

**Art Making and Thesis Writing:  
An Assemblage of Becomings**

by

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## **Abstract**

As an artist, thesis writer and human being, I engage in *creative acts* of connecting and disconnecting, assembling and disassembling, the arrangement of variety and sameness, fit and wonder, discovery through *opening*. I am a bricoleur examining whatever I find as potential pieces – shapes compatible for building and multiple in combination. Manipulatives – stories and poems, letters and conversations, images and quotes – are generated and collected, pulled apart and pieced together from sources outside and by sourcing inside.

The practice of opening is an ongoing creative act. My method is to open spaces where participating in textual and material *assemblages* offers possibilities for emerging connections re/cognizing larger *patterns* in disparate realities of a postmodern ecology. Following assemblage as research method, creative genre and as topic, I explore an ontology of *becoming* through art making. I gather and generate fragments, placing and writing them into forms. Unlike a puzzle where each piece has only one fit, the texts assembled here are not static. Assemblages are alive and dynamic. Juxtaposing pieces, unlikely at first glance, allows for connections, disconnections and reconnections.

How is this assemblage held together? There is no origin or set order yet this assemblage is not random. It is one line of flight amid many possibilities. The gaps, schizzes and the white spaces allow for movement, places of rest and new lines of flight. These spaces are potentially unruly, creating not an assemblage, but a bunch of

bits and pieces. This is the energy I am working with and the risk I take with this form.

This thesis honours life as a creative act and creative acts as moments of possibility.

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Relatedness is not a matter of trying to be related, but rather of living consciously into the actuality of being related. (Richards, 1979, p. 39)



## Prologue

I remember the first time I was aware as an adult of a feeling of opening, awakening, of deep somatic connection, of my world expanding through a creative act, through forming and transforming. It was in my first life drawing class when the leg I was drawing, that is the marks on the page that were being inspired by the model's leg, suddenly came alive. All morning I had been looking at the model and responding to what I saw with marks on paper. I focussed on minute details of subtle line and shadow and I scratched charcoal onto the page. I took in weight and density and curves. At times my whole body was engaged as though through drawing I was stretching out and touching the model, my muscles, like hers, alive and engaged. Looking and drawing and looking again; smudging and stretching and shading; feeling the model's body in my body. I felt as though I was coming to know another person, the model, and myself more deeply by attending fully to her with all of my senses.

I looked down at my drawing. Strangely, it was no longer charcoal on paper; the marks had come alive. The leg on the paper was alive. It was no longer a picture of a leg; it belonged to someone. I could see beyond the marks to the skin and sinew, bone and blood. I was surprised. I felt open and lively, dynamically engaged. The world had changed. My drawing had transformed into something new that was more than charcoal and paper. That was exciting, letting go of what was there, the lines and smudges, my idea of how a body should look. It was like dying, where we have no control; we have to let go of the world as we know it and move on. I released my hold on static objectified being, relinquishing what I wanted my drawing to look like and how I thought I saw the world and a space opened up for the world to come alive.

Experiencing shifting worlds – things transforming within me and around me – and releasing old ways of thinking and seeing and being is slippery. The solidity of knowing oscillates as I participate in the complexity of the world. Words, holding too tightly to definitions, barely touch experiences of expanded being. This shifting, moving between worlds, from an old static reality to a new dynamic sense of the world, is the topic of my inquiry. This thesis is not static representation where I stand apart from the world in order to (re)present; rather, it is an assemblage of enlivened lines, alert to changes, following the depths and contours of becoming.

## Assembling



## Preparation

### Note to Readers

The writer cannot report on everything. It is not necessary to tell the whole story. There will be just enough to provide a faint sketch of the pattern. In any case the writer expects rough seas. The entire work may find itself on the floor in the end, again in shambles. (Gunnars, 1989, section 120)

Setting out to lift one by one the layers surrounding experiences of expansion through creative acts, I settle into decentred being where boundaries between self and other dissolve. As I recognize the contingency of knowing and the plasticity of the world, I experience fragile definitions of self and the world. Being becomes a process of getting lost over and over again, of letting go of knowing, leading to new ways of being – to becoming.<sup>1</sup>

This story is not about the “what” of knowing. It may be about the “how” of becoming. As you read do not ask yourself, “What does this mean?” Instead ask, “How does this text work?”<sup>2</sup> How is the text becoming? What kind of relationship do I have with the text? How is the text relating to itself and its context?

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<sup>1</sup> The actuality or existence of a thing is dynamic; therefore, Deleuze and Guattari use the word “becoming” in place of being. (Massumi, 1992) See this text p. 28. I use becoming throughout the text to indicate a generative, forming and transforming process of being.

