. My

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<sup>19</sup> *"Inherent in the definition of domestication is the idea of dependence and just as we have incorporated technology (in the sense of tools, weapons etc.), we have also devised elaborate systems of technique (rituals, customs, codes, ethics, etc.) to regulate our activity for the purpose of control..."* (Nahemiak, 1991: 75).

*"All tools, from the simplest word to the most advanced space probe. Are disturbers and arrangers of primordial nature and reality- are, in the dictionary definition, 'mechanical implements for working on something'. What they have done... is addict us to purpose: both to looking for purpose in everything external to us and to looking internally to purpose in everything we do.... This addiction to finding a reason, a function, a quantifiable yield, has now infiltrated all aspects of our lives- and become effectively synonymous with pleasure. The modern version of hell is purposelessness"* (Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 64).

father gardened with purpose and seriousness. He was anxious to make his space beautiful and he was certain that he knew the correct way to do that. He was an earnest gardener, only he could do it right. He bought his plants every year at the local garden center. I helped to pull the wide flat cart, taking special care that nothing was knocked down as the cart rattled and shook over the gravelly pathways between plant tables. The job made me tense. My gut churned as the cart became more and more difficult to maneuver under the weight of successive flats of petunias, geraniums and impatiens. Once placed on the cart the welfare of the plant was my responsibility and I could feel my father monitor my every turn and pull with the expectation that the whole collection would crash to the ground under my inept control. I dreaded those trips. Through the spring and early summer those garden center visits were a weekend ritual that helped to fuel the next week's gardening jobs.

I was my father's assistant in his gardening endeavour. In addition to pulling the dreaded cart, I also gathered prunings, watered hanging baskets, swept patio stones and stacked pots. But mostly I just sat quietly and watched. In all the hours I spent helping him in the garden I don't remember ever being allowed to plant anything. I rarely



### *My Childhood Caropian Moth*

*My father pointed out the Caropian caterpillar on the tomato leaf one lazy August afternoon when I was 10 years old. My relationship to him has left a lasting impression on me.*

*He was plump and gorgeous, much larger than any caterpillar that I had seen before. He had beautiful brightly colored spines all over his body. He was vibrant yet he camouflaged perfectly with the surrounding tomato plant leaves in the vegetable garden. So much so that at first I didn't see him even though he was at my eye level.*

*It was my father who encouraged me to find the Mowat-Eber coffee that soon became his home. I placed leaves and branches inside the tin along with the caterpillar and sealed him in with a piece from one of my father's ripped stockings. I watched him over the course of days then growing less interested. I let him die for a week or so.*

touched plants. I was an observer and a janitor. Without me he could not perform. I was the unpaid, coerced audience for the J. G. Garden Show. I was not allowed to play in the game but I was also not allowed to quit.

My father grew up in Long Branch, Ontario. It was a working class neighbourhood west of Toronto. The houses were built very close together and the neighbourhood was an uncomfortable mix of residential bungalows and corrugated metal boxes, which housed factories and warehouses. My dad's father kept a small vegetable garden in the backyard. This was a tradition carried over from his years growing up in Ireland. My father remembers rows of vegetables and the most wonderful potatoes. He also remembers that he was not part of the garden experience and he still describes his father as being a "miserable old bastard".

Gardening seemed to be in my father's blood. It is something he was compelled to do. It was a controlled process with rules for correctness. He was obliged to garden. The success of his garden as a result always seemed to reflect back directly on him and his competence. He needed to surround himself with plants but they never seemed to enter his heart just as I was never allowed inside his

Upon returning it was clear that something very mysterious had taken place. The caterpillar was no where to be found.

What remained in the sealed tin was a large brown cocoon, cocoon carefully attached to one of the branches. There was no more chewing sounds or the sight of the caterpillar moving side to side with his feelers. The tin was still and silent.

This scene stayed the same for months. At one point through a combination of negligence on my part and misunderstanding on the part of my mother, the tin ended up in the garage. This upset me greatly because I worried about how coldness might kill the being I sensed was inside. In hindsight, this was probably a good development because it placed the cocoon in a more natural environment.

Then one warm spring day things in the tin changed again. Blinging upside down from the same branch as the cocoon was the most gorgeous creature moth that I had ever seen. It was a magnificent color with a furled body and a fixed eye like sharp teeth, wing tips. Its wings were smooth and perfect.

garden beds to touch, move or wreck the display. He seemed to arrange his gardening life in such a way that he could gain strokes for creating a beautiful show with the minimum of risk, maybe that's why he never bought seed from seed catalogues. He was never willing to invest the time required to nurture along the tender new growth of little seedlings. My father's commitment to gardening seemed to be short term and subject to renewal. He preferred boxed annual plants of a good size, already in bloom, and ready to be popped into the ground.

Somehow annuals seemed to be easier to control. They could be placed just where you want them and required little on going care, attention or maintenance<sup>20</sup>. They could be trusted to perform as expected with little fuss or muss. Every year my father filled the bed in front of our house with 2 rows of grey Dusty Miller, one on each side as a frame for a row for red geraniums. The show was predictably beautiful.

In contrast to my dad, my Nan gardened with a totally different style and tone. She grew perennials for the most part. Her garden had historical roots. It also had an

The next day I carried the moth in the tin to school to share him with my classmates. I was proud of this being that I had kept alive. By the time he arrived at school his wings looked ragged from all the scraping and bumping against the unforgiving metal of the tin. Miss Potter suggested that I let him go while he was still alive. He needed to fly, she said. But the thought of not being able to just pop into the tin to see him again was too difficult to bear. I vowed to keep him for just another week, then I'd let him go.

I guess one week turned into two because one morning I woke to see my tattered moth lying still and lifeless at the bottom of the tin.

I felt very badly. I had meant to do well by him. I held myself responsible for his premature death.

I had loved him to death and kept him from his life.

<sup>20</sup> "No matter how benign small scale garden-horticulture may be, at its center is the degenerating process of domestication, the first form of genetic engineering" (Shepard, 1992: 74).

English country garden feel to it. She had a clump of variegated ribbon grass from a childhood home in Gananoque Ontario and plants that she had gathered from her many travels. She had a long deep row of raspberries, a butterfly bush with beautiful purple spires, a rambling honeysuckle in beautiful soft yellow that she grew from a cutting taken from a friend's garden 50 years ago and a patio covered in trellised ivy and surrounded by beloved houseplants she had released to the out of doors after having nurtured them over the cold winter months. Next to her side door sat a craggy cactus that she had lived with for over 30 years and was still expecting to bloom one summer soon.

My grandmother lived a full rich life. She was born in Byfleet, England a small village in the country with gorgeous cottage gardens. Both her father and her grandfather kept beautiful vegetable and flower gardens. So did all their neighbours. She remembers picking plums from the fruit orchard and gathering horse manure from the roadways to put onto the beds. She remembers the year when their beans were the largest anyone had ever seen. That was the year they moved the outhouse and shoveled the contents of the old one onto their vegetable garden. She also remembers the beautiful hollyhocks her father grew around the house. She loved working in the garden with him. The pathway to the front door of their cottage was almost obliterated by the overhanging foliage and heavy blooms of perennials that had been there for decades. When my grandmother moved with her family to a small town in Canada the tradition of creating beautiful garden spaces was brought with them. My grandmother still refers to herself as a country girl.

My Nan's preference was to grow perennials because they embodied the history she so loved to create and share. She had an ongoing love affair with plants and her garden. She loved to try new things out and share her findings with others. Gardening for her was about sharing. My Nan had grow lights in her basement and a motley collection of pots. Some were made of green plastic and others of terracotta. She used these pots over and over again to contain the beautiful green experiments that she engaged in when it was still too cold outside for gardening. Even as she approached the age of 96 she was still an avid growing experimenting gardener. On a number of occasions both my sister and I have dug up sections of her lawn and planted seeds and small plants. In fact my grandmother was one of the first people in her neighborhood to have

spinach and cabbage growing in her front lawn. My sister provided the labour and vision and my Nan provided the freedom of thought and the place. My grandmother denied that she was a good gardener and regularly called herself stupid and useless.

My dad must have felt the openness and nurturing nature of my grandmother's gardening. While I was still quite young he dug up her backyard, replenished the soil and grew the most amazing vegetables. I remember walking the two blocks with him to my Nan's house to visit the plants, water and weed. It was marvelous. I still have a picture of my dad holding up a giant zucchini that he grew. My mother was in awe of his prowess and still praises that accomplishment. It seemed that he felt safer and happier gardening in my grandmother's backyard than he did in his own. It was as though he could make a mistake there and not worry about the overall consequences for his landscaped display.

In a way gardening was the source of my parents break up. My father envisioned farming i.e. full time vegetable gardening as a mid life rebellious act against the work-a-day administrator's life he had been leading for almost 40 years. When he moved out 5 years ago he left behind cupboards full of designer suits, ties and shoes which had in the past successfully changed his farmer's soul to that of a successful city slicker. When he left he took his favourite work pants, boots, gloves and Harrowsmith magazines, and headed north of the city to begin the "good life" of fresh food, fresh air and fresh energy.

Now that my father has gone on to farming full time and dedicated his life to vegetables, my mother is left to garden in his garden, alone. She plants the same Dusty Miller as a border to the red geraniums in the center. But she's hired a lawn company to spray and weed the lawn and was required to apply grub killer herself last spring when raccoons began digging up sections of her lawn. The public holes and scrapings in her lawn were a source of great shame to her.

There are signs though that new seeds are sprouting for her. Two years ago she fell in love with a neighbour's giant sunflower that by August was hanging its weighty head over the fence. Last summer she planted her own in half barrels of soil. That's the year that she also started growing herbs in containers and took full ownership of a front yard garden bed. Beside

the driveway my dad had planted roses that because of lack of care had begun to flower weakly and become diseased. Last summer my mother replaced the roses with ones that she preferred and instead of planting impatiens or Dusty Miller in front of them she planted broccoli! She was very proud of its verdant green shoots. She celebrated the small florets in her home cooked vegetable dishes and she took the first steps towards letting go of the shame and hurt that required her to keep the garden as it always had been. She planted a sign of new beginnings for both herself and the whole world to see as they walked by.

My mom is still dependent on chemical fertilizers and weed killers and despite two bouts with breast cancer is still unable to let go of unsustainable paradigms around her separateness from the land, but she is beginning to form a relationship with herself and the world through mutive plantings and happy rewards.

My father has moved to a grander scale in terms of landscape but still lives in essentially the same mindscape. His new partner grew up as a farmer's daughter and both of them work very hard to create the beautiful gourmet vegetables that they sell at local farmer's markets. They fully believe that they alone are creating the beautiful produce that they sell. They have yet to let go to the dance between humans and the Great Creator. They are also cynical about their buyers. They say with much derision that their customers are ignorant and don't appreciate the quality of the produce that they are offered. They are also cynical about local growing practices including their own and make quips like, "everyone knows that you can't grow things here organically. The only difference between organic farmers and the rest is that organic farmers spray at night".

My dad would also say- if pushed- that he loves his garden. It is a beautiful garden. Much more beautiful than many that I've seen. He doesn't need to edge because his beds are raised above the ground by a double layer of stacked logs. His beds are above the earth, that way they are easy to reach and keep clean. He also has pristine pathways between his beds. But despite the beauty I feel uncomfortable there. Everything is so pristine, contained and bounded that I feel that there is nothing for me to contribute, nothing that I can say but, "oh that's lovely". The garden compliments seem to go right back to him directly. During my last visit he held up a

perfect sunny yellow squash and asked, “have you ever seen such a beautiful Patty Pan squash in your life?” This I feel was code for: “I’m good, I grew that, I’m beautiful too, don’t you think?”

On my last annual visit to his beautiful distant farm I openly marveled at how incredibly similar his dirt pile looked to mine. Earlier in the season we had both ordered loamy soil to be delivered to our respective garden sites. We both used soil to top off our existing garden beds and to help build up new beds. As well our bed layouts were also astonishingly similar. We both had a round patch of rambling squash surrounded by rectangular beds of tomatoes, herbs and lettuces. I said out loud that we must be on the same wavelength because we had both taken bare ground and drawn similar shapes in similar spaces with our respective shovels. At 33 I was still looking for a way to connect with my father. I said “we must be working from the same genetic blueprints!”

Silence.

Didn’t he hear me? Am I losing my mind? I tried again, “where did you get gardening from? Who in your family was a great gardener?”

He leaped in, “I’m the only one. I’m the first”.

I paused and considered my options. I took a chance, “as a kid I thought you said that grandpa, your dad, was a great gardener”.

Breakthrough!

He responded, “father, he was the best. He could grow vegetables like you wouldn’t believe!”

My father gardens without getting involved. His beds are beautiful and bounded by thick walls. His garden is a reflection of his prowess.

My mother gardens in small careful baby steps. She's growing like a small precious green shoot.

My grandmother gardened with heart and soul. Her relationships radiated out from her garden. She was invisible.

I am all three.

\* \* \*

## Knotted Swamp

... on the pain of being mired in a bad fit

Hurt pain no gain strain contain

Refrain from slain animals

Deep Caves dark avenues dark slaves

Evil courses through these veins

*Whenever the bond that binds the living creature to his (sic) environment is broken, there is nothing that holds together the various factors and phases of self. Thought, emotion, sense, perception, purpose, impulsion fall apart, and are assigned to different compartments of our being. For their unity is found in the co-operative roles they play in active and receptive relations to the environment.* (Dewey, 1934: 252)

I look outside every morning for a trace of green. The snow in the valley had begun to melt but all that is revealed is rich brown earth. No green. I love the contrast of verdant green to the cold bluey whiteness of snow.

I'm stuck in a frost. I have all the necessary seeds, dirt and trays ready for planting right now. They sit stacked up in the living room. I really love new green growth but I seem to be denying myself right now. I seem to be blocked from newness. That feeling of tingling in my core as I place my hands in the earth, energizing it with nurturing love is being kept away. Who is the me who would avoid such joy, such connection, such wisdom, such truth, such ultimate happiness?

It is the one who feels betrayed, uncertain, empty with nothing to give. It is the me of isolation, deep sorrow, panicky thoughts and false pride. It is the judging me, the unbalanced me, the careful premeditated me, the actress. The person who dons a thousand masks so she can dance in the rain. The rain of self-betrayal, self-manipulation, self-aggrandizement and bleeding. The wounded self that spills her bile and blood everywhere. She drags her left leg across the ground leaving a gorge in the earth, a big trench, a scraping. The scraping tells a story of where she has been. How barren the path has become, how sorrowful the journey. How hurtful the barbed words can be, how dead her body feels. She is unable to let go and dance because like a

marionette she is unable to pull her own strings. She needs fame, goals, the opinions of others, the control of the institution to make her dance. And dance she does. For hours at a time she carries the tune in her toes and moves her body to that outside rhythm. But when the lights go down and everyone goes home to their real lives she's left in a crumpled mass of wood and strings on the floor. She tries to shuffle, to drag her spent and unsupported body but it is too heavy. It is too difficult. Instead she decays, rots in the earth beneath her. The dust that rains down on her nice shiny surface begins to block her breath and make her unrecognizable to the puppeteers. A sadness develops. It is a sadness for the dances not danced and the songs not sung. A sadness for the realization that she cannot dance at will, pick herself up and dance again. She needs to develop her own dancing force, to let go of her dependence on others. She must channel her life force, contain it, and dance it, not letting it rage in her being, chewing up her bones and those of others.

Maybe I need to rot to the brown<sup>21</sup> before I can get to the green.

The earthy brown nurtures the new green growth, gives it the nutrients it needs to flourish, develop roots and spring forth. It is energized soil, alive soil, receptivity, acceptance, it holds my roots. All other garden work; seeding, pruning, planting, fails to hold, is unsustainable until we access the earth, the animator, the compost of new life. Brown is not a primary colour it's a gathering of sorts.

A brief survey of colleagues, friends and family on what they associate with brown revealed an instantaneous negative reaction. Brown is associated with the following: dull<sup>22</sup>, boring, flat, takes energy, excrement, dirty, hippies, wimps, dead, mud, worms, rotten,

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<sup>21</sup> "Brown is the colour of the earth and is preferred by persons who have homespun qualities. They are sturdy reliable, shrewd, parsimonious, look old when they are young and young when they are old. ....More persons dislike brown than like it. In fact, brown is often preferred by the mentally troubled than by those who are at peace with themselves. What may be revealed in a distaste for brown is impatience with what is dull and boring. This may mean country life as against the excitement of the big city. Brown is very easy to dislike. For the most part, a negative and antagonistic attitude toward it is a good trait in anyone" (Birren, 1978: 125). Brown is also the colour of non-white people.

<sup>22</sup> "dull" comes from the Old English "dof", meaning foolish, based on the Indo-European base "dhrwel-" meaning muddy, dim, derived from "dheubh" to fly about like dust. Beginning in the fourteenth century dull acquired a wide range of figurative meanings: lacking sensibility, slow, indistinctly felt, uninteresting, dismal, blunt, while retaining its original meaning of foolish (Shaw, 1999).

regressing, a business man in a brown suit is a loser. When asked about earth tones these fairly well educated politically correct types offered that earth is brown with speckled colours, rich, full of life, humus<sup>23</sup>. Many shared happy childhood memories of playing in the mud, making mud pies, creating, scooping, and piling up dirt<sup>24</sup>. Their tone and demeanour changed remarkably when they thought of earth. The responses to the words brown and earth intrigued me because it is unclear how these colours are distinctively different in any physical way.

It seems that for many, brown is a drab dirty colour lacking life and vitality. It takes more than it gives. It's the colour of warm naivetie, a rural farmer's colour. Yet clay work is about brown. I love the warmth of brown in stoneware. It grounds me. It takes me into the earth. I can imagine what it would be like to tunnel into its depths, like a snake, a worm, a slug, a cocoon, a many legged creature among the roots. Start at the beginning again. Get to the root of the matter.

A swamp is the epitome of brown for me. It is a container of primordial ooze. A wet fecund place from which new life emerges. A water filter of sorts that purifies, removes the toxins, bubbles up new combinations and new lives. A marginal place of beginning and ending. Neither land nor water but both tied together in space and time. Water moves in, rests and exits just as quietly again. It is a place filled with stillness as birds rest during long migrations. They are the wetlands, filled with moisture and possibility. It is a still place that is full of life.

There can be a heavy negative connotation to being mired in a swamp and maybe that's why I avoid brown at times. When my mom used to tell me that my room looked like a swamp it was not meant as an encouraging endearment. There was no telling what kind of mould I was growing under my bed. You couldn't see anything for all the chaos and clutter. It was a dangerous act of rebellion to not meticulously fold my clothes and shelve my belongings. Things might recombine, form new monstrous life and take over the house and my psyche if they were not kept in closets and drawers.

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<sup>23</sup> *"We are of the earth and the earth is of us. Both the words human and humus have the root "hum" which means "of the ground, lowly" (Logan, 1995).*

<sup>24</sup> In her work on the therapeutic value of getting dirty, Sylvie Shaw (1999) argues for a re-evaluation of our relationship to dirt. Much of western civilization has been built on the notion of organizing the environment especially its dirty aspects since dirt was seen as disorder. *"Cleanliness is next to Godliness"* was the most powerful message sent out by the powers that be to the masses.

Being swamped with work was a phrase I often heard adults bandy about as I was growing up. That connoted a sinking feeling, a sense that there was no seeing to the end. It was a murky place, filled with furtive gasps for air and continual treading. Being swamped had a disheveled look to it for there was no luxury of time for smoothing out wrinkles or preparing a nourishing meal. Things had a pace all their own, a life all their own and the swampee was charged with staying alive despite this.

There must be a thick soupiness to swamp water. Its essence is like blood, viscous, nourishing, rich in nutrients, a stew of potential. It reminds me of the Watson & Crick experiment where they placed the basic elements of life in a container, energized them and found that life emerges. What a miracle to behold from such a messy slurry.

I locate brown in my body, in the tanned pigment of my skin, in my guts. Since I was a teenager I've experienced regular brown explosions. As though I'd been trying to closet brown, keep it under wraps only to have it explode in seepy fetid swampy fountains. The pain associated with these brown statements was intense, cyclical and crampy. My guts couldn't hold it together any longer. Their capacity had been breached and their tolerance diminished.

\* \* \*

**“mater”**

*matter, origin, source, mother*

... on what happens when matter is deemed not fit

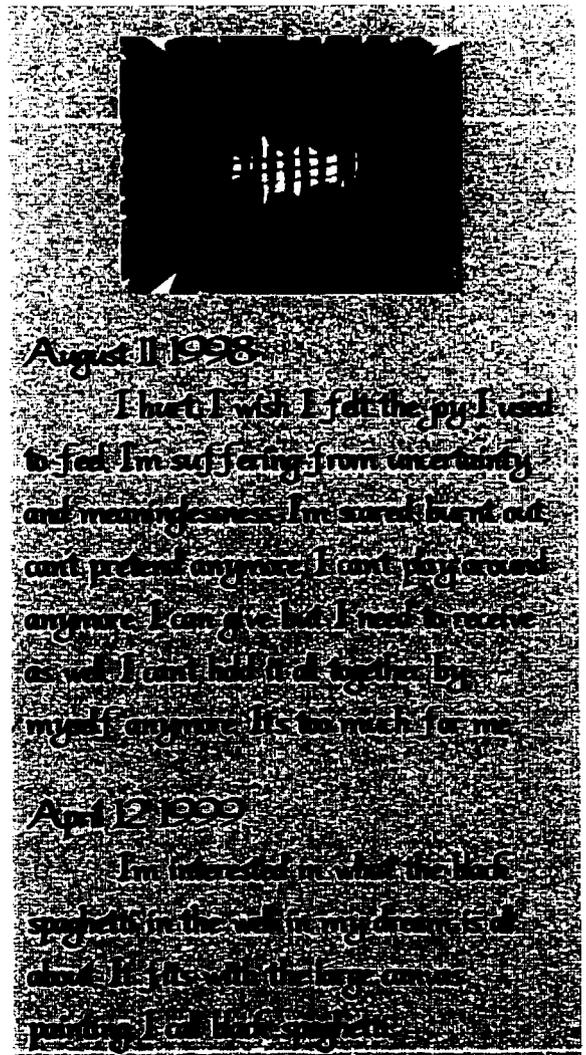
*It is decided that matter is transitory and illusory like the shadows on a wall cast by firelight; that we shall dwell in a cave, in the cave of our flesh, which is also matter, also illusory; it is decided that what is real is outside the cave, in a light brighter than we can imagine, that matter traps us in darkness.*  
(Griffin, 1978: 7)

You are a smiling sharp-toothed creature with a horrible grip on me. You have a tangled vine grip on me the me that longs to get out wants freedom wants energy and light. The stuck entangled me tightly wound in all the worries the pains the fears the what-ifs the shoulds the waiting for life to begin.

Anger, judgement, and seething frustration are the order of the day. Fear, oh such fear, of motion, of breaking a bone, of holding on, of letting go, of cold, of speed, of wind, of, of,.....

The non-stop, ongoing empty conversation, the free association, the past associations, the future ones, the non-stop of it all with no breath in between, no grounding, rootless floating with the wind, the covering grip on my shoulders. Repetitiveness, wonder with big eyes, the stupidity of it all, the waste of energy of it all, as my left shoulder seethes and my temples pound.

What to talk about?



Deep thrusting moaning noises  
escape my lips as tears well up in my eyes.  
I despise my child-woman. I loathe her  
self-imposed helplessness, her needy  
slouching stance, and her struggling  
footsteps.

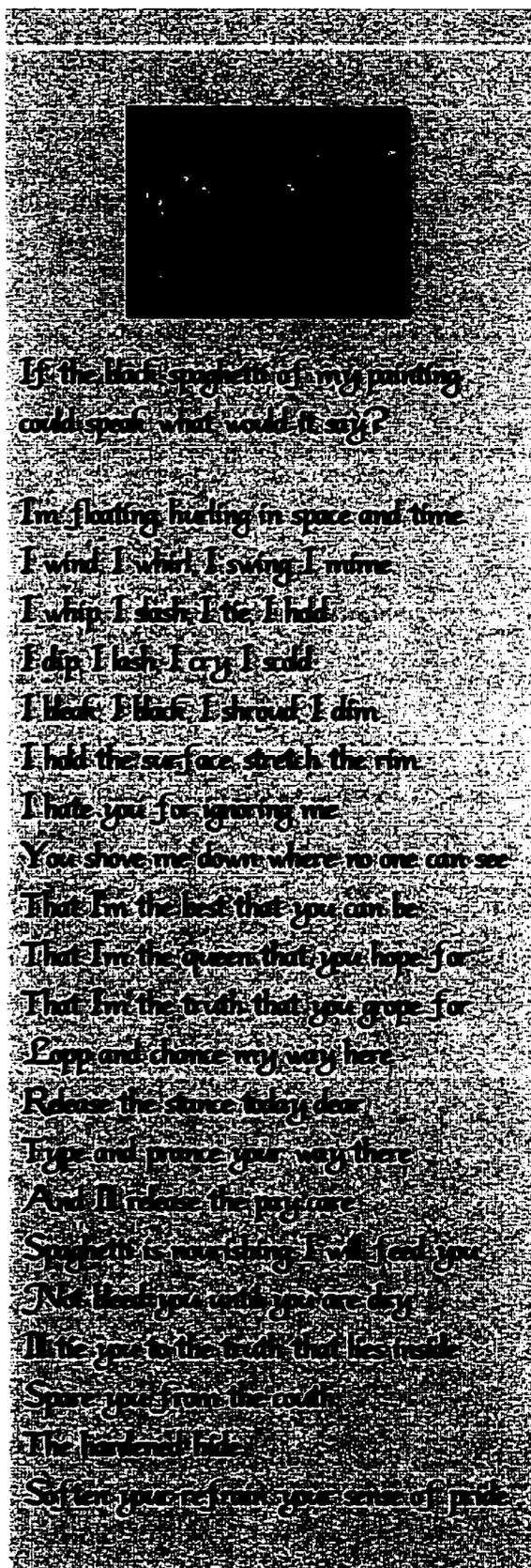
What went wrong? How did she, such a  
bright and talented child become such a  
sponge, a soft malleable, sopping wet mass  
of plastic?

And my role in it all? The  
competent me, the one to lean on, the one  
with an university degree from a campus  
that she is afraid to step on, whose voice  
quietens down to a whisper in the presence  
of the grand buildings of St. George St. It's  
hard to know.

She is an observer, an outsider, a  
storyteller of neighbour's follies and close  
calls. "How did you manage to do that?  
How did you know? You were so lucky  
weren't you?"

Lucky to be alive, have the energy,  
the knowledge, the skill.

The pedestal, the tower on which



If the black spaghetti of my painting  
could speak what would it say?

I'm floating hurtling in space and time

I wind I whirl I swing I mime

I whip I slash I tie I hold

Edip I lash I cry I sold

I black I black I shroud I dim

I hold the surface stretch the rim

I hate you for ignoring me

You shove me down where no one can see

That I'm the best that you can be

That I'm the queen that you hope for

That I'm the truth that you gape for

Love and chance my way here

Release the stone taking down

Eyes and praise your way there

And I'll release the pyre

Spaghetti is nourishing I will feed you

No look you with you are dry

Like you to the truth that lies inside

Spare you from the road

The hardened hide

Soften you're from your sense of pride

she places me, isolates me in the winds of judgement for at any moment my point will be dismissed, my recommendation brushed aside as unnecessary, not applying to her, too scary or too "out there" for consideration.

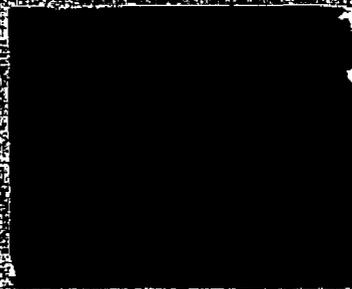
The natural world is a puzzle to her, one big enigma of impromptu disasters and curious happenings. Not surprisingly her body is a foreign territory that speaks in twisted tongues, whose symptoms are not heeded until they break her down, or cause her to lie in the road. Even then it is both unkind and uncouth, impolite and ultimately messy to share such goings on. You wouldn't dare would you?

Shame. Shame of self and others, of life events, of the future in its vast emptiness and the past and its mistakes.

Our world is filled with shame. "Shameful, you shameful messy girl. How dare you? How could you? What were you thinking? Who do you think you are? Dirty, you're dirty and stinky, big and ugly, not nice. Take something for that. You're not really sick. Bodies are not nice, learn to control yours or it will get in your way. Be nice"

October 13, 1999

Let's paint this fear. It's hard like a rock, stuck in place, a boulder in fact like the one I lie on in Algonquin Park. Grey, big grey, mossy boulder. How to move it? Keep it under your power. In fact you can't can you, you must surrender to it, lay on it with an open heart. Don't try to push it or chip it away. It is your support, the foundation on which all permanent things can be built.



*...for many centuries now and I suspect many millenia, "we" (i.e. our minds) have regarded our bodies as somehow untame, unruly-animalistic. They give birth, they die, they generate stomach aches or menstrual cramps, they contract diseases, they tingle with excitement, they get tired and all without "our" voluntary control. Like animals, they don't "listen to reason.*

(Berman, 1989: 64)

Spanked, yanked, pulled and prodded  
 Dark abuses, loud applauded:  
 Careful glances, tightened fists  
 Spareful chances, love resists  
 Pushing postures, deepened lines  
 Forceful gestures, tearful whines  
 Cramping muscles, aching bones  
 Stamping tussles, gaping stones  
 In the spaces, fill me up  
 No safe places, deeply struck  
 Caged, encaptured, hard walled world  
 Rage enraptured, starkly curled  
 Fetal moaning, quivering spikes  
 Animal graining, shivering dikes  
 Close to bursting, water world  
 Churning hurling, tightly squirreled  
 Away in darkness, deep in fright  
 Barren starkness, darkest night  
 Shrouds the horror, drapes the vice  
 Seals the gaping, oozing lice  
 That chew the surface, breathe the phlegm  
 Chase the perfect, pastey prim  
 That festers so deep,  
 That fills me with creep  
 I must now contain  
 Or forever remain  
 Tied to its tightness  
 Lied to its frightness  
 Hidden from the brightness  
 Of lights that elude me,  
 Of sights that exclude me,  
 Hidden in darkness  
 Loaded with starkness  
 The knots deeply bind me  
 Forever finds me  
 Wanting of glamour  
 Hearing the stammer  
 Of my explanation  
 For my resignation  
 So I'll fade like so many tomorrows  
 And be knotted forever in sorrows

SHAME  
 SHAME  
 YOU  
**NAUGHTY**  
 LITTLE  
 GIRL

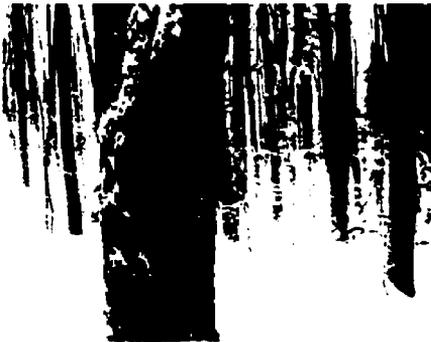
## Trees

... on making the earth fit our desires

*Unlike white sharks, trees do not even possess the ability to defend themselves when attacked; what arms they sometimes have, like thorns are static; and their size and immobility means they cannot hide. They are the most defenceless of creation in regard to man (sic), universally placed by him below the level of animate feeling and so the most prone to destruction.*  
(Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 90)

Orange rings slice slings mark things for distribution  
 Orange rings thought brings heart stings for retribution  
 How dare you mark a tree for death?  
 How dare you judge the worst from best?  
 How could you think you know the way?  
 To organize the forest sway?

Today I went for a walk down a forest road and my heart broke. Tied tight around the girths of random trees were strong bold fluorescent orange lines.



Uncompromising, cinched belts. spray painted tattoos marked the imminent demise of these oddly decorated trees. They stood out on the horizon, the orange drew my eyes to the hillside, it jarred my breath on the trail. My mind ricocheted into an intense hypothetical conversation with the orange ringers.

Why this one, and not that?

That one has a beautiful colony of woodpecker holes, so we want to keep it. This one is not so special, in fact it's blocking out this other one which we'd like to have grow taller and fuller. Eventually we want to be able to come back and harvest it as well.

Harvest?

Yes, harvest. We're selectively harvesting these trees.

My mind flips to the holocaust. Was that a form of selective harvesting? No, that was genocide, eugenics is selective harvesting. It's about controlling for and thus creating a certain desirable form of life and then harvesting it for a certain purpose. I look up "harvest" in the dictionary. It means "to gather in for use"<sup>25</sup>.

Why are you harvesting?  
What's your purpose?

The trees we are going to harvest are blocking the light to the other trees. Once these trees are gone and the forest is opened up, they will grow faster.

So are you saying that if you don't harvest trees regularly to let light in, then the trees won't grow properly?

Yes, we're practicing good forest management techniques.

My mind ponders the concept of letting the light into the darkness of the forest. I wonder if a forest is meant to be a light place like a field or clearing. When does a forest cease to be a forest and instead become another open space? What's the matter with dark forests? The two rainforests I've visited in my life were dark mossy places with an incredible variety of life and gigantic trees. What would happen if we started letting more light in there? I conclude that more light does not equal more growth.

Maybe light is let in, out of fear. Everyone knows that darkness harbours evil. Dense dark forests are hard to penetrate, you can get all caught up in the branches, be poked in the eye, come away scratched up and frustrated. Its as though combing it through selective harvesting will allow for more access, and therefore increased enjoyment of the open spaces created.



This fantasy takes my mind to aerial photographs that I've seen of the

<sup>25</sup> In contrast, "Deep ecology insists that the world's fauna and flora should be respected not just because of their usefulness to humanity (a usefulness measured variously in terms of environmental, aesthetic, spiritual, psychological, scientific or economic needs), but due to their inherent value" (Bishop, 1990: 1-2).

Amazon Rainforest that looks like a comb has been used to work its way through the tangled forest on either side of a road. Equidistant parallel lines cut dusty swathes into the greenery. Roads are the starting point for the opening up. Once they are in, nothing is ever the same again. Stop the road, stop the destruction. I feel the same way about the new roads coming off of this road. They aren't perfectly placed in parallel lines like the ones I've seen in the Amazon. Instead they are meandering and quite creative in their placement. I wonder what they look like from an airplane. Wouldn't it be ironic if they mapped out the undulating branches, the thick trunk and the strong roots of a tree?

The roads in this forest set the stage for a long period of combing, organizing and clearing out to come. They will guide the loggers to their targets in the morning and lead them home after a good day's work has been done. I looked up "manage" in the dictionary. It means to control, conduct, handle and direct.

How on earth did the forest  
manage before your help?

Well, this is not an original old  
growth forest. It is a second or  
even third growth forest that has  
regenerated from previous clear  
cuts. We need to help certain  
tree species to develop.

How do you decide which species  
need developing at the expense of  
others?

Well some species have a longer  
life-span, are more beautiful and  
realistically some are worth more  
at the saw mill.

So a Pine is more valuable than  
say a Poplar?

Right

So we should just rid the forest of  
pesky weed trees like Poplars and  
the world would be a better place?

Well, not exactly. Poplars are  
better than no trees at all. They're  
used a lot in cities because they  
grow so quickly and create a nice  
broad shady place under their  
canopy.

So they have their place?

Sure.

So whose place is it to  
decide what their place will be?

In this case it's our place to  
decide because we own the land,  
and it's ours to do with whatever  
we want.

This last statement really broke my dam. Despite the fact that the whole exchange had thus far taken place only in my head, I had become very angry.

I see, so if you wanted to clear cut  
 this forest, mow everything down,  
 you could and that would be ok  
 because you're in charge here.  
 Every tree, every chipmunk, spider,  
 rotting mass of leaves, every mossy  
 outcropping, every hornwort, toad  
 and mosquito belongs to you?  
 Wouldn't it be great to catalogue  
 all you own on that land? Do you  
 even know how many trees you  
 own? I mean, what do you have in  
 total when you take account of all  
 the trees, the seedlings, the acorns  
 (tree ideas yet to take their shape),  
 and gnarled burls?

I find myself off again on another angry loop. Does the sense that there are many trees give us permission to use up the ones we own? Does this perception however distorted make it easier for us to not behave responsibly with what we have? Is this the dark side of a sense of abundance? Is this the root of waste, carelessness, over use, over consumption, lack of a sense of the importance of what you have until it is gone? Is a sense of abundance only safely cultivated when there is little or nothing available? Is it a necessary and fitting state of mind only in times of famine and drought? What would these beings look like all catalogued in a warehouse or a city square like the one in Yorkville where a big piece of Muskoka granite has been reassembled using cement and positioned next to elegant shops. How bizarre that rock now looks with masking tape-like cement lines criss-crossing its surface in an attempt at natural randomness.



You own a forest place that bubbles  
 with life. It's full of living breathing  
 sentient beings. Don't you feel a  
 responsibility to care for their

health and well being? The lives of millions of beings rest in your hands! Further it seems like there is a tree hierarchy in your mind. From your logger's perspective, some trees bring in more money than others. Yet from my hiker's perspective some trees are prettier. From an Orchestra Beetle's perspective some trees are tastier. From a bird's perspective some are better for nesting. From a farmer's perspective some are perfect for tapping. Why does your logger's perspective win out?

The land you have is abundant now. So removing trees will simply add to your sense of personal and financial well-being with no real loss to the tree abundance. Is that right?

Why not just leave this abundant land alone?

We own the land. We have control. We get to say what happens to these trees, to the plants at their base who are used to the shade, to the animals that live in their branches. We're in charge, and anyways there are plenty of trees in this part of the world.

Yes

Because we're doing nothing with it. It's just sitting there going to waste.

My mind switches to an argument I remember having with my mother a while back. We were debating about how best to help the world. I said its just as good to meditate on a mountain top as it is to serve your fellow human in a hospital. She disagreed. "How can someone sitting by themselves meditating on a mountaintop be anything but selfish"? I countered, "First, chances are she is not consuming very much and second her enlightened open heart affects every being on the planet".

Sometimes I think that the best way to help is to just stay in bed and do nothing, to do no harm<sup>26</sup>. For me, meditating and painting for long periods of time have been the best ways to come to eventually know what action is best to take. Doing, for the sake of doing, has rarely done any good in my life. There needs to be a vision behind the action. Why would it be any different in relation to a forest?

I cried as I walked through the orange ringed forest. I wondered if the lives of these trees were being sacrificed on the altar of ego, of money, of doing, of accomplishment, of human power and the overwhelming need to devour<sup>27</sup>. It's much harder to let things be, to not do anything, hold the tension of stillness until the doing to be done is crystal clear.

So if humans don't witness an event in nature it never happened? Is that what you are trying to say?

It makes no sense to let the forest just sit there wasted. No one will care if we log it, hell, no one will even notice. No one has been through here for weeks.

No, what we are saying is that this is a compromise decision. We are accessing the "best of both worlds" solution. We get to turn our land into some cash, manage it in a sustainable way and we all get to enjoy and have easier access to a natural space. You may be upset now about the jarring, ugly orange-red lines and maybe you will initially be upset at the mess left behind after we log, but eventually you'll forget about all that, and enjoy the wind circulating through the spaces. You'll revel in the openness of it all, be able to go to places you were never able to go before and the mosquitoes won't be as bad.

<sup>26</sup> I originally heard this from E. O'Sullivan during a class on Transformative Learning at OISE/UT.

<sup>27</sup> "Our society is characterized by an inability to leave anything in nature alone. Every piece of land, every creature, every mineral in the oceans, every growing plant, every mountain, every inch of desert is examined for its potential contribution to commercial development and exploitation, and to the expansion of technological society" (Mander, 1991: 161).

I cried and cried because the trees are marked for life. Even if the loggers passed away or had a change of heart, the trees would still bear the brand of a brush with death, they've been overpowered by an aerosol spray can. No longer fully free, these trees are no longer themselves, they've been enslaved, separated out<sup>28</sup>, easily identifiable in a crowd, questioned as unworthy, or maybe too worthy, they are different somehow. They will pay for that difference with their lives.

The language of the orange line is terse, strong, bold and uncompromising. It's a "yes" or "no", computer kind of language with no grey areas. Indecision is expressed through layers of interaction. For example, I saw an X placed over an orange line and wondered if that meant, "I changed my mind". Did the X overpower the orange line and say, "Not this one?" or did the line come second? I think it couldn't have or all the "no take" trees would have X's and all the "take" trees would have lines or rather, rings like in X's and O's. The first person to line up three in a row wins!

This beautiful tree with the X and the O not only has woodpecker holes in a creative worn pattern up the top half of its trunk, it now has unmistakable orange messages which draw my attention to it. In fact I never saw this tree before it was taken and then given back again. It's the X and O, hugs and kisses that drew my attention to it. Was that tree better off before it was seen? I believe so. Now others will also venture off the path to get a closer look at the holes mottling up its trunk. Maybe they'll move their fingers over its worn surface. Maybe some bark will break off by accident or they'll crush a few nearby plants, all because of the orange line language.



The hugged trees, the ones with the orange O's, have been labeled, the first step in being sorted, catalogued, stacked, graded, bar-coded and priced. Those first primitive orange markings lead to a

<sup>28</sup> *"In a wood, the actual visual 'frontier' of any one tree is usually impossible to distinguish, at least in summer. We feel, or think we feel, nearest to a tree's 'essence' (or that of its species) when it chances to stand like us, in isolation; but evolution did not intend trees to grow singly. Far more than ourselves they are social creatures, ... Their society in turn creates and supports other societies of plants, insects, birds, mammals, micro-organisms; all of which we may choose to isolate and section off, but which remain no less the ideal entity, or whole experience of the wood..." (Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 30).*

torrent of ones to follow. They, the spontaneously placed trees of our forest are now inventory. They've been called and accounted for. They are part of a larger role call of sorts where their job description has changed from living in harmony, to living and eventually dying in servitude. They're dead once they've been branded. Everything they work towards, every rainfall that nourishes their roots, every sunny day that nourishes their core and warms their leaves, puts money in the pocket of the man with the spray paint and the calculator. Their lives are not their own anymore.