<sup>2</sup> When Deleuze refers to contemporary abstract art and texts, he asks not what does it mean, but how does it work. (Sorensen, 2001) Rather than limiting the possibilities of being a reader or a viewer to figuring out what the author or artist meant, the reader is required to focus on the relationships between various elements of a work of art or text, thus opening the text/art to reader/viewer as user, that is, part of the process of a living, becoming expression.

Derrida (1973) perceives text as a continuous combination of contexts that can be arranged and rearranged to produce connections. He sees text as an “assemblage,” which is a system of bringing things together that “has a structure of an interlacing, a weaving, or a web, which would allow the different threads and different lines of sense of force to separate again as well as being ready to bind others together” (Derrida, 1973, p. 131).

This text is a multiplicity of writings that relate to each other as an assemblage. Like sculpture created with found objects, the pieces of this text are collected and placed one next to the other thereby producing new contexts, new connections and creating one manifestation, one convergence among multiple possibilities. As Gunnars (1989) reminds us, this text is necessarily partial, bits and pieces of experiences connected to larger worlds providing fluid sketches of creative acts and thesis writing in process.

## Voices

A text is...a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings...blend and clash. The writer's only power is to mix writings, to counter [one with the other] in such a way as to never rest on any of them. (Barthes in Chandler, 1994, ch. 13, ¶ 3)

Postmodern deconstruction (Derrida, 1973) informs the fragmented nature of this work. Removed from original flow<sup>3</sup> and suspended in the text are moments and memories of creative acts and becomings. Experiences shift and move and live wild lives. Words explode away from creative sparks. Still, something shines warmly on the page and, like a coaxing heat, loosens the muscles holding tightly to rational knowing. Lines open up above and below text. Voices are heard from peripheries. White page becomes interpretive space as text (and author and reader) decentre. The creative act of re/constructing this text is energized by a postmodern ecology<sup>4</sup> (Spretnak, 1996), where flow is recovered and patterns of interconnectedness emerge

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<sup>3</sup> I understand flow as the movement of ongoing, transformative and mobile process of becoming. See pp. 20-22 of this text for an exploration of flow.

<sup>4</sup> Ecological postmodernism responds to the empiricist project of fragmentation of the world into distinct entities by drawing attention to processes of dynamic interaction recognizing that humans and objects of the world are not fixed, self-contained entities but are structurally related and ever changing. (Spretnak, 1991) Capra (1999) suggests that we are developing thinking that reflects this new paradigm based on the findings of quantum physics. Capra and quantum physicists describe the world of subatomic particles as a dynamic network of events or processes, emphasizing change and transformation rather than fundamental structures or entities. We now understand particles as interrelated energy patterns in an ongoing universal process of interconnections. There are no distinct entities as would have Newtonian science; there is only a flow of energy showing certain universal patterns. This hypothesis rejects a Newtonian universe constructed from a set of basic entities with certain fundamental properties. While empirical science begins with distinct parts that have a defined substance and structure, quantum physics and new paradigm thinking is founded in a different epistemological framework where things and reality are defined as processes of interactions among patterns of energy and movement. Nothing is static or solid.

organically. This inter-textual form is assembled as an invitation for readers (and writer) to actively participate in living art making and thesis writing. Multiple voices, forms and expressions appear, honouring spontaneous expression and the ongoing forming and transforming of writer and reader. As you read, you too become an assembleur, connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting your experience with/in this voices, forms and expressions appear, honouring spontaneous expression and the ongoing forming and transforming of writer and reader. As you read, you too become an assembleur, connecting, disconnecting and reconnecting your experience with/in this text. Attending to movement and form, wondering and wandering into decentred becoming you may ask, “What rhizomatic connections<sup>5</sup> lie beneath the text connecting it to me and to others? What lines of flight<sup>6</sup> do I travel as I read?”

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<sup>5</sup> See p. 29 for rhizomatic explorations.

<sup>6</sup> Deleuze, in Colebrook (2002), sees reality as “flows of series...with no privileged order, origin or goal. These series interconnect, transform each other and constantly create new possibilities for further branching out or lines of flight” (p. 162).

## **Living Art**

This exploration comes at a time when, as I recognize myself as an artist and a creative being, I am struggling with how I want to be (an artist) in the world. Until now I have limited creativity to the arts and the arts to artists. I realize I have limited creative acts to the art world. By creative acts I mean a practice of directly and intimately encountering the world as dynamic, emerging, like works of art, and as fundamentally interconnected. My thesis proposes to live creative acts as a way of being and knowing that can be practiced anywhere by anyone.