It's been taken away. My beautiful silent refuge has been taken away, never to be the same again in my lifetime. Never to fill my body with joy as I gaze into the valley. That warm feeling is a distant memory as I climb over tree bodies and gasp at the fence-like barrier that borders the new widened road access. Muddy scars criss-cross. Their senseless pattern mars the landscape. No one will escape with their lives. My ability to imagine the people who came before, who felt these trees in their breath has now grown foggier, dimmer, that much more out of reach. It was the trees that connected us to each other. I understand that now.

I held a tree today for the first time, or rather it held me. It was solid in a way I'd never felt before. Small drifts of snow clung to its mossy bark crevasses. It was quiet and still, welcoming yet aloof, all at the same time. What a joyous feeling to hold onto this creature of beauty for dear life. Just me and him. I don't know what kind of tree he is, I don't have a name, I don't know if he is valuable and therefore a good one to harvest or leave behind, depending on your perspective. I just know that as my body quivered with each wave of watery tears, he held me, he accepted me, loved me in his tree way and then let me go again on my own terms. He taught me about my tree self and on the way out of the forest I noticed a beautiful wooden moth/butterfly lying in the sawdust.



Maybe there is hope.

## Logs

...on the loss associated with making the earth fit with our desires



Its the weeping branches that draw me in  
 Their fullness envelopes me with a warm green embrace of smooth robust needles  
 Pulled down to the ground drawn down to the center yet reaching forth towering upwards  
 High above me  
 This is no log

A log is a horizontal tree body  
 There is something about lying down the end to the bursting forth and reclining back  
 The severed life that transforms a tree into a log

To be a bump on a log is even worse than being a log  
 Youre lazier than even the laziest  
 Youre a log carrier a parasite feeding on dead log energy

A log is also my record place. a welcomed location for thoughts. a sequenced organized writing  
 Ritual home

I log my experiences from left to right back and forth on the transformed log  
 Unrecognizable in its bleached pristine purity  
 Id be hard pressed to live without my log book. my place to retreat to

I see a log jam of floating logs too numerous  
 Too crowded on the free way rush hour on ramp too moved to be counted  
 Moving stillness careening through the log shoot labeled orange tattooed organized log chaos.  
 Bumping smashing floating in the dark pod

Here logs are divided sectioned shaved debarked  
 Bald tree bodies shaved clean of any crusty protection that might have lingered  
 All the same now

The orange tattooing long gone in the bark chip cone piled stories high  
 Quartered eventually divided into fair pieces  
 "Mom I want the big piece!"

All the same

Where did my tree go?  
 Could I ever find it again its beautiful rough patterned bark  
 its gorgeous weeping branches?

Never

## Fear

... on the fear associated with not fitting

*There is a kind of coldness, I would rather say a stillness, an empty space, at the heart of our forced co-existence with all the other species of the planet. Richard Jefferies coined a word for it:- the ultra-humanity of all that is not human... not with us, or against us, but outside and beyond us, truly alien.*  
(Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 52)

Deep fear underlies the human alienation from the earth. This subsection looks at fear from a number of different angles. First, Heather and I explore what it means to be in a fitting relationship with the wild. Following that, using the example of being in a forest, Heather, Aya and myself explore the fear associated with attaining such a relationship. Then I share a story entitled *Ocean Fear* that is about a boy afraid of taking an ocean swim. Finally a narrative piece which explores the fear of being seen is followed by a short piece entitled *Painting Fear* that connects fear of the wild with fears that emerge while painting.

## Wild Relationship

**Lisa:** What is the wild for you?

**H:** *The wild for me is unexplored parts of myself or of the self around me. So anything that I have not built up a very close comfortable relationship with is wild.*

**L:** So does that mean that in having a relationship with something it becomes tamed?

**H:** *In having a relationship where you know, where you think you know everything it does, there's an element of taming. If it's a relationship that's brand new where there are a lot of unexpected things happening, I wouldn't call it tame.*

**L:** Is it the unexplored that makes something wild? Does exploring it tame it in some respects or somehow bring it into a purview of control? Can you have a relationship with something without

controlling it therefore keeping it wild, as a native person might say they have through ritual and altered states of consciousness<sup>29</sup>?

**H:** *I think if you're conscious of it.*

**L:** What would you need to be able to do that?

**H:** *I have to rewire myself so that, ... that's not the right word (laughter). I have to accept the fact that its OK to go into a fearful place. That its part of the experience that I need to grow or develop. As opposed to saying that I'm trying to protect myself. In the world as a whole we don't tend to go into anything fearful, I certainly don't walk down the street at night in the dark by myself, because there's the very good possibility that someone, I could get raped or robbed or whatever. We haven't built a society that allows us to go into the wild, there's too much fear associated with it so we try and protect ourselves. And I certainly did do that sometimes and I probably to a degree do it in my art work as well. I haven't really released that part of myself...*

\* \* \*

## Forest Animal Fears

*I felt myself being shaken with tremendous irresistible power by teeth deep in my shoulder. ... My movement caused the bear to start a new flurry of biting and tearing at the flesh of my upper right arm again. I was completely conscious of feeling my flesh torn, teeth against bone... After chewing on my right shoulder, arm and side repeatedly, the bear began to bite my head and tear at my scalp. As I heard the horrible crunching sound of the bear's teeth biting into my skull, I realized it was all too hopeless.* (Herrero, 1985: 112)

**Heather:** *You're not alone when you are in the forest. There's a lot in the forest aside from ... there's birds, there's animals, there's wild things, there's all this stuff there. It's kind of busy and there's a lot going on. It's crowded and you can't see very far. It's a whole different feeling and you don't know the vastness is there because there is so much in front of you. It's just totally different from being on the water where you can really see*

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<sup>29</sup> "Ecology is...learning anew to-be-at-home in the region of our concern. This means that human homecoming is a matter of learning how to dwell intimately with that which resists our attempts to control, shape, manipulate and exploit it" (Grange, 1977: 146).

*nothing, you might see a bird fly by but basically its just space. It's like being on a mountain, on top of a mountain.*

*So I think for me being the introvert that I am, and being much more at peace when I am "alone", these places, the vastness as I describe it are places where I feel at home. Where there is a lot of people around me or a lot of activity around me, which is more how I described the forest, or what you're terming maybe the wild, although all of it is the wild to me, ah anything unexplored, anything out there is wild, and I haven't really spent a lot of time in the wild. The forest just sounds like there is too much going on, I'm not alone in that sense with the forest, its connected to too many other things. As opposed to just being connected to one whole.*

\*

*Aya: On this day when I was walking by myself in the forest I felt so scared even with the birds singing, I felt it was a dead place<sup>30</sup>. Nobody else but me.... The power of nature. I was so scared of that in a way, so I felt that. And even with dirty shoes or hats that were kind of hanging on the tree branches, I felt relieved because they were a human connection. I love nature yet I guess I can't be in the deep nature<sup>31</sup>. It's still a challenge. This was like a journey, a challenge for me, ..*



Ayako Nozawa

*Yeah it was dark and then kind of scary. It wasn't like a beautiful sunshiny kind of place, it was dark and then some plastic thing was hanging, left over from when the water went away. So I felt if the water comes it doesn't matter how we feel, how scared we are, it takes away life.*

**L:** Like when the floods come? Like when the water comes over its banks it doesn't matter how afraid you are there is no negotiating.

<sup>30</sup> Like a forest. we too embody death and decay. "While we live, we ourselves are inhabited. A full ten percent of our dry weight is not us, properly speaking, but the assembly of microbes that feed on, in and with us. Our bodies are the kitchens where our food is cooked, digested, and then burned to cook us. We live in death in a perpetual fever, 98.6 degrees fahrenheit. When at last we are well done, we begin to cool, becoming food ourselves. More and more ordered, more and more stable, like a good piece of roasted meat, we are made ready. At death the cornea clouds over, like the eyes of a cold fish, the sign that our first diners are at table" (Logan, 1995: 55).

<sup>31</sup> Maybe Aya loves the idea of nature yet can't quite put her body into it. Like many she thinks it would be a connecting thing to do but she is also afraid of the unpredictable aspects of the associated body sensations whether she is walking in the dark, or being buzzed by mosquitoes.

**A:** *Yeah*

**L:** How would you feel if there was another person walking in there?

**A:** *I would feel very relieved.*

**L:** Would that depend on how that person appeared?

**A:** *Yeah it would. If he was like a pervert or something then it's a different story. If it was a woman, then I would say 'Hi'.*

**L:** So what do you think that is? You don't know that person so what is it about that other person that makes you feel better? You don't know them and they could be there for any number of reasons, they may not be there to help you in any way.

**A:** *It's that human connection. That's it.*

**L:** They're sort part of your club? They are on your team. They have the secret handshake whereas the rest of those things, you can't be sure... Do you think insects are beautiful?

**A:** *Well I'm not there yet (laughs)*

**L:** Are there some insects that you think are beautiful?

**A:** *Ladybugs but not like cockroaches, or butterflies*

**L:** Butterflies are nice.

**A:** *I still get that scary feeling.*

**L:** Which ones, which animals<sup>32</sup>, uh which insects give you that scary feeling

**A:** *Insects, cockroaches, anything related to those black things<sup>33</sup>. Oh animals like mice I can't deal with them, so there are some distinctions.*

**L:** Spiders?

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<sup>32</sup> *Animals were regarded with awe in hunter-gatherer societies because the Wild Tame distinction did not exist or constituted a fairly soft boundary. Once this distinction arose, or got hardened, awe got transformed into fear (Berman, 1989: 72).*

<sup>33</sup> *"The flying insects swarm around our heads, near the body orifices, which are themselves marginal areas. Parasites on human and animal bodies seem like indeterminate forms, neither internal nor external, neither part of us nor free. Insects crawl which is betwixt and between swimming... They suggest a seething, secret world of transformations, menacing in fecundity and frightening in their metamorphoses". (Shepard, 1978: 100).*

**A:** *I get kind of scared at first, but when I look at them sitting so peacefully, then I'm kind of...*

**L:** How about snakes?

**A:** *(laughs). No, see I'm not totally there yet. Well the insect stage will come soon.*

**L:** What do you think is different between the insects and the bigger animals? Do you have a sense how they are different? What is it?

**A:** *I don't know. Well this is the first time for me to dive into the animal kingdom. I never thought about that. Yeah frogs, I can't.*

**L:** You don't like frogs, so you couldn't hold a frog like frogs in my pond, like if I gave it to you to hold.

**A:** *No, uh, uh.*

\* \* \*

## Ocean Fear

*I saw a fin emerge midway across the water, drifting up slowly, dreamily, like a semaphore hoisted by a somnambulist. It was a sight I had waited in trepidation for, the last several years, on a thousand swims in the ocean—that triangle shape of fin, slicing through the water. (Frierson, 1998: 275)*

“Where’s the pool?” he asks with eyes bright and breath held.

So it’s not the water he fears. Surely it’s not the saltiness of the ocean against his skin, or that miraculous feeling of being super buoyant, held up like a feather in the rolling waves. Surely it’s not that which compels him to stay fully dressed in the scorching sun, wondering where the pool is while his brothers frolic semi-naked in the surf. Then what is it?

The pool is small, it’s a contained space, it’s far from the ocean. Do its surrounding cement deck and wire fencing both spell explored, figured out, mapped, organized territory to this young mind? The pool water is also a bright clear comfortable blue with decals and toys.

But the ocean, well maybe that's another beast. It's an immense container, with vast openings, and unexplored depths. It's likely that those depths will never be fully explored. It simply is not possible.

There is life in the ocean, all kinds of life. The greatest variety of life on the planet exists in its watery depths. Any life in the swimming pool has been chlorinated, or is on the verge of being chlorinated at any moment. Life in the pool is out of place, it is like a fish out of water. In order for human life to enjoy the pool and not become sick from it there must be no other life or it isn't safe.

How can this little boy come to know nature and the natural if he is so afraid? Is it enough for someone to tell him nature stories in school? In these stories there is only the words and the images they create. There is no embodied relationship with life. How can he know the ocean from a distance, get no sand in his t-shirt, no sunburn or scrape, no heart racing encounter with a Barracuda, no gasp with the beauty of the setting sun. This distanced way is the usual way that urban children learn about the natural world. Soon enough they become adults who watch, look, count, name as they try and understand from a distance.

"I need to go into the glass bottom boat because I'm afraid that the sting rays might sting me!", he announces.

Well, why would they? Does contact with the wild have to always be about it doing something bad to us? Maybe we believe this because it is a projection of how we relate to it. Maybe deep down we realize that our "doing to" nature hurts, causes pain and discomfort at a very deep level. This is experienced simultaneously to us and the subject we are "doing to". So of course the stingray will sting, the Barracuda will bite, the sea anemone will impale. Just like we will harvest trees, spray insecticide and manipulate genes. We also have first hand embodied experience of this "doing to". We do it to ourselves and each other when we control, kill and confine our own natural aspects. How do we treat our songs, our paintings, our tears, our smiles, our bodies and our souls? What do we do to them? Hence, what do we by extension expect to have done to us when we open to the wild?

There is a deep fear of losing control, of trusting a wild creature to treat you fairly and predictably. I believe this comes from an absence of a reciprocal relationship to all life. We project our distorted sense of wildness onto the wild. We learn our fear of impulsive reckless destructiveness from human interactions not from those actions taken on behalf of wild creatures. Vulnerability is foolish in a world such as the one we have created with our separate minds. It is not safe to be yourself because someone or something will want to “do something to you”. And that something could be very unpleasant and likely life threatening. We have anthropomorphized wildness and as a result it reflects our own dysfunctional wildness more than it does the wild nature of any being living in a forest or ocean. By understanding and respecting our own wild patterns and our own place in the earth system, we will be better able to connect to, understand, respect and respond appropriately to the uniqueness of each being we encounter.

Many use the phrase “fear of the unknown” to describe the terror that emerges in the hearts of many when they encounter what they perceive to be unpredictably wild. Yet the 10 year old boy in my story was also very clear about what he fears. He doesn’t fear ocean water per se, rather he fears the wild behavioural element of that expanse of water. He fears not being able to see if something is approaching him in the blurriness. His fears are not nebulous they are exceedingly rich in their detail, very real. He fears the attacking, man-eating nature of sharks like the one in the movie “Jaws”. He’s heard about the horrible writhing stings of stingrays and jellyfish. He can’t fathom being surrounded by a school of fish or cornered by a large toothy wise eyed Barracuda. He is clear about what he fears. How does a child come to know these things? I’m sure like all of us from TV, friends, relatives, stories, legends. Stingrays have long whiplike tails that will sting you if they are approached. Barracuda’s have razor sharp teeth that took a chunk out of a friend’s friend’s ear because she was wearing dangly silver earrings. Sharks are everywhere in the ocean. They can smell blood and are attracted by slow moving things like humans snorkeling on the surface or people on surfboards. So on and so forth.

This is an urbanite’s understanding of the sea. It is a disembodied sea story. It’s a “see I told you so” kind of knowing.

The same kind of storying happens with respect to forest experiences. There is poison ivy everywhere so don’t walk off of the trail. Bears, brown ones can climb up trees so you can’t take

refuge there when they come after you, just play dead. Wolves, like the dingos in Australia will drag young children from their tents at night. Porcupine quills travel through the air like missiles to impale even the most distant camper in their sight. Snakes and spiders approach so quietly that you don't know there is one in your sleeping bag, shoe, knapsack, pocket until it is too late. You are surrounded.

In contrast to the fearful 10-year old urban boy by the seaside there might also be another 10-year old seaside dwelling boy. He has encyclopedic knowledge of good places to snorkel, what fish you can expect to see, where the sharks are, what kind of sharks they are, why there are no sharks near here, how he has even been approached by one before, and how nurse sharks are very docile. He's sure of himself, confident, appropriately wary of jellyfish and large black anemones with spines. He is able to enjoy the water and the life in it. He has lived with the water. He knows its rhythms and patterns.

The question becomes, how do you help the 10-year old urban boy to learn in that way? His brothers seem able to immerse themselves in the experience. As a result they too are becoming confident, knowledgeable and respectful ocean lovers. They have tempered the fears induced by untested ideas they had in their heads through direct embodied experience. They have learned to meld the two. Others like the 10-year old urban boy find such a process to be more difficult. For them the ideas are too powerful, they are all encompassing, they have a grip that infiltrates effectively shutting down body knowing paralyzing any chance for contradictory experience. Negativity, distrust, cynicism, fear and impatience can become a very intractable way of knowing self and the world, ultimately leading to alienation from and destruction of the wild.

\* \* \*

## Being Seen

... on the fear of not being fit to come out of hiding



*Vision, ... is not the simple thing it is imagined to be. It has to do with desire and possessiveness more than mechanical navigation, and it entangles us in a skein of changing relations with objects and people. In particular, vision helps us to know what we are like: we watch versions of ourselves in people and objects, and by attending to them we adjust our sense of what we are. Because we cannot see what we do not understand or use or identify with, we see very little of the world- only the small pieces that are useful and harmless. Each act of vision mingles seeing with not seeing, so that vision can become less a way of gathering information than avoiding it.*

(Elkins, 1996: 201)

Like a wild animal. I too am afraid of being seen. I'm afraid to emerge from the forest. I fear what will happen to me. I don't trust the outcome. I watched others emerge before me. They revealed themselves only to be captured and caged. Cajoled, mocked, fed poisonous food, led astray, each met a disturbing fate.



It's as though once I emerge I can never go back. I move out of the cocoon and its nurturing, containing walls. The world is an expansive, confusing place and I am brightly coloured, dearly seen. Maybe that's why I choose the darkness as my place, my time for motion. It covers me, shrouds me in a protective camouflage that gives me anonymity and hence freedom. In

the daytime I seek out a place where I may still myself in relative peace and quiet. If I choose my place well I become my place. we are as one. My leaf-like wings meld with the surrounding leafy background and I am a leaf for a day. Like a chameleon each new day brings a new "me" to become. This daily becoming is both energizing and fear-making. I never know what will come next. I'm continually straddling the knife-edge between security and freedom, safety and risk, stillness and life.

I'm at the same stage in my thesis writing, my painting and my life. I'm afraid of being visible. It has occurred to me to wonder why I like abstract paintings so much and why I choose to pursue much of my art-making in this manner.

Maybe I'm afraid of others really seeing my creations. I'm both afraid to reveal myself in my work and have them share their response to my revelation. I'm afraid that if they can see things clearly, they'll see small, ugly, useless things. They will then see me as small, ugly and useless. Pinned down, life-less, defined, named and finally abandoned. I'll be put in my place. Being visible showing clearly identifiable shape and form means that I will be revealed for all they think I am and I don't trust that they will think good thoughts. I fear that they will judge as harshly as I have judged in the past. They will engage in an all-encompassing simplistic condemnation, a flattening of an experience that could have been rich and enlivening. Instead as long as I remain foggy and fuzzy they only see themselves. Theirs is a projection of order on an otherwise disorderly depiction of life-force energy.



From the beginning I've been affected by fear of revealing myself in an accessible way through my art. This has led to both good and bad consequences. In a positive sense the fear has steered me away from representational art—



making I want to flow with the colours my body creates dance in the sunbursts and revel in the moving rivers. Mirroring what I see has felt like a contest of skill and ingenuity rather than a soulful playful exercise. Yet spontaneous work has paradoxically led me back to the form I so wanted to avoid. By layering colour over colour chaos eventually becomes cosmos in many of my creations. Cocoons emerge out of random splatters wings fill large sections of paper and so I am led back face to face with my fear of form. Now I have no choice but to face my fear.

Out of fear I have both gained great insights into the intricacies of spontaneous painting and have isolated myself from others who have a difficult time engaging with my work. In order to connect I need to be accessible. I no longer want to hide out be isolated and safe. I want to emerge take chances be revealed and responded to.



Wherever did I get the notion that I am somehow safer and hidden in spontaneous work? Maybe because I like the process of wild spontaneous creation so much so that I also love the product. It is an artifact of the process an after-image of sorts that is a postcard from the world I have been travelling in. Rather during representational work I hear my mind fill me with directions and admonishments. My critic my intellect has a very strong preconceived notion of how I want things to look and my skill level rarely

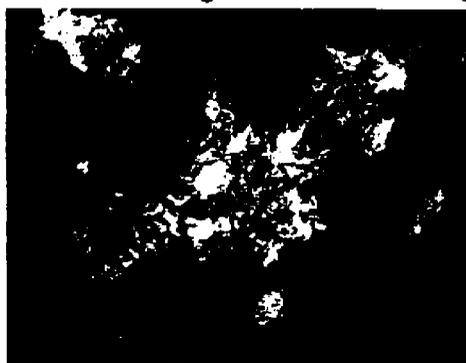
allows me that kind of satisfaction. So I focus on imperfections the missed spots the crooked lines the distortions. The inadequacies are very apparent for me and are therefore also easy for others to see as well. I tried and failed. The painting is forever a reminder of that misguided effort.



However, in order to safely and confidently emerge I must somehow merge both aspects. I need to continue enjoying the process reveling in its life affirming nature at the same time as I must represent in such a way that I act as a bridge for others. Maybe the key is to paint spontaneously from the "body in soul" and then step back and see what's required to help an outsider better engage with the work. I need to straddle both worlds.

I have beautiful photographs of mountains, forests and beaches that I have visited. Up until recently I've felt that painting from these photographs is akin to a form of cheating somehow. That somehow the painting is a representation filled with ego and judgement based on artistic convention.

I remember how liberating it was the first day I painted spontaneously. Up until this moment I had forgotten about that experience. I had been trying to paint a vase of tulips that I'd placed on the table in front of me. It occurred to me that it might be fun to try and paint tulip energy instead of its visible colour and form. I loved the result.



I can reveal form when it seems to be separate from a context. I can be a piece of a leg or an antenna without too much self-consciousness. But ask me to reveal to be seen in full and I am still paralyzed.



## Painting Fear

...on the fit between fear of the wild and painting

Tuan (1979) in his book "Landscapes of Fear" does a good job of delineating the myriad fears that influence our sense of well being and hence influence the choices we make and the experiences we allow ourselves when in the wild. The same fears that emerge while in the wilderness emerge in a different form when painting.

**Fear of large open spaces:** The blank page terror  
 How can I ever fill it? **Fear of the dark:** The  
 dread of browns and blacks **Fear of closed in  
 places:** Fear of staying in the lines **Fear of being  
 seen by a creature:** Fear of exposing self in  
 images **Fear of getting lost:** Fear of not knowing  
 where to go next **Fear of losing the map:** Fear of  
 having no plan **Fear of revealing vulnerability:**  
 Fear of defining self on one page **Fear of being  
 vulnerable:** Afraid of disappearing into the art  
**Fear of being devoured by wild beasts:** Fear of  
 going crazy **Fear of pain:** Fear of opening a  
 wound and not being able to close it **Fear of  
 unpredictability:** Fear of letting go **Fear of being  
 alone:** Fear of being rejected because of images  
 created **Fear of making a mistake:** Fear of  
 making an ugly mess **Fear of coming back to  
 civilization:** Fear of coming back to regular life...

\* \* \*

## Stuck in the Dark

... on the stagnancy associated with fearful not fitting



The stagnant waiting the tension the tugs  
 The war between two equally armed forces that threaten to rip me apart.  
 Reaching up and drawing down  
 How will I ever contain them?

November 27, 1999



Painting was messy, an over heavy, dark and  
 proud bright. I don't like the strength of color, the  
 darkness, the mess, the lack of drawing, lines and  
 transparent forms. I hate the scraped surfaces,  
 scraped here, scraped there. I hate the toughness of the  
 paper. Yet I couldn't control the amount of  
 fluidity or control of it. I was painting all these  
 streaks in one place.

## On The Need for a Good Fit

Deep space and genes are the only two as yet untamed wildernesses left for humans (Mander, 1991). We're at a point where we now have the power to alter the very fabric of the universe itself without really understanding the consequences of our actions (Swimme & Berry, 1992). It's clear that transformation of the current human-earth relationship is imperative.

Simply being in the wilderness can be transformative. Wilderness immersion whether it is a camping trip, a weekend hike, or sitting by a body of water develops a renewed sense of connection and belonging to the earth. We develop a sense of place by going out into wild spaces or back to sacred childhood places (Thomashow, 1996). If we can overcome our fear, we also cultivate a sense of spaciousness by exploring new wild places. We feel expansive, full of freedom and new possibility (Berry, 1988; Porteous, 1990; Tuan, 1979).

A sense of connection to the earth also develops when we connect to our local natural places. We can spend time observing the relationships between beings, and re-root ourselves in the places we call home. Rediscovering the natural history of the places currently in our lives, reconnects us to wilderness on a larger scale. This relationship to local places is crucial for the animation of our connection to the earth in general. It is the linking of the psyche to the natural (Berry, 1988; Orr, 1992; Thomashow, 1998).

We can also engage in earth -based rituals and exercises that expand our sense of self to include all living beings (Seed, Macy, Fleming & Naess, 1988). We can go on vision quests and nature retreats (Clinebell, 1996). More drastically we can move back to the land and live a simpler life in the spirit of Henry David Thoreau (1979). But is all this enough?

Many nature writers express despair and sadness in the face of the pollution and degradation of both their once wild childhood places and their local bio-regions (Carson 1962). Since the experience of a place is so intertwined with who we are, the ravaging of landscapes is psychologically ravaging as well (Orr, 1992; Roszak et al, 1995)). As a result, we must learn to cope with the despair and heartache associated with the now degraded nature of places we once held sacred (Macy, 1991).

Also, wild spaces are becoming harder to find as more of the planet's surface is colonized by the tell-tale signs of the western consumer life style. Over half the world's population now lives in cities and does not have regular access to the reconnecting affects of being on a mountaintop or in a forest (Brown, Renner & Flavin, 1998). Even when we are able to retreat to the wild and simplify life, we carry the powerful vestiges of our socialization and our culture with us.

*I am alarmed when it happens that I have walked more than a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit. In my afternoon walk I would fain forget all my morning pre-occupations and my obligations to society. But it sometimes happens that I can not shake off the village.*

(Thoreau, 1979: 600)

Further, many report that changed feelings and perceptions gained as a result of a wilderness experience wear off after a few days back in the routine of normal modern life (Devereux, 1996; Greenway, 1995; Harper, 1995).

Transformation of the human-earth relationship can not be attained solely from placing ourselves in natural settings. Although immersion in wild places is crucial for the development of a sense of connection, there must also be ongoing animation of a deeper connection to all earth beings. This connection is arrived at only when there is an ongoing daily sense of wholeness or integration between ourselves and the earth regardless of the setting we may find ourselves in (Harper, 1995). Therefore while being in the wilderness has the power to heal the body and mind (Clinebell, 1996; Roszak et. al., 1995), the body and mind also need to heal in order to fully and sustainably "be" in the wilderness (Fleischman, 1997). Further, it seems we need a therapy of sorts that will open us up to the experience of what it is to feel earth-connection. Traditional indoor education of the mind doesn't seem like enough. Somehow we must overcome our fears and open ourselves to the language of the earth again.

Comb me.

Comb me free from the grey stone waxy layers of hurt of dirt of pain of stuckness

Pull apart the pieces that encase me

Carefully, methodically liberate each strand one by one

Pull the mass apart into pieces

Sections that can stand on their own

Separate them from the group  
Weave together these pieces into intricate new designs  
New textures and new patterns  
Feel the breeze move through me as the strands dance and flow.....

I have to stop being nice.

\* \* \*

The following section entitled, *A Still-life: Painting the Pattern that Connects* is my response to the need for learning a new way of being that allows us to clear out the blockages, embrace both joy and fear, open to the earth and experience a good fit once again.

## A Still-Life: Painting the Pattern That Connects

...on the pattern of a good fit



*Pattern contains the nature of nature. Rather than saying that pattern depends on nature, thus, it would be better to say that nature depends on pattern. Pattern is nature seen in the best light. Pattern is a summing up of a view of nature. Via pattern we see nature at its most wondrous.*

(Yanagi 1972: 115)

*Step by step you invent, responding to the inner urge as if the brush were guiding you. No resistance, no control. In that instance there is harmony between you and your work. You watch in surprise as the painting is born under your hand. It is amazingly different from anything you could have thought of or planned.*

(Cassou & Cubley 1995: 14)

In the darkness of the night  
Lies the power of still light  
Whispers hope to counter fear  
Means the dawn is surely near  
Lightening up the dingey corners  
Brightening round the crying mourners  
Looking out to counter inwards  
Breaking rank to carry onwards  
Through the space of illuminations  
Where the end to ruminations  
Brings heartfelt caresses  
Tender addresses  
In the warmth of sunlit togetherness

In the Eastern tradition, the pattern of nature is known as *li* (LaChapelle, 1992). It does not describe a law that nature follows, rather it embodies an inherent natural knowing that reveals itself in pattern and that connects all beings.

*'Li', then is rather the order and pattern in Nature, not formulated Law. But it is not pattern thought of as something dead, like a mosaic; it is dynamic pattern as embodied in all living things, and in human relationships and in the highest human values. (Needham, 1979: 321-2)*

Although many now write about the pattern that connects (Ball, 1999; Capra, 1996; Conforti, 1999), Bateson (1979) was the first to do so. Bateson (1979: 8) began his search for the connection between mind and nature with the question, "what pattern connects the crab to the lobster and the orchid to the primrose and all four of them to me? And me to you?" Then promptly answered his own question by stating:

*The pattern which connects is a metapattern. It is a pattern of patterns. It is that metapattern which defines the vast generalization that, indeed, it is patterns which connect. (Bateson, 1979: 11)*

Capra (1996) describes the pattern of life as being self-storying, self-creating, self-forming. The pattern of life is made up of a set of relationships between the processes of production. To relate it to the eastern perspective there is the pattern (*li*) and the matter/energy structure of life (*chi*). Both are joined in a process or relationship. Each being manifests its own pattern in the context of a network of relationships with all other beings. Therefore patterns connect to other patterns in a patterned network.

Said another way each being differentiates itself by self-animating, and self-forming according to their own pattern in the relational context of other differentiating patterned beings. In terms of the growth of a tree, the *li* of a tree, its pattern of self-creation, relates to the *chi* of the environment (the wind, sun, rain, soil) and grows accordingly. Both *li* and *chi* influence each other to form unique tree-ness. So no particular power shapes the tree, rather the tree co-evolves in a network of relationships. Nature is the co-evolving patterned dance of patterns producing themselves

*Universal harmony comes not by the celestial fiat of some God, but by the spontaneous cooperation of all beings in the universe brought about by their following the internal necessities of their own nature . . . All entities at all levels behave in accordance with their position in the greater patterns (organisms) of which they are parts.* (Needham 1979: 561)

Mandelbrot (1983) began to mathematically describe the complex seemingly chaotic irregular forms that nature's patterning often takes. He wanted to be able to mathematically describe a cloud or a branching tree just as easily as mathematics can describe a square or a cylinder. In his investigations he soon discovered what he called the fractal geometry of nature (1977). He describes how natural fractal forms demonstrate the principle of self-similarity. Broccoli is a good example of what he means. A small branch of a broccoli head looks just like and has the same form as the larger head of which it is a part. The signature of the whole is in the part (Bohm, 1998; Selby, 2000).

*There are many other examples of self-similarity in nature. Rocks on mountains look like small mountains; branches of lightning or borders of clouds, repeat the same patterns again and again; coastlines divide into smaller and smaller portions, each showing similar arrangements of beaches and headlands. Photographs of a river delta, the ramifications of a tree, or the repeated branchings of blood vessels may show patterns of such striking similarity that we are unable to tell which is which.* (Capra, 1996: 138)

However, Ball (1999: 117) cautions us to not think that Mandelbrot's computer generated ordered mathematical models are the same as natural fractals. Nature's own self-similar pattern generation is subject to the forces of *chi* (matter and energy) and these are often chaotic forces. The resulting natural fractals have recognizable patterns and a self-similar composition where the part mirrors the whole, but they are more irregular because they are formed in relation to a "noisier" environment. Therefore out of the chaos of the simultaneous co-evolution of countless life forms comes order and patterned complexity.

Painting the pattern that connects is not about willing ourselves to create form. Instead it is about opening out and willing ourselves to accept natural patterns and forms. It is about opening oneself to universal patterning. It is about moving aside the directives, the rules, the laws that we deem need to be obeyed in order for art to appear and instead open to the pattern.

*It is perhaps the most universal problem ... how to replace in us the will to form with the will to accept natural form. (Kuang-Ming, 1982: 115)*

In this instance we do not use our will to create and form images with the paints, rather we use our will to open to and be fully present and in communication with nature through paint. We prepare ourselves and trust the process (McNiff, 1998). In painting, if one lets go of the will to form things, and not mold them according to dictates then one dives into this chaos. During a deep immersion in the chaos, cosmos or ordered pattern emerges. Form, pattern and fractal order come to light. When painting comes from this place of letting go, the paintings are fractals. They are mirrors of the self in our natural form. The painting is a self-similar "part" of the whole that is us, we see the signature of the whole in our creation. It is also a self-similar part of the whole that is the painting experience at that time. We paint our unique pattern in the web of patterned relationships at the same time as we experience the universal pattern that connects.

*The image, as with any manifestation of form, carries with it a holographically encoded snapshot of the entire informational field within which it is embedded. (Canforti 1999: 76)*

January 2, 2000

Last night I had an interesting dream. My sister and I had enjoyed our time in the country side and were walking along a road that quickly turned into a bridge. While standing on the bridge we found ourselves overlooking an idyllic scene comprised of beautiful green hills.

Somehow I knew we were waiting for a train to pass. We knew it would do so soon. Without me noticing my sister somehow heard the train and grabbed it in her hands. As it passed through her hands it turned into a filmstrip of some sort that made its way into my hands. I was threading this filmstrip through my hands and letting it spool into an interesting amber plastic container. I'm not sure how the filmstrip entered the container but it did and was spooling at the bottom of it. At one point I was concerned that the film was coming too quickly so it is likely that I was just getting things together. So I asked my sister to slow down if she could. I was aware that she had a good deal of tension that she was holding in her hands since the train had been moving at a fast clip and she had stopped it and was now controlling its speed and direction. As

For me one of the most powerful examples of the relationship between fractals and painting can be found in the work of Taylor, Micolich & Jonas (2000). They investigated the fractal nature of Jackson Pollock's drip paintings and dubbed his work Fractal Expressionism. Apparently Pollock painted by dripping paint in one continuous stream or trajectory that splattered paint in a dense web. Painting in this manner stands in contrast to the typical broken brush strokes that comprise a painting. Pollock's repetitive, cumulative, so called "continuous dynamic" painting process is strikingly similar to the way patterns in nature evolve.

These researchers recreated Pollock's technique using a paint dripping pendulum. Both a pendulum that drips paint in a regular rhythmic motion and a kicked pendulum that was knocked into a chaotic rhythm were used to create paintings. Using computer scanning and the mathematical properties of fractals as their litmus, they determined that the images created by the chaotic kicked pendulum were fractal. They also scanned Jackson Pollock paintings and aerial photographs of a treed landscape and found both to be fractals. They concluded:

*Pollock, ... didn't simply mimic what patterns in nature looked like in the way that da Vinci and Hiroshige did but instead used Nature's*

*this point I was surprised to see that it had turned into a film strip. After a bit of time I realized that I was holding only the plastic ball. The film strip was no longer. Instead in each sector of the ball there was a snake. I also became aware that in front of each section of the container was a plastic door of sorts and I was barely managing to both hold the ball and hold the doors closed at the same time. I managed to continue holding the doors closed until I was jolted by something and one of the doors opened up allowing a beige/green snake to get out. I tried closing the door again but it was too late; he had already gone out. The snake had diamonds on his back and intimidating teeth. He did not and just grazed over the inside of my left wrist but he didn't bite me. I was concerned about having let him out. I was worried that he would hurt someone who wasn't expecting to see such a dangerous snake in such a benign landscape.*

*I immediately upon waking I wrote down some images and free associations about the dream.*

*Films carry people and things from one location to the next. They are about something about movement and transition. Films do not have a voice or reel of sorts.*

*motion-chaos- in his painting technique and hence generated "pure Nature" in his paintings. His patterns stand as examples rather than imitations of Nature- they can be described by a fractal dimension just like Nature's patterns can. Pollock adopted the same rules of construction as Nature- statistical self-similarity- and hence captured the essence of nature. As Pollock himself noted, "Painting is self-discovery. Every good painter paints what he is" (Rodman, 1957: 82) concluding "I am nature" (O'Connor, 1951: 226). (cited in Taylor et.al, 2000: 149)*

Pollock let go to the moving chaos in his work and emerged with fractal forms, natural patterns. He did not "will" forms to emerge rather through his unique dripping technique he placed himself within the chaotic natural rhythm of nature and there simultaneously created himself and the natural world. His paintings became a mirror for the experience of being one with the natural world at the same time as they were natural. There was a "meditation in action" (Franck, 1993) quality to Pollock's work as well.

Pollock was painting his own pattern, animating his own uniqueness in the process as the same time as he was bathed in universal natural patterns.

Another way to look at painting the pattern that connects is provided by Capra (1996) when like Bateson (1979) he describes

Then movement causes still individual frames to become animated and full of life when they are spun through curiosity. Stillness becomes life when you move still images through a movie projector. In film, smoke, layers, darkness, black, white and colour, need light projecting through to be seen. By focusing on the sun and then projecting the images onto a screen the story the images tell is revealed. However there must be an order of image presentation and a certain motion that is created for the story to make sense.

The snakes were alive yet contained in this bizarre honeycombed structure. Each was separated from the other one, just like each train car was contained from the other and each frame of film was separate from the others. The snake's body, its moving vertebral backbone, flexes and winds as he traverses the ground. Each vertebra is separate yet connected to the other in a long strand. This all reminds me of the painting I did of images lined up in rows.



Train: train of thought  
 Fused to images  
 Moving in the movies  
 Contained in a transparent container to be  
 transformed, not lie  
 The life force, the backbone, snakes  
 Bridge between our inner dreams  
 Passions and the world  
 The train my soul grabbed and held  
 became a record of life, a cord of life, a  
 moving catalogue from beginning to end

"mind" as being the connector. He sees mind as being the process of life, the organizer of life activity. He sees the interactions of a living being with its environment as being mind or mental interactions. He furthers the argument by stating that the use of LSD, a psychedelic (mind manifesting) drug, accentuates, activates, amplifies and acts like a catalyst of inherent mental processes. He states that the striking fractal patterns that are experienced while on LSD must somehow be embedded in the brain and refers to the research done by Grof (1985) as support for this statement.



This connection is fascinating in light of the work done by Jeremy Narby (1998) who states that DNA is the self-patterning pattern that connects. In *The Cosmic Serpent* Narby gives a rich well documented and fascinating account of his search for understanding of how Andean natives use hallucinogens to know the wisdom of the rainforest. The Ashaninca say that the plants tell them what

This I held, stored, accumulated and contained until I could not contain it any longer and the life force in the form of a benign green snake, got out. Then once it became clear that I could not be hurt, I worried about the ethics of letting such a snake run loose and wild in such a benign landscape. It was if people were not expecting it. A moving catalogue from end to end, reminds me of DNA, the great journeyer, the great connector, how I contain it and have to release to its inherent wildness as well. Holding it in my hands is not really possible, it has a life all its own.

### The Cosmic River

The cosmic river  
Is the weaver of the web  
That makes my heart sense quiver  
Gives my soul its flow and ebb  
It bathes me in its riches  
It fills me with its charm  
It sends me up with stitches  
Made of water, stream, the yarn  
It flows me around the rock face  
It pulls me with undertow  
It takes me into a dark place  
Then teaches me how to know  
The way to illumination  
The one where the sun shines pure  
It curves with determination  
Its destination is sure  
It has been flowing here for ages  
Yet it keeps on changing  
It pulls me deep in sleep

illness they are good for. Healing remedies are told to them while they are in an altered state.

He postulates and then gathers evidence for the ability of DNA to communicate to shamans when they are in altered states.

*... the global network of DNA based life emits ultra-weak radio waves, which are currently at the limits of measurement, but which we can none-the-less perceive in states of defocalization, such as hallucinations and dreams.* (Narby, 1998: 116)

*In their visions, shamans take their consciousness down to the molecular level and gain access to information related to DNA, which they call "animate essences" or "spirits". This is where they see double helixes, twisted ladders and chromosome shapes. This is how shamanic cultures have known for millenia that the vital principle is the same for all living beings and is shaped like two entwined serpents (or a vine, a rope, a ladder). DNA is the source of their astonishing botanical and medicinal knowledge, which can be attained only in defocalized and "nonrational" states of consciousness, though its results are empirically verifiable. The myths of these cultures are filled with biological imagery. And the shaman's metaphoric explanations correspond quite precisely to the descriptions that biologists are starting to provide.* (Narby, 1998: 117)

In his search Narby realizes that modern biology does not accept that nature is intelligent and can communicate. Biologists see DNA as a chemical, an inert substance that is the pattern language or code of life, but

*Withing love of panda's hue  
It freezes by all of the voice of reason  
The river takes its hold when the truth  
has been let out  
That the river is our being  
The river is our care  
The river is our seeing  
The river shows us more  
Than what's floating on the surface  
Than what's nagging on your mind  
By streaming down the air space  
Burial treasure you will find*



is itself not alive. Biology has a large blind spot when it comes to embracing indigenous wisdom even though much of the complex indigenous botanical knowledge gained while in an altered state has been recently verified by science.

Whether altered states of consciousness allow us to melt down to the molecular level and access the wisdom of the DNA inherent in our own bodies or in the beings that surround us. Or somehow the processes of our mind when we are open to them generate natural fractal forms and patterns that are nature-like. The conclusion I draw is the same. I am of nature. I share the pattern of life with all other living beings. When I "defocalize" (Narby, 1998), let go, open up, go into the chaos, alter my



conscious state with drugs, trance, food deprivation, spinning, or in sleep, I am one with that pattern. I am that pattern, that pattern is me, my expression takes on that patterned form, and all is of nature. I resonate with naturalness.