I begin to regard myself as an artist re/connecting – tapping into connections and connectedness – through art making in a world defined by empiricist worldviews as rational, objectifiable and separate from the viewer. What are those reconnections? What am I looking for? I am looking to hold an artist/creator way of being wherever I go.

Through attending to the creative acts of art making and researching and writing this thesis, I am discovering, uncovering, and recovering how to be an artist who perceives connectedness and non-duality in a world that habitually separates art from life, artist from art making, one from another. I am engaging in a practice of living creative acts. By participating in the world as emerging artwork, I develop a creative ontology, foregrounding connections and deepening my awareness of connectedness. This thesis honours life as a creative act and creative acts as communion with an interconnected world.

## Textual Sculptor

Assembling, disassembling and reassembling text is a practice of engaging with the world as a series of dynamic emerging works of art and attending to moments of becoming. Textual manifestations shaped and moulded, shuffled and reshuffled, re/cognize larger patterns. As in the child's game of Lego, materials are gathered, placed and assembled to create a textual sculpture. I am a bricoleur<sup>7</sup> examining whatever I find as potential pieces – shapes compatible for building and multiple in combination. Manipulatives, stories and poems, letters and conversations, images and quotes are generated and collected, pulled apart and pieced together from sources outside and by sourcing inside. This is a creative act of connecting and disconnecting, assembling and disassembling, attending to the arrangement of variety and sameness, fit and wonder, discovery through opening.

For me, the practice of opening is an ongoing creative act. My method is to allow openings where participating in textual and material assemblages offers spaces for emerging connections. It is a method of assemblage<sup>8</sup> where I explore an ontology of becoming through art making and thesis writing. I gather and generate pieces and place and write them into forms. Unlike a puzzle where each piece has only one fit, the texts assembled here are not static. Like bits of Lego, they are ready for endless possible combinations. Assemblages are alive and dynamic. Juxtaposing pieces, unlikely at first glance, allows for connections, disconnections and reconnections.

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<sup>7</sup> “One who creates improvised structures by appropriating pre-existing materials” (Chandler, 1994, Ch. 13, ¶17). Levi Strauss saw ‘authorship’ in similar terms: a creative act that entails a dialogue with collected, pre-existing materials.

<sup>8</sup> “a: an artistic composition made from scraps, junk, and odds and ends b: the art of making assemblages” (Merriam-Webster, 1996). Deleuze in Colebrook (2002) sees assemblages as “unexpected, disparate and productive connections that create new ways of thinking and living” (p. 76).

Through creative acts I attune to connections between all things, a postmodern ecology (Spretnak in Clements, Ettlring, Jenett, Shields, 1998) honouring inclusiveness of disparate realities.

## **Rules of Combination**

I seek to bring the aliveness I experience in art making to this text. As I record living assemblage,

openings rupture and provide spaces for seeing anew;

sparks and surprises capture movement and wonder;

oscillations open text to multiple interpretations;

natural reiterations follow dynamic discourse and discovery;

fluidity responds empathically to patterns of connection;

intervals and interruptions occur where reader and writer take flight toward

unknowingness; and

aesthetic sensibilities synthesize experiences of complexity.

## **Sculpting Worlds**

I am drawn to building things, to collecting odds and ends, to creating old from new and new from old. I examine and re-examine, creating and recreating my world as sculpture, perceiving connections where works of art emerge. Through spontaneous art making, I experience becoming. Engaging – watching, feeling, moving with, facilitating, living – as I manipulate makes art emerge and gives me new ways of perceiving and becoming in the world. When I make art there is space for moving around, for collecting and generating things, for playing and placing objects, words, experiences, side by side and discovering larger knowing, recovering becomingness and uncovering new within old. I learn to see objects as dynamic, part of a flow. Not complete distinct entities, they are evolving fragments with infinite possibilities of connection to something larger. I re-enact a non-static, interconnected world.

Deleuze and Guattari (Marzec, 2001) in their theory of movement argue against the widely held perception of objective reality as having some essence in an obvious solidity which everyone can comprehend. The classical sense of objects being solid “causes us to forget the source from which the object arose” (§ 3). Contrary to an empiricist understanding of objects in the world being solid and static, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, “every object presupposes the continuity of flow” (§ 3). The source from which every object arises is a foundational flow of energies or directives. In fact, “a product carries with it an entire history of that which has been allowed to come to perception and that which has not, and it vibrates with an intensity that can only come from the constraining demands of its adherence to the ground plan of perceptions that have come to be” (§ 3).

Nachmanovitch (1990) sees this foundational flow of directives or energies not as a force of physical energy but as information in the form of patterns. He considers creative processes as self-organizing where “activity arises, slowly changes, suddenly shifts, learns from mistakes, interacts with the ways of its fellows and its environment” (p. 33). Participating in a creative act allows artists to tap into this self-organizing pattern of activity. Nachmanovitch suggests artists are guided by “a deep seeing of the underlying pattern beneath appearances” (p. 31). Through creative acts, artists remove apparent surfaces from objects, recovering unseen levels of pattern or connection.

Art making and thesis assembling are creative acts that have given me the opportunity to experience the continuity of flow in every object and to perceive underlying patterns. Through assembling, disassembling and reassembling art and thesis, I live a practice of becoming, sculpting worlds.

## **Falling Apart**

Everything has the potential of falling apart and being reassembled into new patterns of connection. Falling apart is part of the continuity of flow. As in dying, in allowing things to falling apart, we release our hold on static reality and invite mobility and transformation. Engaging in assemblage as research method, as creative genre and as topic inspires me to create a moving text held together by an energy fuelled with the potential for falling apart and (be)coming together again into new wholes.

How is this assemblage held together? There is no origin or set order yet this assemblage is not random. It is one line of flight amid many possibilities. The gaps and the white spaces between pieces of writing are important to allow for movement, places of rest and new lines of flight. Yet these spaces are potentially unruly, creating not an assemblage, but a bunch of bits and pieces. This is the energy I am working with and the risk I take with this form.

## Art School

In life drawing class, students sit at easels preparing drawing implements as the model comes in, steps onto an elevated platform, undresses silently, and takes posing instructions from the teacher. Bright lights illuminate the body, exaggerating shadows and curves, tones and textures. The room is silent except for the rustle of pages turning and charcoal scratching.

Modern aesthetics is part of a whole cultural project of objectification that channels perception into modes that are detached and abstract, forcing us to remain in a modality where our gaze is that of the detached observer. The artist is supposed to be emotionally, [intellectually, physically, spiritually] distanced. (Gablik, 1991, p. 99)

Visual artists are taught to be onlookers, to stand back and objectively represent what is seen. Assuming a spectator consciousness outside the picture and separated from the world, artists observe and report, objectify and enframe. Repressed is any engagement in the lived reality of making art. (Gablik, 1991) David Levin suggests “this reduction of being to picture has been characteristic of aesthetics and is a pathology in the very character of our vision” (Levin in Gablik, 1991, p. 99).

Art making has not escaped the rational, reductionist, objectifying ways of approaching the world characteristic of an empiricist paradigm. In fact, modern aesthetics is based on a rational framework that focuses on fixed forms and on the object as the source for value rather than on context and process. Empiricism encourages separation and distancing of self from other, subject from object, and has left us with an “ontology of objectification and permanence” (Gablik, 1991, p. 60).

As an adult, I decided to immerse myself in art making by enrolling in art school. I was struck after the first few intensive months by how differently I felt after I had been actively creating. I would come away with a sense of expansion and dynamic movement. Objects and space around me vibrated with metamorphic energy. I came to look forward to the act of creating and to the experience of an expanded sense of myself, of the materials I was working with, and of the world around me. After finishing an art piece and presenting it to my classmates, I was often most excited by what had happened to me and to my world as I was making the piece. I was not interested in the object I was presenting or in my classmates' focus on the limited surface identity of the piece. More important to me was what had happened while I was making the piece, how I had changed during the act of creating, and how I subsequently (was) opened to a more dynamic world as a result of making the piece.

I wanted to tell of coming away from gathering and forming and transforming materials for a sculpture and seeing everything – a lamppost, an exhaust pipe, a roll of toilet paper – as evolving art forms. After participating in the creative metamorphosis of a car door into a sculptural window onto a parking lot, my relationship to the world was more direct, a living contact where I was part of dynamic, transformative energies. In my body, I could feel energetic vibrations as formerly static objects exploded into moving and movable pieces only to be reassembled in new forms.

I wanted to tell of the time I was in drawing class making big fluid brush strokes with black ink on paper ten feet long and three feet wide, allowing the marks to appear on the page, to flow from the brush onto the paper and back around through my body. Engaged kinaesthetically, my body moved easily. I could hear brush strokes and smell

the soft tanginess of the ink. My eyes saw anew each moment as the drawing flowed onto the paper. As I stepped away, the space around me opened to something larger. It was vibrating and so was I. Standing next to other students, I had no words, only energy opening between us. I wanted to engage as intimately and directly with them as I had with ink and paper.