## The Web of Life

*Let your awareness drop deep within you like a stone sinking below the level words can express. It is the deep web of relationship that underlies all experience. Out of the vast net you cannot fall. No inability or failure or cowardice can ever sever you from that living web. For that is what you are.*

(Macy, e-mail communication)



My first painting exposure to the web of life or the network of rivers began with the following dream:

*I am swimming in a fast moving river and I'm heading downstream quite quickly. I'm on my back with my feet heading downstream and my hands providing direction and locomotion when needed. Up ahead on a rock I see a large brown bear. He is watching me with his all knowing bear eyes and I can not read his motive. He doesn't look like he is about to retreat so I begin to quickly kick my feet and use my arms to swim back upstream and one of his reach is broken.*

The morning after the dream I recorded the dream and decided that I wanted to go back and repeat the ending to see if the dream's signifier of fear I was sure that I had learned all there was to learn from the bear.

Another way to describe the pattern that connects is as archetypes that are both in nature and in the psyche. The dynamics of self-organization are what create these patterns. Archetypes can be seen as the patterns of instinctual behaviour. Conforti (1999) likens archetypes to resonance in a morphogenic field and uses an example showing that salmon migrate by staying in and following the resonance of these fields.

According to Sheldrake (1990: 19),

*... matter itself is now conceived of not as static inert stuff but rather as vibratory patterns of energy bound within fields. Material particles are dynamic patterns of activity, and the organizing structures underlying them are invisible non-material fields: matter arises from fields and energy. ... (Fields) are non-material, organising regions of influence.*

Maybe spontaneous art creation and the connections it engenders can also be described as resonating with the "field" of relations. While painting you put yourself in the field, or immerse yourself within the flow of a river.

*The creative force flows over the terrain of our psyches looking for the natural hollows, the "arroyos", the channels that exist in us. We become its tributaries, its basins; we are its pools, ponds, streams and sanctuaries. The wild creative force flows into whatever*

I decided to take myself back in the river in a meditative state so that I could receive whatever the bear had to offer. I did this and was given a beautiful yellow rose. I held the rose in my hand and in my heart. After completing the meditation I decided to paint the energy of the rose. I wanted to know what lurked beneath the facade of its yellow royness. I blindly chose the colours for the painting and ended up with the following image.



This painting surprised me because it didn't seem to have anything to do with a yellow rose. It was dark green and looked like a particle river flying out of its banks. So I opened to a poem about the yellow rose in an attempt to know more.

*Yellow rose*

*Olykiros*

*What you are inside*

*Could you be*

*Let go your fear*

*And let me for a ride*

*Be your friend*

*Until the end*

*It keeps you safe and warm*

*Sad and sad*

*And don't be*

*My petal can do no harm*

*beds we have, those we are born with as well as those we dig with our own hands. We don't have to fill them, we only have to build them.*

(Pinkola Estes, 1992: 299)

Feeling the creative flow in this sense is about opening to the river, to the field that calls us. It's about not resisting that resonance. When the resonance is avoided or blocked an incredible alienation and dissonance occurs that leads us to wander until we find that connection again. To be in the flow again we must unblock the tributaries, open our streams and clean out the drain pipes.

The poem seemed to bill about motion that would keep me safe and secure. Also the orange river in the painting seemed to be transforming into a blue-green network of rivers.

Soon I started to experience nets and webs consistently over the many paintings that followed. Every time I sat down to paint, a network was revealed.



*The first time a rainstorm pours down a mountainside looking for an outlet, it will create a suitable pathway down the hill. Gravity and other forces are important influences in the direction this pathway takes. However with successive rainstorms, the system develops a memory of its previous trajectory. The original route, now having become more fully defined through successive iterations, evolves into a more highly defined memory and pathway. Thus there is the establishment of a pattern.*

(Conforti, 1999: 79)

This sequence creates memory and habituation within a system. It reminds me of what happens after repeated regular exposures to painting. The opening, the creative pathway is widened and exists waiting for the next flood of the river. The ability to create in this sense grows as resistance is dissolved away. So to create is to make creative capacity, to self-grow in our openness to the creative.

**create** v. borrowed from Latin *creatus*, past participle of *creare* to make, produce, from a lost noun *kre-ya* growth, related to *crescere* arise, grow.

Chambers Dictionary of Etymology

There is a pattern to all living beings. There is a pattern to growth cycles, to physical appearance and to creation. These patterns are universal between species. They connect all beings. I engage in patterning when I paint thereby opening out to and sensitizing myself to natural patterned knowing.

*Everything in the universe is a universe self-reference. The universe is guided from within, like music that is composed as it is played, like a painting that takes us places as it is painted. We are within that pattern and we can enable the pattern to have a certain consciousness of itself through us. The universe knows itself through us, we are the painter and the painting.* (Thomas Berry Lecture, Port Burwell, June 3, 1999)

The pattern that connects is a wild pattern. It is self-creating. If left on its own, DNA re-creates life ad infinitum. Letting go to the pattern is an act of courage in the face of this wildness (May, 1975). It is about opening to the forces of natural pattern so mysterious that it is beyond our full comprehension. We can never fully absorb its complexity especially since patterns are not static, they are constantly changing.

*We have been trained to think of patterns, with the exception of those of music, as fixed affairs. It is easier and lazier that way but, of course, all nonsense. In truth, the right way to begin to think about the pattern which connects is to think of it as 'primarily' (whatever that means) a dance of interacting parts and only secondarily pegged down by various sorts of physical limits and by those limits which organisms characteristically impose.* (Bateson, 1979: 13)

Much like a water trapped fish we can never fully get perspective on the nature of the water life. Only if we step onto land can we see the vastness of the water life that immerses us. Although we may "think" we can attain that distanced perspective, we are of the pattern we are trying to observe. Said another way, the wild aspect of the pattern that connects is akin to our unconscious nature and no amount of conscious rational conjecturing can know that world of sensation and metaphor because it is unconscious (Rogers, 2000)

We can not will ourselves to paint and experience the same connection to the wild as we do when we open out and let go to the experience. When we "will" a creation we are not co-creating or co-evolving with the beings present in that moment. We are seeing the surface,

caught in the view. Like the tendency for many to engage with nature like it were a pretty picture (Saito, 1998), painting in this way does not access our sensitivity to the natural dance that the painting process can become. Granted, painting is not as multi-sensory an experience as being in nature, however the practice of opening to the wild co-evolution that is painting opens and cleanses our senses. I feel that I have an advantage in this regard. When I take out my contacts, I have “blurry time” experiences.

## Not Being Able to See

...on a blurry fit

*(Hu)man(kind) has lapsed into a fixed and "narrowed" mode of "single vision" by means of the physical eye alone, which sees reality as a multitude of isolated individuals in a dehumanized world.*

(Evernden, 1993: 32)

I was born very far-sighted (8.5 diopters). The muscles controlling the lenses of my eyes are too weak to focus my view so without corrective lenses I exist in a blurry world. My parents first wondered about my vision when my eyes began to regularly cross that was the first signal that something was not right. Early on I went for eye training that helped me to learn to not cross my eyes. That made me look normal but I still could not see clearly. Ironically when I cross my eyes I can read write and function quite well. In fact I went through most of high school looking good by wearing glasses only during class time. At 16 I went on a two week Spring break holiday to Florida with a friend and never wore my glasses once.

I believe I learned something about sight during my early years that I have rediscovered only recently through painting. Not being able to see the intricacies of fine detail opens me to the larger pattern. It also opens me to movement within the pattern as I embrace the vibration between the intricacies. I am not a pinpoint detail person. I am a pattern seer an over-viewer. I need the overview before I can take in the fine details. I need a place to hang them. I need to know their relationships to each other.

In the last year I've rediscovered the power of "blurry time". I will now spend full days without my contacts in. I especially enjoy doing this in the summer. I wear a loose sarong so that I can feel the breeze on my body and I create with garden life. Or I frolic in the water. I sometimes start my days by going for a blurry run where I can see the shadows and light of the trees as their leaves move in the breeze. I see trees in their wholeness when I'm in my blurry state. I also hear my breath and free run in my sensory experience more fully. I feel smoother more integrated less outward looking for cues and more inward focused as a result. The boundaries between self

and other become more transparent. Its as though I stop looking for things to look at and instead focus on feeling my way through interactions.

I dont seem to get as easily tied in knots about the details of an activity when Im in "blurry time". I seem to be able to more easily lose my self in the process. If I explain to family and friends what I am doing and how its not personal that Im not looking them in the eyes (I cant see their eyes clearly) then I feel my interaction with them also becomes flowing and smooth. They know that Im not watching them they feel the freedom of invisibility somehow and I also feel less preoccupied by their presence. I cant see them so they arent really there in a judgmental kind of way. We are both freer to do as we please and be who we are.

Strange how my far-sightedness is seen as a medical problem that needs to be corrected.

Wearing glasses as a young girl made me feel ugly and self-conscious. I wasnt able to do gymnastics with the same gusto as my sisters because I couldnt really see enough to be safe. I felt awkward and a bit ashamed of the big eyes emerging from behind the rims. In order to see what everybody else was seeing I had to wear my corrective lenses. What I saw without them was not right. What would have happened to me if I was born before the dawn of written text and corrective lenses? I guess Id have lived happily in "blurry time" not realizing that what I saw was any different from what everyone else was seeing.

Ive experienced a deep resonate kind of seeing during "blurry time". Its a sensing a harmonizing that makes my pupils my retinas my contacts obsolete. superfluous really unnecessary. In fact they can get in the way.

Its interesting about seeing things. To need to see things to know what they are, as opposed to hearing them or smelling them is very powerful for us. The power of our eyes to decide what the world is, can make it worse for us because we dont trust our bodies our hearts. The eyes seem to be so tied to the intellect. Visual acuity can actually

cause me to doubt what my night vision my "blurry time" my night sensing is really telling me.

The two sometimes compete for center stage for the title of truth bearer. They out shout each other jostle with their elbows trip spit and pummed. They duke it out defend their turf and say "look again you've got it all wrong". Like a bickering couple whose words are not reaching each other whose languages are different and denote radically opposing ways of encoding the world they astonish each other with the void that exists between them. Cornered each in their separate place they do the dance of particle and wave. Usually he says "I see the truth of the matter. Its clear. Im observing from a distance Im objective I know whats real. While I have sympathy for your impressions as heartfelt as they are ultimately I know the truth because I am separate. I can see the simplicity Im not confused clouded by my feelings and sense abilities. Everything is simple and clear. Get a grip get a hold of yourself you move all over the place youre so up and down. Why try and muddy the picture by making things more complex than they really are? 'Be rational!'"

She says "I feel the complexity of things I sense it in my body. My head races my gut aches my palms sweat in response to all that you've just said. I hear you in my cells. I dont want to pin things down divide them up compartmentalize I dont have a position. Instead I move I cycle like a wave like a breeze across a wheat field. I undulate I float I dive down to the dark depths and pop back up again just as quickly. I inhale life into my body I feel the breath in my cells I take it all in I always have. My knowing comes from the past the present and the future. The first beings to climb out of the primordial muck onto land are me just as the eagle who soars above is also me. Its all me hearing you tell me its all so simple".

Like night and day they are joined at the hip. Like siamese twins they must learn to cooperate with each other. She feels she has a solution. "You just cant have it your way all the time. I can no longer stand to be defined relative to you. That privileges your viewpoint. The way it stands now together we are a two-sided coin you are heads and Im not heads. I become defined by your absence as though there is you

and then everything else that is not you. Instead I want to be joined to you and be "tails" simultaneously. I don't want to be the unseen to your seen, the invisible to your visible, the unconscious to your conscious or the irrational to your rational. I am the implicate to your explicate, the wave to your particle, the whole to your part, the space to your place and the feminine to your masculine. We complement each other in a dance of harmonious union, with you within me and me within you simultaneously".

\* \* \*

Training oneself to see beyond the surface gets us past the judging naming gatekeeper that for me at least, lives in my eyes, so that we may allow information from the other senses to permeate our being. I experience my inherent wildness while painting. I try not to distance myself from the view or feel the need to tame or place it behind fences and moats. For when the wild pattern calls me, I want to be sensitive enough to be able to hear it and strong enough not succumb to the eyes that say, "but there's nothing there!". I place my body in the river. The pattern that connects is the river<sup>34</sup>. I let go to the flow and bathe in the pattern. The process of spontaneous art creation is about releasing to the river and embracing what it has in store. It is a wild river that is always changing. It is the creative river described by Pinkola-Estes (1992), the field of relations (Conforti, 1999; Sheldrake, 1990), the world of the wild unconscious (Jung, 1957) and DNA in Narby's (1998) description of shamanic knowing; the cosmic river of my poems and dreams.

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<sup>34</sup> "This repository is like a river that runs through you and around you, a river in which you are completely at home, the river is the source" (Gold, 1998: 7).

The River

The river it knows	Must be freed and left to wander
The river it flows	Over rocks and silt not squander
The source water grows	The precious pristine water
The direction it shows	Of the river of our souls
Our true inner beings	Free the flow
Our true inner seeings	Dance in the know
Our genuine feelings	Feed water show
The seed it sows	The way to go
Of much needed sun	To find your source
In the face of great darkness	To chart your course
In the ugly alone starkness	To happily go
Of dried up beds	Deep and slow
And dammed up heads	To the source of you
Filled with pressures of containment	To the water so true
Aching banks of self detainment	Loving and being in the greeny-blue

Regularly opening to the wisdom of the river slowly begins to crumble the damming of the wild. Visits become longer over time and soon the dam has been flooded and there is no longer a divide or a barrier between the wild and daily life. Painted images emerge in dreams, dreams emerge in painted images emerge in wilderness experiences, emerge in poetry, song and daily chores. Synchronicities abound and there is a sense of presence in the moment whilst in the flow of the wild.

Regularly releasing to the river as well as dissolving barriers and increasing sensitivity to the wild, also teaches us how to be in the moment even though all is chaotically changing. It animates our own inherent wildness thus dissolving the boundary between the human and the wilderness. Further it enlivens, enchants and enfolds us in a timeless state where we can experience the creative spark that binds all living beings. Experiencing spontaneous painting is akin to being one with the life spark. The painter is led to a new respect and appreciation for both the journey that is long-term image making and the stories that images tell. It teaches that metamorphosis is not a one time cycle, rather we are continually changing. In fact the only thing

that stays the same is change. Painting helps one to be better able to cope with this constant metamorphic flux, it provides a hand hold of sorts.

*“Painting is the art of metamorphosis”*. (Elkins, 2000: 119)

Spontaneous painting is in itself a form of self-transformation or metamorphosis. Work of this nature is essential for the sustainable transformation of the human-earth relationship. The signature transformative experience that spontaneous art-making promotes is the ability to open to, resonate and dance with the life force, the field of relations. While in this dance, one comes to simultaneously know self and other. Over time, the cycle of life shapes and moulds to promote the transformation, the self-change, a deepening of feeling that is inevitable.

Both my painting and inquiry processes have been about following what resonates. I embraced whatever seemed to fit. This inquiry journey has led me to the experience of metamorphosis.

## Inquiry: The Cecropian Moth Life Cycle

... on a metamorphic fit



*This sounding-winged Hawkmoth, which like a gigantic bee is buzzing around the jasmine in the deepening twilight, hovering over and anon to probe the starry flowers that make the evening air almost palpable with fragrance- this moth, what "story of life" can he tell? Nearly a year of existence he has spent as a helpless, almost motionless pupa, buried in the soft earth, from whence he has emerged but this evening. About a twelve month ago he was a great fat green caterpillar with an arching horn over his rump, working ever harder and harder at devouring poplar leaves, and grower ever fatter and fatter. But before that he had one day burst forth a little wriggling worm, from a globular egg glued to a leaf. Whence came the egg? It was developed within the ovary of a parent Hawkmoth, whose history is but an endless rotation of the same stages- pupa, larva, egg, moth, pupa, etc. etc.*

(Gosse, 1857: 118-9)

Simultaneously painting and experiencing the metamorphic life cycle of the Cecropian Moth brought my attention to my own ongoing personal transformation and the transformative cycle of this inquiry. This work has been a co-evolution. Just as the caterpillar contains the information that will create the moth, so to the moth contains the necessary information to create a caterpillar. This dance is a perpetual cycle of relationship. The particular knowing of the caterpillar is different from the expansive knowing of the moth yet both are contained in the other. Intense blind voracious relationships with single leaves mark the existence of the caterpillar in contrast to the hungry expansive overviews afforded the moth. My own research cycle started with a focus on consumption, a gathering of sorts and ultimately transformed the once dormant, into far-seeing flight. Dancing with the paints, transformed into dancing with painted images. Like a newly emerged moth I have found my way by being sensitive to what felt right. I fell into this transformative inquiry process by paying attention to what I was attracted to<sup>35</sup> or what resonated in the moment, and followed that path. Resonance formed the backbone of my artistic inquiry process.

*Without sensitivity to primordial communication within the universe, the universe's story comes to an end. That this is certainly the case with an individual organism we can readily appreciate in the case of the monarch butterfly. Climbing out of the pupal shell, stretching its wings in the drying sunlight, what other voices of the universe can this butterfly rely on for guidance? It must make a journey that will cover territory filled with both dangers and possibilities, none of which has ever been experienced before. To rely on its own personal experience or knowledge would be disaster for the butterfly. Instead it finds itself surrounded by voices of the past, of the other insects, of the wind, of the rain and the leaves of the trees. The information of the genetic material comes forth precisely within its interactions. That is, the monarch butterfly has little if any individual awareness of the difference between beneficial winds and dangerous winds until it finds itself confronted by them in reality. The winds speak to the butterfly, the taste of the water speaks to the butterfly, the shape of the leaf speaks to the butterfly and offers a guidance that resonates with the wisdom coded in the butterfly's being. ... The source of the guidance is both within and without- the universe as a single yet multiform mode of being.* (Swimme & Berry, 1992: 42)

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<sup>35</sup> There is a mysterious aspect to what attracts or allures and it is a fundamental dimension of the universe. "These allurements permeating you and everyone and everything are fundamentally mysterious. You are interested in certain things, certain people, certain activities; each interest is as fundamental to the universe as is the gravitational attraction our Earth feels for the Sun" (Swimme, 1984:46).

Cecropian moths metamorph or transform themselves from caterpillar to moth through a mysterious and complex process that continues to enchant scientists. I too have become enchanted with this self-change process as the effects of the practice of spontaneous painting and artistic inquiry ooze into the cells of my painting body. I did not choose the metaphor of Cecropian moth metamorphosis for this work, rather I was led.

I have discovered that painted images have stories to tell. Like the metamorphosis of a caterpillar to a moth, the creation of a spontaneous painting, the experience of this inquiry and the creation of this thesis, there is a flurry of activity that does not happen systematically from the head to the abdomen. It's a simultaneous creation of the whole. It's characterized by a complete dissolving down of the caterpillar followed by an all-at-once, co-creative coming together of the moth. All of this is happening in the context of cocoon-like outward silence and stillness.

## Caterpillar Knowing

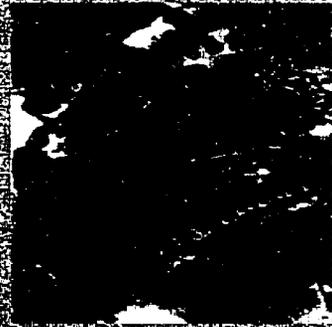
...on the fitting need for nourishment

The caterpillar eats, takes in, consumes, gathers energy and gets bigger and stronger. She splits her skin, eats more, chews things over, splits her skin again and again. She takes in way more than her body weight in food, generating more of herself as a result. Leaves become a caterpillar in an instant. Like a bookworm, she reads and reads until she is sleepy and full.

Caterpillars warm my soul, they munch, they munch, they munch. They first lived as eggs that have now developed into crawling, eating, exploring creatures. They are so filled up that they may explode if they are not careful. They shed their skins, eat, shed, eat, shed. Chew, chew, chew, they chew the fat, the meatiest part of the plant, the stem. Leaves fill them to the top. They suck out the juice. They are like worms that aerate the undergrowth, bring in space, chew out darkness beneath the plants, down at the roots. Chomp, chomp, chomp. As a group their impact is profound. They create such damage to a single tree, yet they nurture the future growth of butterflies. Eventually they will create and retreat to a cocoon, where the leaves they once ate become their shelter, their home. The leaves will now encase and protect them. They are camouflaged and safe.

March 8, 1999

I started with rose gouache. Rose gouache keeps roaring its head. I enjoyed the bursts, the starbursts of colour on the wet page. Then I added green in the places where there was no rose or the rose had faded. I followed that up with yellow and then gold. I also deepened the rose with burgundy and finished by adding orange markings to the gold. Finally I heard the word black in the air and started outlining the yellow/orange shapes. I've come to think of them as caterpillars on leaves. They are all over the page. They look robust as they survey the area. This reminds me of three days ago when I had a caterpillar walking across my bed while I attempted to sleep.



Caterpillar

Parvae encased  
 Wormy embraced  
 Sealed not erased  
 From access outside



Careful distaste  
 Hoping in haste  
 Times not a waste  
 With love by your side



Tearful release  
 Anxiety decrease  
 Happy increase  
 Will come your way soon

## Cocooning

... on the fitting need for containing and stillness

She seems to simply know when the time has come. The days have become shorter or maybe even longer, she is in synchrony with the universe and she resonates, spins with the plan. When it's time, she feels it with her whole body and seeks to create a safe place, a hidden place, a still place to retreat to.



She finds the perfect place to attach to, to connect to, because she is going to let go now and release to the universe, totally trust her body to the process. She says goodbye to life as she has known it up until now and releases to the spinning pulling thread of change. She not only becomes a moth, she also releases to the moth becoming her. She spins herself into the moth making place.



Spinning is about drawing out fibers and spinning them into a thread, something that will tie things together. Spinning is about creating a container, a place to be safe and warm, a cocoon that bounds the transformation, defines boundaries, creates a sense of home, connection, a web between nodes of unique possibility. Spinning is the twirl of her skirt as a young child makes

herself alive with dizziness<sup>36</sup>. Spinning is about staying in the soup of life, it is about feeling the spin of the earth ripple up the spine, about feeling it in the belly. Spinning is about the balance of a top on its fine point in space, simultaneously still on that point yet in full motion. Spinning is about the paint moving around the page as I spin across the front yard holding the canvas over my head. To spin is to be alive, to live in connection, to be uniquely as one with all life.

To spin is to be on speaking terms with the earth. Spinning is one ancient earth language that we can reacquaint ourselves with. Spinning is spontaneous, wild, embodied, organic and primitive. All life is created via the spin, without the spin there is no life energy. Further it is the first spontaneous spin that got the whole thing started that we can still feel in our hearts and minds as the deepest earth connecting force. Being uniquely ourselves in the spin is the key.

In order for her moth self to be animated the caterpillar must face a death of sorts, a death of the life she has known thus far. She has to release her roving life of blind leaf eating and skin shedding. She must pick her place and commit to it. She must surround herself, bind herself with string, and become tight, still, motionless and silent. She has no control over the fascinated scientist who cut her open to observe what is going on. She is wound tight as a ball, hanging out on a limb, blindly trusting that everything will work out all right. She has relinquished herself to a deep sleep governed by the lack of light, the cold, the winter silence.



far. She has to release her roving skin shedding. She must pick her place and commit to it. She must surround herself, bind herself with string, and become tight, still, motionless over the weather, predators, or may discover her location and is going on. She is wound tight as a ball, hanging out on a limb, blindly trusting that everything will work out all right. She has relinquished herself to a deep sleep governed by the lack of light, the cold, the winter silence.

Diapause is a dormant state, like a hibernation, or a deep sleep, a resting, a near death silencing. All that remains of life is the potential, a small spark deep in the anti-frozen veins of the near death being that was once a caterpillar.

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<sup>36</sup> Miller (1993) writes about how children naturally seek out contemplative experiences.

## Deliquescence

...on the fitting need to melt down

Maybe the breeze warms, the sun emerges and energizes the seemingly dead moth-er-pillar. It moves her out of her silent frozen state and the moth begins to put herself together with the melting away of the old structures. Pieces re-join, re-vision, re-imagine themselves. Moth mapping is occurring, the directions for which have been there all along in each body cell. Connections that are inevitable, were always going to be, always had to be, were destined to be, are now becoming.

The caterpillar contains the undifferentiated moth cells called imaginal disks that morph into a moth, the moth contains the cells that once mated with the opposite sex cells that will create the eggs from which caterpillars will emerge. The liminal space betwixt and between caterpillar and moth is most evident in the chrysalis when the creature is neither one nor the other yet is both, is a moth-er-pillar of sorts. It is at this time when the cells of the caterpillar melt down to feed the caterpillar's moth cells, the imaginal cells that need nourishing to turn imagination into moth matter.

*And, all in tears, she melted,  
Dissolving, queen no longer, of those waters  
Her limbs were seen to soften, and her bones  
Became more flexible, and the nails' hardness  
Was gone: the slenderest parts went first, the hair,  
The fingers, legs and feet: it is no great distance  
From slimness to cool water, back and shoulders,  
The breasts, the sides, were watery streams, and water  
Went through her veins, not blood, till there was nothing  
For anyone to hold.*

(Galinsky, 1975:180) a translation of the melting down experienced by Cyane in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (5: 429-437).

The melting down is a deliquescence that dissolves down old structures and nourishes the dormant waiting to be energized. All this happens in synchrony with the resonant spin of the planet, the pattern of night and day, and of warmth.

Today its cold and snowy again  
 I too am in between seasons  
 No longer winter and not yet spring  
 No longer caterpillar and not yet moth



Bound up tightly in my cocoon  
 Waiting for the opening  
 For a beam of light to energize me  
 From the within and without  
 To move me into the onward

Movement, a sense of life-emanation  
 Is what I crave  
 Yet I must be alive to have such cravings  
 I am in suspended animation





Still, yet full of life  
 Alive, yet full of stillness  
 I am a moth-er-pillar  
 A still life

While in cocoon, melting down with the spin that both destroys and creates, does the caterpillar dream of flight? Does the moth dream of leafy flavours?

Cecropian dreams

Scenes

From the crack between the worlds

Memory streams

Untied seams

To a new shape I am hurled

Energy beams

Silent screams

Careful stepping back uncurled

Confusion teems

Chaos preens

Cosmos writing system pearled

## Opening and Emergence

... on the fitting release of new energy and life

At some point the balance between caterpillar and moth is tipped in the moth's favour. What was hidden in the caterpillar has now blossomed in the moth. The implicate becomes the explicate. What is hidden in the moth, is the future caterpillar in its now form.

The moth feels the draw to the light.

*Light in the shadowy darkness of the space  
That is the enclosed place of the happening  
Container of the end of the world that is just beginning*

A hole is made, a doorway created, an opening is embraced, and an imago or moth emerges from the chrysalis. unfolds and dries her wings and takes her first flight. She will roam the earth, but for only a short time, a breath in the scheme of things. With dazzling wings aloft above the trees, balanced on a tightrope branch, she is delicate and majestic.



There is evidence that moths, silk moths in particular remember their caterpillar self. Research shows that trained silk worms can demonstrate the same behaviour in moth form (Conversation with entymologist Laurence Packer, York University). There is an identity, a memory of sorts that transcends the drastic body changes experienced, a stillness of self remains in tact.

She will learn about herself and the world through feeling what resonates in her body. She will act, the universe will respond. She is in the dance. She is a miracle of the dance of DNA with the spin of the universe. She is living embodiment of the pattern that connects.

She will roam in the air long enough to mate, and then lay eggs. Soon she will disintegrate down again, in a hungry, dizzy spin. Her energy consumed, she will rot back down to the earth, to feed new plant growth.

The metamorphic cycle is a wild happening. It has a rhythm and timing all its own yet despite its appearance of cocooned distance from the natural elements, it is deeply sensitive to environmental conditions.

In order to navigate the territory she calls home, unlike the caterpillar the moth has eyes with which to see. She has a sort of night vision that combines a sensitivity to pheromones with a instinctual draw to my front yard light. The new moth emerging from her cocoon is opening herself to the light for the first time. She can see beyond the simple rendering of her caterpillar simple eye to a complex moth eye that provides her with night vision. She is a wise flyer.

In French a moth is a *Puan de Nuit*. She is a night seer, she sees through the dark haze. Night vision is like energy vision where the pattern and shape are resonated with, despite the lack of light. It's the ability to be sensitive and responsive to the energy radiated by other beings. Its about radiating your own energy. It's a communication between bodies dancing in the dark. In this sense moths are the shadow of butterfly knowing.

The regular practice of spontaneous painting allows me to develop in-sight or the ability to see the within of things. It illuminates dark areas, energizes them and then offers me a mirrored reflection, an illumination of sorts. Like a moth I am attracted to the light, I resonate with its energetic pattern.

Spontaneous painting is about shedding light on embodied understandings. It is about drawing forth the implicate in a fluid dance. It is about searching out through painting and revealing new lit areas. Like a search light in the blurry fog, painting illuminates new places, and new ways of being. I come to know in a new way, I reflect the light in new ways, I become light sensitive. New in-sights, inner light reflections make me lighter, freer, more penetrating, more able to move into darkened places. Shedding new light on an experience in this instance is akin

to shedding skins, once the old skin is removed, new layers are revealed which reflect the searching light once again. So the cycle goes. Insights from search lighting make me a lighter being, a shape shifter of sorts who is able to move and illuminate previously inaccessible realms. With liquid light in the form of paint these realms take shape on the page, are reflected upon, and shed new light on the experience of their creation. Spontaneous painting as an artful form of research is like this as well.

Art is Research is Art

Spontaneous painting is re-search  
 looking again  
 developing a new way of seeing  
 with each painted stroke  
 new understandings are revealed  
 like a search light in the fog  
 new places are illuminated  
 their image is reflected in me  
 I reflect with them  
 new in-sights are gained  
 I am able to see the within of things  
 I'm seen in the within of things  
 We are both illuminated

\* \* \*

## Inquiry and Nature

... on a fitting way to know nature

*... I could not make science a religion, since science can never apprehend the wholeness of an experience; and it was not art for art's sake, since art and living are two different things. But it was to go on finding out about (by science) and experiencing (both in art and living) the two opposing ways of relating oneself to the other; the rhythm between the way of detachment, of analysis, of standing apart and acting according to a preconceived purpose; and the way of fusion, becoming one with what is seen, steeping oneself in it in a spontaneous acting together.*

(Field, 1957: 126)

In general, analytical scientific research has been characterized by a need to define terms, conditions, and to pinpoint the location of the object under investigation. It has been about making clear definitions, thereby placing knowledge in compartments, as though it were a discrete entity to be coveted. It has also been about separating the mind and the body. It has been about placing objective knowing, sourced in the intellect, over subjective embodied knowing, which is sourced in relationship to the earth. As a result, there have been two main separations inherent in traditional ways of inquiring. There has been the separation of knowing through thought and knowing with the body, and there has been the attempted separation of inquirer with the object of the inquiry. Both are artificial separations that do not acknowledge the interdependent relationship between all beings in nature and the inherent particle-wave duality of all matter.

The following metaphor may clarify what can be known from research founded on detachment and that honouring interdependence. If I wish to investigate the nature of river water there are two main ways to learn or know all there is to know. First there is the analytical scientific way. I can go to the river's edge with my sterilized glass jar (while wearing my laboratory coat) and lean over into the foaming rapids and fill my jar to the top with river water. I can weigh this water, I can calculate its volume, I can freeze it in my laboratory freezer. I can leave the lid off and record how quickly it evaporates. I can put it under a microscope, I can even study its electrons, its energy components. I can write about my findings using numbers and graphs. I can share my findings with colleagues who have also taken their own sterilized jars to

the river and run their own tests. We can marvel at the consistency of our results if we all follow the same procedures. We can say we know river water. In short I can manipulate and study it as a separate entity from life without ever getting wet. This is a powerful and instructive way to know. We are schooled to know in this manner and this type of researching will continue to take us far. But is this all there is to know about water?

Instead of leaning over the river with my glass jar to contain the water, I can put on my bathing suit and know water. I can dive into the moving river and feel the water on my body, in my nose and ears. I can hear the water roar, I can feel the coolness, I can also feel the force of the eddies as they push me under and toss me up again. I can feel water sting my eyes and notice the soft taste in my mouth as I gulp for air. I can float and be lulled into a dreamy state. In short I can know water with my body. I can be water. I can try to feel where I begin and water ends. I can know my own watery nature. I can feel the watery waves slam into rocks. These waves disappear as soon as I capture water in the jar but as soon as I enter the contents of the jar back into the river the water flows once again. Therefore by embodying water I can know it in relation.

Yet there is also a realization that I can never fully know all there is to know about the water in the river moving through the valley. It is constantly changing in response to me, the weather and the land. At the same time there is a universality, a common connection to all life experienced when I am in that water. I can know all there is to know at that moment in time, I can connect to the wave aspect of water.

Further, enfolded in the jar filled with water is the nature of the river. If I investigate deeply enough to the subatomic level the particle-wave nature of the river water emerges once again. I can see that the water in the jar has both a jar-like discrete particle nature and a wave-like relationship nature. So I can come full circle back to knowing that water is both particle and wave at the same time even when it has been studied in the jar. Yet there is still something missing. I cannot capture a storm or a drought in a jar. Once captured water no longer resonates with the wind or reveals its tidal nature. An artificial stillness is created that has pulled water out of its natural context. So even though I may know the dual aspect of water that is in a jar I can not know jarred water in earth relationship. Therefore which aspects of water reveal themselves

at any given time rides on how I choose to inquire. Full watery knowing requires a balance of inquiry methods.

Research can become even more problematic when we use it to know about living beings like moths. Living beings are unique individuals as much as they are members of a community or ecosystem. The traditional scientific way of knowing about moths sees individual moths as specimens- a single part or thing regarded as an example of its kind. The unique relationship between a single moth and a human on a given day is not supported using traditional methods of inquiring. Uniqueness in relation is flattened by the overriding need to acquire, contain, pinpoint, define and catalogue.

Traditional Lepidoptery is about creating containers, compartments, definitions, and dividing lines between the knower and the known. It is about separation and at its most distorted it is about "severation" between the human and the wild<sup>37</sup>. I can set up a moth trap in my backyard. I know that moths are attracted to light in the darkness so I can place a bright beam of light in a poorly lit area of my Muskoka yard and wait for the moths of summer to appear. I can lure them with a sugary syrup painted on tree trunks. When they do alight I can net one or a few at a time, or I can hastily pull a mesh cover over the space and contain them as a group. Now I've got my moth specimens. Since they are incredibly hard to get a good look at outside in the dim light and because when they die (which is usually in a few weeks after emerging from their cocoon) their bodies will rot and smell, I need to preserve and prepare them for further observations and experiments. Although I may also decide to keep a few of them alive in order to record how long they live, watch flight patterns or mating interactions. However, once captured it is unlikely that I will resist the temptation to kill and preserve a few so that I can come back to them later when the air is cold and the snow is on the ground, and look under the layers of wing hair with a microscope or compare last year's moth's to this year's.

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<sup>37</sup> "Whenever the bond that binds a living creature to its environment is broken, there is nothing that holds together the various factors and phases of the self. Thought, emotion, sense, purpose, impulsion fall apart, and are assigned to different compartments of our being. For their unity is found in the co-operative roles in active and receptive relations to the environment" (Dewey, 1934: 252).



the self and the planet, to make up for centuries of detachment and the destructiveness it promotes, when attempting to know living beings, we must get wet. We must dissolve into mothiness.

If the signature of the whole is enfolded in the part (Bohm, 1980) then the nature of the universe is also enfolded in our bodies<sup>39</sup>, and in our creations. By engaging in embodied knowing, by animating our own moth aspects, embracing moth energy, diving into the water, we can know both the particle and wave aspects of ourselves, moths and of the universe. We can know the inner and the outer simultaneously. The two dance together in a cosmic swirl of related patterns and properties.

To transform the relationship of the self with the planet we must jump in. This can be uncomfortable, too cold, too rough, too out of control, messy even. However this is the nature of the embodied aspect of knowing. Further when we can live and research in a world where analytic knowing is not seen as somehow better, or as a reference point or overlord for more embodied spacious knowing, then the particle-wave nature of existence will be reflected in the complexity of our methods for investigating it.

There is a problem though. In order to share embodied moth and watery knowing with others who may not be able to jump into the same experiences it is necessary to record the experience somehow. How to do this? If I create graphs with numbers or develop descriptive passages, I lose the essence of the life force that I am studying. One answer is to create and share artful expressions of the experience. By letting go of the analytical and jumping into mothiness through paint, poetry or clay, I emerge with a new artful sample each day. The moth's colour and form is made visible, its shape is made manifest and its sensual qualities emerge in poetry. The moth begins to speak. All of the arts are a way of both knowing and sharing this aspect of the nature of moths.

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<sup>39</sup> *"In an as yet unexplained way each human being contains the information about the entire universe for all of existence, has potential experiential access to all its parts, and in a sense is the whole cosmic network, as much as he or she is just an infinitesimal part of it, a separate and insignificant biological entity"* (Grof, 1985:18).

Therefore to be a sustainable inquirer of life is to be an artful inquirer of sorts. It is not enough to observe from a distance to understand, I must also experience the phenomenon first hand and artfully contemplate the nature of that experience in order to be able to fully understand it. I must give colour and form to life energy. The following is the description and artful representation of a real moth encounter that demonstrates what I have been attempting to describe.

\* \* \*

## Moth Knowing

... on a first attempt to fit inquiry and nature



May 28 2000.

I never expected to see a Cecropian moth in the wild or even in my neighbourhood for that matter. What an incredible gift from the universe to be able to spend the last three hours with her. Amazing.

Today my sister spotted a beautiful Cecropian Moth on my neighbour's front stairs. She's been here for at least a half an hour now cycling her wings pulsing them as though she's trying to stay warm. It's a smooth figure-8 pulsing that she is doing. It's a hypnotic waving of her two sets of wings while her feet remain firmly planted on the pressure treated wood. Her head is a beautiful burgundy colour. She's shaggy like a sheep dog. There's a crescent moon-like line of pale pale blue in each eye spot at the ends of her wings. Her abdomen has beautiful white stripes against a dark brown backdrop. She has pure white accents at the ends of her wings above the eyespots that fade into grey as they approach her core. A beautiful buttery cream colour rings each wing and then warms to a rich brown which is accented by a dark brown as it moves towards her core. Her antennae are wide and thick like fern fronds. They are perfectly symmetrical. One plate lies on top of the other.

I'm fascinated by the branchiness of her antennae. They are strong and very beautiful. They tell her about the world that surrounds her. She picks up the signals so to speak. This branching pattern mirrors the beautiful crystalline ferning pattern in my own

saliva when looked at under magnification. Its like the branching of a tree. Amazing. The moths wings also have a wonderful branching or ferning pattern much like the veining in the placenta or the arterial branching in the hands that type these words into my computer.

I love the roundness the fullness of her abdomen. Shes lush, robust and full of life.

As I quietly draw her from different angles using different techniques I hear the sound of a chainsaw. In the distance I also hear the crush of cracking tree bodies as they hit the ground. Is someone building a new home and therefore clearing their site? Is someone hoping to attain a better view of the lake? Its not a droning kind of sound rather it has an angry spitting cadence. It picks up momentum, grabs into the flesh of its chosen target, accelerates its toothy grip and then saws right through.

The moth and I contemplate each other quietly. We are still and focused. She has stopped pulsing her wings now. She is more peaceful somehow.

If I were honest Id have to admit that I would love to have her displayed in my next academic installation. Id love to be able to observe her to commune with her whenever I liked. It would be marvelous to have her with me at my fingertips if you will.



would love to have installation. Id love to commune with her would be marvelous to have fingertips if you will.

I want her yet I want her alive. Theres a tension to our interaction now that delights and entrances. At any moment she can fly away out of my reach and I would likely never see her again. As it stands this is the first live Cecropian moth Ive seen in almost 30 years. This reality makes me respect our time together. Yes I could likely trap her in a box but then she would no longer be fully herself. She would become less alive, less Cecropian somehow. She would be under my control and this would darken our relationship. The marvel of many other encounters I have had in the wild is also rooted in the reality that at any time the animal I am communing with can end the interaction. This keeps me present, respectful and in awe. As soon

as I take control, the magic has somehow been lost. Instead I marvel at her tolerance for noise, wind and the flashlight I have pointed on her. I'm amazed that she hasn't picked up and flown away in response to the loud noise of my motorized polaroid camera. I would have thought that she'd be more sensitive to the wood creaking underfoot and to the flashlight I've been shining on her to get a better look. When I wave my hand over her body she sometimes responds by pulsing her wings but not every time. Just as often she ignores me completely. Instead she stays, she's still, we are together.

I wonder what message the moth has brought for me. Is this an anthropocentric thing to expect that the moth is there for me, that she has something to share that will help me? Maybe it would be more enriching to think of us as co-creating an experience together. Her mothiness enlivens my humanness and vice-versa. She becomes more who she is in my presence. I become more my self as she advises me:

Think bright light  
 Like the wind  
 Hold tight, don't fight with the forces  
 Recind  
 Flow sure, flow free  
 Release the hold on memory  
 Embrace the new, the sure  
 The glee  
 Make more room for times  
 With me  
 I'll teach you fullness, lightness, beauty and charm  
 I'll heed your voice, I'll do no harm  
 I speak in visions  
 Let love take hold  
 Careful divisions make words too bold  
 Love me, love you  
 Get off the let down

Be light be free  
Whisper windy sound

I have the urge to shine my flashlight more directly on her so I can get a clearer Polaroid photograph. Should I? As I get up to stand over her she opens her wings. Maybe she'll keep them open long enough for me to draw them. When I raise my hand over her she opens her wings completely. I am very close to her I can clearly see how her head abdomen and legs are all a beautiful rich burgundy or maroon like the permanent maroon paint that I first fell in love with in March and used by the tubeful. The burgundy moves out from her body to her wings where it dissolves into brown.