I was let down over and over. At the beginning of each presentation day I could feel the energy and excitement stemming from the creative acts in which the students had participated. Yet at the end of each day, I left deflated by the surface interpretations that defined and limited the art experience to the static art objects lying on the floor or hanging on the walls. There was no acknowledgement of how creating something new might alter the creator's perception or experience of the world, not to mention transform the creator herself. How had the thing I created, which taught me so much about opening to materials, about being in dynamic relationship with the world and about becoming human – the thing that came from me and of which I was a part – become an objectified unit apart from and outside of me?

## Inquiry

**Explorations:** from *plorare*: to cry out; to cause to flow<sup>10</sup>

To cry out is a way

of asking

of inquiring

of being

open.

It is a way

of saying

“Hey! What am I doing here?”

And of entering a space of not knowing

of looking

of letting go.

Crying out is letting go

of what is

and standing

in the unruliness,

in the emptiness

in the flow

open

and crying out.

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<sup>10</sup> Source: [www.dictionary.net/explore](http://www.dictionary.net/explore)

## Art and Writing

Art making, rather than being representational, “opens up spaces for the exploration of that which eludes capture and resists being closed off into concept” (Lenzo, 1995, p. 19). What is this open space where connections are unearthed? I am intrigued by the spaces that are opened up and accessed below the writing on the page or around a work of art in progress. What is happening in those spaces? How am I experiencing rhizomatic<sup>11</sup>, metaphoric, oblique, poetic connections that are submerged beyond my conscious knowing and yet emerging through expressions?

In writing to discover my thesis topic, I have a similar experience to when I am exploring through art making. When I let go of knowing and write into the unknown, I come away with an expanded sense of myself and of the world. Writing as exploration is as much of a creative act as art making. I see both as practices of ways of knowing and being that are open to unknowns and to an expanded sense of my self and the world.

I open to becoming  
as I write to uncover,  
discover, recover.

I write to participate in a way of being without knowing what it is I’m doing or being or becoming.

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<sup>11</sup> See p. 29 for further discussion of rhizomatic connections.

## **Becoming**

Indeed the outcome of any Deleuzean "becoming" is not emphasized, for becoming is a process, a line of flight between states which displaces and disorients subjects and identities. The "betweenness" is experienced, not attained. (Fleiger, 2001, p. 43)

The actuality or existence of a thing is dynamic; therefore, Deleuze and Guattari use the word "becoming" in place of being. (Massumi, 2001) Becoming has traditionally been thought of as the "becoming of" some prior being and assumes a subject, a being that does the deed. Deleuze attempts to shift this stable terrain by providing ways of thinking "new modes of becoming – not as the becoming of some subject, but a becoming towards others, a becoming towards difference, a becoming through new questions" (Colebrook, 2001, p. 12). Deleuze's becoming explodes static views of being and expresses the shifting and generative nature of reality. (Massumi, 2001)

As I engage in creative acts, I immerse myself in a changing generative state of things. Participating in the movement and emergence of art works, I release a limited, objective, static perception of reality and return to a world in dynamic process. Outcomes are not emphasized as movement is continuous and there is, in fact, no completion of the work. Opening spaces for becoming is my practice of art making and writing and entails ongoing creative dialogues with the world. Living becomings is an infinite conversation with a fluid, active and ever-changing world. As I engage in metamorphosis, I am transformed. Movement inherent in becoming provides places of possibility for transformation of self and other.

## **Art, Writing and Rhizomatics**

Inquiry writing and art making are full of rhizomatic connections. Deleuze and Guattari insist writing be “rhizomatic rather than arborescent” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 76). Arborescent books have a unified structure with a centre and secondary branches while rhizomatic books have chaotic root structures, “connecting every point to every other point, moving in every direction, branching out to create new directions” (p. 77). As I recognize ubiquity and intangibility in rhizomatic connectedness, possibilities open up. I experience rhizomatic becoming in writing and in art making.

Rhizomes are roots structures with vertical shoots connected laterally beneath the surface of the ground. (Merriam-Webster, 1996) While I am engaging in creative acts – moving objects around, piecing things together, finding links, uncovering relationships – I am tapping into one set of connections or one vertical shoot and bringing it to the foreground. There are many other rhizomes beneath the surface ready to break the surface. As I uncover the rhizome that is the path of my creative act, I sense the presence of multitudes of other connections.

My work is simply one set of connections I perceive while many other connections resonate beyond. The experience of foregrounding one set of relationships attunes my spirit to infinite possibilities of encounter and interplay between the things in the world and between the world and myself. As I participate fully in art making and in living, I encounter the possibility of submerged and unknown rhizomatic connections, sensing infinite openness and fluidity of becoming. I am playing inside multiplicities, sensing multi-layered resonance and becoming an active player in meta-images and meta-patterns.

## Open

*adj.* 1: having no enclosing or confining barrier

2a: being in a position...to permit passage

8b: having clarity and resonance unimpaired by undue tension or constriction

10a: willing to hear and consider: responsive

10b: accessible to influx of new factors. (Merriam-Webster, 1996)

How do I open to connections through participating in creative acts? I listen. I approach the world with caring attention. I attune to the dynamic energy of becoming and move with it. I open to possibility and unknowns. Emptiness. Nothingness. Then there is a form or a word, a mark, a shape, and then there are two, and the gestalt moves and shifts. Two forms become something new. Then, I open, not knowing what has become or is becoming or will become. Knowing encloses and confines. Not knowing opens . . . me. When I relinquish knowing, I relax, definitions relax. All my senses become more attuned and responsive to details of movement, pattern, form, and energetic vibration. It is this place of aesthetic knowing<sup>12</sup> I want to study, to allow to take over, to be a part of my way of being and becoming.

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<sup>12</sup> Aesthetic knowing involves non-verbal processing of information, drawing on visual, spatial, aural and bodily-kinaesthetic forms of knowing. (Gardner, 1993) Levine (2004) suggests that art is a way of knowing. "It is *poesis*, knowing by making, as contrasted with *theoria*, knowing by observing, and *praxis*, knowing by taking action" (§ 53). As I engage in creative acts, it is a way of coming to be and to know connectedness in the world.

## Aesthetic knowing

attending; sensing; knowing through doing, writing,  
creating; gathering; assembling; connecting; piecing  
together and pulling apart; relating; finding; examining;  
making senses; decentring; becoming.

As objects,  
textual fragments  
and images  
are assembling,

theories of aesthetic  
knowing  
and ontologies of  
becoming  
emerge.

Through the making that is *poesis*, I engage non-verbal processes of being and encountering the world. Making allows me to engage in and honour aesthetic knowing where I draw on visual, spatial, aural and bodily-kinaesthetic forms of knowing which lead me to ways of being and understanding the world as non-static and connected by patterns of energy. I do not create the connections; I tap into connections that are already there.

## **Shudder**

It is not until I have accepted the gift of a thirty foot cedar log, stretched like a balance beam from the beach to the cliff, not until I return to the log and begin searching the beach for stones – big, smooth, round tidal stones – then, one by one, starting in the middle of the log, placing them, side by side, the weight of each stone, solid in my hand, released to balance gently four feet off the ground. Stone by stone, I live a story, once again, piecing together a path, a pattern, a piece of art.

It is not until I have become a rock placer, a bridge builder, a woman of stone, moving back and forth over the logs, looking, picking, overturning, selecting, lifting, holding, moving, placing, and then, turning back to pick again. It is not until I leave the stones and the log and the open expanse of the beach; until I move out of the light, and slowly take the wooden stairs up the cliff, that I realize I am (different) in a different world. The darkness of the trees around me sinks in and the leaves vibrate, each new-growth green bud shuddering, vital and weightless after the solidity of the stones.

My openness opens everything. I sense rhizomes pulsing beneath my feet, connecting the stones with the tree and through me to the sky. Once again I connect to vibrational dynamic energy. I realize where I have been and where I am. The magic of moving stones, of suspended weight, of creating alongside the natural forms of the beach is in my every step. Only now do I bleed the tension, fall apart, shudder with the new buds, sensing the ephemeral next to the permanence of stone.

## Nowness

A dizzying struggle with the Now-ness of experience, that is my involvement in writing. And I believe it is this interaction between imagination and its embodiment as it develops which sustains the speaker and the writer – and sustains the artist in other materials.

(Stafford, 1978, p. 22)

Can I write about and explore a way of being without knowing exactly what I'm doing or how I'm knowing and being? I feel like I need to have a clear, explainable experience of creating when it's not clear. There are no rules! There is no one way!

How can I honour this struggle and move beyond it? What struggle? The struggle of wondering whether I'm moving forward, of feeling tired and limited by this page; the struggle of coming to practices of becoming, of holding open spaces in order to expand beyond where I am now. I feel like all I do is struggle with the practice and never get to the expansion.

What if this thesis doesn't make sense? What if I never figure out what I'm doing, how I'm being? What do I do with this whole idea that my thesis topic is a practice of becoming and it will never end? Keep going. Keep writing. The topic becomes foggy and unclear, ubiquitous, and intangible. Keep writing. Let go. Okay, so what does that mean? Let go of defining a clear topic and method and let them emerge. How? What does "let them emerge mean?" Okay, so I've had enough of this slipperiness, of just about touching something and then having it disappear from my reach. I have tiny idea openings, cracks in the wall, and then slam, they close up. Keep writing. Maybe it is the crack that is important and not what is on the other side.