This time when I waved my hand quite close to her she seems to be fine. She is remaining still and committed to her position. Is she used to me? I love the way her antennae sit back on her head and almost rest on the tops of her wings.

Dare I touch her? I'd love to feel her abdomen. It looks so soft. I worry that touching her wings would impair her ability to fly again but wouldn't her abdomen be ok? If I touch her abdomen won't her wings brush my finger in response thereby brushing off the wing dust?

I have shivers up my legs. They are also running up and down my spine. I used my drawing pen as a stick for her to climb upon. She gripped it very tightly and I placed her on my sketchbook. I wanted to take a polaroid photo of this but of course by now I am out of film.

I worry about the other photos I have taken during this encounter. Will they turn out? Will I be able to look upon them with joy. Will



I be able to share this encounter with others through those representations? Prove that it really happened?

I started to draw her as she stood on my book. At first as I drew, she pulsed her wings in the beautiful smooth figure eight pattern that she displayed when I first encountered her. But then she began to shiver. I worried that she might actually be scared that being out from under the shelter of the stair was making her cold and she was shivering. Maybe she was dying.

If she died right here if this was to be her last resting spot then I could include her in any future displays that I may create. That might be exciting. Then again maybe I was scaring her to death. It made me upset to see her like that.

I called my husband over to see her on my sketchbook. He saw her loved her beautiful wings and then suggested that I put her into an open top box that way I could continue to observe her and she would still be free to go at any time. My immediate response was "no" because the whole point of all my work to date was to develop ways of communicating of interacting without resorting to capture or containment.

When I invited her to crawl onto my pen I was manipulating her in a way its true. Yet she really gripped it strongly and seemed to welcome the contact. Am I projecting<sup>40</sup> that?? As I moved the pen I realized that she needed to have a very strong grip because she was so very heavy. I tried to place her back in her spot under the stairs. When I placed her down she wobbled like a humpty-dumpty, while she tried to get her bearings. She was also being blown about in the wind and needed something to hold on to. I tried to give her the opportunity to crawl up on my pen again but she crawled onto my finger instead. She and I looked at each other face to face, eye to eye. Do moths have faces?

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<sup>40</sup> "Projection in fact is a case of transferred values...It is a familiar fact that colours of a landscape become more vivid when seen with the head upside down. The change of physical position does not cause a new physical element to be injected, but it does signify that a somewhat different organism is acting" (Dewey, 1934: 249).

My first thought was that she was going to bite me. She was bigger than a bumble bee and part of me feared she could do a serious amount of damage. This thought was followed by a second one that immediately calmed me down. A dear authoritative book-



wise voice reminded me that she has no mouth-parts and that she can not hurt me. Her legs tickled me and had a strength and furriness that I enjoyed. I noticed that one of her wings had a small piece out of it and was reminded of how moths live very short lives. their once pristine wings become ragged and tattered. She was not newly emerged from the cocoon. she had been out for a while already it seemed.

I loved having a photo of her on my finger. Did I connect with her as I could have if I had been less pre-occupied with taking a photo? Maybe. I looked at her face and drank in its features. Her eyes were large and complex. It was an amazing moment that left as suddenly as it had arrived. After placing her back on the step she wobbled for a moment and then flew off into the tree canopy that surrounded us. Flapping like a bat she disappeared into the vast greenness.



The whole time I was with her I didnt want to disturb her yet I also wanted to interact. I noticed that I felt more comfortable using my drawing pen to connect with her rather than my hand or finger. I needed the separation in order to feel safe. On some level I wasnt willing to risk all in the encounter. I didnt trust what would happen. I had no experience to draw on so I wanted to be safe. I was too frightened to put my finger out and have her alight on it. even though I was drawn by the appearance of her softness and beauty. She on the other hand had no protection against me and my curiosity yet she stayed in place for hours.

Throughout I had no urge to measure her but I did count her 6 legs. I noted that they consisted of many segments and I looked to see if the fronds of her antennae were alternating or opposing. I think its opposing but I'm not sure.

I'm sorry that she had to fly away. Did I fail somehow in the encounter? Did she feel too molested? At one point I thought of bringing her home to my yard while she rode on my sketch-book. Then I wondered why it wasn't ok to just leave her where I found her. Maybe the yard light that was still on originally attracted her so I should come back and look for her tonight and tomorrow morning.

My legs are still shivering from the encounter. All the drawing I did while with her has opened my heart to her. I feel like I really saw her as I drew her over and over. I became entranced by her flowing lines, the harder lines in the patterns on her wings, the shadings and her furriness. I felt like I needed to be using pastels in order to truly capture her furriness. Her colours were so rich and warm. So nurturing so vibrant so full of life. I loved the subtlety of the pinks and greys with the blueness of the eyespots.

I feel the urge to paint with those colours. To record my leg energy, record the energy of the interaction somehow. I've come into the house now still feeling energized and euphoric. I'm going to quickly do two drawings. The first with my right hand the second with my left. Both I hope will capture an aspect of the shaky legged moth energy I feel in my body.

RH

Prickly  
Cycling up and down  
Focused  
Contained  
Shivery  
Vibrant  
Alive  
Tingly



RH

LH

eyes  
pearls  
seeing  
in a  
strand  
chakras  
energy  
weaving  
each in  
turn  
full  
casing  
a hood  
corn cob  
all  
connected



Eyes  
Pearls  
Seeing in a strand  
Chakras  
Energy weaving each in turn  
Full casing  
A hood, corn cob  
All connected

I want to paint the shaky legged sensation as well as her in particular. Both are her together. I want to use my LH to embrace the connection the fluidity then I can give form with the right. I looked across the room at my big blank canvas (24" x 30"). The moth energy seemed big and vibrant enough to be worthy of such spaciousness. I closed my eyes to choose the colours and applied the paint with my left hand followed by my right.



I love the eyespot and all that it embodies. Its my favourite part of the painting and of the moth. There is a great deal of energy in this painting

I feel clear focused calm and collected at the same time as I feel strange like I've been resonating with a whole different energy field than is my usual experience. When I look at the painted moth legs I get that hair standing on end shivery feeling again like I had when the moth was holding onto my finger. There is something about their long

spidery pointiness that seems to electrify me. I feel as though I know this moth in my body.

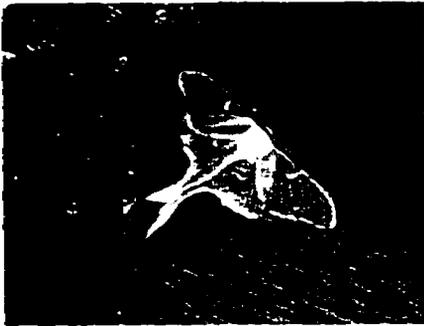


\* \* \*

### Luna Eyes

Last night my husband suggested that I turn out the cabins outside light in order to save on electricity. I said that I wanted to be able to see the moths in the morning and the best way to do that was to leave on the light that draws them out of the forest. It worked.

Her wings begin to quiver as I come closer to my journal. I want to write about this experience. I'm looking at the most gorgeous giant Luna moth. My dad often told us about how beautiful Luna moths are and he was right. They really are.



I love the beautiful warm green colour of her wings. The rusts and pinks of her eyespots and the stripe along her front wing line. She senses me and is preparing for

flight. At first she flops from the door jam to the deck in response to my repeated kicks to the front door. Nicki (my sister's dog) has been so desperate to get out for a pee that he's wedged the door into the door frame with all his jumping and scratching. I worry about being able to get some time with the moth and still be able to treat Nicki well. I know he is hungry, starved for attention, and needing some exercise, yet I am compelled to interact with the moth.

She has beautiful antennae just like those of a Cecropian moth. That's what I seem to want to draw first the antennae then the legs the head the wings and the abdomen. This moth doesn't seem to have an abdomen on first glance. It's funny the long swallow-like tail seems to cover it up.



I'm inside my sister's cabin as I write this because the mosquitoes are absolutely ferocious. Between Nicki's barking and howling the quivering wings of the moth and the biting bugs I have to draw very quickly.

I feel funny running for my camera, running back to get film to put in it yet I'm thinking about who I might encounter in the woods and how I would explain that I don't have time to talk because I have a live Luna moth to commune with. Upon returning with my camera and film it occurs to me to wonder if she has anything to share.

Luna speak  
 Relaxed gentle green  
 Soft spoken wings of freedom  
 Sparrow tail dancing to the rhythm of the breeze  
 Eye-ful gesture of sleepiness  
 Floppy silent easiness  
 Easy does it  
 Don't you shove it  
 Focus on mothiness  
 Mossiness and quietness  
 Link and tie the days together  
 Whatever the weather  
 Indoor outdoor closed door opened door no door  
 Travel through to you  
 Release the do

Luna flight  
Moonshine sight  
Glowing light  
Rejoices  
Mothiness cosmic dress  
Connect to less  
You will know  
Release to flow  
Grow slow  
No show

Then using my left hand first I drew Luna  
moth energy with my eyes closed.



Then I did the same thing using my right hand.



I did both drawings with my eyes closed in order to help me to resonate with the moths energy. For me with my eyes open her energy is centered in her eyespots and her antennae her sensing organs combined with the eyespots that make her look so all-knowing wise able to really see me. Yet eyes that arent truly looking at me bother me somehow they are both powerful and disturbing. How is this moth seeing me? Are the eyespots a diversionary trick being played at my expense? I am so distracted by them. I continually find myself being drawn back to them. I wonder about them and therefore probably dont notice how closely I really am being monitored.

Theres something very unsettling about eyes that look real but can not see. Its a nasty trick. an exploitation of sorts a contrivance. Yet the eyespots are one of the defining features of this moth of the Cecropian moth too. Its in part what makes me so fond of them. These spots make them who they are. The warm cream coloured moths nestled along my sisters kitchen window screen dont have eyespots and are no where near as interesting as this Luna. They lack a certain mystique.

\* \* \*

To know nature without killing it is to open up to the natural in ourselves and use that knowing to inform and bridge with the more-than-human world. We need to practice a sort of knowing in relation. Knowing in this way is about diving into the water and into the experience of mothiness, to transit the experience, to embody it and express it somehow. Creation in the form of art-making, photography, and poetry is the antidote to destruction, a bridge between self and other that is also a record, an interactive embodiment of the life in question. In this sense art-making and specifically spontaneous painting is also research that fits the human with the earth. It is a form of artistic inquiry.

\* \* \*

## Artistic Inquiry

... on artfully fitting inquiry with nature

*To look at any thing  
 If you would know that thing,  
 You must look at it long:  
 To look at this green and say  
 "I have seen spring in these  
 Woods, " will not do- you must  
 Be the thing you see:  
 You must be the dark snakes of grass  
 Stems and furry plumes of leaves,  
 You must enter in  
 To the small silences between the leaves,  
 You must take your time  
 And touch the very place  
 They issue from. (Moffit, 1994: 30)*

This inquiry not only attempts to embrace experience and share an artistic inquiry process through spontaneous painting, it also attempts to push the envelope of the rendering of artistic inquiry as it is used in educational research. My moth experience is an example of this type of inquiry.

Artistic inquiry is a unique kind of qualitative research. Qualitative research is an approach to research that gives voice to the wisdom of the ages contained in each of us.

It involves an interactive process where the continued long-term focus on an experience leads the researcher on a voyage of discovery (Moustakis, 1990). This process requires that the researcher is flexible and has a willingness to accept the unexpected. Since the research journey is not controlled or systematized, or the essence of the experience would be lost, the researcher must approach the process with an open mind and heart. She must let go of a need to artificially order or control the research process. In many ways, the research process develops a life all its own. At the same time it is also a personal process (Reason & Marshall, 1987).

It is also the case that the phenomenon under study is not separated into discrete parts and analyzed. Rather the integrity of the whole of the experience must be studied and maintained (Collins, 1992). The research must reflect that all life experiences happen to whole people living in an interdependent, interconnected world. (Ely, 1991).

In general, I believe that research is obliged to be renewing and enlivening. It must attempt to capture and express the spirit of lives lived as well as add new spirit to those lives being explored. It should give more than it takes. Further, qualitative research provides the forum in which to understand experiences in such a spirited renewing interconnected manner. It affirms the potential in all people, at all stages, and values their embodied knowledge (Hunt, 1992).

From a qualitative perspective it is also acknowledged that often we know more than we can say so that numerous artistic forms of expression are appropriate and essential (Eisner, 1991). Given that human experience is multi-modal, non-linear and multidimensional, then the ways we choose to understand an experience must also be multi-modal, non-linear and multi-dimensional. Finally, there must also be congruity between the focus of the inquiry and the research processes used to understand the experience (Buttingnoi, Jongeward, Smith & Thomas, 1998).

Artistic inquiry is a term first used by art therapist Shaun McNiff (1999) to describe a type of art-based research that uses the power of the artistic process as a way to know. This inquiry method represents the ultimate of experiencing, understanding, transforming and sharing self and other through the arts. It is an intuitive process filled with mystery and motion.

In her seminal book *Art is a Way of Knowing*, Pat Allen (1995) shares a twenty-year process of image creation which uses various forms of spontaneously generated expressive art. In the presentation of her artful process she reveals the power and richness of this form of inquiry. She shares both her art and her experience of creating art. In the forward to this book M.C. Richards states that artistic knowing, "*is like an underground river that gives us life and mobility*".

By engaging in spontaneous art creation I am both entering into and transcending my body to attain a contemplative state. I am also co-creating my body to record the transcendence. My hand chooses the paint, the brush and my whole being moves the paint across the page. The result embraces both my body and the body of the earth in a cosmic dance.

Knowing through spontaneous art-making further necessitates artful responses to the new creations. In his work with expressive art therapy students, McNiff (1999) highlights their artistic inquiry innovations and how powerful it is to use different art modalities to further deepen understandings of an artistic inquiry process. There is power in this approach because “images and processes of artistic creation are always at least one step ahead of the reflecting mind” (pp 73). What can be gained from writing a poem about some element of a painting is a new dimension of understanding of the message that the painting has to share. In contrast, surface reflection on the painting removes that deeper meaning and may even cause a flattening of the experience. Jung (1979) gave the name “active imagination” to his way of dialoguing and animating images and artistic expressions.

More detrimental still to the life enhancing message of a piece of art is an attempt to pin down a meaning or somehow “explain” what it is saying. James Hillman (1997) cautions against this tendency to define the meanings of animal symbols in his writings about dreams.

Artistic inquiry involves animating the soul of the image or creation. Through this type of respectful animation we also animate ourselves. When the need arises to judge, analyze, label or otherwise pin down a creation, life force leaks out. The act of reflecting in an analyzing or explanatory way does not “continue or advance the expressive qualities presented by the works being contemplated” (McNiff, 1999). The challenge of the artful inquirer is to maintain the integrity of the process while still providing enough reflective structure to guide the reader/viewer to highlighted understandings.

The use of art in qualitative research has increased in popularity over the last 5 years. Yet it is often presented as a hybrid of forms. Some researchers attempt to artfully present the understandings gained from their inquiry but are not necessarily using art as the way they have

come to gain those insights (Diamond & Mullen, 1998; Eisner, 1991; Finley & Knowles, 1995; Oldfather and West, 1994). In other words the recording of an experience or a life is sometimes pursued by other qualitative educational research methodologies such as interviewing, observing or participating in an experience. The resultant knowing is then transformed into an artful form in order to convey more of the richness of the experience or understanding. Granted, the researcher and the co-researcher often engage in the creation of art as a way to more deeply express what may be tacit knowledge and therefore difficult to express in words. But in many of these studies, art is used solely to augment more “legitimate” ways to come to understand the phenomenon in question.

When the process of knowing through art is distilled solely to descriptive accounts of the art making experience something vital is lost. In fact Coffey (1999) shares how incredibly difficult it is to reasonably translate an artful experience into words. He questions the purpose of an exercise that privileges traditional academic writing over other forms of representation. Ideally the form for presenting the understandings gained from an artistic inquiry process, must in and of itself be artful. However sharing artful experiences while keeping the art alive yet contained between a front and back cover is a difficult task.

Further given the creative nature of the relationship between people and art it is not a given that the same artful representation will produce the same understandings in all people. Therefore the artful inquirer must let go of the need to control reader/viewer responses. It is as though an artful rendition of an artfully executed inquiry is a journey of discovery at all levels. The inquirer must let go to the process of art creation, they must let go to the artful rendering of their understandings and the reader must let go to the journey that they are taken on. It is a quest that adds spirit to life at all levels.

Therefore one purpose of this thesis work has been to carefully and methodically use an artistic inquiry approach to explore transformative experiences of artful earth connection. This inquiry is an attempt to integrate knowing in the fields of artistic self-inquiry, and deep ecological learning. It also represents an attempt to move artistic inquiry to the level of contemplation of the self in the universe. It is an attempt to honour the wise knowing that occurs

when we open our hearts and begin to artfully engage with the cosmos. For the most part, spontaneous painting has been the backbone of the art making practice followed although this has been augmented by photography, drawing and poetry.

There have always been contemplatives, it is only in recent western history that the role of the contemplative has been relegated to the purview of a select few. Instead, we must all find a way to contemplate our universal connections for the sake of the survival of our living world. Artistic inquiry is a beautiful, engaging, soulful way of doing just that. When pursued over a period of time, it has a living cycling and transformative quality about it as well that in my opinion is best mirrored in heuristic research methodology (Moustakis, 1990). In other words I have used a heuristic research cycle as the methodological base for this work because it seamlessly mirrors both artistic and natural processes, as they wax and wane with the seasons.

## Heuristic Research

...on a fitting artful metamorphic methodology

My inquiry process has been a long-term cyclical spiraling process that has been both artful and natural. As in all heuristic studies, this inquiry began with me becoming the first participant in the inquiry. I developed my own techniques and my own understanding of the nature of the spontaneous painting experience and its relationship to sacred earth connection. However I didn't do this alone. I was a member in a number of different learning communities.

Heuristic research requires that I am continually returning home to myself, that I value my own experience, develop and use my intuition, and am prepared to jump into unknown moving waters to emerge forever changed by the experience. Following the cyclical nature of a heuristic research model means that there is an easy flow between stages and an acceptance of "letting go" to the flow of that cycle.

Like myself, the painters involved in this study have independently developed their own spontaneous painting processes. Each has a way of approaching the process that is unique and best addresses his/her own needs. This inquiry has afforded us the opportunity to begin to individually reflect on our experiences and return what we have come to know, back into our painting practice. Therefore this inquiry honours experiential adult learning in a form similar to the Kolb experiential learning cycle.

*The underlying insight of experiential learning is deceptively simple, namely that learning, change and growth are best facilitated by an integrated process that begins with (1) here and now experience followed by (2) collection of data and observation about experience. The data are then (3) analyzed and the conclusions of the analysis are fed back to the actors in the experience for their use in the (4) modification of the behaviour and choices of new experiences. (Kolb, 1975: 33-4)*

This sequence is a genuine cycle that loops back on it self. As the inquiry process progressed our understandings or theories about the nature of the experience developed and changed thus leading to changes in our practice. Therefore there was an emergent spontaneous aspect to the design of this inquiry.

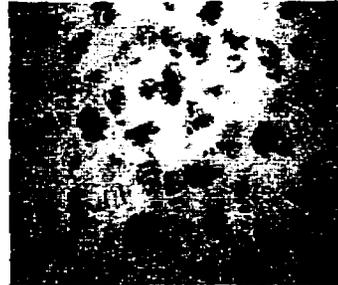
I bathed myself in the experience of earth connection through spontaneous painting. I looked for themes, patterns, differences, and similarities between myself and others, between new understandings and the tried and true. The root of the word “heuristic” is to discover or to find. This process is predicated on the belief that,

*Behaviour is governed and experience is determined by the unique perceptions, feelings, intuitions, beliefs and judgements housed in the internal frame of reference of a person. Meanings are inherent in a particular worldview, an individual life, and the connections between self, other and the world.*  
(Moustakis 1990: 32)

The goal of the heuristic researcher is to immerse herself in the experience of the inquiry phenomenon in order to develop a deeper understanding of its nature, themes, qualities and relationships.

I moved through the six heuristic research stages of *Initial Engagement, Immersion, Incubation, Illumination, Explication* and *Creative Synthesis*. Each exhibited a remarkable similarity to the metamorphic stages in the life cycle of a moth. As the journey progressed I developed an awareness that moth knowing was enfolded in the caterpillar all along and that the rhythmic dance between concealed and unconcealed is both natural and perpetual. I felt differently as I awakened to each inquiry stage over time and the images that emerged over the course of this inquiry are also a record of that feeling journey.

## Initial Engagement: Egg Knowing ... on awakening to a fitting question



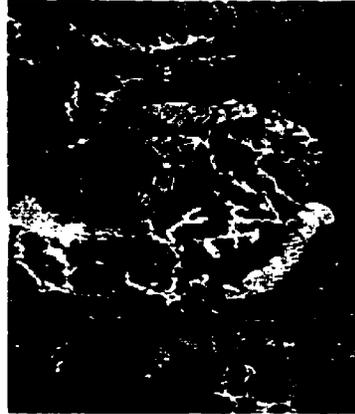
Like dormant seeds planted deep in my being I have always been engaged with the question of earth connection. My truly *initial engagement* began when as a two year-old child I



first warily plucked leaves from the geranium plants on our apartment balcony. I knew I would be scolded but I also knew I needed to make contact. Other early stories about my childhood explorations and how I struggled to hold the tension between what I knew from experience and what I was taught in school have been shared in the section entitled *Growing Up Still* (see page 51). My sense of disconnection over the

years developed into a deep yearning that has fuelled this journey to rekindling a good fit. In terms of this present inquiry, the journey began the day I became frustrated with painting tulips. At the time I thought they should look real and so I huffed and strained in dissatisfaction at the mean marks my brush made on the paper. The moment it occurred to me that it might be fun to paint how the tulip feels to me, to paint our energy connection, was the day that everything changed (see page 104). What followed was a deep immersion in spontaneously painting emotion that opened me to the natural in myself. Soon I began to wonder both about the potential for the transformation of earth relationships through spontaneous painting and how this work affects others. At this point the inquiry was born with the intent to answer the following question: *What is the experience of artful earth connection?*

*Immersion: Caterpillar Knowing*  
... on nourishing the question with fitting experiences



After initially engaging the question to be explored, the second phase of *Immersion* was a time when I lived daily with emerging answers and hence new questions. At this time I immersed myself in all that drew me to a deeper understanding. I took in experiences like a caterpillar voraciously eating her way through the leaves of a tree. Many types of experiences informed this process: painting 3 to 5 times per week, journaling most days, doing right hand and left hand drawing, attending both watercolour and acrylic painting courses at the Hockley Valley Ecology Center, and Haliburton School of the Arts, painting with others in Toronto and in Huntsville. I shared my work at various nascent stages with the OISE/UT Arts-informed research working group, and the larger OISE community. I became a founding member of the OISE/UT Center for Arts-informed Research and through this participation gained a richer understanding of the nature of artistic inquiry. I went to and presented at conferences on Holistic Education and Human Ecology, the latter leading to me becoming a member of the International Community of Ecopsychology which exposed me to intense on-line and face to face discussions on issues of nature connection, spirituality, consciousness and art. During the course of this inquiry I read numerous books and articles in the areas of fine art, art therapy, ecology, ecopsychology, deep ecology, ecophilosophy and artful inquiry. I was invited to attend a 9-day Nature Connect Outward Bound in Temiskaming Ontario where I canoed, did nature connecting activities, solo camped, painted and drew. I took a 10 week long Vipassana meditation course and continue to mediate daily, do Flow yoga and less regularly run. I also went for long forest walks and in the winter explored the white expansiveness of the lake in front of our home. I visited local and BC

logging sites and participated in a special Nature Connection Playback Theatre that was conducted by and for beleaguered logging protestors on Salt Spring Islands, BC. These activities developed a deep connection between myself and the experience of earth connection through spontaneous painting. Ideas bubbled up as I moved my body, released to stillness through breath, and heard myself speaking to others about what I had come to know. Only in the last year or so have I been able to step out of my immersion long enough to be able to see the overall patterns.

My contact with other spontaneous painters helped so much in that regard. This inquiry was at its heart a self-study that was greatly informed by pulling out other painters' highlighted images and experiences that both supported and contradicted my own. By sharing their images and stories I was better able to story myself, to pull together floating, on first glance seemingly disparate pieces into a whole. I worked with other painters in both informal painting and talking sessions, combined with interviews. I endeavoured to understand the experiences of these painters as it was seen through their eyes.

Painters (Ayako Nozawa, Heather Spurdakos, Yoshiko Matsuda, Hannah Van Alsten, Jonathan Metcalfe, Charlene Wood) were drawn to this inquiry through word of mouth, and as a group had a wide range of experiences with both spontaneous painting and earth connection. Each had pursued spontaneous painting as an ongoing personal practice for at least 6 months, except for Charlene who had been painting for only 6 weeks before we came together. Some had been painting for years. Sharing as co-creation (Hunt, 1992) was used as the model for the sharing of images and ideas. Images were not analyzed or pinned down in any way rather we tried to open to what they were trying to say. Although I did not formally record interactions and painting experiences during group painting times in part because I was deeply immersed in being a participant, these sessions intimately connected me with the painting processes followed and the images created by the painters. So much so that interviews became a time to simply highlight and pull out common understandings as well as distinctiveness. They also became the main time when the connection to earth relationship was made, as that was my unique passion. Before being interviewed, the painters were asked about their desires and intentions surrounding the inquiry. Based on this, a mutually acceptable research arrangement was developed. This made

the research design somewhat emergent in nature and honoured principles of adult learning (Hunt, 1992) one of the most important of which is equity of expertise.

During interviews, earth-connecting experiences were shared verbally and with the enriching support of images. In fact most stories emerged by looking at an image created. The main focus was to enrich the experience of earth connected spontaneous painting together in a way that respectfully honoured the unique contribution of each individual at the same time as I attempted to weave a coherent understanding of the experience of artful earth connection. My own understanding of how I uniquely approach spontaneous painting also emerged at the same time as I saw myself in the affinities and painting patterns of others.

These painters and I have informed each others' work quite profoundly. In fact both Yoshiko Matsuda and Ayako Nozawa continue to paint regularly and are building their professional roles as educators around what they have come to know from their artful processes. Yoshiko's work focuses on the embodied imagination and what she calls the pointing body. She has experienced a number of profound embodied experiences that she credits with her ongoing painting and drawing practice. Ayako is interested in the contemplative aspects of painting and how painting has developed her ability to be in the moment. She has noticed small shifts in her awareness and comfort with the wilderness. Jonathan Metcalfe is a cartoonist who has only recently come to spontaneous painting. He enjoys experiencing the energy of nature and giving it colour and form. He has strong eco-spiritual beliefs. Jonathan is the only painter I have not had the pleasure of painting with. His understandings supported and affirmed the ideas developed in this thesis, but his words have not been used because he was interviewed only informally. Hannah feels that painting enhances her deep connections to animals. Of all the painters she probably has had the most in depth wilderness experiences. She uses spontaneous painting as a way to know the earth. Heather Sperdakos and Charlene Wood have come to painting relatively recently. Both Heather and Charlene have had tastes of what an ongoing spontaneous painting practice has to offer. Both shared experiences of shifts in awareness and connection to aspects of both themselves and the natural world in the short time they've been painting. In particular, Charlene is at the honeymoon stage with the process and conveys understandings with an

energized excited freshness. That's why I was keen to include her words with an accompanying image.

Painting with others was characterized by an atmosphere of good will, respect, mutual trust, openness to feelings, and non-judgement. This atmosphere was maintained throughout 1:1 interviews as well. Although group painting sessions were not formally part of this inquiry it would be misleading to say that they did not have a profound effect on the nature of both the images produced and the understandings reached. There was a sense of painting community that developed and continues in the present which helps individuals stick with their own process and develop a richer understanding of the stories images tell.

Together we explored three main aspects of the experience of sacred earth connection through spontaneous painting. These are the painting process, the product and the relationship to experiences in nature. Each aspect seemed to generate its own set of questions, the answers to which were gathered with each painter, over 1-3 formal approximately one hour interviews, at which time, journals, individual paintings and spontaneous art responses to paintings, were also shared.

During our time together, the painters were encouraged to provide examples and artful representations of their experiences, in addition to answering specific questions. In other words, images were the backbone on which hung the sharing of journal writing, poetry and narrative reflections on earth connection and the painting process.

Interviews focused on the power of the painting process. The ritual of preparing the space, paper and paints, combined with the act of brushing paint on the page. Both the preparation and painting involve entering into, and staying in, the wild creative space. This is a freedom filled expansive area where self and imposed boundaries can be superceded and one is able to soar with eagles or dive to the deepest depths. Some also enter a timeless trance-like state much like a shaman when they engage in the painting process. This state allows the painter to dissolve into the creative life force that joins all beings. However, this space can also generate a great deal of fear and uncertainty that must be both embraced and moved through, in order for

the process to continue. Therefore I was also interested to know how the process of spontaneous painting is experienced by other painters. Does the process promote the dissolution of the boundaries between self and other, and if so, how? What aspects of the process seem to be most powerful for changing thoughts, body sensations, feelings and behaviours towards the earth? How do painters experience and let go of fear and uncertainty while painting?

Second, through communing with the creative life force while painting, a painter is offered a product in the form of colours, shapes, textures and beings that emerge from the process and take a place on the page. Art therapists often encourage the interpretation of the meaning of these forms and colours to help clients better connect with their own colours and forms (Allen, 1995; Gold, 1998; Soden, 1998). However the images on the page can then become solely self-images which are enslaved in the power of the all-consuming ego, much like the planet has been enslaved to serve humans. In contrast, the colours, forms, textures and beings in paintings can be experienced as living creative forces in their own right (Hillman, 1997; McNiff, 1992). By dialoguing with them through conversations, poetry, clay work, or further painting, they are animated, thereby offering the chance for a rich enduring relationship. This ongoing dialogue can not only animate the wild creative in the painter I believe it can help to strengthen empathy and a sense of connection to the wilderness in general. This led me to a grouping of questions about the nature of the relationship between spontaneous painters and the colours and forms in their paintings. How does this relationship mirror their current sense of connection to the earth? How would they describe their experience of place and space through the regular animation of their painted images? The answers to these questions led to many new questions and generated the stories shared in the section of this thesis called *Still Alive: On Speaking Terms Again* (see page 206).

I transcribed the audiotaped interviews and then transcripts were returned for clarification and changes. Transcribed interview content was also modified and deepened by the painters as reading their contents often sparked new insights and connections. Many paintings were digitally photographed, sometimes during interviews, sometimes much later. The painters were given a digital CD of their images, which in many cases allowed for their images to be used in their own work.

### Incubation: The Cocoon Has Been Spun

...on first trying to fit things together, then waiting for a fit to emerge



The third phase of a heuristic process is entitled *Incubation* and is described as the period that allows,

*...the inner workings of the tacit dimension and intuition to continue to clarify and extend understanding on levels outside the immediate awareness. It is a process in which a seed has been planted; the seed undergoes silent nourishment, support and care that produces a creative awareness of some dimension of a phenomenon or a creative integration of its parts or qualities.*

(Moustakis 1990: 29)

For me, this was a time to continue nurturing but in a much less active way. It was the time to let go and let the growth come on its own, using its own schedule. This process was akin to the way a cocoon, a container emerges out of the seemingly random spinning of silky fibers. I spun and I contained.

I delved deeply into my own images and stories. These slowly began to weave with the highlighted understandings that emerged from the interviews with the other painters.

For me, cocooning happened after the transcripts from the interviews had been finished and edited, notes on themes had been compiled, artifacts in the form of artwork, and poetry and journals had been gathered and organized. I organized interview transcripts, notes, personal documents, artwork, and photographs in such a way that I hoped that patterns would emerge.

It has taken a great deal of time and effort for me to be able to step out of such an all-consuming process long enough that I could make some sense of it without becoming too distanced. To date I have painted 234 small paintings and 202 larger ones for a total of 436 paintings. Over the course of this inquiry I have moved from using watercolours and 8-1/2" x 11" paper to using fluid acrylics and stretched canvas up to 24" x 36" in size.

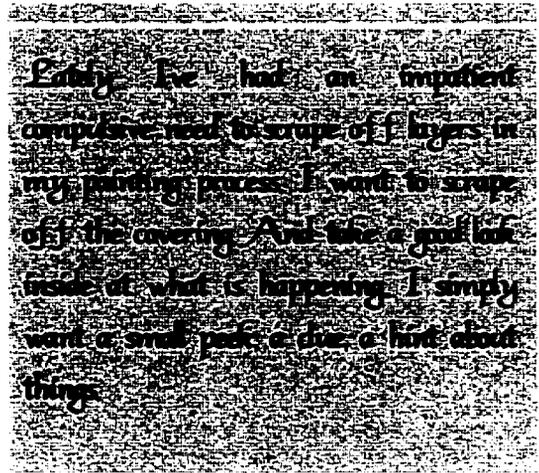
First, I spent a great deal of time simply organizing my own work. About a year ago, I pulled all my paintings out and attempted to lay them out on the floor. I really wanted to see them as a group. I had a recurrent fantasy of finding a big room and covering the walls and floors with images. Alas that was not meant to be.

This container is nourishing, it's safe it camouflages me, yet it also stifles me, separates me, holds me in and ties me down, sometimes for too long. I have no agency, no way of moving out or beyond. Somebody please open a window or door. Create a space for fresh air, for breath, for a vision or view beyond and out. Let me feel my body move over ground, dance in the air. Like a bound infant I do not know myself, I can't predict my reach, I have no way of connecting. I'm all tied up, tied in place, held down, stifled, yet safe. I can't hurt myself or anyone else, yet I am in pain.

I manage a few of shadowing that has just emerged into my psyche. I can't see where all this is going, where all this will end up. I am both a participant and an observer in a fascinating process that I can not recreate or control.



Almost all of my small paintings were in spiral bound books and I feared the chaos that would reign if I simply ripped them out of their container and spread them around the room. I also had far too many larger paintings. They alone more than filled the floor space of my living room. I was forced to stack and cram. An afternoon of this activity was all it took before I realized that something drastic was going to have to happen.



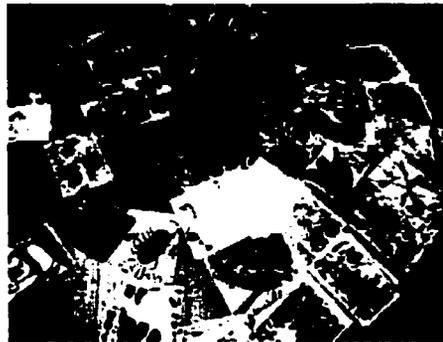
Once gathered together, I coded all paintings chronologically while they were still in their spiral bound books. *Book One* was my earliest book and it began in September 1997. I denoted the book number and the painting number on the back of each painting. I recorded in a separate journal which dates were covered by which painting book. This was key for me in being able to quickly find corresponding journal entries for individual paintings. That being said I also numbered my 31 journals in chronological order. I recorded the start and finish date of each journal and highlighted any special themes they contained. This helped me to better remember the lay of the land as I wrote my thesis, allowing me to home in relatively quickly on certain themes. Since one painting ritual of mine was to start each new session by doing a small painting first, I could also correspond my larger paintings with both the small ones and journal entries without much difficulty. Unfortunately I did not always date the larger ones so some can only be vaguely grouped into a month. Although it is clear by looking at the small ones, which large ones are most likely to have been painted on the same day. I found consistencies in colour and form on any given painting session.

At first I approached this organizational task with great glee and satisfaction. I loved the clarity, the order making, the systematic way that I neatly recorded information in my thesis log book. These activities took me back to my years as a research assistant at both the Hospital for Sick Children and the Hincks Institute in Toronto. At that time I loved coding videotapes, doing statistics, graphing outcomes and finding patterns. There was a simple elegance to the work that

was very satisfying. It was with that attitude that I first began to work with all the images and prose I had created.

The paintings were the backbone of my organizational system. As the process developed I simply opened myself up to try and hear what they are trying to say. All things flowed from the art. As Ayako said, "let the art speak" Early on, I learned to trust that.

To get an overall picture of things I decided to photocopy each small painting and its corresponding writing in black and white. I thought it would be a good idea to look for patterns in the images based solely on form. Black and white photocopying was the most efficient, least expensive way for me to work with form. Once accomplished, I sorted these copies into loose groupings. Somehow I felt that it was easier to see the common forms of the paintings when there were no colours to distract my eyes.



As I quickly did the first sort of the paintings into groupings based on distinctive forms, I noticed some interesting patterns. The following two pages is representative of the major groupings I found in my work.



many spiders



walled compartments



spinning shapes



crystalline grids



radiating spheres



large single spiders



chains



embryonic forms



caterpillars



string, thread



starbursts, nebulae



branches



sphere wrapped with strands



butterfly/ moth



implanted sphere



spindles



single snake



golden snakes/ chains



many small shapes



complex web



bursting sphere



rib cage



grid, net



cocoon



stream, webbing



opening, space, window



many small spheres, eggs



animal, turtle



honeycomb



black and white forms



dragon

After organizing my images into groupings I struggled with issues around arbitrariness and the diversity that I felt I was artificially simplifying.

January 20 2000.

Its arrogant to think that I can organize life into a taxonomy of sorts. Yet thats what the early biologists did. Generally they looked at whether or not a creature had a backbone. How much of one was important in addition to what was hanging off of it. I find myself putting the more concrete shapes the recognizable forms the faces the flowers the turtle in the center and then radiating out are the component parts of those complex forms. I also find I have a need to make a distinction between more "organic" lines and straight ones. This despite the fact that I know that the straight edges of a salt crystal are organic yet regular and crystalline like a snowflake.

There are an infinite number of ways to arrange my work I find. My natural inclination was at first to keep everything organized chronologically. Now that that pattern is secure Im interested in differences and commonality.

How much does something have to be different to warrant it being placed in an adjacent pile to the one it is already in? This is such an arbitrary judgement. Instead I had the thought that maybe I could use my body to put things into some sort of series of groups see what I was attracted to. Also maybe there are communities of paintings which are simultaneously different yet belong together. Rather than isolating all the spheres together into a homogeneous group maybe there is a group or groups of paintings that seem to go together to tell a story. Maybe that same group could also show different perspectives or dimensions of the same thing. Maybe the grouping could tell a story of evolution over time or the complexities of a relationship to some quality over time.

I had a thought that I could group my work intuitively by asking where I'd place it on my body. If it's my body that painted these images then the process and the product are both embodied and so maybe any grouping done needs to be a literally embodied one.

Depending on who is doing the groupings different selections would emerge. A physician would organize the paintings differently from a psychiatrist or an energy worker. The paintings evoke form, colour, emotion and energy simultaneously. Each could tell a very different story. I could also organize the writings into groups and then see what corresponding paintings come up.

The fairly chaotic ramblings of this journal entry attest to the incredible complexity of the task I had set for myself.

There also seemed to be paintings that combined two seemingly disparate patterns. Often they were in a tension or in juxtaposition.



I'm most interested in the combined patterns because they may help me with the chapter writing. Also I've been aware of the need in myself to have a system by which to categorize the images ahead of time. I thought about using the Native Medicine Wheel, the Five Elements in the Chinese tradition, ectopic imagery from cave paintings etc. actually I'm most interested to use those because they are cross-cultural, basic and speak to a time when the relationship between humans and the wild was purer somehow, rawer, more in the moment in some sense.

*In addition to the separate groupings and the relationships between them there is the change over time or time-developmental factor. I'm also interested in that aspect. Like the transformation from caterpillar to chrysalis to moth there is a cyclical transformation.*

Sometimes, the paintings seemed to depict a visual transformation and revealed how holding the tension of the opposites of two complementary aspects can lead to a creative solution in the form of a third entity.

I set out to group the paintings into clusters that seemed alike and appeared to belong together. I also created a second layer where combined forms seemed to emerge. I was able to track the development of my work chronologically but more importantly by observing the patterns in my work I was able to see their reflection in the work of artists the world over and through all time. I was also able to see the reflection of the universe. It's then that it really hit home that many of the forms that I had painted looked like the building blocks, structural elements and fully developed aspects of earth beings.

Although discovering that my painted forms are mirrored in nature was affirming of my attempt to connect to the earth through spontaneous painting, I was still interested in the stories that images tell. I wasn't interested in writing about the meanings of spiders, webs and branching patterns, I was interested in broader stories ones that pulled out nature experiences and tied in the painting process. I was also interested in dialoguing with the images.

So in my ongoing quest to understand the pattern language of the paintings, I pulled all

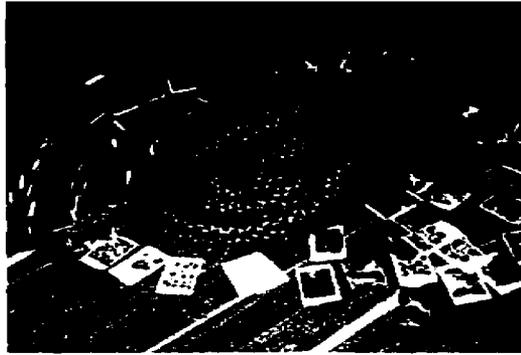


the small paintings out of their spiral bound books and attempted to combine them into groupings based on similarity. I looked for what seemed to belong together. Even though I know these paintings very well, each is like a very familiar friend, it was interesting and exciting to see new relationships now that the paintings were unbound and out of sequence. For me, this exercise illustrated the power of unique energies and how things like self and relationship develop over time in a patterned way rather than cycling back and forth in an endless bivalent swing with no directional movement.

This time, colour played a role as small paintings found their counterparts in large paintings of both similar form and colour. However I still couldn't step back to see a full view of my creations. I toyed with the idea of photographing groupings but felt that the resultant images might be too small to be of any use. Instead I decided to photograph the 350 individual paintings that I resonated with and seemed to be part of a larger story.