## **Slipperiness**

How can I describe how I have come to let go of knowing and to expand more?

Last week when I was walking in the fog and taking pictures, I realized that fog softens the edges of things making them less defined, less bound. In the fog things blend into each other and there are no edges. I can't see the end of the branch so it becomes endless. There are no limits so things become limitless. I abandon my perception of the world as finite, static and describable. Moving around in the fog, I lose my way and open to new ways.

## Writing in the Dark

Lying in a shell, protected, demanding comfort from the cover – drawing, sucking, squeezing some kind of relief from my bed sheets as my heart pounds and the room becomes a stranger. The moon pulls me out into the night. Often when I am drawn to walking alone at night I resist, then when I finally enter the outdoors and the moon casts her brightness through the dark, I look up and say, “Of course, this is why I’m out here.”

Down on the causeway, away from the streetlights, I stand staring at the beach in front of me. I can see forever. Everything is shades of grey lit up like a film set. I sit on a bench staring at the shadows. Dark, stark, clean lines, muted against the greys of the night. Multitudes of grays: dark, light, blue, yellow, green. How can the light from the moon be so warm and cool at the same time?

I decide to write. The moon illuminates the page and my pen and vague shapes of words. I know where the end of the line is but I can’t make out the details of the black inked words. Writing while blind is an act of faith. I know the words are being recorded even if I can’t see them. Not being able to see where things begin and end forces me to move on, to not read back over what I’ve written, to keep putting words out into the void.

**Moonlight**

Have you ever  
written  
by moonlight,  
the clean lines  
of the shadows  
keeping you company?

Have you ever  
written  
blind,  
the moonlight  
reflecting off the pen,  
illuminating the paper,  
the form of the black  
inked words  
obscured  
from sight?

It's a small act  
of faith,  
putting words on  
paper  
not looking back  
wondering what is  
there, and what is  
becoming.

## **Art as Verb**

This thesis embraces art as a verb not a noun. The art I make tends to be ephemeral and performative, and so I focus on processes, on what happens during the emergence of the artwork. Creative acts require care and attending to what is happening in the world. When I attune to the present moment, letting go of plans for what is to come next, I open up to play, watching and responding to the natural dynamic flow of things. By witnessing, that is, attending and attuning to, the multi-levelled shifting nuances of transformation that occur as a work of art emerges, I become actively involved in a dynamic self-organizing world.

The act of art making embraces movement, natural flow, patterns, connections and interconnectedness. Giving up art as product, I engage in art making as becoming. I see art making as a method for attending to and caring deeply for the world.

Art making is a practice of emergence, of being a part of something dynamic emerging, birthing, over and over again. It is a reminder that there is flow beyond what I create. It is an ongoing practice of opening to potential and waking myself up. When I am engaged in a creative act I ask:

What is happening now with this sculpture?

How are the materials connecting, forming, transforming?

How can I respond? Now what is happening?

What am I hearing and seeing, feeling and tasting?

How will I respond deeply, directly, honestly, empathically, kinaesthetically?

Participating in emergent art works has shown me a dynamic self-organizing epistemology.

## Communion

### Creative Union

The end of art is not art, but communication, or better still communion.

(London, 1989, p. 74)

A few weeks ago in class I described creativity as an act of communion, an act where I expand into God being. London (1989) suggests that when we engage in creative acts with the freshness and awe of new beginnings, it is a primary act of creation. We are “playing God” where creating becomes an act of attending to our primary relationship to the world. I have moved from seeing art making as a means of expansion of myself and how I see the world, to art making as being in communion, as a practice of communing with universal patterns and energy.

I hold spaces for communion when I make art and when I write to discover. These acts are spontaneous, concentrated, intuitive, connected, flowing, expansive, responsive. Entering into creative dialogue with the world is prayer. (London, 1989) Attending closely with my whole being to what is happening around me – the words on the page or the materials of a sculpture – I let go of myself and move into a state of communion. Through creative acts as prayer, I am moved by energies beyond myself, surrendering to the ineffable, the transcendent.

As I develop intimate relations with the materials I work with, I become part of a process beyond myself. Buber (London, 1989) suggests, “All real living is meeting. The relation to the *Thou* is direct...as it plunges out of its isolation in to the unity of the whole” (p. 54). Through art making I participate in deeper levels of connection to myself, my material, other humans and, ultimately, the ineffable.

## **Faith**

So, how *do* we learn to trust ourselves? To teach? To learn? To write?