This was a very long process that has turned out to be worth every minute spent. I cleared a space in my painting area and photographed the paintings one by one. I had doubles made of each photo so that I would feel image abundant and now for the first time I was able to step back and get an overview of things. Immediately upon having my photos processed I laid them out in a circle, gathered the images that seemed to go together and paid attention to the development of more complex images in concentric circles. I liked being able to sit in the middle of this sea of images, to spin my body around, to walk around the outside and experience the wholeness of them as a group.



I was able to quickly sort the images as though they were playing cards. This was a period of time characterized by repeated ordering of individual images into family groupings of various descriptions.

Despite the fact that I was excited and affirmed by the living nature of so many of the forms, I was still not hearing the stories from the images. I still felt like an image organizer, an observer, an organized analyzer of sorts. So to work through this issue I decided that I would wait patiently for an image to come either in painting, dreams or waking that would give me new clues.

\* \* \*

## Illumination: Cocoon is Enlivened

...on the arrival of a new fit



Although it was a relatively short time after stating my intention that I felt new movement and clarity, this was an anxious time. The biggest illumination to reveal a larger pattern containing many of the images, came on Feb 20, 2000 when I found myself scraping the image of a moth/butterfly, in the frost on the car window.

*While travelling to Toronto yesterday I found myself scraping the form of a butterfly moth with my fingernail in the frost of the car window. I had been waiting in stillness for a form to emerge that would tie together some of my many paintings. Until the moment in the car like a caterpillar I couldn't see the larger picture. When I returned home I looked through my work and for the first time saw numerous eggs caterpillars cocoons and butterfly moths.*

*Illumination*, the stage where new understandings came or were coming to light, was a long awaited relief for me. Once I realized that I had painted all the stages of a metamorphic cycle, and was able to pull out the paintings that fit into various stages of this cycle, corresponding stories also began to emerge. Stories that focused on my childhood relationship to

a Cecropian Moth. It was at this stage that I most deeply realized the power of following a heuristic research process. I understood how much trust is required to stay with the process, despite only being able to access small glimpses of the whole for a long time. I couldn't have worked to a deadline at this stage because I was clearly not in control of when things would coalesce.

My first *illumination* was a dam breaker. I went back to the images again and pulled out all kinds of themes, in addition to the moth life cycle, which I hadn't seen before. Stories emerged alongside as well.

Further, on July 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000 I felt that something even more integrated was emerging in one whole piece. I sat down to the computer and generated a list of the ways that spontaneous painting connects the painter to the earth. The themes and patterns emerged as quickly as I could type. The fog lifted as quickly as it had arrived. The question "*What is the experience of artful earth connection?*" seemed answerable now. Time spent reflecting on the experience of painting, and getting to know the paintings themselves was well spent. The following is the list generated of the ways that spontaneous painting is earth connecting.

#### Experience self as more than mind-body, feel the body in soul

- feel differently at the end of a session than when you began. Clear out blocked areas
- get perspective on waxing and waning thoughts, feelings and body sensations. Dis-identify with feelings realizing you are more than your thoughts, feelings and behaviours
- develop the witness self.
- develop the ability to stay in the present moment where all of nature lives, experience spirit in the present
- feel that you start with yourself, your feelings and sensations and somewhere throughout the process without realizing it find yourself dancing in the universal.

#### Healing of body-mind, animate full potential, respect non-rational ways of knowing

- enrich sensory perception
- see more subtlety and richness in colours
- be able to meditate on detail and complexity
- feel movement of your body, be in your body
- translate body sensations, feelings and thoughts into universal colours and forms, reduce subjective sense of difference and separation from other living beings.
- train self to receive sense of connection, open out self

### Experience historical, cultural, natural patterns of colour and form

- appreciate the historical connection between images, and the wild. Painting the pattern that connects (DNA) manifested in colour and form over time.
- paint universal forms

### Persevere in fear, pain and the unknown

- embrace love, get perspective on fear, learn to move through large open spaces
- learn how to stay with a process that leads to an unknown destination, unknown aspect of the wild is embraced
- experience painting as self-soothing

### Move from faith to experience to grace

- move from faith in a connection to all beings to experience of interconnection
- give voice to energies that are within and without simultaneously
- experience the interdependent nature and subjectivity of all beings by dialoguing with colours and forms You come to know that you are not alone.
- become more differentiated whilst being in more communion, through animating images that are of you and universal simultaneously. Learn to know the self through respectful relationship with the Other.

### Animate child-like awe and wonder

- become enchanted with the repeated mirroring of patterns and forms in own work and the natural world. Develop enchantment around the inseparability of own patterns and natural patterns
- feel excitement, connection and love for colour and form
- animate child-like awe and wonder for the world, where do images come from? Images fascinate and bewitch by overlaying in paint, dreams, the wild.

### Become wild, more yourself, more like wild beings

- begin to appreciate cycles, waxing and waning, patterns of relationship, impediments, sustainers as you go along
- spontaneity develops, mindful risk taking is nurtured, respect is cultivated in the face of danger, become wary of the domesticated, trust the earth, trust yourself

### Experience synchronicity between life, images and the wild

- experience synchronicities between feelings, body sensations, dream images, painted images and wilderness experiences.
- turn inside-out, and outside-in
- feel the melding of observer and observed

Develop vision that fuels future actions to take, what will you contribute?

- images begin to point the way to right action.
- image making sustains the action to be taken. We begin to see a way to *be* in the world.

Animate wildness in others

- paintings become a record of the journey to reconnection to the wild, you become able to step out and see the patterns
- Paintings animate the wild in others much like a wilderness experience animates others
- Paintings inspire others to begin their own journey to reconnection with the wild. They feel it can be done.

I felt a renewed faith in the heuristic process even though I found the wait for a breakthrough to be interminable at times<sup>41</sup>. I began to pull out examples of writing that meshed with the themes.

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<sup>41</sup> Heuristic methodology is, “*difficult, lengthy and consuming*” (Braud & Anderson. 1998: 266).

## Explication: The Moth Moves Towards the Light

... on learning more about the new fit



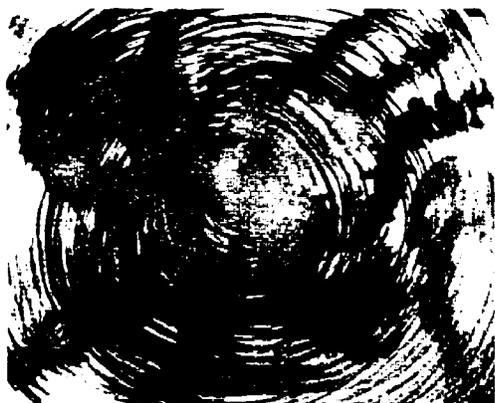
*Explication* followed *illumination* in this process. It was a time for discovering nuances and layers of meaning. It was the time when a more complete understanding of the key ingredients were discovered. It was also a time to allow for new connections to be made as the main themes began to percolate up through my work with the stories I had gathered from each painter. Once I felt I had sufficiently internalized and understood our shared experiences, it was time to draw together common core qualities and themes that tied us together. Specific narratives, illustrations etc. that supported these common themes and qualities were also drawn out of the data. These stories and images can be found in the *Stilling Life* (see page 45) and *Still Alive* (see page 206) sections of this thesis. For the most part I've attempted to represent painter experiences in unedited form mirroring the way they were originally shared in dialogue.

Six earth connecting patterns emerged from the many themes I had generated (see pg. 185). These patterns held the themes together in more complex relationships that mirrored aspects of earth connection<sup>42</sup> I had read about. The following is a summary of the earth wisdom contained in each of the following six patterns: *the spontaneous, the child-like, the embodied, the organic, the primitive tribal, and the wild*.

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<sup>42</sup>After months of sitting with many small groupings of paintings I read the following quote by Roszak (1992: 213) and had an experience of crystallization that helped me to understand the paintings in this newly patterned light. "... We begin to see how the urban-industrial reality represses much that is essential to the health of both person and planet: the primitive, the organic, the feminine, the child-like, the wild".

### The Spontaneous



The spontaneous aspect teaches us to clear our mind of thoughts and directives. We let go to the flow of impulse in the moment. The spontaneous helps us to connect to our instincts, our life spark, our unforced naturalness. It teaches us about the power of being in the moment and the co-creative aspect of all lived moments. It places us in communion with creative forces as our hand automatically moves for a colour and creates a form that we could have never predicted. We learn how to breathe our way back into the flow of spontaneity and become mindful again when we move off track. Spontaneity promotes a lightness of being at the same time as it embraces a felt communion with all beings. While being spontaneous we are in the spin of things.

### The Child-like

The child-like aspect teaches us to remain playful, in awe and wonder of the mystery of it all. It helps us to take ourselves less seriously and encourages us to remove our guarded and suspicious adult cloak. We become able to appear foolish, silly and wide eyed. We can spin in circles and follow that quiet still voice. This aspect keeps us in beginner's mind which encourages us to approach each new experience in the moment, with no preconceptions or looking to a particular outcome. We develop wonder and love for colour and form in all beings and ponder where images come from. We can marvel at the universal nature of forms created by children the world over. We rekindle our trust and commitment to the creative process that often helps us to remember childhood nature experiences of deeply rooted earth connection.



### The Embodied

The embodied aspect teaches us about opening up and being receptive to what the earth



has to teach on the material level. It teaches us about the fragility of life, the miracle of birth, and the power of the life force. It teaches us how to still ourselves and listen. It teaches us to trust our body and its inherent wisdom. We can move beyond “using” our bodies for certain purposes and instead co-create with all it has to teach us. The embodied aspect challenges us to

let go and let be. It helps us to heal the body-mind imbalance and allows us enriched sensory experiences. We become better able to balance our thinking, feeling, sensory and intuiting abilities. We can be with our breath in the moment. We can open to new ways of connecting in by clearing out blocks and filters. We can begin to know that images are our flesh and bones.

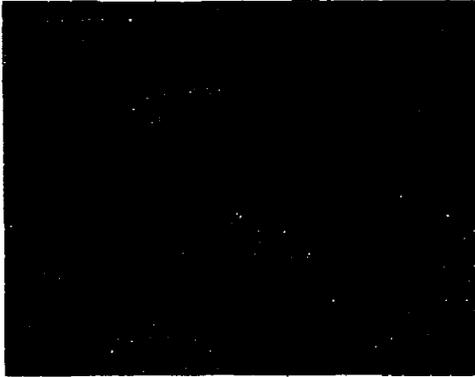
### The Organic

The organic aspect teaches us about natural cycles, about growth and decay repeated over and over again. It teaches us about rhythmic seasonal waxing and wanings, nourishment and patience.

We learn that there is a time for all things and all things come in their time. We experience how sustainable growth can not be hurried, that fetid



decay fertilizes the soil for new growth and that without nourishing soil nothing will grow to maturity. We begin to feel enchanted with the repeated mirroring of patterns and forms in our own work and in the natural world. We come to know that our own patterns are natural patterns. We develop trust in the life process and release the need to control the outcome of this process in order to feel safe.



### The Primitive/ Tribal

The primitive teaches about our tribal roots and our connection to all beings. It teaches about the historical need for humans to creatively express their connection to the earth on walls, in pots, on the land and in their songs, dances and rituals. It also teaches us about the co-creative collective nature of our relationship to earth beings. It removes the delusion of separateness through sharing the timeless unchanged images and expressions of those who came before and lived sustainably with the earth. We see historical patterns of colour and form (eg. Cave paintings) mirrored in our own work. We embrace ancient cultural art patterns as well (images from Mayan, Egyptian, Greek, African, Native American, Australian aboriginal cultures). We come to understand the importance of co-creating with a group (tribe) in an ongoing way in order to inform the process and provide support and encouragement. We begin to promote a culture of co-creation and nature connection.

### The Wild

The wild teaches us to be resilient in the face of challenge, respectful of forces beyond our control, and to let go the desire to control wild forces out of fear. It teaches us how to remain grounded in the face of the unpredictable. We learn humility, sacrifice, and ultimately deep reverential respect. We also learn to persevere in pain, and move through fear invoking large open spaces. We learn to stick with a process that leads to an unknown destination and fully embrace the unknown aspect of the wild. We become wilder ourselves. We begin to live in the present moment where nature lives and are able to be still in the face of complexity, the unknown, and the spacious. We begin to understand and get an overview on patterns that create, and patterns that are destructive. We can experience metamorphosis and meld into wild sacred earthy communion.



Each pattern connects us to the earth in its own unique way, however they are by no means separate or mutually exclusive aspects of earth connection. One can enter earth connection through each and immediately make the acquaintance of the other five. Further, the qualities in each can be found in the other. I can feel the wildness in my spontaneity or embody the primitive at other times. Therefore the separations, the teasing out of self-contained strands, is a fluid activity of sorts and serves to provide focal points but not rigidly bounded categories.

Each pattern is a language, a way of communicating, a way of knowing. Each pattern connects us to the earth in its own unique way. These patterns weave their way throughout this work and they reflect the qualities necessary for human-earth connection. Often it is the absence of these qualities that fuels our pervasive dis-ease. By aligning with and animating these qualities we can harmonize with the sacred earth. We embrace a sacred place where all is one.

\* \* \*

Creative Synthesis: The Moth is Free  
...on the ripple effect of the new fit



Finally I opened myself to the possibility of a *creative synthesis*, a time for embracing a new integrated understanding, possibly a new perspective. According to Moustakis (1990) this stage can only be attained through tacit and intuitive powers once the researcher is thoroughly familiar with the major themes and has explicated the meanings and details of the experience of individuals and the group as a whole. This final stage of analysis involves synthesizing the resulting themes and essential meanings into a creative rendition that allows the researcher to tap into their imaginative and contemplative sources of knowledge. The final rendition may be a literary work, a painting, a poem, a narrative....

For this work, I have enjoyed the process associated with three *creative syntheses*.

## First Creative Synthesis: Cecropian Still-life

...on a fitting synthesis of inquiry and nature



I felt the need to create an integrated visual understanding of my artful heuristic inquiry process that revealed its links to knowing nature, so I created *Cecropian Still-Life*. I created this installation over a period of two weeks and each idea seemed to simply bubble up and feed off of the last. I created six black panels each with a painting that looked like the liminal cocoon moment when both caterpillar and moth co-exist but when the balance is tipped and energy favours making the moth explicate (*illumination* in my heuristic research process). Above each painting I placed photos of paintings that were sequenced in the order of moth metamorphic stages. These images repeated themselves around the top of the hexagonal shape created by the six panels that were looped together with black leather laces. The impression created was of the experience of a moment in the context of a constantly transforming life. On the black cloth covered tables below these images, I placed traditional Lepidopterist's tools and images depicting different ways to kill and preserve moths and butterflies. Thus a tension was created between the rich colourful paintings of moth energy and the scientific paraphernalia.

I originally thought I would use brown cardboard or even white panels, until I went to pick the material out and realized that black called me over. It was only afterward that I realized that black was very appropriate because moths are night flyers.

I let the paintings show me the way. I knew I liked the six paintings I chose because they formed a solid group, and they were lively in the way they straddled worlds. I also loved the images of Lepidopterist tools and the descriptions of killing techniques, for their unapologetic almost gleeful tone. They were detailed in their directions for how to gut a moth, pin, flatten and stuff. They were like killing recipe cards and a window into a very different world. The actual metal tools placed on the tables further deepened the experience of manipulation and death, especially since I managed to find some dead moths, as well as separate wings that I placed here and there.

After I crawled out from under the installation, through the draping black fabric (I tied the panels together from the inside), I realized that together the panels formed a cocoon of sorts, bound around a branch-like pillar. Further the act of setting up the installation was bodily akin to cocooning myself and then emerging into the light. There was also an organic quality to the experience of interacting with the display since in order to see it all, one had to walk in a circle all the way around the outside.

It wasn't until I stepped right back from the installation that I realized that it looked like panels in a filmstrip or movie of sorts. That I had stumbled into trying to make stills (photos) come to life. This reminded me of the dream I had January 2, 2000 (see page 113) about holding the train in my hands, that soon became a filmstrip, then a snake winding its way into a multisided container. The form of the installation felt authentic and tied together the richness of the experiences I'd had, while at the same time adding new richness and deeper understanding.

\* \* \*

Second Creative Synthesis: Body Painting  
... on the fit between art and the earth body

My second *creative synthesis* called *Body Painting* happened on an impulse. I thought it would be interesting to have a friend trace the outline of my body as I lay in "goddess pose" on a piece of canvas. I did this outside on a beautiful sunny day in July 2000. I was having trouble truly seeing how all the paintings fit together as a whole. At one point I envisioned placing the paintings on the drawing of my body in order to see how they would distribute themselves. Instead I thought it would be fun to spontaneously paint on the outline of my body.

This piece ended up being a synthesis of all the themes that had emerged around the same time and is a wonderful depiction of the relationship between reaching down into the earth and bursting forth with the support of a beautiful spinning energized core.

July 4 2000.

Upon seeing the blank piece of canvas rolled out onto the ground I immediately envisioned having D. and A. trace around my body. I wanted to see what my body tracing would look like in "goddess pose" on the canvas. So I lay down on my back and they outlined me in an oil pastel.

I was pleased with the result. I looked surprisingly thin especially my waist when drawn like this looked so tiny. I liked my image a great deal. I was really shocked at how distorted my self-concept seems to be.

At first I had trouble engaging with the outlined shape. I had a taste of the old anxiety around being too contained and constricted as though the lines that defined my body were inflexible and demanding.

However I was immediately attracted by the abdomen. When I first looked at the blank body I immediately knew that I had to paint the figure 8 and the circle around it. It



was dear. So right in the center of the skinny waist I so admired I drew a figure 8 like a mobius strip. This shape was the same as a copper one I made placed in the abdomen of an effigy I burned at Guy Fawkes Day Nov 1999<sup>43</sup>.

Then I encased the figure 8 in a circle. I began with blue and black as my colours of choice. I eventually encased these original colours with orange, yellow gold and red. But I started out fairly austerely,

I was reminded by a painting I've come to call "larva woman"

(also see page 106). I did this painting the previous summer and it consisted of a woman with a lions mane around her head and a very organized grid of sorts encasing her. I remember how the roots of her head seemed to go down to the center of her body, joining into a blue red being who seemed to be lying there. The blue rising up from below seemed to be



mediated by the white as it transformed to red, as it ascended to the head. Looking at the image now I see the center as a tense place where the little central being must somehow prevent herself from being ripped apart from the opposing forces she is attached to. The entire image also seemed to be encased in a prickly layer many protective coatings had been overlaid. The center looked like those bursting rock pine cone shapes I have so many of. In larvae woman there is a strong dividing line between the upper body and the lower. I see that as the dividing line between the bursting forth and the reclining back to the ground that threatens to tear me apart if I dont develop a strong vibrant spinning center. I felt that this nest was supposed to be the center of my being. I painted it right in the middle. In the current painting

<sup>43</sup> I had decided to set fire to, thus transforming fear lady. Later I returned to retrieve the copper mobius strip from the cool fire pit and was visited by a beautiful red fox. The copper emerged tarnished but unscathed. The fear woman was now a pile of ash.

there seems to be a transformation of this bivalent creature into a figure 8 in a nest a deep yet light nest.

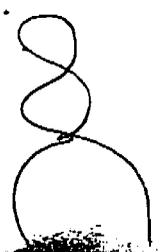
It is at that point that I noticed the shadow of the leaves of the overhanging trees place their forms on the canvas. I took a green pastel and outlined them all. I loved the variegated pattern they created and the connection between what I was creating and what nature chose to contribute. During the process of outlining the leaves a dragonfly landed on the canvas. I outlined him in the exact same position in which he had landed. Then I outlined him in black paint whose thickness seemed to transform him into a butterfly. Then I left the center of my body and started by focusing on a small area in the top right hand corner of the canvas which was the area that corresponded to my actual left hand (as I was lying face up while I was being traced). I painted this hand light green and moved beyond the boundaries of the body outline extending the colour into a vine that rambled off the edge of the page. This vine had an entangling and securing quality to it simultaneously.



As I began to paint the head the image of the webbing of sorts from the "larva woman" painting came into my mind. I also wanted and used lots of blues. At one point I became obsessed with recreating the neat cloud effect I had stumbled upon with one of my gold DNA strand paintings (see page 116). I saw a dear head with clouds and a blue sky. I ended up with something close to that and finished it with a single pupil, a single eye, a learner, a student of the universe, absorbing reflected light from the universe, taking it in, responding to it, sending out light, watching us both change as a result.

After working on the head for a time I continued my work on the center. I started to cry as I painted the center over with gold and orange. I carefully laid down peony petals and rose leaves into what had become a nest. There looked to be two areas in the nest connected in a spiraling energy pattern. I started to cry more deeply as I realized that the head wanted to extend his tentacles down over the nest. I didn't want the beauty and serenity of the nest to be destroyed. It would simply be too much to bear. Its such a beautiful section in fact its by far my favourite part. I didnt want to destroy overpower or cover it over. I really didnt, I needed a solution.

I decided that the head-piece didnt need to obliterate the middle rather it could cradle it wrap around it and wrap around again sending its energy down into the earth. So



is that what it  
is to be in



that's what I did. I also liked the synchrony between this spiraling embracing form and what the metal spring bracelet I had been wearing had been doing for days. One strand kept interlacing with another since there was this first crossover there had to also be a second one in order for the strands to be able to lie flat around my arm. When I placed the bracelet flat on the table the 3 sections traveled in perpendicular planes. The same effect happened with this painting. The strands of the head wound around the center and then crossed again as they reached down to the earth. I also sense a roundedness to this energy that was hard to depict on the flat piece of canvas. I see my body in the same way with two main strands of energy travelling in parallel yet crossing each other, melding creating out of their tense opposition and then moving on. The center seems to be the energetic spinning core for this exchange.

Once again I found myself attracted to the head area. I refined it for quite a while putting layer upon layer of vibrant colour radiating in all directions.

As I recorded how I painted this image. I found myself wondering whether the red cage-like object above the roots is really about groundedness. It seems too contained somehow. The roots are separate from the container there seems to be no way in. Yet upon

closer inspection it is in the energy loop as it feeds energy up to the core and gathers energy back down. I'm constantly worried about whether my container is alright when in actual fact I think I need to spend more time addressing my heads tendency to overpower ensnare and make me dangerously top heavy.

At the end of this painting process I spent a great deal of time swirling the paint within each of the three big areas and between the areas in the two overlapping figure 8 patterns. I loved the feeling of the grand swirling strokes in my body. I swirled in an infinite cycle around and around alternating hands and directions of travel.

As I stepped back and observed the entire creation I felt that the three areas still seemed separate somehow. That somehow they needed to be more explicitly joined. That's when I created the red swirl between the top and the center and the orange swirl between the roots and the center. As I look at this solution now it seems that it is a bit superficial. There's a compartmentalized feeling that is evoked in part by the very different forms these areas take and the differing colours. I see the sky eye the nest center and the rooted container. I wonder after the fact if I should have obliterated the center with the dark head strands. I ask my left hand for an answer to this.

It responded "maybe you couldn't see clearly how it looks but you've resolved it. Cradling holding the center as sacred is the key. That is what you need".



*Body Painting*

## A Follow up to the Body Painting Creative Synthesis

In October 2000 while feeling a real angry fire in my being I quickly began painting the following piece that seems to be a further development of the energetic joining of the three distinct areas in the *body painting*



On this particular day I felt profoundly angry, sad, and on fire all at the same time. I felt like a coating had been ripped off of me and I had gained an enormous amount of power at the same time as I felt very unprotected from the pain of the earth and my own personal pain. I wrote in my journal "I'm in sad upset disarray, I feel deeply hurt, deeply not part of the loop left

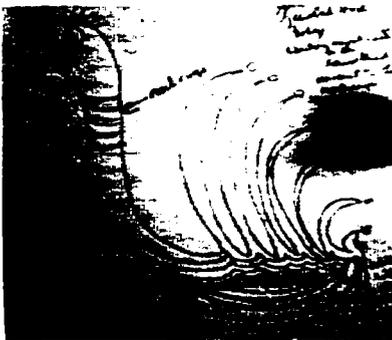
out of intimate contact, feeling isolated and rejected".

I also did both left hand and right hand writing to try and get a clearer picture of what was going on. Right hand: "pain, sorrow, isolation, doubt, anger, loneliness, isolation, deep emptiness and hungry, aching bones, sorrow and deep shameful sadness".

For my right hand drawing I wrote the following:

Two heads as one, two peas, sperm and egg, space

for seed to emerge, containing it yet open, coiled snake around a seed, female genitalia.



Left hand: "falling back down, destruction, devouring, disappointment, careless, not trustworthy, sad like a top heavy uprooted tree". Left hand drawing: I'm going to ring your neck, strong, wise, proud, a bit overdone, pretty together, phoenix, wise bird, good bird, jewelled bird, turkey waiting.

majestically to be slaughtered innocent to the neck ringer. A world of waves rough with many layers.

When I think of “neck ringer” now I am reminded of the orange ringers who tattoo trees as a first step in the highly automated process of cutting them down (see page 83). I'm disturbed by these images and the power of the feelings I am experiencing. Has one aspect of myself been naively waiting to be consumed by the other like so many turkeys at Thanksgiving?

Whether my large painting with the three distinct yet very much conjoined areas is an ideal to be worked towards or the current state of affairs was hard to know. This latest series of images spoke to a highly integrated energy pattern that describes an unbalanced dynamic. Maybe it is possible to see and really experience the consequences for such imbalance only when my energy flows in spirals and I am able to simultaneously step out of my own pattern and yet see it most clearly.

\* \* \*

Painting this piece helped me to understand that one of the main purposes for me behind spontaneous painting, is to rebalance the relationship between the active bursting forth aspect and the deeply rooted reaching downwards. Opening to the creative tension between stillness and life promotes a movement away from the ultimate lack of sustainability of dichotomy, to a state of rhythmic creative ease and flow, where oppositions are artfully transformed into complements creating a sacred place of simultaneous security and freedom. Without an energized spinning center there can be no balanced energy exchange that informs the uniqueness of each aspect. By painting my body I had simultaneously expressed the wholeness of my painting process, the deep trust that had developed for my heuristic methodology, the felt experience while painting and the interdependent yet continually unique nature of image creation over time. While at first I had fantasies about intuitively placing paintings on my body in some way, instead I painted my body, thereby revealing the underlying principle that informed all the paintings I had previously created.

### Third Creative Synthesis: The Thesis ... on attaining a coherent fit in written form

The third *creative synthesis* has been the creation of this thesis. Before weaving together all the pieces as they are now presented, I couldn't see a larger view that integrated the *Cecropian Still-life* creative synthesis with the *Body Painting*. I knew they needed to inform each other but it was difficult. One morning I woke up and realized that the body painting defined the overall relationship that my work was trying to express. The *Cecropian Still-life* was simply an example, an instance of the larger relationship between bursting forth and reclining back, the explicate and the implicate (Bohm, 1980), life and stillness. In fact the moth seemed small in the *Body Painting* compared to the other bold forms. By understanding the relationship between the *Body Painting* (which was comprised of three main dimensions-bursting forth, reclining back and the spinning center from where both forces emerged) and the experiences I planned to share in my thesis writing, I began to understand that here too there were three main aspects.

The core piece that provided energy and spin to both the thesis and to the work described in the thesis was the process of painting itself. That was one dimension. Distorted patterns of earth relationship and connected patterns were the other two dimensions. Painting, like the spinning nest in the center in the *Body Painting*, transformed disconnection into connection. So my thesis would present distorted relationships between stillness and life, the painting process that connects, followed by connecting relationships between stillness and life. Before this understanding had been attained the thesis seemed chaotic and without focus. I knew that I was talking about distortions in the relationship between stillness and life. I knew that I had many examples of such distortions. I knew I had many things to share both theoretically and practically about how to use painting to attain union of the forces again. Finally I had many examples of experiences of this connection through painting. Once I understood these three aspects, it was simply a matter of weaving together the pieces. Thesis synthesis became possible. The moth metamorphosis stories became a single concrete example of the ongoing rhythmic dance between stillness and life that permeates the thesis, thus tying it together. As a thesis writer I had finally emerged from my cocoon and could now see the larger picture. The different dimensions now fit together as did the work of the other painters. I could breathe a little more easily.

The artful heuristic inquiry process I followed combined with spontaneous painting has become a powerful way to know. This knowing underlies a sense of connection to the earth that is revealed in the following section entitled *Still Alive: On Speaking Terms Again*.

\* \* \*

## Still Alive: On Speaking Terms Again

... on fitting experiences



*... I know I am made from this earth, as my mother's hands were made from this earth, her dreams came from this earth and all that I know, I know in this earth, the body of the bird, this pen, this paper, these hands, this tongue speaking, all that I know speaks to me through this earth and I long to tell you, you who are earth too, and listen as we speak to each other of what we know: the light is in us.* (Griffin 1978: 227)

Being on speaking terms again is about resonating with the earth. It is about living moment to moment, simply and richly, choosing quality of life, and being able to slow down and pay full attention. Sharing such moments with others inspires, breathing life and vitality into relationships.

Spontaneous painting whether it is in the studio or in a forest holds promise for helping to do more than simply satisfy the human need to create. It can be a communal act that places us in a slow moving reciprocal, sensory dance with the more-than-human-world. Like meditation, painting and drawing can also focus the body-mind, helping it to stay in the moment. Attention to living beings, seems to draw them out from the shadows, an exchange develops. We become more human and more of the earth community simultaneously when we open our hearts in this manner. This opening is not a willful earnest endeavour rather it is characterized by a softening, a release to dissolution, a letting go. A gesture of trust and patience, watered by acceptance and

gratitude for each breath in the moment, each brush stroke of paint, each defining line, speaks to our deepest nature. We are on speaking terms with the sacred earth once again. The following pages share experiences of just such earth connection.

\* \* \*

## Moments

...on opening to fitting moments



*Ayako Nozawa*

*Vast as a single life is vast, filled with moments that expand infinitely. Or as a single detail that can speak to us of everything. (Griffin, 1995: 246)*

**Aya:** *Moments. I'm interested in moments these days, that moment seeps in, to me its all about moments. I've moved to sketching, ...emotionally charged things, sketchy, little colour, sketchy, landscape, the moments, the beauty of moments, outer sense kind of feeling, or moments. Whatever I felt close to or kind of activated by, I kind of wrote down. The next day all of a sudden it came to me as a connection, it's related to stillness.*

*The moment of bursting energy,  
My sister's face with so much emotion,  
Then myself looking quietly at the river,  
The moment, each moment is always still,  
The moment is always alive but still,  
It's always there whether we receive it or not,  
It's not me finding the stillness,  
It is there, it always is,  
I just have to humbly let myself receive the moment,  
Stillness comes in and then I become part of it,  
It's not me diving in there,  
When I open myself quietly,  
The stillness comes, seeps in me, it becomes me*

**Lisa:** That's beautiful.

**A:** *This is it. Remember all the struggles I had, the passionate side, you know the sun energy and water stillness, I had all these images. This is it, you know that red and green, and the white line, pulled away. But its not me finding...*

**L:** (Laughter as we both put our arms out). It's opening to it and its really opening, like you're not protected right, you're like this you're totally open to it.

**A:** *Coming in*

**L:** Washing over you

**A:** *It's more like a receiving, rather than finding and diving*

**L:** Taking the layers off so you can receive

**A:** *Right. That's the thing that's released, so even in this movement I see the stillness, the stillness is always there. That's this whole thing after moving around all the time. So this connected with that question at the very beginning, "so how has my painting changed? When did it start?" And I realized that it was all the moving. It's in the moves. Instead of sitting and trying to be in the stillness, and trying to find the stillness I could try and catch that moment in that movement. Now I want the experience, I'm so much into experience, I want to live it, I don't want to study about living. I don't want to research about living, I want to just live.*

**L:** Is that enough just to live or do you need to give back to the world something about what you found out about living?

**A:** *Maybe that will come in the next stage...*

\* \* \*

## Living with Death

... on accepting a fitting death

*The tao lies before my eyes, zen resists definition, ... zen is life that knows it is living and must die. And seeing drawing is the constant confrontation with it.*  
(Franck, 1993: 30)

**Lisa:** This is what you were talking about when you said somehow going to that death and how feeling that connection really made you feel connected to the animals.

**Aya:** *Right, right. At the beginning when I was walking by myself in the forest I felt so scared even with the birds singing, I felt it was a dead place right. Nobody else but me, but after I went through a section and then when I finally saw one single squirrel just jumping I felt so relieved, I felt like I was sharing this destiny with him.*

**L:** Wow because that's very different from the beginning.

**A:** *Very different. Yeah so now I hear these birds singing and I feel so relieved because these are all beings that are sharing that death or life kind of destiny together in every moment and they've been living that way so I felt a strong connection which I had never felt before<sup>43</sup>. So maybe that's the start. Because I never drew any animals before.*

**L:** So they are sharing the same kind of experience.

**A:** *That death or life moment, continuation. So I thought, ok my journey is over so I thought that was done so I started to come back to the road and how stupid this one road looked. It's only the human beings you know who are the ones who are thinking we can control death.*

**L:** In what way?

**A:** *Stupidity. Oh we can put the road here, we can bike*

**L:** That it's paved and there is no grass coming up

**A:** *But that is such an ego, controlling fiction world. So I thought wow only human beings think they are so far away from this death or life destiny*

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<sup>43</sup> "It is only those who listen for the speech of the birds who know that we have all come from that darkness" (Griffin, 1995: 245).

*experience<sup>44</sup>. That was the time I think that I started to connect with animals. Never in my life, like my paintings have been with nature, people, that's it, animals were somewhere else. For the first time I sketched all these animals.*

**L:** What would your reaction have been before instead of "Oh wow"?

**A:** *They're cute, like human beings. But this time I felt so different. It was so beautiful. They were so beautiful. I never thought that animals were beautiful before.*

\* \* \*

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<sup>44</sup> *"fragmentation creates a temporary reprieve from the fear of death and loss. But it also creates its own grievous sense of death and loss. When mortality is displaced onto others the roundness of life vanishes and with this what has also disappeared is that sense beyond measureable sense, pointing to both unknown and the known, giving a sharper intensity to what becomes, and in the act of vision, more strongly present. In dividing itself from mortality, the European psyche dulls its own experience of the world. If sexual desire, sensitivity to touch, taste, smell, love of colour, movement, passionate emotion, all that which is the estate of those on earth, is consigned to others, it is also relinquished. What is lost is nothing less than the eros at the heart of existence" (Griffin, 1995: 51-2).*

## Simplicity

...on the elegance of a good simple fit



Knowing joy in the small things  
 Warmth and happiness first  
 Hugs and breaths of peace  
 Helping others do their best  
 Loving others to the finest  
 Warmth a full fireplace full of flame and heat  
 Happiness beauty care attention to detail  
 Craft in the day to day  
 Joy in the small things  
 All things done with love  
 With care and consideration  
 Made with the finest attention to detail  
 Practicality use and design  
 Loved to death loved into being  
 Loved into existence  
 Care deep daily care of self and others  
 Warmth and happiness in the small things  
 Revel in them everyday  
 Clean plant weed nourish  
 Love it all to bits  
 The small things  
 Small is beautiful

## Opening

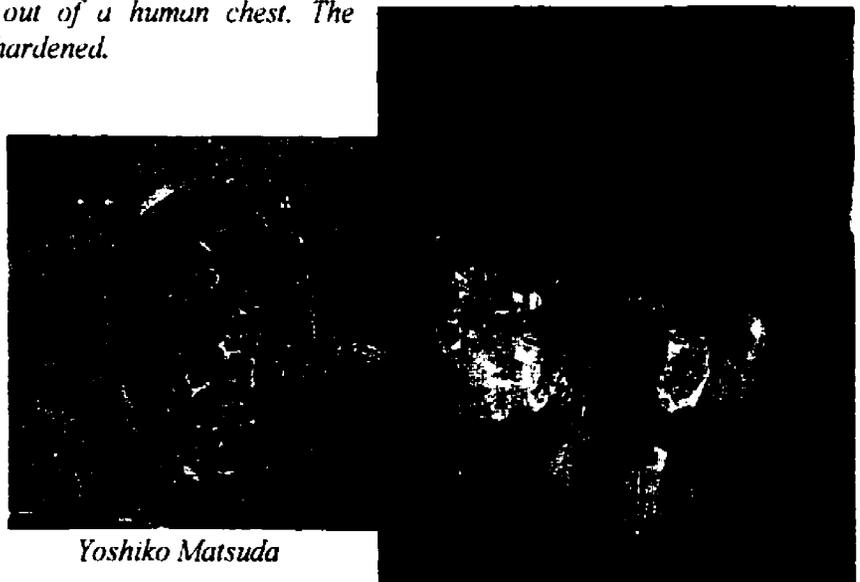
...on a heartfelt opening to a good fit

*We learn to trust that what needs to open within us will do so, in just the right fashion. In fact, our body, heart and spirit know how to give birth, to open naturally, like the petals of a flower. We need not tear the petals nor force the flower. We must simply stay planted and present.*  
(Kornfield, 1993: 36)

Such an opening or awakening can be a transformative experience. It requires radical trust and commitment to being with the experience, not resisting. When one hardens to the experience there is a temporary stagnation as though a river has been damned. It is a temporary condition though because what is meant to open will indeed open. The follow moments are recounted by Yoshiko as she experienced a sense of dissolving of the boundaries around her body and a full heart opening to the universe.

*This series of somatic experiences around my heart chakra made me realize that the boundary of the skin can dissolve. The idea that the skin is the boundary must have developed in relation to the way we experience our bodies as separate entities. To me, the boundary of the skin felt as if an ancient door had been shut for hundreds of years.*

*It was screaming in my chest, "let me out"! But, the chest was an iron cage. Under the chest bones I felt it was there. Pressing the chest bones from inside. I remembered a scene from the film, "The Alien", where a creature burst out of a human chest. The body hardened.*



*Yoshiko Matsuda*

*A month later, something unknown came into my chest in meditation. It took me nearly an hour to let myself open to it. With exhalation, I released the tension that I held on to. The body shook, as if it were the lid on a boiling pot. What came in from the chest spread smoothly, filling my torso and limbs, like warm water.*

*On the same day, I was walking on the street. I had an empty hole at the chest. The wind of the universe blew into the heart. I felt a strong connection to the universe.*

*Six months later, it was a slight sensation. I noticed that the heart of the person before me was open. Then the two hearts felt connected. A second later, I saw a column of white light between the two chests. My heart was filled with deep warmth. I felt light protected and free.*

*Yoshiko Matsuda*

### **Red Heart**

*Red vibrant heart, my life force  
Pumping vigorously and powerfully  
My life energy to keep me going*

*The shadow area is the texture and depth of the heart  
It is only the reflection and your perception  
It is the dark area and it is also part of life  
Depending on how I look at it  
Shadow area can be changed to something else  
Heart is so thick and strong*

*My heart is pulsing to deliver the blood and oxygen  
Source of energy, of movement, of life ...  
No matter what, heart is beating for me  
When I am resting  
When I am angry  
When I am forgotten  
Heart is beating non-conditionally*

*Red is vibrant, life energy  
My heart is not only waiting to be received  
It is sending the energy back again  
I am free to have this live part of me.  
My passion*

*Ayako Nozawa*

Heart full Sept 22 1999.

I feel the embodiment of my full heart. the rusty robust heart that is tanned from the summer sun and now cooled by the fall breeze. This is a warm happy heartfelt feeling that exudes joy when the leaves fall and a quickening of my heartbeat when the frost hits. The glossy surfaces of the squash leaves reflect my sun bleached hair. Their curled edges roll in to protect their exposed fleshy surfaces. The clear blue sky frames the rusty red trees with an illusory warmth that will soon give way to clouds and flurries. I feel the receding accelerate. I hear the wind generate the energy to tear the leaves from their branches or do they simply let go and float down seeking the warm earth below. They relinquish their succulent leafiness and don the cloak of dusty butterfly wings that are pulverized as I navigate the forest path.



## Unconditional Love

... on love as a fitting experience



*I was surrounded by nature and that's the time I felt very free because it is unconditional love there. I felt so liberated.*

*Ayako Nozawa*

*It was a liberating discovery for me. The contrasting colours red and green, that used to contrast so much, are here at the same time. I used to feel uncomfortable with them side by side. The strong contrast evoked profound reaction in me. They could not stay there. I felt tension.*

*Together they are unconditional acceptance. The red colour is from my heart that beats no matter what and the green is nature.*

*Red of anger, green of security  
Red of fights, green of memories*

*Red: passion to explore  
Green: serenity to settle down*

*Between North American and Japanese cultures  
Between family, workplace, society and self  
Between my passionate side and my reserved side  
Between my aggressive side and my peaceful side*

*Green and red were too strong a contrast  
White line, the thin balance of these two worlds  
Sometimes made me insane and schizophrenic*

*Tired of this constraint*

*Putting them together created discomfort*

*Red and Green in a flag of Mexico where I was  
Red and Green in a flag of little Italy where I am  
History changes from negative to positive*

*Red of heart, Green of nature  
What a surprise to feel the unconditional love  
These two colours do not exhibit the discomfort within myself*

*Red of magma in the volcano  
Green of the trees on the volcano  
The uncontrollable volcano, the ancient  
Could change to a mountain  
Highest and most beautiful in Japan  
Little by little, over a long long time  
Breathe through the diverse trees  
Reflecting on the shining lakes  
The mountain embodies all things*

*The mountain is grounded to the earth  
The landscape which remembers the history of the universe*

*White line is no longer in control of the two separate ego worlds  
That's where I am centered and grounded  
Where the balance already exists  
My life path in the spiral growth  
Where I can connect to the universal energy  
Center of energy, the forever energy to fuel me*

*Ayako Nozawa*

\* \* \*

Reciprocity  
... on a fitting exchange



*Dragon Fly Energy*

*This painting was done at a time when I really felt that I needed to shift my attitude before moving north, needed to make a change in my life. So I did this dragon fly painting and I was doing it, it wasn't a true dragonfly, it was actually a damsel fly, so it was a relative, it kept landing by my feet on the blanket.*

*Hannah Van Alsten*

**Hannah:** *I guess it is all sort of a process including meditation and nature walks and that sort of thing and painting outside. I found my best paintings came when I would take a blanket outside and all my art supplies and go hang out on a sunny day and just paint for you know for a couple of hours until I thought the piece that I painted is finished.*

*So I had two dragon fly encounters. I had dragon flies at the cottage land right on me or land right at the end of the dock and just stay there as I was moving and you know, checking me out or flying around and I had, this dragon fly energy painting was done outside and at the time I was sitting on a blanket. It just kept hovering and it kept coming back. So, this painting was done trying to animate dragonfly energy. There was a purpose to this one. I wanted to see what dragonfly energy looked like for me.*

*It's occurred to me that part of the way that painting has reconnected me is doing the spontaneous painting, seeing something in it, a form of some sort, for me that's usually animals, and then as a result going out and investigating habitat, behaviour and just trying to draw that being if it is one that is in my location, to me. In that way it is a tool to help give me focus to go out and actually investigate certain creatures*

*And when I have encounters with animals I tend to at that instant stop and think about what I was just thinking about, when I see that animal or that connection between you know myself and an animal has been made.*

**Lisa:** And what do you make of that?

**H:** *Well, it's simply recording it and seeing what the patterns are. To start understanding why certain creatures are entering into my life at certain times and a pattern usually emerges. For instance, crows usually for me are associated with fear, I'm not scared of the crow, but they are, they tell me that if I see a crow, and it's not just to see a crow but if it's, you can start telling which ones are significant encounters and which ones aren't. That whatever I'm thinking about that the fear is overriding that thought, you know a fear of whatever inadequacy or fear or I can't do that or that sort of thing. So that's, that pattern has emerged as I have been writing about what I've been thinking about as the encounters occur. Does that make sense?*

**L:** Oh totally, totally. So are you saying that the animal is cueing you to something that you're, to a state you are in but that you might not be aware of at the moment.

**H:** *Yes, so let me finish with the dragonfly. Dragonfly has been the most significant in my life lately. I did have the little damselfly, dragonfly relative come, you know check me out as I was painting it. Then I was writing about, this was right after I painted, a little bit about the process. So what colours came out, what I liked and didn't like about the colours, often I don't like certain things I've painted. That painting started with two dark blue spirals flowing outwards and then the tails of those spirals joined. Those to me signified the big dragonfly eyes. ...and I see the movement and danger and light and I have the ability to store that energy, orange and yet radiate it. So if you look here, so it's storing the orange and yet it's radiating it as well so it can take it in and it can flow outwards. Allowing me to outwardly connect<sup>45</sup>.*

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<sup>45</sup> "...to see the world is also, at the same time, to experience oneself as visible, to feel oneself seen....We can perceive things at all only because we ourselves are entirely a part of the sensible world that we perceive! We might as well say that we are organs of this world, flesh of its flesh, and the world is perceiving itself through us" (Abram 1996: 68).

*I was talking about sailing on the wind and skimming the water and swimming  
and I go into a poem.*

*Light airy  
Yet strong and stable  
Like a table  
Or a fable  
I glow to row and tow  
But not sow  
I need love and caring  
To be fair and sharing  
I breathe air and water  
But not to bother  
In worrying or hurrying  
For I love searching out meaning and romance  
To dance, take chance*

*So that came out of the spiral. The spiral was very significant also for my life. I see it as change and as love searching out meaning. So it's the process, be involved in the process and not so much the outcome. To dance and to take chance, that's sort of risk taking as well.*

### Tree Reciprocity



*Jonathan Metcalfe*

*Perception is reciprocal. When I see the trees attentively enough, they see me. But when I hurry to a grocery store and do not see them, they return to the ideas of what they are, flattened and characterless.*

*Yoshiko Matsuda*

**Heather:** *Well (laughs), I go for my runs and I come back walking after my runs and I have conversations in my head and I kind of ask questions and I feel like the trees are talking back to me (laughs) like they're, the answers are coming back as quickly as I ask the question. I'm not sure exactly how one might describe where those are coming from but I feel that they're coming from everything around me. They may be coming from a different part of me which is part of everything now, so I do feel like I have the support of, its funny I refer to trees, these big huge trees in my neighbourhood, all*

*around me and I feel that I have the support of nature in doing what it is I'm doing and that's a very comforting feeling and certainly gives me a feeling that I'm protected, that I'm never alone, even when if I'm walking down the street by myself, there are live beings of some sort watching over me, and I can communicate with them and it almost happens instantaneously. Its like they're part of me.*

**Lisa:** Has that feeling that they are protecting you in some respects shifted your relationship to them in that you feel more protective towards them?

**H:** *Ah yes, I never thought of it that way, but yes I would say that, probably yes, we developed a relationship where a relationship may have not existed before or may have been very superficial or I've been taking advantage of it or whatever. It is a different kind of relationship. More of a nurturing, caring type of relationship.*

\*

**Yoshiko:** *Usually when I draw and when I paint or when I do anything that I devote myself to, I feel no boundaries. When I draw, I draw outside objects, trees and animals. I don't paint objects, I paint from the inside-out. So I might paint, make images but that's not from the outside. When I draw a tree or an animal, I make an intimate connection with the thing that I draw. I see more, I feel more<sup>46</sup>. For example when I draw a tree, I feel connected to the tree but also feel connected to other things as well, like animals who come along. I notice pigeons come to me and squirrels and cats. Nuts and leaves will drop on my head. Once another nut dropped onto a pigeon's head. I had animals a couple of times visit me. That kind of stuff happens. But when I stop drawing and look at them, and say oh here is the pigeon, or a squirrel somehow they go away.*

*Trees, leaves, I love trees, I feel comfortable I get energy when I'm in the forest.*

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<sup>46</sup> "Every dot, every line on the page had gone through my whole organism. I was no longer the onlooker; I had crawled under Africa's skin. Drawing the landscape, I "became" that landscape, felt unseparated from it... You become what you draw. Unless you become it, you cannot draw it" (Franck, 1993: 6).

## My Tree Self

I've been trying to hold my ground lately to feel my still solid connection to the earth even when the wind blows hard and my being feels like it is being tossed and turned. I've been trying to be like a tree at times a solid vibrant wise old oak tree at other times a beautiful playful apple tree. I've been trying to trust that my roots will hold me that they are spread out wide so wide that they cross and twirl with the roots of all my neighbours into one large root network. I've also been hoping that I have chosen rich soil to nourish my roots. That I am able to build strength from the nutrients in the soil that I will not be poisoned or without water. I am water and I need water to be alive. I fear that I would do very poorly in shifty impermanent sandy soil that doesn't hold its moisture. The soil I imagine surrounding my roots is dark brown.

It is porous and peaty, it contains the remains of my ancestors. My mother nourishes me even after she is dead. My grandmother and her mother also nourish me through the richness of the soil that hides my roots. No one can see what is happening in the secret land below ground where my roots strengthen their hold. But the immensity of the importance of my rooting is apparent when I feel the wind rising challenging me to the depths. It is that underground strength that gives me such a majestic sway.

Like all trees I had no choice about where I would grow. Synchronous events conspired to place me right where I am supposed to be. That place is always changing. Once I was an urban tree desperately trying to grow despite the concrete box that I had been planted in a container I had long ago outgrown. I remember the anguish of being that tree, the tension I felt, the confinement, the stifling of my potential. I felt helpless alone, imprisoned and certain I would soon die. As I grew, I tied myself in knots until it was all I could do just to stand upright. I had become a distortion of the tree force. I was strangling my own energy flow. Nutrients could not reach my cells to nourish

them because I had a tourniquet around my waist. The fluid movement of liquid food stopped and I began to crouch and twist in braided loops.

I don't feel that way anymore. I feel that my roots are well nourished and I've managed the once seemingly impossible task of escaping the limitation of the concrete box and I now root myself in a vibrant community with supportive friends and family as well as beautiful natural surroundings. What was once an unyielding limiting box at my feet has been cracked open by the shear force of my roots. Breath by breath day by day I made the walls around me move. I created new openings new spaces by the force of my will. I could have died in that box as a slumped statue a constant reminder of life confined of potential unrealized. Instead I harnessed my deepest forces and chose life. I strengthened my grip on the brown earthy darkness and pushed through the barriers that surrounded me. I now stand tall.

I also rooted myself in mindfulness. The practice of directed attention the practice of being in the moment in the present. This has helped me to feel a sense of belonging a sense of place a connection to the natural world. I feel as though the forest has found me. I am no longer lost to myself. I have been recovered. I have made a once confining place into my own freedom space. I did this ironically by standing still.

*Stand still. The trees ahead and the bushes beside you  
Are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here,  
And you must treat it as a powerful stranger,  
Must ask permission to know it and be known.  
The forest breathes. Listen. It answers,  
I have made this place around you.  
If you leave it, you may come back again, saying Here.  
No two branches are the same to Raven.  
No two trees are the same to Wren.  
If what a tree or bush does is lost on you,  
You are surely lost. Stand still. The forest knows  
Where you are. You must let it find you.*

(David Wagoner, 1999: 10)

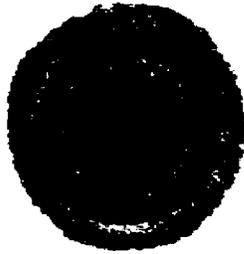
As a tree I try to let go and sway in the wind because I know if I resist and hold hard to my position a limb may snap or my trunk will succumb leaving me branchless with no leafy covering. I will be left with no way to breathe in the air that I need for nourishment. I will die and slowly move away from my treeness and become a stump a home for a chipmunk for beetles and bugs a peaty, mossy foundation for mushrooms and fungi. Slowly I'll become sawdust that aerates and enriches the same soil that I once took my nourishment from.

I'm not eager to enfold myself in that manner just yet. I want to spend many more years expanding my upward and downward branching. I want to feel the exhilaration of the simultaneous forces of reaching to the heavens and burying myself in the earth. So I strengthen my grip on the ground by holding stillness and I expand my energy forth to the heavens and sway in the wind that rattles my leaves. I am perfectly still in my motion and I am in awe.

\* \* \*

Peace Purpose Passion and Principle  
 ... on the sense of ease that comes with a good fit

**Heather:** *Well this one, the one that looks a bit like an eye or I'm told looks a bit like an eye. And I remember feeling completely and utterly at peace and just the sense that everything was OK and that there was absolutely no reason to worry, that it was something that was happening I was in a very comfortable space. And there was a lot said in that meeting that I didn't say, that other people said about that painting, which we don't have on tape.*



*Heather Sperdakos*

*But it was interesting to hear someone suggest that it was, not to use names here, that it might have been my third eye, expressing itself and others said that it's a reflection of my eye, that it's exactly or very similar to the colouring of my eye and I was clearly seeing, ... the whole process that I was going through without reacting to it or getting excited about it or getting nervous about it.*

*So it was quite interesting, and it's kind of a yellowy green, all my yellows are not true yellows. Also the other painting over there, has something written on the back, saying: "peace" again, "purpose", "passion" and "principle", ... I was into the p's, but in some way that was an expression of purpose, passion and principle and it really is, it's circular with a lot of similar reflections coming off on the sides, but the yellow is around...*



*Heather Sperdakos*

**Lisa:** *Are there any turning points or "ah ha" experiences that you had, was it a gradual coming on when you felt your relationship changed and you were having this kind of relationship?*

**H:** *Well a lot of it is that I've had the time, I've given myself the time to spend time doing other things such as painting or sailing and ah just appreciating the world around me, that I never had time to do before. I lived in a very, in many ways, isolated as well as privileged world where this is what I saw and everything else around me I knew existed, but to actually experience it hands on is another story all together, which is connected to the idea of painting. To actually get my, to use my hands and start playing with the paint um that's not something I've done for a very long time... the world in which we work is here and everything else is there but we don't have to pay any attention to it.*

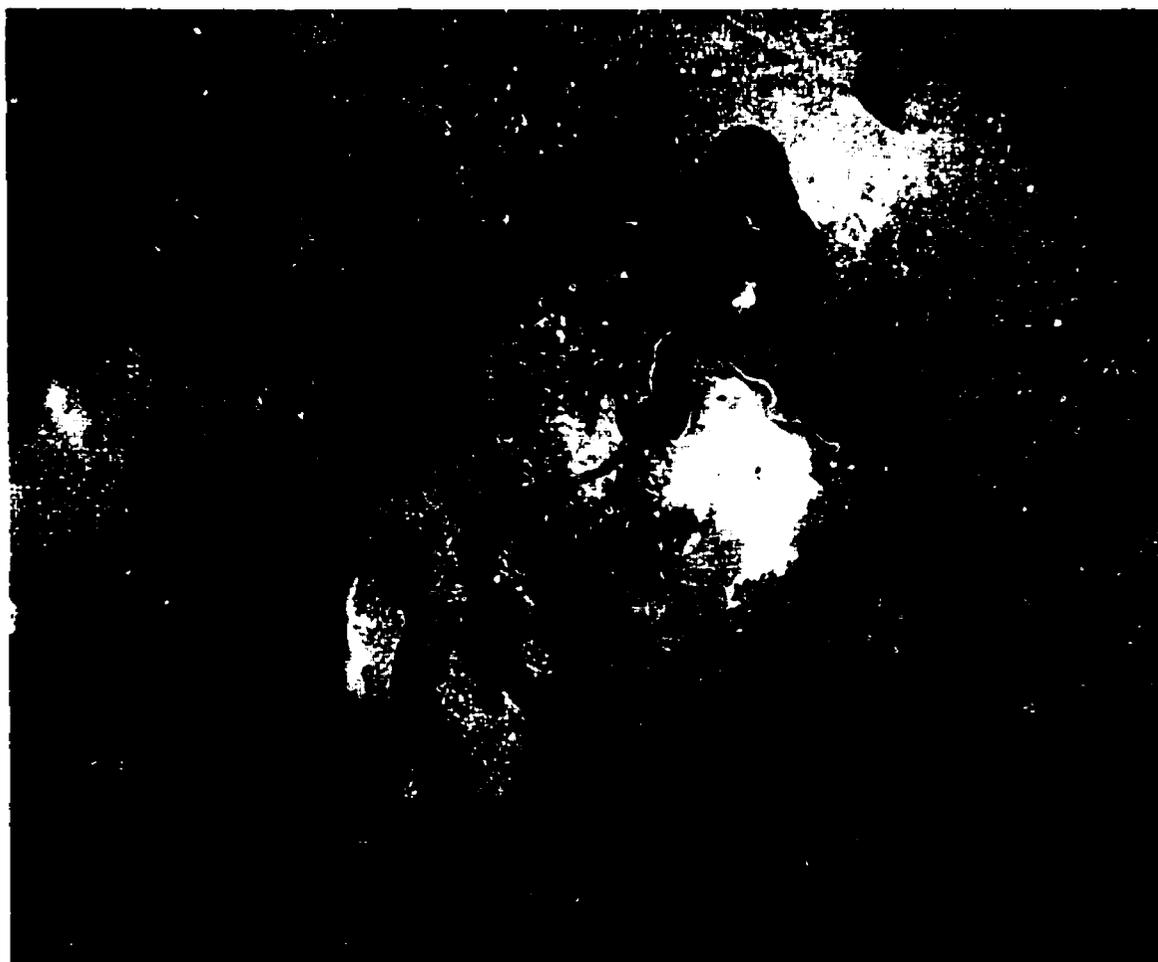
*Now I feel much more of a connection to all of that and a responsibility towards having these places around the world, that in some ways what I'm doing is impacting and I do have the responsibility to see that and to do something.*

\* \* \*

## Meditation

... on still silent fitting

The following two images were painted after a day-long meditation retreat. I find them to be meditative in and of themselves.





Wild Sacred Place

... on wild fitting

*At some point we must lift our heads from our books and lift ourselves  
from our desks, and sing with the birds and sleep on the open ground.*

(Weston, 1999: 170)

Blocked place traveller  
 Splayed greying logs  
 Randomly sprinkled match sticks dropped from an airplane  
 Awkwardness  
 Unevenness  
 Chipped flaking bark  
 Stumbling legs  
 Wayward shaking steps loose footing, scraping branches poisonous leaves  
 Echoing loon souls  
 Moon tornadoes on liquidy waves  
 Golden hardness unforgiving knife-edged gray rock faces  
 Twisted ankle fear bruised knees  
 Coiled spine broken nails racing heart  
 Doubtful thoughts long winding pathways  
 Rhythmic green to grey, night to day  
 Rock to wave float to peaceful save

My second Outward Bound trip had a very different tone and tenor to the first one I took 12 years ago. On that first trip I was pre-occupied with physical challenges. I enjoyed my strong sleek body and endeavoured to portage as many canoes as the men. During my solo I remember putting up my shelter against a smallish birch tree and hunkering down. I knew that if I just stayed put I'd be fine for the 24 hour duration. I simply stuck it out. I admired my instructors and wanted to be seen as competent at everything I did. As I recall, there were lots of trees along the river. However I don't remember any particular connections I felt with the landscape. I connected with people for the most part. I was a good member of the team.

Fall 2000 I set out on my second Outward Bound experience. This time, in addition to reveling in the physical, I also found myself looking forward to getting to camp so I could enjoy some quiet time. I craved stillness and quiet. I loved the rocks all along our journey. I saw faces in all of them. I loved the rocks along the shoreline and at our campsites, I drank in the turquoise colour of the river water with every pore. The beauty of the sky, the luminescence of the northern lights, the coziness of my sleeping back all stick in my mind. This time I was struck by the tension I felt between a very traditional teaching style and the spontaneous free flow nature of how life by the river can be. I didn't want to be led, I needed to co-create. I used whatever time was available to engage creatively, ritually and silently with the river. The resulting trip was spellbinding, releasing and empowering as I experienced a profound interweaving of art-making, wilderness ritual and contemplation that I had never experienced before. I spent most of the 10 days experiencing a string of related synchronous events and the spontaneous responses they inspired in me. Most amazing was the sheer repetition of uprooted trees in the landscape that continually drew my attention. Moth/butterflies and nests also played a large role. Painting became a way to perceive what was happening and was also used as a balm of sorts to keep me calm and centred.



This trip was a culminating event on my longer journey to understanding artful earth connection. It was a weaving together of art making and the wild that was awe-inspiring. The following three stories: *Water Rings*, *The Burying Place* and *Solitude* were all experienced on this Outward Bound trip.

## Water Rings

... on a wild watery fit

I enjoyed paddling the canoe today especially as the sun began to set on many portages. I am mesmerized by the beautiful flowing colours and rounded shapes made by the water. Its the view that I always come back to the rounded fleshy colour dance of light and water. Its the one that moves me the most. Its the bright blues alongside the greys blacks and whites that does it. My connection to nature. when I feel it is just like this. It flows its reflective colourful self with wonderful contrasts and gradations of gray. Its energized fluid wavy and connected within the energy source that energizes all beings. Its the watery source that flows into and out of crevasses log-jams and stock piles. Its flexible nourishing and today is taking the form of beautiful hypnotic water rings. The river floats me and tames me. I am its servant as much as it is mine. We were as one today as I paddled along into the sunshine. The reflection of the setting sun was a large tornado made up of millions of interwoven light pools dancing and morphing.

I was paddling in the bow as the setting sun shone directly onto our faces. It was a glorious end to a beautiful sunny day. The sun was hovering just above the treetops heavy weighted slowly seemingly drawn down to the earth. slowly slipping past the edge of the horizon.



I love paddling in both moonshine and sunshine that dances on the water. At the cottage sometimes I swim in the sunbeam that spotlights the line between the dock and distant trees.

So we paddled in the beam of the watery sunspots. The water was undulating very slowly as the wind was slight and the wave action minimal.



Left hand



Right hand

I love the black rings around the sky blue centers the greys that melt to whites the moving canvas of it all. As I paddled, I became lost in the fluid ring cascade.

The watery rings are thick not like oil slick rainbow rings rather they are fleshy full rings of substance and colour. I think that the rings are most vibrant when there is blue sky and the sun is low because the blacks whites and greys give way to blues and golds as well. These rings within rings are a beauty to behold. They are vibrant alive joyous at peace changing moving yet recognizable at the same time. Melting melding flowing morphing yet still rings within rings of dancing colour. They bring me peace.

Peaceful permanence  
 Lightful heart  
 Hopeful remembrance  
 Love can start  
 To map the way  
 To keep the place  
 Swing the sway

Alive sweet pace  
 Layers over time  
 Vibrant guide  
 Supports the rhyme  
 Swirling abide

After paddling I was surprised to see the same patterns in the rocks at our next campsite. They had the exact same rings within rings of colour that I had marveled at in the water.

## The Burying Place

... on letting go of barriers to a good fit

*Now we will let the blood of our mother sink into this earth. This is what we will do with our grieving. We will cover her wounds with mud. We will tear leaves and branches from the trees and together pile them over her body. The sky will no longer see her fallen thus. We will pull grass up by the roots. We will cover her. Thus as we do this we know her body will melt away.*  
(Griffin, 1978: 219)

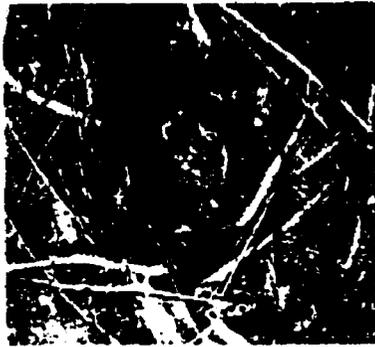
So dear grandmothers take good care of me. Keep me safe and warm. Keep me nourished. Break me down slowly and reform me into a being who nourishes others. Smooth my rough edges with warm worm bites and scratchy centipede toes. Caress me into a smooth ball of malleable clay. Help me to play my day away and breathe fully in my dark daring nights.

I buried her today. I was called by the "man-made" pile of sand and rock, a unique place in this landscape of moss, lichen, wintergreen and long sharp grey rocks. I was drawn to the disturbance of it all, the signpost of change, of destruction, of releasing to the pull of the earth's plan. I moved closer to this place and envisioned a



cairn, a carefully arranged monument to some loved soul, a place where the grandmothers gathered to mourn their dead, to re-member, to re-kin-dle, to re-joice in the flow and cycle of it all. I moved closer still and discovered the mount, the pile of round stones and sand, to be what remained of the rootings of a large pine tree. A tree that hasn't stood tall for a very long time, a tree who has been released to horizontal so long that only its form remains clothed in a tunic of lush green moss. I caressed the moss with my toes and sat on the upraised roots. I often sit on uprootedness, on airborne, webbed root chaos. I enjoy the height, I enjoy the contact, and the view roots afford over the earthy horizon, between the trees. I sat on these roots, this sand and rock for only an instant before I started digging in the humus that surrounded the scene. I dug deep, I dug round and created a small nest with solid nurturing sides. A nest whose containing will hold me, hold my hand, be a safe place for all time.

I began to place small sticks around the nest, to arrange a meshing of sorts that contained it ever more permanently. I created a home, a net, a location, a nurturing place, a place to remember, a sacred moment. At that instant I remembered the woodcarving I had done by the fire three days previous.



It was a totem-like carving done out of rosy red bark. I carved eyes, a solid nose, a stern sharp edged mouth and strong cheeks. I carved the little girl who got me through it all, the trooper who was able to keep putting one foot in front of the other. The careful, sensitive defender of my soul, my caring heart, my love's place. I kissed her lips and carefully placed her in the nest. I chose moss for her blankets and I gave her two protective mossy layers. I placed two pine cones over her, some lichen and I chose a leaf. I split it in half and created a yin/yang smile. I cried, I buried, I nurtured, I released, I created memories, I remembered and now I rejoice.



*I feel the tickling toes of the centipedes as they explore, traverse and slowly crumble my terrain. I am whole like this and in pieces. Paths join criss-cross and form a net that both ensnares and contains me.*

*Whatever will become of me?*

The answer came immediately.....

*You are stronger than the chomping of the fly larvae or the scraping of the centipedes and sucking worms*

*You exist beyond them yet with them*

*You will melt down into a fecund ooze and then emerge*

*Golden bright like a new dawn*

Willingly plant your seed  
 Feel the warmth of the soil soul nourish your body  
 Your casing will soften in all this wetness  
 Your roots will push down deep down to a place of life long sustenance  
 Then the bursting forth will begin

Softening is like shedding a skin  
 Releasing a worn protective coating  
 Pull it back and off  
 Release it wiggle in and out and around  
 Pulled away from you it will be  
 And you will be reduced to tears  
 Tears in the fabric of the old  
 Open wide your heart so bold  
 Relax breathe bear down  
 Embrace reprieve resound  
 Careful campy containment  
 Relieves from over arrangement  
 Love the detainment  
 And feel the new life kick free

Shedding  
 Shredding  
 Gliding  
 Letting  
 Old things wither  
 New things grow  
 Happenstance shiver  
 Melding know  
 Inside-outside-in  
 No skin  
 Skinless

### Skin free

Guts opened wide for all to see  
 Right there in their faces  
 The oozing sores the real disgraces  
 The careful pores will all be available

I feel like a mummy who is still alive. Her protective bandages have been torn off yet not completely. They still provide much needed support. Beneath them lie wounds, gaping blood red places where the stones hit deeply enough to penetrate the skin. The pocked armour is off and what has emerged is the soft sensitive bits the dimensions that have not seen the light of day in a very long time. They will need nourishing and care in order to venture forth and have the strength to contain passion for life, to grasp the fiery power that lies beneath the hesitation. She will bear the scar of her torment giving others encouragement, as they watch vulnerability transform into strength and tenderness simultaneously.

Is it that I simply buried my head, armour and left my body encased in an impenetrable layer of protection? Is this just more of the same headiness a decision made and carried out on behalf of the intellect to the neglect of the body? Am I still disconnected or rather encased from, protected from, feeling the source, my center, my embodiedness? Yet my head, my buried wooden head carving is made of flesh. It has eyes to see and a voice to speak. I have all these things as well. I am more than my head yet many can identify me from a head and shoulders snapshot that literally leaves my body out of the picture. The lower reaches, my trunk, my torso, my feet and the way they grasp at the earth for stability are also a dimension of me. Yet somehow so much of who I am happens above my shoulders. Maybe that's why they ache so much, their burden is heavy, top heavy in a way with so much weight put on this small percentage in real terms of my flesh and blood. Did I carve my head, my face because that is what required carving out, hollowing, opening, melting down of the armour in order to really listen to the wisdom of the forest and my body? To really reattach to the humbling effects of being a body, to no longer stand head and shoulders above the embodied crowd but to rather strive to live in the

taller rarefied air of the intellect and the rational. was my heads vision. If I lose my grasp on the ground. feel my breath rise to my shoulders leaving my belly starved for oxygen and the motion it brings. my life becomes dominated by my heads vision. Carrying myself around by my head and shoulders feels unwieldy now as I fold my belly into a slouched hunch. cutting me off from the powerful place the core where heaven and earth negotiate their terms and spin as one.

Maybe the melting down of my head will have a trickle down effect the juices will feed my belly, pump my heart full of energy that it has been without for so long. At Findhorn one morning I felt very scattered. I felt like I couldn't think straight. There were so many possibilities buzzing through my head. My new friend simply stroked my energy to the ground. Brought my awareness down to my roots so that my head could seat itself in the context of my body. I immediately felt embodied again. So what others see on the face of it in that head and shoulders shot with the pained smile is one dimension of my being. Since I feel I've accessed other dimensions of being I now recognize when I'm putting on that face or shielding myself from what is available to be fully felt both joy and pain. I no longer need to have so much protection on when I venture out into the world.

So maybe it's a good thing that I've begun to witness the melting down of my intellect. The control center is beginning to melt and trust again. It used to be that my body kept trying to be let in and my mind kept saying "what are you talking about? I don't see anything I don't hear anything. I have nothing to say about it. What you're crying about doesn't exist no one else has said these things before. they don't exist. What's the point of seeing it hearing it or talking about it when there is nothing to do about it any way. What's the point?"

The only hope it seems is to melt into body knowing and begin to see with the eye of the body. I can begin to see with new eyes begin to embrace the wisdom of new aspects or dimensions of self and embrace knew. Is those heart centered aspects that can access the wisdom of the universe.

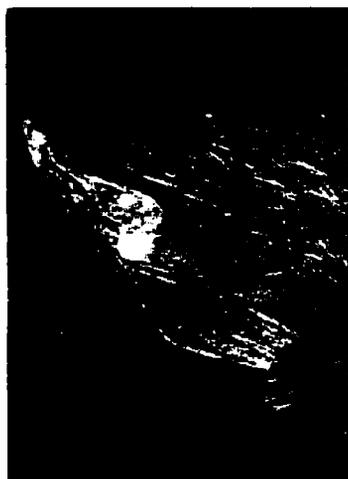
## Solitude

...on a fitting quiet time

Dramatic rootscapes fill my field of view. Rocks dirt and wood are co-mingled to create a beautiful tapestry of balance and security that once held down the upward swaying. Now the roots are above the ground exposed to the air dried out, rotted down, over-exposed and underprotected.

It has stopped raining, my tarp is up and so far all is "A-O-K". I don't know if my shelter can stand a serious onslaught of rain but my sense is that won't be happening right this minute. My sleeping site a nest of sorts feels warm and nurturing. My bed consists of a "therma-rest" placed over a thick cushy bed of humusy pine needles. I can sit up and lean my back against the mossy trunk of this fully uprooted yet fully alive Jack Pine. Unlike the dead uprooted pine beside which I buried my carved face, this pine tree is flourishing. All the roots are completely exposed yet what were once branches have simultaneously turned into foraging roots and skyward branching trunks. The original trunk rests on the ground and has been reclaimed by soft velvety moss.

Instead of building my shelter immediately upon arriving, I surveyed the landscape and walked around for a while. When I first stumbled upon the site for my shelter, I found two sticks perfectly positioned to make what I saw as two arms holding up a body. This was placed on a large rock beside the uprooted end of the tree. It reminded me of a birch tree holding a branch like the one our trip leader pointed out on the shore yesterday as we paddled by. It was unique.



Soon after seeing the sticks close to the large rock lying on the ground, I found a moth-shaped rock. It was lying on the pine needle humus bed. It was a beautiful warm golden coloured moth. Tears welled up in my eyes when I first saw it, at the same time as I also laughed out loud in



recognition affirmation and simultaneous disbelief that yet again this flying creature was showing herself. I felt accepted and welcomed to this site. No other could possibly be my home for the night. The night flyer had pointed the way yet again. Her signal her simple presence assured me that this was where I needed to build my tent nest and not in the lower valley with the birch trees as I had originally planned. It was only then that I noticed the full extent of the uprootedness of the tree that the moth rock lay beside. On the surface it looked as though the tree was not speaking to the ground it seemed to be cut off from earthy knowing like the Y-shaped stick there seemed to be a blocking of sorts. There are whole large sections of its roots

that are weathered grey and dry like old driftwood. Yet there must also be a place where its roots are large flexible and very alive. After closer inspection I discovered that despite the fact that the tree was clearly uprooted there was lush healthy growth being nourished that emerged from somewhere else. This tree was simultaneously a dead uprooted tree lying horizontally with its thick now mossy green girth resting on the earth and a vibrant alive tree with thriving green needled branches. It straddled both worlds. It appeared that the hard edged rocky and sandy soil that it toiled decades to root into could no longer hold it yet despite the toppling it managed to take new hold to somehow find nourishment again in the ground begin anew or rather continue on.

I love sitting down in the piney loam and resting my back against the log that was once her trunk. In fact as I sit here I realize that the tent nest I've created as my bed for the night is in the exact same spot relative to the rocks and upturned roots of the burying place of my carved face.

Its raining again

When I first assembled my tent nest I worried about the risk of being struck by lightning. I am both against a trunk near to the roots and under the branches all at the same time. My sleeping bag actually places my body next to her body. A direct lightning

strike would electrify us both instantly. Yet somehow I crave her support and am willing to take my chances in order to have it.

When I first attempted to build my shelter using four pieces of rope and one sheet of polypropylene plastic I placed the clear plastic tarp between branches (or are they trunks) of the tree. The tarp seemed to be too flat, too high up and not long enough for the job. I had to undo all my knots and start again because I worried that rain water would pool too easily overhead and eventually pour all over me.



My final construction turned out to be a very open affair. In fact it was open at the head, the feet and in the middle where I constructed a dormer window that looked upon the chiseled grey rock faces. At first I found the wide openings to be unsettling and even a bit disturbing. They made me feel exposed, vulnerable, naïve even in the face of blowing wet winds. As the afternoon progressed I came to welcome the air, the view and the moisture that filled my space.

As I whiled the afternoon away in my shelter I became more entranced and in awe of the strength and ominous presence of the stone faces overlooking my site. There was a clear distinct one that was overtly masculine in an Adonis kind of way. He had very strong sharp chiseled features and large lips. Beside him was a more feminine form who seemed to be looking into the distance. There was the suggestion of roundness and free flowing hair in her countenance. The ending of his face marked the beginning of hers. They were as one attached in some strange way. Immediately upon seeing them I decided to sit down and draw. That way I hoped that I would really get to know them. I had to work quickly though because of the increasing downpour.



Who is he-she?

A poem emerged in response...

I am the black manow of your dreams  
 I give strength stability and love to your endeavour  
 You can visit me often if youd like  
 Come here again and again  
 Go to Rayburn paddle north you will see  
 Come again and again  
 To the land of beautiful emerald green water



Im undercover in the rain leaning up against the mossy green horizontal trunk of the uprooted Jack Pine that I now call my home. Im tucked in my nest. Chickadees are flitting from branch to branch above my head and I am being loudly scolded by a red squirrel. I have my plastic bag of granda cheese milk powder gorp (good old-fashioned raisins and peanuts) and teabags. I have my "therma-rest" my sleeping

bag my raingear and the pitter-pat of the rain to keep me company. I am surrounded by the still vibrant and living boughs of this uprooted tree. These warm arms release me from the all out downpour. I feel sheltered yet open contained yet free. The moist cool breeze blows through my space from front to back. I lean my head out of one side of my shelter to feel the rain drops land on my face. The water is cool and sweet. A drizzle travels down the right side of my neck.

Centipedes crawl on my sleeping bag. In fact I've taken three centipedes off of myself in the last few moments alone. That's three more than I've ever taken off of my body in my entire life at least as much as I can recall. Also when it first started raining flies many flies were in my nest crawling over head on the plastic ostensibly seeking dry shelter from the rain. Their numbers unnerved me and I morbidly wondered if they were laying the eggs of the larvae that would soon consume me should I die in the night.



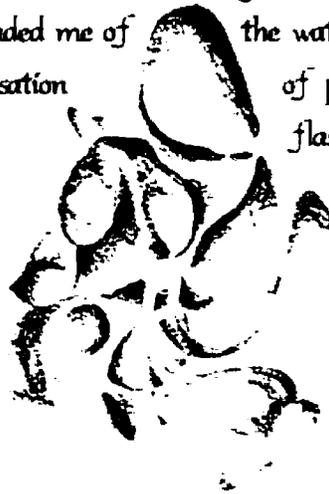
It's true that I am in part afraid of the darkness to come. What will tonight be like in this nest this hastily put together container?

When darkness first fell I leaned my body up against the trunk and pulled out my art supplies. First I did a spontaneous painting. I cleared my mind chose the colours by running my fingers across the paints and then moved my brush across the page until I felt a colour was finished. It was difficult to accomplish a truly relaxed state as I squeezed the flashlight between my left shoulder and ear but the sheer pleasure and comfort I took in the process was well worth any awkwardness I had to endure. I felt like I had an old friend in my nest with me. I reveled in this painting time. The schedule for this Nature Connect course had thus far been so busy that there seemed to be so few daylight hours left and available to do the kind of extended painting that I had become accustomed to.



What emerged from the painting session looked distinctively like a moth. This pleasantly surprised me and my fears about a long lonely cold rainy night abated somewhat as I felt her moth presence in my nest. I felt nourished by her appearance and reassured that it was important for me to be having this solo experience no matter how uncomfortable it might get. My night flying moth was an inspiring image of clarity and vision in the darkness. I somehow knew I'd be fine.

After painting I impulsively filled a small watercolour page with a random swirling squiggly line created by moving my pencil around the page without lifting it off. I enjoyed the spaces this spaghetti line created and I began to do something I'd only done once or twice before. I spent hours obsessed with the nuances of shading each shape I saw in the spaghetti until I had created a complex contour drawing. The process was slow and labourious but it suited my mood as I shaded and layered in a rain drop rhythm. The rounded voluptuous shapes reminded me of the water rings I had seen earlier the previous day. That same sensation of peace and focus seeped into my cells as I worked until my flashlight turned amber and eventually went out completely leaving me no choice but to crawl into my sleeping bag.



Eventually I gave in to an active sleep where I straddled the knife-edge between protection and vulnerability, vigilance and release holding on and letting go. When I awoke I didn't feel fully refreshed in fact I felt rather fatigued as I tried to process the visions and experiences I'd had throughout the night. It was very hard to tell the difference between what were dreams and what were in fact visions. The most provocative was the life-like yellowy-green snake sitting on one of the rocks outside of my tent nest at dawn. He faced the entrance to my tent. His face was craggy with dinosaur teeth very sharp pointed teeth that encased his jaw. Although very

vibrant in his colouring and quite threatening in a toothy kind of way the snake seemed to be more on guard than anything else. He was coiled on the rock absorbing what traces of warmth he could gather into his bloodstream. He wasn't interested in approaching me and he was gone as quickly as he had arrived.

Throughout the night I also had a strange sense that there were nearby animals simply waiting for me to drift off so that they could approach and investigate. I wondered how close they might come in order to satisfy their curiosity and potentially their appetite (against all recommendations I slept with my head next to my food bag instead of removing my food off-site). At one point in the night I felt unblanketed as though something someone had silently approached and quickly pulled off my sleeping bag. I yelled out "No!" woke myself up and discovered that the end of my sleeping bag had been snared on a branch at my feet. This entanglement had restricted the free movement of my sleeping bag.

Once dawn had permanently settled in I relaxed into a luxurious deep sleep knowing that I had done it. I'd gotten through the night.

I spent the next day drying out clothes in the now very strong breeze and sunning myself on a large rocky outcropping next to the water. Later in the afternoon after I packed my nest tent up gathered up all my belongings including the clothes I had hanging out to dry on branches I sat down in the pine needle humus and rested my back on the Jack Pine log one last time. My hands wandered to the ground and before I could understand what was happening I had once again created a small nest-like hole. Immediately upon seeing the hole I decided that I needed to bury the stone moth. It was within reaching distance because I had moved it back onto the ground and beside the log in order that it be returned to the place I found it. But now I wanted it to be buried right where I had slept I didn't want to cover it over completely yet I enjoyed how it seemed to emerge from the ground as if bursting forth somehow. I also felt the desire to meld the moth with the 2 sticks. They seemed like such separate forms and I wondered if there was a way that the solid golden moth could join with the thin sinewy branches.

So after I was pleased with the placement of the moth I placed the Y-shaped stick as though it impaled her heart and then balanced the remaining straight stick in the crook of the Y. I liked that the straight stick seemed to be full of motion and intention. It was no longer being held up by the Y (why), rather it actually looked like it was penetrating the Y while at the same time being supported. The sense of blockage I felt around the original placement of the two sticks relative to each had also gone. Together they now seemed to embody receptivity and penetration. I encircled the nest I had created with pieces of moss that I had already disturbed due to my habitation of this site.

It wasn't until I stepped back and looked at the creation from a distance that I noticed the reflection of the two sticks on the body of the moth. What I saw as two separate sticks became 3 equal beings side by side as their shadow darkened the core of the moth. I loved the feeling of integration and lightness that seemed to come with this realization. Light had transformed this creation into a new shadowy image. There was a sense of rightness about all that had happened at this site and this final "joining" was a culmination of sorts. I had succeeded in bringing what seemed like disparate aspects together. I felt at peace in my bones.



I gathered my belongings and walked towards the canoe that had arrived to take me back to base camp.

Sometimes I wonder if my nest is still there...

Openings: A Conclusion  
... on a review of fitting experiences



Earthroots

*Pluralities of persons can be helped to go in search of their own images, their own visions of things through carving, painting, dancing, singing, writing. They can be enabled to realize that one way of finding out what they are seeing, feeling and imagining is to transmute it into some kind of content and to give that content form. Doing so, they may experience all sorts of sensuous openings. They may unexpectedly perceive patterns and structures they never knew existed in the surrounding world. They may discover all sorts of new perspectives as the curtains of inattentiveness pull apart. They may recognize some of the ways in which consciousnesses reach out to grasp the appearances of things. (Green, 1991: 28-9)*

Spontaneous painting is the rendering of life in the moment. This work is an ongoing commitment to opening out, receiving and then giving back again. Over time, through this reciprocal dance, we have the ability to feel our own incorporation or embodiment of the beauty, awe and mystery of the earth body. When a connection to all life is felt, action is sustainable and life-centred. We are penetrated with earth presence. We experience a good fit with the earth and are on speaking terms once again.

This final thesis section is an attempt to highlight and deepen our understanding of this journey and briefly share the vision of new journeys to come.

I may start a painting with the question "where am I at today?" and emerge with a beautiful green landscape or cosmic flow of colors. The painting is simultaneously me and the earth. I am no longer separate, the two. I love the feel of flowing clouds, flowers and seas. I am clouds, flowers and seas. I have begun to fully experience myself as part of the natural order. Somehow I have come to know that the language of paint is a natural language. It is the language of all life, a living language.



I paint to know what I know. I have found a way to see how myself and other beings feel. Painting has become a form of guidance that leads to further learning and exploration. It is an ongoing dialogue with the natural world. When I engage with paint, brushes and paper, I live in a transitional world that is simultaneously me and the universe. The images created embody this transitional energy and hold it still for a short while.

I have been painting spontaneously for over three years now and have co-created hundreds of images. Over this period of time, I have experienced the fear associated with trusting that the process will be safe and nurturing. I've combated my urge to direct the outcome and analyze the resulting colours and forms. I continue to learn about the ways of the earth through painting and am in awe of its power. This journey has been a search for deep earth connection. As a result of my ongoing painting practice I have become committed to this contemplative way of being in the world. It continually reminds me of its power. I feel the creative life force in a way that I never before thought possible. If I am able to open myself up by "letting go", I dive into the colours and my soul takes flight. Letting go is universal and therefore available to anyone who is interested in experiencing a richer more sustainable earth connection.

On some level when I first began to spontaneously paint I felt that if I kept it up long enough, pattern would emerge in my paintings. I had a sense that there was a pattern to the waxing and waning of my emotions and I thought that by painting emotion I might be able to "see" that pattern. Viewing that pattern through my judging eye would hopefully convince me of my own natural patterned nature. What I didn't expect from the experience of long-term painting was the dissolving down of "me" into the pattern that connects. I had been prepared for certain patterns to emerge in terms of colour relationships and forms. I didn't expect there to be an overlap between painted images and life encounters. I didn't expect to begin waking and sleeping dialogues with images. Even though I believed that everything is connected, I didn't expect the veil between the worlds to be lifted in such a way that I wasn't sure what was "real" any longer. I was ushered into a life in the liminal- betwixt and between, simultaneously visible and invisible. According to writer Susan Griffin (1995: 47-8), I was experiencing "eros".

*There are moments when I glimpse another self swimming as if in a great watery world beneath all the definitions I have been given. It may be in movement, or meditation, wakefulness, or near sleep, and suddenly a door has opened as if into a vast room. I discover dimensions in myself I had not known before and yet recognize with some sorrow as if I had been separated from an old friend for too long. The sense that I have at these moments is that I have broken through a wall into another world than the one I was raised to believe existed. In this world sensual experience has a significance beyond the narrow boundaries I learned as a child. I feel no division between what I call self and world. At these times I have felt*

*everything in my own life and all of existence to be brilliant with a kind of lucidity.*

When I first started writing about this work I couldn't articulate how painting connected me to the natural world, even though I could feel the connection every time I moved paint on the page. My understanding was "not-yet-speech-ripe" (Taylor, 1998). It has been a long journey to a place where I am able to share ways that painting connects the painter to the earth (see page 185).

Spontaneous painting has helped me to experience a sense of belonging in the world. I also feel more spacious. This internal sense of spaciousness has simultaneously created a deeper sense of connection to place and rootedness of self. I have embraced a way to attain a sense of space and place through painting that renews and ultimately transforms earth relationships. Being on speaking terms with the earth is about experiencing sacred place.

### Sacred Place

At times while describing this work, I find myself using the words space and place interchangeably. It seems that together they form a whole, they are complements whose nature depends on the perspective taken. Maybe the place we are in is the place of note and everything else is space. The place is known and the space surrounds, is less known. The place is bounded, contained whereas the space is open, less defined, all encompassing, less contained. There is a sense of location, stillness, rootedness to the sense of place. In this instance, freedom, choice, expansiveness, movement and change are associated with space.

Traditional academic research has mirrored a power distortion between place and space. It has focused almost exclusively on place or analytical thought. It has been characterized by defining terms, and conditions, as well as a need to pinpoint the location of the subject under investigation. It has been about saying "this is the place". The clear definition, the hierarchical, linear delineation, the compartment, the discrete entity have all been coveted. The embodied spacious aspect of knowing and existence have been left out.

In contrast, in a contemplative practice like spontaneous painting we attempt to disengage from the bounded, blinkered place and let go to expand the spaces between the chattering words in our heads, to attain a sense of spacious connection to all beings.

Having read so far in this thesis your head may be reeling from the expansiveness of what I have been trying to express. More than once you may have even heard yourself saying, “get to the point Lipsett”.

Well, for me, this is the point. The spaciousness of artistic expression evokes tension in the pinpointing mind. We all have it. We want clarity, limits, boundaries, something to hold onto, to hold us firm. But we also need to be able to develop the ability to hold the tension created by spaciousness, to let go the need to know what will happen before it actually transpires, to be alright even if we don’t instantly understand. We need to develop equanimity; the ability to live with not knowing, not desiring to control the outcome, thus inviting spaciousness and balance between knowing via the rational and a compassionate heart (Kornfield, 1993). We also need to develop the ability to simply experience without needing to find a use or higher purpose all the time. If we can cultivate the ability to dive into an experience we emerge forever changed.

We can better accomplish this goal when we clear out our inner spaces.

*Spontaneous expression has an expansive intelligence that is nonlinear and nonlogical, much like our dreams. The purpose of the painting process is to unclog this channel of intuitive action and allow it to operate in every aspect of our life. Painting stimulates insight because it brings us to where we are; it keeps us in the moment, facing whatever is there. It moves us out of the claws of concepts, putting us in a place of innocence and vulnerability, a place of wonder. New understanding will always spring from not knowing. Emptying of the brain through painting creates a vacuum that attracts real spontaneous knowledge. (Elkins, 2000: 73)*

By clearing out we gain space to take in the new. For example, I may feel upset about something when I begin a painting. By running my hands over the colours and letting their energy choose me, and then painting, I turn that upset energy into colour and form. Somewhere

in the process I find myself observing the upsettiness from a new perspective. I am no longer in the place called upset, instead I am in a new place observing a space filled with upset colour and form. I am no longer upset, instead I am “me”, the lighter more spacious unencumbered me, observing the nature of upset. Therefore through spontaneous painting I am able to create a sense of internal spaciousness while at the same time experiencing a deeper connection to my place in the moment. I can therefore be more open to nature in a deeper more sustainable way. I don't need to take it in, acquire it, or co-opt it. I can move like a watery fluid between myself and the natural world through art creation. I have become more internally balanced and natural as a result.

Spontaneous painting also affords an opportunity to experience a sense of space while in relationship. A nice way to see where your inner space is at today, right now, is to record feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations that emerge in response to the prospect of filling a wall sized blank page of paper with painted colours and forms. Do you immediately experience a voice that says this space is too big?

This response I think is quite common in adults. Yet this is fascinating because just about everyone can hold a brush and apply paint. There are even now a number of examples of zoos and communities that are giving elephants brushes and paints and having them go to it. Elephants don't seem to worry about the size of the page or the quality of the images they create. Their work is sold as art to people fascinated with the possibility of capturing an elephant's view of the world (for an example, see [www.elephants.com/art](http://www.elephants.com/art)). It is impossible to pick their work out of a roster of human abstract art so maybe their paintings manifest the creative life force just like ours.

Also children don't seem to have a problem with painting all manner of large surfaces (Gardner, 1980). In many cases, for them bigger is better. Children create images and express all manner of colour relationships with abandon. What separates us from the elephant and the child? What happens between early childhood and adulthood that changes the way we relate to space?

We have been socialized, trained in the ability to step outside ourselves and judge the quality of our expression in the context of the outside world. In large part we have learned about the nature of that world through our schooled experiences. Hence when faced with a large white sheet of paper to fill with paint we feel we need to create a defined representation, a location, a boundary, a place. We have come to learn that defining a distinct place is what is important. This need is a reflection of what we value, namely pinpointed judgment and analysis. Therefore if we do not have formal painting skills (and that's the majority of us) then we feel anxious about the quality of our creation in the context of the analytical judge. Unlike the child and the elephant painters, we lose our groundedness, our sense of belonging, our sense of order and control when given a large space to create in. We avoid, diminish and often fear situations that call on this more spacious embodied way of being in the world. We don't have the ability to contain the tension these experiences create. So we avoid them, never really coming to terms with the consequences for this avoidance in our day to day lives.

Groundedness and rootedness are coveted states. We want to keep our feet on the ground, but there is a paradox. Through spontaneous painting it has been my experience that the more inner spaciousness is developed, the deeper a sense of groundedness or place is attained. Holding our feet on the ground at the expense of spaciousness actually decreases our sense of groundedness. Like a rigid tree in a strong wind, if we don't fluidly move and bend we will likely be uprooted.

Also, if we take up too much space we lose a sense of the place that we call earth, we become ungrounded. We can't feel its presence anymore. For fear of letting the planet take up too much of our internal space we attempt to control its wildness. We fence, we pave, and we build. There are also times when we are so deeply embedded in knowing our own place that we neglect to care about the space that is the home place for other earth beings. In that instance our knowing is immediate, bounded and blinkered.

How can we develop a sense of groundedness, security and freedom to explore such large undefined spaces, whether it is on the page or in the wild? How can we develop our own expansiveness, learn how to contain the tension of vast spaces in a single place, and better still,

fly free into a space, explore it, all the while carrying a sense of rootedness and connection with us?

One answer I have attempted to provide with this thesis work is that we can begin to animate our own sense of spaciousness. We can renew a relationship with the unschooled child painter within who in many ways embodies our own animal nature. That child embodies our deepest connections to the natural world and our deepest connections to a spacious self. We can become balanced, whole and able to move between space and place with abandon and fluidity. We can learn to temper the analytical place focused intellect with the embodied sensuality and freedom of the creative space traveler. Both are required for wholeness and right relationship to self, others and the planet. Once attained we enter a sacred place.

The following are two concrete examples of what I'm trying to express.

One of the skills associated with traditional painting is the refinement of the ability to see. In order to paint a picture of a "landscape" I could focus on the trees and the grass, get out my browns and begin covering the blank page with treelike trunks and wispy grass blades. I would be painting the place, by defining the subject with colour and leaving the spaces as secondary or at least second. But learning to see the place or subject of a painting is only part of it. Another equally valid and interesting experience is to paint the spaces around the trees first, not the trees themselves. This is called negative painting and involves first seeing then painting the negative places or simply the spaces around the subject to be highlighted. This technique often tricks the analytical mind because preconceived notions of how something should look play no role here. I simply focus my eyes on the abstract shapes surrounding the subject and paint away. The experience can be very freeing and almost magical as focusing on the creation of the spaces miraculously reveals the place or coveted subject. By clearly defining the spaces and giving them form, place is created. Also a new intimate connection to the place being painted is felt. With this shift in perspective new connections to places are attained.

The same is also true on a larger scale. As a result of the experience of venturing into the cold, dark, silence of outer space, a deep sense of connection to earth and its living beings has emerged for many astronauts.

*The white, the twisted clouds and the endless shades of blue in the ocean make the hum of the spacecraft systems, the radio chatter, even your own breathing disappear. There is no wind or cold or smell to tell you that you are connected to the earth. You have an almost dispassionate platform-... - and yet so moving that you can hardly believe how emotionally attached you are to those rough patterns shifting steadily below.*

(Thomas Stafford, 1988: 16)

*Looking outward to the blackness of space, sprinkled with the glory of a universe of lights, I saw majesty- but no welcome. There, contained in the thin, moving, incredibly fragile shell of the biosphere is everything that is dear to you.*

(Loren Acton, 1988: 21)

So paradoxically by exploring space we reconnect with our deep sense of love for earth, our home place. It has been my experience that exploring spaciousness through spontaneous painting creates the same paradoxical effect. By moving from defined places, compartments, boundaries we hollow ourselves out, open out our perceptual and emotional worlds to expansiveness, freedom and spaciousness thus generating the room, the emptiness to fully take in place. It is in this way that painting helps us to renew our ability to form sustainable relationships, to be separate yet feel connected.

We dance between space and place when we are in earth relation. When I paint, I don't paint landscapes or places but rather I am painting the spaces between them. I am painting the motion between the locations. I am riverwalking in the spacious motion of the creative life force in order to increase my own spaciousness paradoxically giving me a stronger sense of place.

By diving deeply into new spaces one doesn't necessarily become spacey, and out of control. One finds a natural rhythm between a sense of groundedness and a sense of freedom, in alternation. Dewey (1934: 155) describes "rhythm" as a natural waxing-waning relational dance between complements.

*...a torrential flood sweeping away all resistance, a stagnant pond, an unbroken waste of sand and a monotonous roar are wholes without rhythm. A pond moving in ripples, forked lightening, the waving of branches in the wind, the beating of a bird's wing, the whorl of sepals and petals, changing shadows of clouds on a meadow are simple natural rhythms. There must be energies resisting each other. Each gains intensity for a certain period, but thereby compresses some opposed energy until the latter can overcome the other which has been relaxing itself as it extends. Then the operation is reversed, not necessarily in equal parts of time but in some ratio that is felt orderly. Resistance accumulates energy, it instigates conversation until release and expansion occur.*

Being able to stay in a rhythmic space-place dance is in part what spontaneous painting offers practice in. It's about holding a tension between complementary forces, for the dance of these complements stokes the life force.

*As we dare to relinquish expectations the richness of the universal currents may fill our lives, the flow of the yin and the yang, the enjoyment of the creative pulse.*  
(Exeter, 1988: 42)

Attaining a sense of this rhythm is not an earnest endeavour rather it entails letting go of the will to form a certain planned creation.

*Though painstaking efforts may have their contribution to make in carrying out a work, more astonishing is the effect that "no-mindedness" has upon it. One gains greater insight into nature with open trust rather by attempts at intellectual understanding.*  
(Yanagi, 1972: 214)

We open ourselves to the mythical power of abstract art.

*If art's liberation from the need to reproduce the objective world opens us to the mythmaking function of the psyche, then we may well begin to find in abstract art, which has popularly been seen as meaningless, the very existential meaning that is absent from our present culture. This could be that we could begin to give up our desperate and increasingly futile efforts to control our destinies through application of conscious intellect and trust the myth in which we live to reveal itself to us- if we watch for its appearances and enter into dialogue with its manifestations.*  
(Wyly, 1988: 32-3)

When we open to the mythical stories of self, earth and the universe we feel a deep sense of reverence and awe. For me this sense was deepened by the mirroring of natural patterns in my paintings.

### Patterns That Connect

*Beauty is the transformation of the world into pattern.*  
(Yanagi, 1972: 115)

When I first started this work I was looking for a way to both see and deeply feel. I wanted to place my emotions, understand them outside of myself, know that I was more than them, yet also embrace them as my own. I needed to be able to step out and see the patterns. This led me to a realization that my emotions, the dimension of me that I thought only "I" was painting, are actually universal, the images that emerged were of the natural world, of the cosmos. They were universal archetypal images. I was painting the pattern that connects (Bateson, 1979). Therefore spontaneous painting mirrors our own naturalness through the forms that are generated. Also we become more ourselves, more natural when we paint.

I recently came across a book that outlines so many different ways to look at spontaneously created natural form that this topic could be a thesis just on its own. In it Kryder (1994: 42) outlines categories of forms inherent in *sacred art*- "art derived from an entranced state of consciousness wherein the unconscious merges with the conscious through the imaginal". She describes: subatomic forms, atomic forms, crystalline forms, plant forms, animal forms and morphotypes (complex symbiotic forms). She talks about light based forms: the point, the rod, cylinder or column, the branch fishbone or ribbed form, the triangle or pyramid, the radial or cross, the right-angled web, lattice or grid; the forms that subtle energies take: the laminar flow or chaos, the spindle or spiral, the wave, S-curve, zig-zag, chevron, the step or progression, the sphere, circle or oval, and the loop, knot or weave; and sacred totemic animal forms that embody spiritual qualities. Others share similar observations.

*Whenever we look in the world we find geometric forms: the pattern of a snowflake, the hexagonal honeycomb, the many-sided crystal, the*

*parabola of a trajectory, the spiral of a snail's shell, the regular pattern of leaves on many plants, the proportions of the golden mean as applied to the human body....and there have been artists who have surpassed all others in discovering the secrets of geometrical relationships, weaving them into their paintings like an invisible skeleton, an imperceptible pattern which gives their work a stamp of supreme harmony... To discover the geometric laws in the universe and in art can be a deeply joyous experience. The two different languages of art and science can merge into one at such moments.* (Carlgren, 1976: 42)

Discovering this merging between the scientific and the artful can animate wonder and joy. In my work (see page 176) there are examples of almost all of the forms Kryder describes. This is very exciting because by simply letting go to the flow, by following what I was attracted to, by trusting the process, I emerged with natural patterns and forms long recognized the world over. Not only have these universal living forms been rendered throughout human history they are also found in children's spontaneous artwork.

*Out of the amorphous scribblings of the infant emerge, first certain basic forms, the circle, the upright cross, the diagonal cross, the rectangle, etc., and then two or more of these basic forms are combined into that comprehensive symbol known as the mandala, a circle divided into quarters by a cross. Let us ignore for the present the general psychological significance of the process: I merely want you to observe that it is universal and is found, not only in the scribblings of children but everywhere where the making of signs has had a symbolizing purpose-which is from the Neolithic Age onwards.* (Read, 1966: 4)

Spontaneous painting is therefore a powerful way for accessing and giving colour and form to life energy. It links emotion to natural form and it affirms the absence of a divide between humans and the earth. As Philip Ball (1999: 5) states in his book *The Self-Made Tapestry: Pattern Formation in Nature*,

*You can't help concluding, once you begin to examine this tapestry, that much of it is woven from a blueprint of archetypes, that there are themes to be discerned within the colourful fabric. Nature's artistry maybe spontaneous, but it is not arbitrary.*

Images and image creation are a powerful way to transform the human-earth relationship. Not surprisingly, many native traditions place a great deal of emphasis on both the healing and culture building aspects of the creation of images and symbols (McLuhan, 1994). In fact it is in part this ongoing interaction between people and images that allows for a meaningful relationship with nature to be formed. By engaging with images we begin to story ourselves and the universe in which we live. It is a process that captures the mind, heart and soul. By creating via an artistic medium without rationality, criticism or an eye on the quality of the end product, a rich dialogue can be attained. There is an internal sense of security (place) which increases as does a sense of freedom (space). There is most importantly a redeveloped sense of profound connection to all living beings that emerges through this animation of images. Finally, there is a renewed sense of enchantment and sacredness that also develops as the story of self and hence the story of the universe is told and transformed over and over again. We take our place in the natural order.

Moreover, to fully enter into the difficult kinds of decisions we will inevitably face in the future, means that this kind of joining of hearts and heads must happen. We must be able to access the wisdom of both simultaneously and at a moment's notice. We must feel the pain of no easy answer, of being responsible for the end of a life in order to also feel the love that gives us the strength to deny our wants at other times. It is that heartfelt feeling state that gives us the earthy wisdom, the connection to all beings, the balance to the intellect's tendency to see us as separate, in control, not of the earth, blindly ripping away at her flesh.

*If the supreme disaster in the comprehensive story of the earth is our present closing down of the major life systems of the planet, then the supreme need of our times is to bring about a healing of the earth through this mutually enhancing human presence to the earth community. To achieve this mode of presence, a new type of sensitivity is needed, a sensitivity that is something more than romantic attachment to some of the more brilliant manifestations of the natural world, a sensitivity that comprehends the larger patterns of nature, its severe demands as well as its delightful aspects, and is willing to see the human diminish so that other life forms might flourish.* (Berry, 1988: 212)

When we open ourselves to the unifying pattern that connects or the self-creating story we begin to see with new eyes. We see with the sensitive eyes of the heart.

## Knew Eyes



*Yoshiko Matsuda*

*I am blind and do not see things of this world; but when the light comes from Above, it enlightens my Heart and I can see, for the eye of my heart sees everything; and through this vision I can help my people. The heart is a sanctuary at the Center of which there is a little space, wherein the Great Spirit dwells, and this is the Eye. (Black Elk, 1971: 819-820)*

*To see is our Original Nature, our True nature. To look-at is a product of our conditioning. To see is not to grasp a thing, a being, but to be grasped by it. (Franck, 1993: 39)*

Eyes in strange places on human bodies entice me. I immediately think of the eye filled paintings of Alex Grey (1998). A lot of his imagery has a Buddhist root to it. Apparently you are not supposed to look directly into a Buddha's eye. It makes me think of a painting of the Buddha at the yoga studio that I attend sometimes. I remember the eyes in the hands, the eyes on the feet, the 3<sup>rd</sup> eye, eyes on body parts. As a scientist looking at a Luna or Cecropian moth I might say that their eyes are for camouflage, they help the moth to be safe by discouraging predators from attacking out of fear of the big creature lurking behind those eyes. The assumption is made that there is a life behind those eyes, the eyes are the window of the soul are they not? So maybe eyes on the hands, feet, heart and the third eye depict that knowing. Seeing happens with many different aspects of our being.

As I've already stated, my painting project began over three years ago originally because I wanted to "see" emotion. I wanted to welcome the colour and form of emotion on the page. I saw this process as a way to begin to get clarity, meaning and understanding of patterns. That led me to seeing myself in a natural way. I began to "see" how emotion connected me to all beings. Amazingly though, in order to accomplish choosing resonant colours, I closed my eyes, blocked off my physical sight in order to really see. It's as though I needed things to be blurry in order to be able to truly "see" what was going on.

Rediscovering the power of "blurry time" (see page 123) has been one of the healing aspects of my painting process. I now see my far-sightedness as a gift. Intuitively I came back to this knowing by closing my eyes when I choose the paint colours. I developed that into closing my eyes at times when I paint as well. I believe as a child that I learned that there are all kinds of things to see and learn when the world is blurry. I believe that painting helped me to reconnect with that inherent wisdom.

Jeremy Narby (1998: 46) while studying Ashaninca hallucinatory knowing, also describes how he "defocalized" in order to be able to see more richly, more deeply.

*Five months into my investigation, my wife and I visited friends who introduced us during the evening to a book containing colourful "three-dimensional images" made up of seemingly disordered dots. To see a coherent and "3-D" image emerge from the blur, one had to defocalize one's gaze. "Let your eyes go" our hostess told me, "as if you were looking through the book without seeing it. Relax into the blur and be patient". After several attempts, and seemingly by magic, a remarkably deep stereogram sprang out of the page that I was holding in front of me. It showed a dolphin leaping in the waves. As soon as I focused normally on the page, the dolphin disappeared, along with the waves in front of it and behind it, and all I could see were muddled dots again.*

When I have my eyes closed, I seem to see with my heart. The fear, the immediate tendency to recoil seems to dissipate and I can feel the life force. I see through the eyes of love.

*Eyes are love searching out meaning.*  
Hannah Van Alsten

It also happens that the kind of soft focused seeing that is associated with drawing can generate a similar feeling of connection.

*The meaning of life is to see... my eye has always been in love with the splendours of the world that surrounds us. My response to what I see has been to draw and the more I have drawn and the greater has become my delight in seeing and my wonder at the great gift of being able to see. I only have to stop drawing for a week to feel my eye go dim, to feel starved and impoverished and so I draw everything, leaves, plants clouds swarms of birds, humans in the street. One day I realized suddenly that the seeing and the drawing had fused into one single infused act. I call it seeing drawing. It was a revelation and it changed my life. (Franck, 1993: ix)*

**Aya:** *That's it. That's what I felt when I was drawing something in Japan. I wasn't drawing, I was seeing, its that infusion exactly. I thought he really described it well. I wasn't drawing to make a drawing, it's me really seeing the essence of it. So it wasn't drawing it was the process of seeing it, in the moment seeing the essence. I thought "wow", my painting has changed because like there are so many ways of drawing and painting, sometimes I love the essence of the movement of the people, and then I draw or sometimes I love the beauty of things and I just want to re-create it or sometimes by looking at it, by drawing I see more, and you know something grasps me and I don't know what I drew.*

**Lisa:** Do you get drawn into it and just keep seeing more and more eventually getting drawn into to the small places?

**A:** *And then I even feel more beauty. I hear a story from somebody and then I kind of have all these visions and then I want to re-create them. Yeah by talking with somebody I sometimes see the vision, very clear and its like getting into an energy field, to feel that energy, so many different kinds and so when I read Franck, I thought this is it!*

Closing our eyes, seeing through blurry eyes and deeply focusing all allow us to feel and give form to life energy through art making. We are placed in an embrace where we are grasped by the earth and we begin to see beyond the visible.

*... many tribes feel the real world is not one that is most easily seen, while the Western technological culture thinks of "this" as the real world, the one that "can" be seen and touched easily. To many Native Americans the world that is real is the one we reach through special, religious means, the one we are taught to "see" and experience via ritual and sacred*

*patterning. Instead of demanding proof of the Otherworld, as the scientific mind does, many native Americans are likely to counter by demanding proof that "this" one exists in any real way, since by itself it is not ritualized.* (Toelken, 1976: 24)

**Yoshiko:** *I want to get in touch with what is invisible in the physical world. The physical world I believe is, just one dimension. I want to have those experiences, to keep my faith, to believe that this is just one dimension because when I have lots of things to do, to deal with in my work, study, and situations, I often get lost.*

Many write about how the experience of the visible goes so much deeper than what is seen on the surface (Elkins, 1996; Field, 1957; Grey, 1998; Kellen-Taylor, 1998). It is about feeling, resonating with the invisible and turning it into something that can be seen, in a felt sort of way. Seeing in the usual physical manner is an interesting process of translation that we seem to be addicted to as though seeing something clearly means it exists and has been understood. We feel safe and in control somehow. For me this brought up the whole issue of being visible, really being seen (see page 101). The veil or shield between myself and the world not only stopped me from seeing, it also stopped me from being seen. In order to see clearly I needed to do some unlearning (Franck, 1993). I needed to trust what the hand saw and let go of my attachment to the scene in front of my eyes. I had to see with knew eyes, those eyes who have seen everything before, who see through the surface to the source.

*Knew eyes  
 Windshield wipers clear and pace  
 Blinking eyelashed lids embrace  
 The worlds of sound deep pain and fright  
 Curls division dark with night  
 The tasteful tempts decides whats truth  
 Knife cut tethers release knew youth  
 To heights I swim in depths refrain  
 Windy beaches warm heart pain  
 Deplete yet replenish the eye of my heart  
 Complete my diminish body minded new start*

Seeing with the heart, the thought of the heart, is an aesthetic response, it is about imagining. It ensouls and enlivens. The root of the word aesthetic is the Greek *aisthesis* which means "taking in", "breathing in", a "gasp".

*Phenomena need not be saved by grace or faith or all-embracing theory, or by scientific objectiveness or transcendental subjectivity. They are saved by the "anima mundi" by their own souls and our simple gasp at this imaginal loveliness. The ahhh of wonder, of recognition...*

(Hillman, 1981: 48)

According to Hillman there are three aspects to taking in or breathing in the world.

*-There is the aspiring and inspiring of the literal presentation of things by gasping. The transfiguration of matter occurs through wonder. This aesthetic reaction which precedes intellectual wonder inspires the given beyond itself, letting each thing reveal its particular aspiration within a cosmic arrangement.*

*-It means taking to heart, interiorizing, becoming intimate with. Not only the confession of my soul but also hearing the confession of the "anima mundi" in the speaking of things.*

*-It also means interiorizing the object into itself, into its image so that its imagination is activated (rather than ours) so that it shows its heart and reveals its soul, becoming personified and thereby loveable- loveable not only to us and because of us, but because its loveliness increases as its sense and its imagination unfold.*

(Hillman, 1981: 48)

By opening to and practicing heartfelt seeing we become one with the earth again.

Spontaneous painting is one way to clear the channels and practice heartfelt relationships that nourish all who embrace them. Seeing with awakened eyes becomes a powerful tool for living, as old filters are peeled away and a fresh vision shines through. This new way of seeing also animates aspects of self that may have been lying dormant, mummified in a sense, tightly bound up in layers of constraint and constriction. It's not that we aren't whole already it is that we are veiled, armoured, closed off from our sense of connection to wholeness (McNiff, 1992).

### Mummification

Not being able to feel the world through clothed hands, not being able to hear the world through covered ears, not being able to taste or smell the world through the gauzey thick fabric

and finally not being able to see except straight ahead as a way to navigate to the target at hand, are markers of the bound life. There is also a sense of rigid arms and legs as the imprisoning fabric restricts motion and transforms flexibility into a small range of stereotyped actions. If moved through and peeled back, one can access a world of sensuous attention in relationship.

Yet a sort of anaesthetizing mummification also protected me from the ravages of a painful world that I was unable to live in. It allowed me a measure of belonging and functioning in modern 21<sup>st</sup> Century society. The cost was that it denied me the experience of living in synchrony with the natural world. It didn't equip me for the cycles and wild aspects of an embodied, earthly existence.

The process of painting is a response to the process of shielding that covers over and binds our sense-abilities, that shrouds our encoded affinity for fitting with the earth in a close fluid swaying dance. Unwrapping the bandages, the simultaneously protective, yet constraining layers needs to be a slow empathic process that allows for false starts and quick retreats. Generations of mummification have gotten us to where we are, it is a long road ahead to a new place where we can live in synchrony with the natural world again.

Once removed from my body, the layers that once kept me safe and contained my fear, are now no where to be found. I must navigate the earth with a new sensitive skin, I must learn all over again how to engage in a way that will keep me safe yet will help me to move through boundaries that stop me from growing and developing.

March 4 2001

Whats going on with my body? Two weeks of the flu and Im still headacheey, I have very sore shoulders and sciatica all down my left side. Body what is it you are trying to tell me? Are you sloughing off clearing out?

I decided to paint using whatever colours and materials I was attracted to. I started with the black then the white oil stick. I let colours flow across the page. After I had finished

I saw large moth butterfly wings with large antennae. There seemed to be a white strand pod of sorts the last vestiges of a cocoon. I also saw eyespots.

Is this what emergence feels like?

Pretty craggy I'd say

Stay with the silent program.

The stillness as you come to life

Too much life too little stillness is not sustainable

Release into the growing pains that come with a new form

You are not sick as much as you are sick and tired of the old form

Open out the tight spots create accepting stillness there

The right hand sees the shape things will take

The left has almost completely released the barrier



When the barrier is removed I need to protect myself from the inside out. I must find my strength in the fire at the center of my being. I must share that strength with others and not keep it hidden away in my own furnace. I must also be able to shield myself from others' attempts to steal my fire in order to build their own fires at my expense. There is still a lot to learn.

The removed coverings revealed new coverings underneath. It seems the journey has just begun. In this sense painting is a way to uncover as much as it is a way to sooth the wounds that appear. There is such a feeling of connection available to painters when they paint that it can be a safe haven, a testing ground of sorts where winged creatures take their first flight. Painting is a practice place for the skills needed for a sustainable life in the flux.

*In the end there is nothing but the painter, the paint, the brushes, and the blank canvas. More than any other art, painting expresses the place between rule and rulelessness in which we all find ourselves.*

(Elkins, 2000: 180)

This place between rules and rulelessness is liminal, a threshold between the worlds. We are neither here nor there when we are in the liminal. We are in a sort of limbo (Dissanayake, 1992: 70) a dreamtime (Duerr, 1985). We are in a sacred place or in Hindu we're in a *tirthas*,

meaning a “crossing” or “ford” (Devereux, 1996; 106). We experience the margin where domesticity and wildness meet (Weston, 1995: 236). We begin to understand and embrace life in the “ecotone”.

*In the natural world, edges where differences come together are the richest of habitats. Animals often choose these ecotones, where contrasting plant communities meet, to raise their young where the greatest variety of cover and food can be found... Transitional species, plants and animals such as those found in tidal zones, have become highly adapted for life “on the edge”. ... To an ecologist the “edge effect” carries the connotation of the complex interplay of life forces where plant communities, and the creatures they support, intermingle in mosaics or change abruptly.* (Krall, 1994: 4)

Painting provides an opportunity to both experience such liminal edge spaces as well as work through the fear associated with entering them.

## Fear

Painting is a way to face fears head on. The painter is able to clean out the mess of blockages, old ideas and stagnant intransigent destructive patterns and maintain and develop a life-long ongoing reciprocal exchange with the wild. Painting becomes a medium of expression and transformation. Both happen simultaneously.

Spontaneous art making enlivens many of the necessary principles. It embodies: letting go, staying with the breath, and trusting the process. Repeated exposure times allow new habits to be developed. Painting also helps one to use the energy of the fear to stay in the moment and enliven the senses, thereby allowing a deeper connection to the pattern in all life to emerge so that events seem less random and more predictable. The painter develops a way of staying in the flow, using that as a balance for heady knowing, allowing a nurturing dialogue between the two to emerge that is challenging and ongoing. It generates dialogue and its inherently expressive nature counters the constant barrage of messages that implore us to act on fear. It develops skills around how to be in the wild without controlling it. Trust, love, connection, breath, pattern, complexity, awe, magic, wonder, constancy, the “now” are all present. When in the grip of fear

whether while painting or in a wilderness setting, the question to ask becomes, “am I OK, fully alive and present in this moment?” My mind may be scrolling the horrible scenarios yet at the same time my body could be saying, “this is so peaceful, this feels so good”. It’s not about what could happen or what has happened but rather about what is happening in this moment.

Also there is often a lack of trust associated with these fearful times. In the wild this is characterized by the perceived threat of unpredictable and aggressive animal behaviour. In this instance it might be helpful for humans to examine the degree to which their behaviour has been and continues to be worthy of an animal’s trust. If we evaluate and act on our own trustworthiness in such instances, we have a chance of controlling the only thing we have a hope of controlling, namely ourselves.

*So often the attitude is, “Can I trust you?” But maybe the question really should be, “Am I trustworthy?” We seldom seem to ask that. If there is an increasing sense of one’s own placement within the larger context then there can be some steadiness in oneself, and that is the beginning of trustworthiness.*  
(Exeter, 1988: 75)

Trust undercuts fear because it is built on a bed of love, connection and participation. There is a free flowing spontaneous aspect to it that puts us on speaking terms with the Other we so deeply feared. We embrace life.

*Love of life is the uninhibited expression of interest, or curiosity- the cosmological urge... It can perhaps be seen most nakedly with young children in a sudden, unexpected encounter with animals. This is a response to the world that is not driven by fear or even need...but a response rooted in trust, which tends to be spontaneous and immediate, not hurried or driven.*  
(Berman, 1989: 100)

This trust extends to other people in the world as well.

### Painters as Co-travelers

Without a group a co-travelers, people who are also exploring ways to earth connect, doing this work might be an overwhelming experience. Mainstream life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century does

not lavish support on the arts, especially not the spontaneous arts. It is for that reason that it is important to have support from other painters.

The other painters in this inquiry were a great support to me throughout painting sessions, interviews and while I wrote this thesis. Without their consistent encouragement and the feedback they provided I'm convinced I would not have been able to do this work. I believe there is a reason why native vision quests (a solo spiritual wilderness experience) are for a defined period of time. Being alone in the wilderness of the not-yet-speech-ripe is very challenging and at times alienating. There needs to be a bridge back to family, community, fellow painters and the earth where perspective can be gained, energies refueled and richer understandings developed. Companions on the journey are a must as these relationships promote the attainment of a necessary balance between immersion and emergence. Also sharing paintings and processes with each other helped us to develop a language to express our experiences. We became more confident in ourselves and more committed to our respective painting practices. Developing a supportive network became essential.

Yet despite the support I received and the marvelous rewards associated with engaging in this kind of work, it is not an easy ride. To open to seeing with new eyes, to begin to take action in daily life to resonate with the earth and respond to its messages still requires a solo act of courage and commitment.

*Our traditional languages express most clearly the anthropocentrism from which our difficulties have emerged. Our imagination is filled with images that sustain the present direction of our culture. Our spiritual values are disorienting with their insistence on the flawed nature of the existing order of things and the need for relief by escape from the earth rather than a greater intimacy with the earth. Constantly we assert the value of the human over the merely resource values of the natural world. Our legal system fosters a sense of the human as having rights over the rights of natural beings. Our commerce, industry, and economics are based on the devastation of the earth. Disengagement from such life commitments requires a certain daring.*

(Berry, 1988: 210)

Macy (1998: 6) describes the era we find ourselves in as the Great Turning- an epochal shift from a self-destructive Industrial Growth Society to a life-sustaining society.

## The Great Turning

There are three main groups of activities that Macy (1998) describes that all serve this shift (pp. 17-22). The work described in this thesis falls into the third group.

First there are “holding actions” taken in defence of the earth. These activities include all political, legislative, and legal work required to slow down destruction. As well as direct action in the form of blockades, boycotts, civil disobedience and other forms of refusal.

Second there is the analysis of structural causes and the creation of alternative institutions. These activities are taken in an attempt to understand the dynamics of the Industrial Growth Society and to respond with alternatives. Activities include but are not limited to: teach-ins, creation of alternative local currencies, study groups, worldwide electronic activist networks, educational services, land trusts, community initiatives, and holistic health and wellness methods.

The third grouping of activities is described as a shifting in perceptions of reality, both cognitively and spiritually. Within these shifting perceptions we feel both grief for what has been lost and gladness in response to breakthroughs in quantum physics and systems theory that reveal that reductionism and materialism offer distorted views of the nature of the universe. Through the revival of wisdom traditions, we are also reminded that our world is a sacred whole. In this third dimension, shifts in perception lead to transformations in values. The areas of system theory, Gaia theory, deep ecology, creation spirituality, Buddhism, shamanic teachings, ecofeminism, ecopsychology, voluntary simplicity and the arts all inform these transformations.

*The realization we make in the third dimension of the Great Turning saves us from succumbing to either panic or paralysis. They help us to resist the temptation to stick our head in the sand. They also help us to resist the temptation to turn on each other, finding scapegoats on whom to vent our fear and rage. But when we know and revere the wholeness of life, we can*

*stay alert and steady. We know there is no private salvation. We join hands to find the ways the world self-heals- and see chaos as a seedbed for the future.*  
(Macy, 1998: 23)

The shift in values associated with the third dimension enables the turning to take place and must underlie the activities in the other two dimensions in order for them to be sustainable. We must find the courage to survive the current situation, critique, refuse and resist its underlying foundations, and simultaneously move towards a place where we can create alternative visions (O'Sullivan, 1999).

Environmental action and advocacy need not be fuelled by an us-versus-them dichotomous attitude since this is simply a new iteration of human versus nature. Respect, compassion and acceptance are all part of developing an empathic response to the earth that counters the "us-them" stance of the western mindset. To me, activists who see their work as somehow more valuable and effective than other kinds of work are also guilty of the same alienating us-them positioning. Whether "them" is the earth, the majority world, animals, plants, corporations, governments, we are all them.

*It is in the nature of political bodies always to see the evil in the opposite group, just as the individual has an eradicable tendency to get rid of everything he does not know and does not want to know about himself by foisting it off on somebody else.*  
(Jung, 1957: 114)

Our response must come from the place where we learn to simultaneously contain and animate what is sustainable in both us and them. Yet attempting to both control and animate those qualities in others before that has been mastered in the self is like trying to hold air in your hands. It may involve a great deal of angry or even sympathetic contortion but when all is said and done, you've only tired yourself out. Nothing has really changed. The split between self as "good" change agent and other as "bad" corporation, consumer, logger, polluter etc. must be melded in order for change to be sustainable. This melding implies the difficult task of internal personal melding that involves taking back the projections of "evilness" we place on the shoulders of the enemy we are fighting and begin to talk to the enemy within. When melding occurs then action and advocacy can emerge from a place of compassion, sensitivity and respect for the "other" as a mirror for self.

*Accepting the shadow and embracing the light is the task for each of us if we wish to become whole persons and come into individual and world balance. We act on our feelings and beliefs, so if we hold the belief that evil is "out there", we project our own dark parts onto "those others". We tend to put those unwanted parts of self on someone else or some other group, make them the carriers of our own unfinished work. If we, as individuals, could face our dark side and learn to transform that energy into constructive action, we would be taking a monumental step towards changing the world. Instead of a "we they" attitude of blame, each of us would take responsibility for all that happens in the world.*

(Rogers 1999: 125)

Therefore transformation on the personal level simultaneously transforms all relationships leading to more sustainable action. There are many ways to transform our relationship to the earth. Many approaches have a role to play in nurturing earth relationships and vibrant guiding visions. It is important that one approach not be valued over another. Political mobilizing is as crucial as meditation, activism is just as important as artful holistic education and therapy. As long as all are working with the same goal in mind, namely deeper caring connections and therefore sustainable actions in relation to the earth, we are supporting the great turning.

How to help others, as well as myself, move beyond or through fear to a place of spontaneity and trust continues to be one of my goals. This is akin to moving from survive, to critique and finally to create (O'Sullivan). Reducing a sense of risk through embodied knowing, yet taking risks in order to stay alive and growing are both essential. Accepting death as an inevitable part of being in the moment with life is also part of the reciprocal exchange. How to release from the grip of fear is the key regardless of how that fear first engulfed you. We need to actually place the body in the context of the fear in order to know its nature first hand. This is not an easy thing to do and is best not taken lightly.

## Serious work

If we want to take the earth seriously, we need to take the arts seriously which means we need to begin to take our individual lives seriously. This necessitates expanding our field of concern beyond the currently narrow need to earn and spend.

*For hundreds of thousands of years, ancestral ways of life satisfied human needs; fulfilling these needs was what life was. Today "the good life" (which in traditional societies meant many children, good health, long life, prosperity, and cosmic and social harmony) is often conceptualized as the sweet life, la dolce vita, or "the American Dream," where plenty of money transforms the old sins of human nature- gluttony, lust, sloth, pride, anger, envy and greed- to eating well, love affairs, holidays, prestige, power, competitiveness and possessions. Yet the limitlessness and irresponsibility we extol can only characterize people whose lives are not serious. For most of us, most of the time the values that we live by are not existential (at least not until disaster strikes in the form of cancer or a natural disaster).* (Dissanayake, 1995: 200)

The challenge of new artists in Lipsey's (1988: 468) mind is to embrace the potentially transformative power of serious art making in the name of spirit.

*This is the challenge facing present generations of artists- if not those now well into their careers, then those just beginning or soon to begin for whom art is still a magical word, a word that unaccountably makes one leap inside with hope, as if there is something to be seen that has not yet been seen, and as if it must come through artists' hands- not nonsense, not just entertainment or personal invention, but something absolutely serious and beautiful.*

## Appropriateness

The goal is appropriateness. In a native American sense it is a kind of ethic or moral position in relation with the earth.

*...the native American ethic with respect to the physical world is a matter of reciprocal appropriation: appropriations in which man (sic) invests himself in the landscape, and at the same time incorporates the landscape into his own fundamental experience. ...this appropriation is primarily a matter of the imagination.* (Momaday, 1976: 80)

The concept of appropriateness implies a reverential and ultimately sustainable balancing of sorts between what is taken and what is given back again. We feel gratitude for what we have borrowed from the earth as it is indeed the case that everything we have and everything we are has come from her sacrifices for us (Rifkin, 1985). We act in reverential ways towards her through respectful practices that cleanse our hearts.

*That which is appropriate... is that which is natural.*  
(Momaday, 1976: 82)

### Art for All LIVES Sake

In the context of the degraded and momentous destruction of living beings on the planet, spontaneous painting is not just another self-help, middle class, romantic activity to be pursued on rainy afternoons when the golf course is closed. With long-term commitment it becomes one way to renew the eyes, to be able to feel the living world in all its beauty and splendour. The ecological crisis is in part a crisis of perception therefore only when we begin to perceive the world differently will we be able to act differently (Capra, 1992).

The lessons for me of spontaneous painting have in part been centered around the imperative to give back for what has been given. I can no longer “use” art making as a way to transcend the difficulties of embodied life on a dying planet. Art making in this sense is indeed about human transformation however it is in the context of the more-than-human world. Key components to this perspective are the development of sustainable human-earth relationships characterized by reciprocity, attention, response-ability, sensitivity, spontaneity, respect, awe, empathy and compassion.

*Achieving a relationship with nature is both a science and an art, beyond mere knowledge or mere feeling alone; and now I think beyond oriental mysticism, transcendentalism, ‘meditation techniques’ and the rest- or at least as we in the West have converted them to our use, which seems increasingly in a narcissistic way: to make ourselves feel more positive, more meaningful, more dynamic. I do not believe nature is to be reached that way either, by turning it into a therapy, a free clinic for admirers of their own sensitivity. The subtlest of our alienations from it, the most difficult to comprehend, is our eternal need to use it in some way, to derive*

*some personal yield. We shall never fully understand nature (or ourselves), and certainly never respect it, until we dissociate the notion of the wild from usability- however innocent and harmless the use. For it is the general uselessness of so much of nature that lies at the root of our ancient hostility and indifference to it.* (Fowles & Horvat, 1975: 48)

In order to move beyond usability, spontaneous art making can be more than a dumping ground for bad feelings or unresolved conflict, it is a sacred act that can be prepared for and honoured. It opens an exchange, a bridge between the human and the more-than-human world. It is a channel for multidirectional communication and transformation. Art can be simultaneously healing for the self and for the earth if approached from this place of respect.

However it is indeed necessary for a cleansing to occur before the power of art making can be fully embraced. When this clearing out through art making is approached respectfully with the full intention of reciprocation in kind, the earth can absorb our pain. However it then becomes necessary for us to feel the pain of the earth. Like neglecting to care for the sick friend who nursed us through our illness, we will continue to lose the earth's support until we are able to engage in such a truly reciprocal exchange. This means that images can not be seen as solely self-images, they are co-creations with the earth and must be treated as living beings in their own right. Using painting as a way to pour out our tensions so that we may feel happier as we continue to rape and pillage the planet is not a sustainable exchange. Instead painting becomes a way to give colour to the earth's pain as much as it is a way to give colour to the painter's pain. When creating from a context of interdependence, art is truly healing for self and the earth.

## Humility

There is a necessary humility that accompanies earth-connecting work of this nature. It is not grandiose, on a large scale, full of bright lights and loud cheers. It is quiet, personal community work, which makes its presence known on a daily basis, slowly seeping into the fabric of everyday life. The real work of planet saving will be small and humbling (Berry, 1993).

Another aspect of this work is to become more human, and less automated like machines. This requires that we become one again with our bodies simultaneous to becoming one with the

natural world. It means a letting go of control and developing humility, in the 'humus', 'rooted in the earth', sense of the word.

We also need to connect with our own pain and weakness in order to be in relationship with the earth. Just as intimate human relationships do not develop from a place of perfection, so to with earth relationships.

*A human relationship is not based on differentiation and perfection, for these only emphasize the differences or call forth the exact opposite; it is based rather on imperfection, on what is weak, helpless and in need of support- the very ground and motive of dependence. The perfect has no need of the other, but weakness has, for it seeks support and does not confront its partner with anything that might force him into an inferior position and even humiliate him.*  
(Jung, 1957: 116-7)

It is difficult for the human ego to present weakness in a culture that values competitive strength but opening to our own softness is sometimes all that is required to develop intimate connection to self, other and the earth.

*... the idea of humility doesn't seem to fit with the present fashion of becoming more assertive- if we were to be humble, we might not receive what we need. But in considering life as art, humility is just a slight shift in positioning, an internal movement- perhaps the release of an opinion, perhaps an affirmation of trust in the larger ecology, knowing that we can safely let go and see what should rightly happen. These shifts in relationship, in quality of presence- a softening, or an opening- can magically change a whole situation.*  
(Exeter, 1988: 25)

Painting can be approached with humility as well. A distinction can be made between art making that is created through a way of grace and that which is created through the way of self-reliance. The way of grace is characterized by dependence and trust in a greater power. In contrast, the way of self-reliance relies on the talent and skill of the individual. Depending on which way art making is embraced, a different relationship with both the art made, and with self, are experienced (Yanagi, 1972). I would add that each also develops a different relationship with the earth.

*A ship entering harbour with swelling sails is not doing so on its own but has surrendered to the great power of the wind. In a similar way, the mass of the people, even those devoid of talents, may be carried to their goal with the help of a great external power; they complete their journey with ease. Those who take the hard way seek their own greatness; those who follow the easy way surrender themselves, reflecting on their own smallness.*  
(Yanagi, 1972: 133)

In addition to developing individual humility it would be helpful to develop cultural humility through more expansive educational practices. There is a quality of enchantment embedded in the cosmologies of many native traditions that we have ignored, not understood or appreciated (O'Sullivan 1999: 100).

*A postmodern education, embedded in an ecozoic horizon, would engage and tap into the profound significance of indigenous knowledge. It should be of real educational interest to enter into dialogue with world perspectives that have rich cosmologies. ... This type of education would not be a romanticizing of native ways. Rather it is expected that new and more enriched perspectives would be generated. For our own specific educational worldview it would be an opening and appreciation of worldviews and peoples other than our own. It would be an exercise in cultural humility that has been too long in coming.*

Knowledge of these traditions and respect for their wisdom supports artful earth connection. The enchantment deeply embedded in the cosmologies of indigenous cultures strengthens a humble posture and need for reciprocity. It is not a belief that is being acting upon as much as it is an ongoing experience in daily life. It is an opening to moments of connection and animation. However enchantment is described in words, it is not an idea to be grasped rather it is an on-going happening to be experienced.

*The view of nature that predominated in the West down to the eve of the Scientific Revolution was that of an enchanted world. Rocks, trees, rivers and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive and human beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos, in short, was a place of 'belonging'. A member of this cosmos was not an alienated observer of it but a direct participant in the drama. His personal destiny was bound up with its destiny, and this relationship gave meaning to life.*

(Berman, 1981: 2)

Therefore transformation of the human-earth relationship through renewing access to creative spontaneity moves us from a need to use, control and ultimately destroy the earth, to a sustainable relationship where we are once again enchanted and in awe of the uniqueness of all earth beings. Spontaneous painting as an ongoing practice allows us to feel and express the universal life force, the pattern that connects all beings, that loving bond. When we take action from this place of respect and enchantment we are acting on behalf of all life thereby better ensuring an outcome that is mutually nurturing and sustainable.

### Wilderness Experience

I have also come to the conclusion that work of this nature must be done in conjunction with wilderness experience. It's an ongoing relationship that must be opened to. The beauty of the natural world animates our own beauty, as well as our earth-honouring beautiful creations.

*... beauty is that which has been liberated- or freed- from duality.  
(Yanagi, 1972: 129)*

Without natural beauty, painting threatens to become an anthropocentric exercise. Yet without human creation of some sort then there is not a full opening to the natural world. Both creation and creating need to be present.

*Appreciating beauty goes beyond sense perceptions, it is opening to the soul of the being in relation. Beauty is not physical it is within the act of connection, it is breathing in to our being's other life. Imaginational intelligence resides in the heart, it is a simultaneous knowing and loving by means of imagining.  
(Hillman, 1981: 7)*

The imaginal seems to provide the bridge between humans and the wild, just as it opens us to earth form in all its incredible diversity. Work done from a place where the self is able to resonate with all earth beings and share that resonance in some form, is earth connecting. To resonate is to follow an interest, a passion, to move with the attraction. All beings engage in this.

*Love begins when we discover interest. To be interested is to fall in love.  
To become fascinated is to step into a wild love affair on any level of life.  
Then we discover not only that we are interested, but that our interests are*

*entirely our own. We awake to our own unique set of attractions. So do oxygen atoms. So do protons.... Each person discovers a field of allurements, the totality of which bears the unique stamp of that person's personality.... By pursuing your allurements you help bind the universe together. The unity of the world rests on the pursuit of passion.*

(Swimme, 1984: 47-8)

Following my passion while in the wild can be sensuous and erotic. It is a love affair with life. Also being in the wild helps me to observe the changes in my ability to connect. I am both a detail person now and can stand for a great long while examining the patterns on tree bark, as much as I love the shadowy swirl of colour in "blurry time" (see page 123). I also enjoy painting outside whenever the opportunity presents itself. Laying canvas on the ground and getting down on all fours to paint is a wonderful way to engage with the process. I can immerse myself in what Glendinning (1994: 6) describes as our primal matrix- the state of a healthy, wholly functioning psyche in full-bodied participation with a healthy, wholly functioning Earth.

*...we have access to the love for life, equanimity, and resilience that are inherent in the primal matrix when our lives are embedded- with all of Creation's animals and greens, insects and microbes, rocks and roots- in the rhythms of the Earth. We are fully who we are when we live in the natural world.*

Also embracing nature's rhythms while painting, following the breath, following the paint as it moves across the page is about embracing an earthy slow pace.

*Having lived in the amazingly rapid world of television imagery, ordinary life is dull by comparison, and far too slow. But consider how it affects one's ability to be in nature. The natural world is really slow. Save for the waving of trees in the wind, or the occasional animal movement, things barely happen at all. To experience nature, to feel its subtleties, requires human perceptual ability that is capable of slowness. It requires that human beings approach the experience with patience and calm.*

(Mander, 1991: 86)

A number of the wilderness experiences that I shared in this thesis had a ritual component to them. I fell into these rituals by continuing to follow what resonates (see page 229- 245). I've since discovered that there is a strong supporting literature on the power of ritual for earth connection (Jenkins, 1997; Kryder, 1994; LaChapelle, 1988, Seed et. al., 1988).

*Rituals affirming the interconnectedness of the human and the nonhuman worlds exist in every primitive culture. The existence of these rituals attest to the fact that our sense of separation has ancient roots in our species. Their existence also suggests that effort is needed to maintain our relationship with the rest of nature. They also point to directions where we can search to recover the lost connection.* (Seed, 1988: 11)

Art making has also played a large role in human ritual and the animation of sacred place, through the millenia (Dissanayake, 1995).

*Prior to the appearance of city-states, the cultures that later became the Greek, Celtic, Egyptian, Chinese and Indian all shared mythic connections with the landscape that were expressed in art and rite. Ancient megaliths and caves framed significant spots upon which the sun shone during a solstice or equinox. These were places where the gods and goddesses performed deeds that amplified the subtle energy and light; their reception created vital force and illumination within. Rock art or totems were often made at such sites.* (Kryder, 1994: 42)

In addition to performing artful rituals in the wild, I also have begun to appreciate the more ritual aspects of my painting practice. I paint in the same place each time, set up my materials methodically, gather water, fill containers with colours, open my watercolour book and select a clean page. I start with a small 8-1/2" x 11" painting first and then move to larger sizes. I leave the paintings out to dry and reverse the setting up process in my clean up. There is a preparation that happens when I ritually set up in this manner. A welcoming of the creative flow, a quieting of the mind that develops, a slow opening to the present moment. While painting I do not listen to music and when in a group I find I am very distracted by talking. Carefully cultivating a place in which I can paint peacefully is paramount for the success of my encounters. Being consistent about how I set up helps me prepare myself to make the transition to a different way of being. Painting regularly also helps to make the transition more fluid. It is as though images wait for a chance to be expressed. When given the chance they appear out of nowhere and soon come to expect their free playtime. I have an easier time connecting to the energy of life when I engage in some sort of daily practice.

## Education

*A child awakens to the universe: the mind of a child to a world of wonder, the imagination of a child to a world of beauty, the emotions of a child to a world of intimacy. It takes a universe to make a child, to educate a child, it takes a universe to fulfil a child.* (Berry, 2001: 10)

As educators we need to teach our children to respect the sacredness of artistic expression. Creation is a response to the beauty and splendour of the planet. We must design learning environments that are conducive to spontaneous creativity. These are trusting, respectful environments that provide a safe nurturing place for expression. Spontaneous painting can not be taught in as much as it can be welcomed, encouraged and nurtured. Its product should not be criticized, judged or marked in any way. However I do believe that various factors associated with the process can be evaluated. Factors such as commitment to completion in any given session, commitment to an ongoing practice, respectful compassionate engagement with own work and the work of others can all be observed and self-evaluated. Gallas (1991) describes wonderful examples of how ongoing art making enriches learning in the elementary classroom. It's a piece that offers hope for the integration of the spontaneous arts in all aspects of learning. She sees art as a way to help children continue to develop and mature their natural spontaneous artfulness and more fully know what they know.

Spontaneous painting is a practice ground if you will for "in the moment" merging. As applied to environmental education spontaneous painting practice teaches the necessity of engaging in other ways of knowing that promote heartfelt participatory earth connections. Participatory consciousness is a way of being awake to the universe. It is characterized by a somatic, non-verbal, re-ordering of our relationship between self and other, that is mirrored by a merging with, and the lack of a need for engagement to appropriate something or fulfill certain purposes (Berman, 1981; Heshusius, 1994).

Environmental education taught in a manner that does not evoke the sense of connection I have just described will not meet its desired aim for students to be simultaneously knowledgeable in the issues and heartfelt in their relationships. A kind of Empathic Education

(Laura & Cotton, 1999) is called for in this instance to counteract the covert messages of environmental education traditionally taught like a science.

*It should now be clear that unless the form of educational knowledge we select is motivated by empathic connectivity with nature rather than power over nature, there is no place to go. Environmental education will simply reproduce, albeit in admirably cosmetic ways, the same contexts of technological invasiveness and intrusion that warrant extirpation from the school curriculum. Once the knowledge as power paradigm is shifted from its position of epistemic priority, however, and substituted by an empathic knowledge of participatory consciousness, then the real work of environmental stewardship through education can begin. Appreciation of the need for empathic connectivity with nature provides a new sense of the domain of our ecological responsibilities which emerge from our interactions with nature and this leads to an empathic redefinition of the tools of technology.*

(Laura & Cotton, 1999: 171)

We find ourselves embracing solutions to the environmental problems we face through ecological relationship not solely through technological quick fix. I would not however choose the word stewardship to describe the earth relationship I envision. The early meaning of the word "steward" lies in the management of a household or an estate (Chambers Dictionary of Etymology, 1988). The earth does not need managing rather it craves voice and reciprocity. It also needs compassion in the sense that it needs us to feel its deep pain (Seed et. al., 1988). I don't believe that the earth needs our help to manage its affairs. On the contrary I believe we'd be best to follow its lead, or better yet get out of its way. The earth is a complex living organism within which we are an overwhelming force, at the same time as we are essentially a small factor. Either we learn to live reciprocally, or we will die out, our "fit" being too poor to manage any type of evolutionary sustainability. The earth will not however perish with us, in fact it is likely to flourish without our presence.

Environmental education would benefit from embracing art just as art education would be balanced and enriched by embracing the ecological. For me the two go hand and hand to create a sacred enlivening bridge between self and planet. Art making for the sole purpose of personal individuation without an ecological grounding is an alienating act that reinforces the value that the earth is only useful to the extent that it furthers our causes and meets our desires.

Environmental education that doesn't embrace spontaneous art making denies learners the opportunity to develop powerful ways of knowing that balance the intellect. New visions that emerge from this imaginal space when melded with sound practical knowledge can drive sustainable actions.

A sound environmental education is rooted in values that promote sustainable action. One compilation of just such essential values is called The Blue Mountain Statement of Essential Values ([www.sehn.org/blue](http://www.sehn.org/blue)). They state:

*Particular values form the basis of our survival. When practiced, they help us live in reciprocity with nature and with each other. We are the relationships that we share, and we are permeable- physically, emotionally, spiritually- to our surroundings. Therefore we hold these values as essential: gratitude, empathy, sympathy, compassion, humility, respect, restraint, simplicity and humour.*

Spontaneous painting practice taught in an ecological framework allows painters to develop an embodied understanding of these values. We begin to experience and thus learn a new ecological language.

*Attending to ecological knowledge means metaphorically relearning "the language of birds"- the passions, pains and cryptic intents of the other biological communities that surround us and silently interpenetrate our existence.*  
(Manes, 1995a: 52)

The implications of this work for education in general are far-reaching and could easily balloon into another thesis. To begin to embrace sustainable earth relationships we need to teach the western mind how to embrace heartfelt earth connection through the combined power of art making and wilderness experience. We must help individuals develop daily practices that help them to stay open to that connection and we must guard against the patterns and habits that close them off from the more-than-human world. Learning environments and curricula that are both artful and of the earth provide a much needed counterbalance to the antiseptic, technological, fact based learning that is embraced in so many educational institutions. By emphasizing feeling connections we lay the down the soil for factual learning. When this is done in childhood we help to lay good foundations for future connections.

*It's not so important to know as it is to feel. Childhood is a time of soil preparation that will provide nurturing for the lifetime to come. If facts are the seeds that later produce knowledge and wisdom, then the emotions and the impressions of the senses are the fertile soil in which the seeds must grow.... The years of early childhood are the time to prepare the soil. Once the emotions have been aroused- a sense of the beautiful, the excitement of the new and the unknown, a feeling of sympathy, pity, admiration or love- then we wish for knowledge about the object of our emotional response. Once found it has lasting meaning.*

(Carson, 1956: 45)

The experiences shared by other painters and myself reveals that a similar process in adulthood can be transformative. In other words, what applies as a sound approach to the artful ecological education of children also holds true for adults. While it respects analytical reason, truly earth connecting adult education mirrors the same emphasis on heartfelt sensation. However due to the overpowering nature of the rational mind, adult environmental education from an empathic artful perspective can be very challenging. From my experience leading workshops with adults I have found that I must provide many openings for energy renewal. Unlike the children I used to teach, many adults so rarely engage in spontaneous art creation that the process while joyful can also bring up a great deal of pain and discomfort. A great deal of support and patience is necessary.

In a general sense, I do not advocate immersion in the primitive, or an overpowering of the separate-self ego, rather I envision a re-balancing of the forces of the wild with the rational. A joining at a place where we can once again be on speaking terms simultaneously with our wild selves and the earth. In this sense I envision the renewal of ways of knowing that have been long buried personally and culturally. Once unearthed we become more sensitive to the earth and become better able to act in ways that nurture all life. This last quote is a great summary of all that I have been trying to express about the educational implications for this work.

*We need to make art about centipedes! We need an art in which a centipede is speaking. I think it is very similar to Pleistocene art. Its very similar to Mycenaean art in which the natural world is there and speaking as itself. It is not there as a moment of contemplation for the fiction of man (sic). One of the reasons I think aboriginals have been able to stay on the Red Path, as Black Elk would say, is that they used ritual to make sure the rational part of the brain never took over. Maybe the reason for this was*

*to keep in balance the rational and the irrational... They wouldn't see it as that kind of dichotomy, but this one calculating part of our existence, as to the intuitive, holistic and creative part- we don't have any of that balance in our society. We need logic to get by in the world, but it becomes hypertrophic at some point, in that it keeps on growing. Its like elephant tusks, the mastadon tusks. At some point they cross and they become burdensome. Maybe our minds are like that. We need to develop techniques to keep the rational mind in balance. I think that art plays a role in it.*  
(Manes, 1995b: 102-3)

## Artful Heuristic Inquiry

Experiencing a metamorphic life cycle through painting brought my attention to both my own ongoing personal transformation, the transformative cycle of this inquiry and the potential for transformation in human-earth relationships. This work has been a co-evolution on a number of different levels. The process of spontaneous painting transformed thoughts, feelings, perceptions and actions over time. Slowly a new way of seeing was developed. The patterns and forms in paintings transformed understandings of myself as natural. As a group many paintings depicted the metamorphic or self-transforming cycle of a butterfly/moth. Those images represented on paper a cycle of transformation that I felt, thought, and saw in relation to the earth over the last 3 ½ years. Finally, the creation of this thesis and the research that led up to it, has opened me to the transformative power of an artful heuristic research cycle. This cycle is ongoing. I have chosen to stop and reflect on the journey taken thus far but despite the fact that I have stopped for a bit, the process hasn't. It just keeps on going. Being on speaking terms with the earth once again is about embracing life in perpetual cycle.

The process associated with this inquiry was very difficult and yet rewarding. It was intense and seeped into all aspects of my life. Ideas bubbled up while I was on runs, meditating, painting and gardening. Sometimes I woke up at 4am and had to get up and write. I felt like I was a passenger on a roller coaster that twisted, climbed and plummeted in tune with a different master that wasn't entirely me. This process was not conducive for working to a deadline. Like trying to tug on the new green shoots of seedlings, growth is not accelerated, instead it is killed out right. At one point, taking daily baby steps was the best response to what seemed like an interminable wait for things to fit together coherently. I tried to keep my engagement with both

the question being asked and the stories the paintings told and found that like spontaneous painting, heuristic inquiry develops the ability to stay with a process that ultimately leads to an unknown destination. It affords the inquirer an opportunity to stop seeking the answers and instead, open to them.

Although I promote the ease with which anyone can develop the ability to paint spontaneously, and feel the benefits that result, I can't be so positive about the experience of creating a thesis from the transformative experiences associated with artful earth connection. Suffice it to say I have learned a great deal. However from beginning to end this thesis has also been a great deal of work. Certainly double the work of a traditionally rendered thesis. Then again, maybe it's just a different kind of engagement that's involved.

Not only did I have to have a very good grasp of the literature in order to be able to associate spontaneous painting with earth connection, I had to muster the courage to try out my theoretical beliefs. This was not a weekend affair. The trial needed to be long enough that I could detect change over a period of time. As much as the tuition paying side of me wanted to step out of the painting process after about one year, by then I was deeply immersed in a process that threatened to take me out of academia all together. Day after day all I was attracted to was moving paint around the page. Writing about the process, organizing images in any way, stepping out and representing my work in any form felt jarring and down right abhorrent. Also for the longest time I was so immersed in my process that I couldn't formally engage with the experiences of the other painters. Only now as I write this do I realize that I have the energy and space to deeply dive into someone else's process, as deeply as I dove into my own. Had I acted on that impulse, this thesis would have been at least another year in coming. I'm not saying that faster is better, I'm simply trying to be honest about the incredible time commitment required to do work of this nature. Throughout the 3-1/2 years of this inquiry I did little else. After a deep immersion I finally resurfaced and began the slow fairly difficult process of trying to understand where I had been, what I had done and what stories the paintings had to tell. After about six months of engaging with my journaling, my paintings and the experiences of others, I needed to find a way to bridge images, poetry and narrative with a traditional academic style. I felt it was important to integrate, fit both aspects together as that was the message I was trying to send with

my work. Committing to the artistic over the academic would have simply tipped the balance creating a new distorted relationship without offering a solution that honours the power of both. I like how Weston (1999: 12) describes just such a tension as it relates to the field of environmental philosophy.

*Too often the academic style enforces a kind of abstraction and endless hedging in the places where we want to know what to 'do' and whether or not it is 'too late'. Also the necessarily detached voice pulls heads and hearts apart. On the other hand, the activist poetic tradition too often lacks critical care; the claims are too easy, too sweeping or unclear. People also want to know how to 'think', facing in some ways an unprecedented philosophical situation, and now after the first wave of vertigo and amazement has passed, we recognize that this kind of thinking is 'hard'. ... The upshot is truism, but seldom heeded for all that: each side needs the others' help. We need to think more wildly and widely and also more critically and carefully.*

The painting experience as I've already suggested had a life all its own and doesn't easily lend itself to the pinpointing requirements of academic work. As a first attempt at integrating the head and the heart in a text, I am pleased with the result. I wanted to create a thesis that would be read, that was beautiful in its own right and that evoked feeling responses and story telling. I have to say that initially I was not eager to weave images and poetry with the head. I had to learn to trust it again and more than once I had to be strict about not letting "library Lisa" go overboard. Although I became very excited about what others are writing when I delved into the literature and felt a reinforced resolve to see this work to completion, academic writing is not a form that sits as comfortably as it once did. Synthesizing the scholarly with images, narrative and poetry is very difficult to do well. I feel I still have a lot to learn in this regard.

One of my motivations for creating this artful thesis was to push the envelope in the rendering of scholarly work. I feel it is appropriate and hopefully helpful to others if I share a bit about the computer skills I developed as well as crucial hardware and software I think is required to create image rich text. I see no reason in keeping these things a secret (see **Appendix I**).

Also in order to produce this thesis I had to be ruthless about focusing on transformation through artful earth connection instead of allowing other dimensions to be developed. The result

is that this thesis is now the backbone for future work that will fully develop the six themes of the spontaneous, the child-like, the embodied, the primitive/tribal, the organic, and the wild (see page 189). Each could be a thesis in its own right. So although a huge commitment of time and energy was required to get this work to the stage where I am now writing my concluding comments, I have generated enough material to keep me fuelled for a very long time, which is a great bonus.

### New Experiences



This experience has changed my life. As I've already mentioned I plan to develop each of the six themes of the spontaneous, the child-like, the embodied, the organic, the primitive/tribal and the wild. I also plan to run creative professional development programs for teachers, teacher educators and holistic practitioners. There seems to be a turning in the tide around the value of creative professional development. My emphasis will be on artful self-care with an emphasis on ecologically sustainable practice.

As it stands I am making a commitment to both my community in Muskoka, Ontario and my bioregion. I am of the forests and the lakes and hope to continue doing the bulk of my work here. This work and I are both tied to the place where I live.

Yet in terms of my own sustainability I realize there are many contradictions to work through. The watercolour paper I currently use is highly bleached and made from trees. The

paints are acrylic for the most part and are not water soluble. I need to find a more ecologically friendly way of disposing of them aside from putting them down the drain and into my septic tank. I've stopped using animal-hair brushes and now use scrapers and foam brushes for the most part. Like an Albertan artist I met recently, I'm interested in beginning to work with natural materials in my spontaneous painting. He uses oil tar, blueberries, and grass in very large quantities to make his own paints. His paintings are a testament to his bioregion, yet I worry about all that goes into them. Is it a fair trade?

I also continue to dance between approach and avoidance.

*As I write this it is late on a warm early May night. I am being teased by a small brown moth who keeps launching herself at my reading light. She approaches then immediately recoils no doubt as the intensity of heat threatens to turn her to dust. So to with me. I've approached the light before the promise of connection and just as vigorously recoiled in horror at the intensity of the experience. Yet I continue to return. Back and forth I dance to and fro approach and retreat.*

*With experience, we may come to understand that desire is always frustrated and frustrating, and knowing this, we may try and resist the heavy sweetness of its intoxication. The dance of eros is strange. We find ourselves pushing towards the Other and then pulling away, desiring and fearing, yearning while foreseeing.* (Pryer, 2001: 136)

I miss painting a great deal right now. I long for a re-union. It has been months since I've really been able to immerse myself in the dance of fluid colour. The paradox associated with writing an earth-connecting thesis has been the resulting very disconnected state that I find myself in. I have spent full days and many evenings for months now at my computer. I've watched spring arrive through my position on the in-side of my window. I've been like a caged animal this last while, as the daffodils open and the deep burgundy buds on the trees turn golden green.

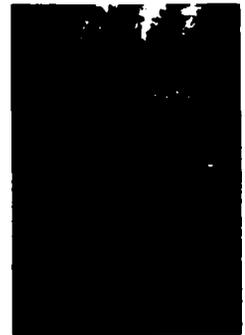
So I plan to resume my painting practice, be in my body again and do as much of it as I can outside. I have desperately missed the physicality of my life while I've engaged in this project. Painting itself is also a very physical activity.

*Painting is a bodily art... It has to do intimately with the act itself; the muscles that burn after repeated gestures, the thin sweat of constant activity, the rubbing and caressing of paint against paint.*

(Elkins, 2000: 161)

I also plan to spend the next few months putting my hands in the earth while gardening.

As I write this there is a backhoe out front scraping the surface of our front yard to remove the stumps left behind from the Tag Alder dear cut we did last fall. At the time it was a relatively easy decision to make. The swath of water loving bushy trees formed an impenetrable fence in front of our home which is in a valley as it is. We felt boxed fenced in and sequestered. The alders had to go.



Randy manipulates the big arm of his backhoe with awe-inspiring dexterity. In the moments it has taken to write these words he has successfully scraped an area the size of an average suburban lot. I am simultaneously excited about the prospect of starting a new garden project in the front yard and ashamed at the mess we have created. I am also doubly uncomfortable as I sit here writing about artful earth connecting at the same time someone else is systematically madding and beautifying what was only a few short months ago a quiet haven for song birds and a natural soil stabilizer.



These truly are times of no easy answers. My desires won out this time as I have to admit they often do (most of our land is now garden). So I guess part of a new beginning for me involves opening my heart to my own human foibles seeing the

grey in all things staying with the spin, shouldering the burdens that are mine and endeavouring not to create any for other beings.

Heartful earth connection is founded on simultaneous seeing that is both inward and outward. We must see with compassion sometimes and steady resolve at other times. I am new each time I look and am seen, so is the earth.

*... we regard the world anew, having regard for it as it shows its regard for us and to us in its face. We pay respect to it simply by looking again, re-respecting, that second look with the eye of the heart. This respect demands reconstitution of our language so that it speaks again of qualities- naming what is there, rather than what we feel about what is there and abstraction away from what is there. .. Instead the emptied sense of our words must be refilled with concrete images, our talk, an animal talk, echoing the world.* (Hillman, 1981: 129)

\*

It's been two weeks now since Randy dug out the giant holes that will house my perennials. I had two dump trucks full of earth and one of compost delivered. I shoveled the earth into the holes creating blank garden canvases of a sort. I imagined a wonderful English garden with hollyhocks, delphiniums, sunflowers and meandering pathways.

But it's been very rainy this spring. The ground was saturated weeks ago and yet the rains still come. Streams and ditches have collected the run-off from the surrounding hillsides and funneled it through our valley home and into the garden beds creating bogs. What looks on the surface like piles of brown earth waiting to be planted hides a wetter truth. If I place my foot on their surface and then transfer my weight, a thick soupy brown slurry opens up and threatens to pull me in. We dug our gardens in hard clay or "gumball" as the locals call it, unknowingly creating a spontaneous swamp.

At first in reaction to the extreme wetness of the beds we talked about how we could drain off the water using perforated pipes and doing a great deal of ditching. But as with painting I want to stay with the dance.

As the rain continues to pour down any efforts we make to counter its effect seem silly and self-absorbed. The land is speaking loud and clear. It says SWAMP.

So a swamp it will be. We've now embraced that this area is going to be transitional space, a zone for both land and water aquatic life and plants. It will be filled with bull rushes, lily pads, irises, willow bushes, tall grass, peepers and salamanders.

We feel supported in our co-creation and welcome new visitors human and animal alike to our liminal front yard. We listened to the earth and also feel heard.

\* \* \*

## A Final Summary

*Once we have, to quote the poet Robertson Jeffers, "fallen in love outwards", once we have experienced the fierce joy of life that attends extending our identity into nature, once we realize that the nature within and the nature without are continuous, then we too may share and manifest the exquisite beauty and effortless grace associated with the "natural" world... When we hear the earth speak to us, we are transformed ...* (Seed, 1988: 16)

This work opens space for eros. It nurtures our experience and expression of life motion. For me the process began with the painting of my emotional states in the Fall of 1997 and has now enveloped me into both the pain and pleasure of full bodied earth life. Learning about the sensuous self is about learning to fully live, to fully be in communion with all life. It is about sharing life in the spin, whether it is positive awe-inspiring and happy or negative, painful and sad. The juice, the life strand that connects the "all" is this embodied e-motion, this aesthetic strand that simultaneously pulls inward and tugs outward. The equal yet distinct forces of inward and outward keep us in this motion. The tension between complements is the life energy, the sustainable feeling of flow and connection. The branching upwards and the pulling downwards generate an incredible spinning core. It is the core at our center, our belly buttons, the place where we first connected with the "other" when the opposing energies of the male and female converged bodily to create the "I" we are also trying to animate. The umbilical, the cord, the navel, the center of the universe is the life force, love, the pattern which connects.

Wherever there is a marriage or a relationship connection of any kind, in order to maintain it there must also be an exchange, a dialogue, an open channel for communication. For the mother and fetus it is the umbilical chord, for the young child it is the senses, the mouth and the hands, as we grow it often becomes destructive and/or lost through sole dependence on the thinking mind. It needs to be an ongoing dance, a partnership of shifting proportions, of dissolving down of self to meld with the other. It is a co-creation generated by authentic expression and heartfelt receptivity. One must not only be open, maintaining a clear channel, one must also be able to generate and share decipherable messages, to be in a reciprocal exchange of sorts.

This work is about simultaneously uncovering just such a language, a native tongue if you will and as a consequence, developing a new way of being. This language lies in the depths of our bodies, in the forms on cave walls, on pots, in the germination of a seed, in the spontaneous play of a child, in the wildness of a tiger's eyes and in the nurturing of an infant suckling at a mother's breast. Opening out to this language, unveiling the roots of our connection, experiencing its newness, both its pleasure and its pain yet remaining in the spin, the life force, the unconditional acceptance of all that is, enlivens, fitting us with the earth once again.

Reconnecting to the earth through spontaneous painting is about many things. It is about experiencing profound shifts in sensory perception in relationship to self and the earth. New openings develop that transform awareness. There is psychological reworking and integrating of internal relationships between different aspects of self. Human body-mind re-balancing resulting from reconnecting with the wisdom inherent in the flesh is a large component. Community re-balancing becomes crucial as sustainable networks of individuals are developed, allowing people to co-create together, nourishing themselves and the earth. Spiritual re-awakening to the awe and mystery of the universe is a large dimension of this work. Being able to regularly check in with that mystery and feel a connection is central. This work is about education in its broadest sense, about drawing out the light within each of us. Once uncovered, we learn to respect and nourish our own light thereby opening to experience the light in all life. We become moved to act on behalf of beauty, joy, lightness and creation. Work of this nature is also a form of therapy, the treatment of a tenacious and pervasive dis-ease in the form of disconnection, which fuels life destructiveness. One benefit is to become better able to remain firmly standing in the face of cold, darkness, fear and loneliness thereby building strength and tenderness in equal measure.

For me this work has been about balancing the complementary energies of stillness and movement, letting go and containing, reaching into the heavens (bursting forth) and digging down into the earth (reclining back). It has been about opening up and receiving, letting go of the stagnant, finding earth in the stillness of breath, and dancing with the spontaneous splashing of colourful painted waves.

By holding the tension of complements, by connecting to the dance of life, we may fit in once again thus finding ourselves on speaking terms with the earth. The separating, the warring of the mind and the body, the masculine and the feminine, the inner and the outer, waste the energy and the potential of a unique contribution to life. If we can move ourselves from the either-or, us-them stance to a both-and or “bond” position we move to a new place of union. From an Eastern perspective this place of unity is not the result of bridging separations rather it is the development of a consciousness that experiences the undifferentiated primordial state prior to divisions, where everything is one (Nakagawa, 2000). We access our natural fit, the connection that had been there all along. We are on speaking terms once again.

The creativity needed to reach sustainable solutions for our earth relationship problems lies in holding the tensions between these complements and accessing the unity from which they emerge. Like a child’s button pull toy made with a loop of string thread through a button or a tree whose roots plunge to the earth as its branches reach for the heavens, both the forces of reaching up and reclining back must be present for energy to exist in the center, for the creation to continue. All beings fit together in this place. Anything else is unsustainable and destructive in the end. Black and white thinking needs to be moved beyond. Denigrating life in order to enslave it for our purposes or even worse killing it to meet our needs is just as bad as “whitening” it, sentimentalizing it in cute planters, with bows and cartoon voices like in so many children’s movies. The earth is neither. We need to hold the tension of both positions and watch as that tension spins the black and white disk into a blur of grey.

Spinning, energized, full of motion, speed, and the energy to create, that is the reality of greyness. To live in that grey is to be of the world and yet separate from it, to be fully feeling yet also nonattached.

So being on speaking terms is about learning how to live in the spin. It is about being able to lose self in the earth flow and be simultaneously more yourself.

Therefore a sense of sacred connection comes from actively experiencing the wild creative self. It is the experience of a unifying dance. This dance takes place in the liminal space

that is the creative act. We can come to better know ourselves and the wild earth in a joyful renewing manner when we enter this dance. Transformation of the self and the planet need not be agonizing and analytical. It can be a celebratory creation that affirms the inner wisdom and interconnection of all beings. What once seemed so separate becomes melded and unified.

Spontaneous painting is about giving colour and form to that which is not said, not able to be spoken. Before painting came into my life I'd all but forgotten how to speak that language. When painting is not part of my life due to neglect or other pressing obligations I lose my sense of the flow. Just like a good hot shower can wash off the dirt and grime, a single painting session can put me back in the river again. This was not always the case though. It has taken a great deal of clearing out to get to the place where the river flows easily when called. There was a lot of layers to be unwrapped and a dedication to not re-wrapping myself again by letting doubt in the form of my highly schooled rational mind take over.

To be on speaking terms again with the earth takes practice and patience. New skills need to be learned and supported in community with others. Adaptations must be made as the effectiveness of one language wanes over time. The willingness to accept not knowing what to do next is key to trusting that the dance, the dialogue will continue if we simply remain open to it and trust the relationship. In this sense, language is not simply to be used for its communicative power rather the language itself speaks revealing a certain kind of story. Each language tells a new story, so our task is to begin weaving those stories as opposed to continuing to privilege some ways of knowing, some languages and hence some stories over others. When we embrace the lived experience of different ways of knowing there is new potential for the transformation of the human-earth relationship. The hardest thing to do is to start.

## Start

Start

In the center

Which is your heart

So much is there waiting to be born

Let the breath be exhilarating that you take in

Breaking the chains of self-imposed bondage

With a crack like thunder

And a storm breaking free in a summer sky

Know there are no boundaries

There are no rules

There is only one thing that exists

And it is love

All that you are already

It is a matter of allowing

It is a lesson in moving beyond

And manifesting this love in all that you do

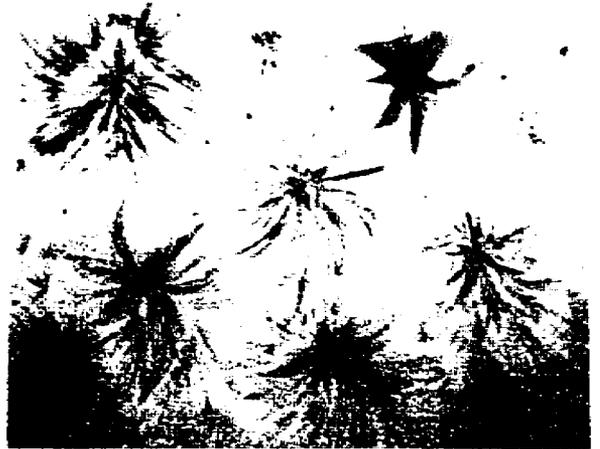
Whether it is in word or deed or paint

Be still and know that I am God

Let the light move from your heart to your mind

And then your thoughts to your pencil and finally to your paper

Let us start.....



Charlene Wood

### Advice to the Image Oriented

I would have been unable to insert even a single image into a MS Word 98 document if I hadn't bought a scanner (Microtek), upgraded my hard drive, installed a CD-R (writeable CD drive) and a regular CD drive, as well as purchased a copy of Photoshop 5.5. Less crucial but incredibly convenient were the later purchases of a HP 315 Photo Smart digital camera and an Epson 870 printer so that I could generate photo quality prints. I also have a HP 697 printer which does just a fine job of putting out a good looking document.

I very quickly discovered in December of 1999 that simply buying a scanner was not enough. It took about 10 minutes to scan an image especially if it was a full 8-1/2" x 11" and then because such a big file was generated I could neither load it into MSWord 98 without crashing my machine, nor save it on a diskette. That's when I upgraded to a PC with 2 Gigabytes of disk space and a re-writeable CD drive. I leave all my images on CD so as to not unnecessarily clog my hard drive.

The subsequent installation of Photoshop 5.5 also necessitated the extra disk space and RAM as it uses an inordinate amount of resources. A sequence I have repeated hundreds of times in the last 3 months goes something like this.

I am working on a section of a chapter in MSWord98, the text calls out for the inclusion of the image or the images that originally inspired the writing. I find the original painting, quickly photograph it with my digital camera, insert the camera's mini diskette into the Sandisk camera memory card reader. This allows me to access images seamlessly from a file into drive D. Then I enter Photoshop (which is usually up and running), click on Open, select the image file in question (from the file in Drive D), adjust its, size, colours and contrast, and save it to my CD drive. Then I go back to MSWord98 and use *insert picture*. I could also simply cut and paste from Photoshop but I like the intervening saving step as a ritual that has developed over time.

That's it. I like this sequence better than scanning photographs because this way I get larger images at a higher resolution.

Sometimes I need to insert an image that is a photograph. In this case I use the scanner, scan the image into Photoshop, make any adjustments, save the image on a CD, then insert it into my document. All this takes about 2 minutes. It moves so quickly that I now write in this manner. Inserting images does not interrupt my flow and actually inspires richer work to bubble up. Without this or a similar set up I would have been relegated to the unwieldy and expensive proposition of inserting photocopies of photographs and images as separate pages in the body of the text, thus disturbing the work's flow for both the reader and the author.

\* \* \*

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