To follow our thoughts to find out what we are thinking. How do we give ourselves permission to take flight: with our thinking? with our writing? with our teaching? (Rasberry, 2001, p. 307)

How am I going to take this experience of thesis writing into the rest of my life? What will I have at the end of it all? What do I have now? I realize that every time I sit down to write, every time I hold my thesis question in my consciousness, I engage in a practice of trusting myself and connecting to the larger world. Thesis writing, like art making, is a practice of faith, of being part of something larger than myself, of participating in life at a level beyond self. It is a practice of stepping out into unknowns when I can't see what is there yet sensing I am a part of that which I can't see. This practice of letting go of knowing and of opening, having no confining barriers, allows me to participate in a dynamic connected world.

## **Communing**

Community is built into the spirit of men, we have but to perceive it.

(Richards, 1979, p. 43)

I experience communion in other parts of my life. Two weeks ago, in my Tai Chi class we had a guest instructor from out of town. Her teaching was very simple and clear. We were to practice the Tai Chi set together as a group. She said if we did it would open our hearts. Letting go of our own Tai Chi and focussing on others will open us to a larger energy. She said, “Everyone else’s Tai Chi in the room is important.” It was such a simple concept, yet new to me. For ten years I have focussed and pushed and stretched and opened my hips, my back, my shoulders, and my knees and held on tighter and tighter to “my Tai Chi.”

We started the set. She said, “Look around. Forget yourself. Keep everyone in the room in your peripheral vision. Stay in time. Give up your own Tai Chi and yield to the larger group.” At the beginning we were all shaky, bobbing up and down, out of time. It was difficult to focus on everyone else and to let go. Difficult to let a larger flow take hold. I had to trust the energy of the group would move me along if I let go. As I focussed outward my body started to release. I was sensing all the others in the room and holding a space for a larger connected, communal practice of Tai Chi. We invited each other in. And slowly we came together, moving energy as one.

I experience this in creative acts as well. When I turn my awareness fully toward what is happening outside me – the words on the page or the materials of a sculpture – I surrender myself and give way to communion, to a communal energy where I am moved by something larger than myself.



## Disassembling



## Playing with Parts

### Disassembling Creative Acts



## **Paradigms**

I'm sitting here trying to sort out how to situate an ontology of becoming within, around, on top of, beneath, in relation to contemporary Western epistemological paradigms.

Modernism:

objective truth,

fixed reality,

world as collection of objects;

humans vs. nature;

scientific reductionist knowing;

Deconstructionist Postmodernism:

truth is relative;

world as aggregate of fragments;

reality is socially constructed;

humans have wronged nature;

knowing through narrative and;

Ecological Postmodernism or Re-Constructive Postmodernism:

truth is experienced;

world as community of subjects;

reality is in dynamic relationship;

nature is subject; knowing is complex. (Walker, 1998)

## **Lego**

I pretty much take for granted that here in the West we are still deeply entrenched in empiricism. I know every time I take a step away from a rational world view to have a look around, I bump into old habits of objectifying other, placing myself at the centre of knowing and my world and, trying to understand the world by naming, labelling and separating things. It certainly works for sorting things and finding linear ways of organizing. Like when I've got all my Lego pieces out and I've just spent hours putting them in different piles according to colour and shape and size. Divide and define. Modernism works. (Walker, 1998)

What I like about a couple of other contemporary paradigms, deconstructionistism and reconstructive or ecological post modernism (I'm sure there are many more but I'll work with what I've been given), is that I can relate the words "deconstruct" and "reconstruct" to acts of making art and playing with Lego. When I am making found object sculptures, for example, I disassemble objects in order to examine the constituent parts as a deconstructionist would deconstruct language to examine socio-political influences. (Spretnak in Walker, 1998) When I make art, I either literally take things apart and then play with the pieces to find new forms, or I change the context in order to allow new connections to be made and new forms to emerge.

Deconstructionists refer to knowing and being as fragmented (Spretnak in Walker, 1998). Fragmentation can be useful when disassembling static empiricist concepts and realities in order to see the constituent parts, to examine them and to begin to play with them. Disassembling and resulting play leads away from defining the world and the things in it as static, allowing for a more dynamic sense of how things are

created and how they work. Once I start playing with things and noticing how they change depending on where they are – what relationships and connections are being made manifest – I am freed from the limitations of static seeing and being.

So, here I am. I've dumped each separate container of Lego onto the floor in one big colourful, if slightly messy, pile of fragments. Funny that the word "fragment" means part (Merriam-Webster, 1996) implying something larger. All Lego pieces are part of a big complex community. There are infinite possible connections among them. They are, in fact, not separate, but always in dynamic relationship to each other. So, as I consider the multiplicities of possible connections among all the Lego pieces, I think of ecological postmodernists who understand the world based upon new concepts of reality developing in physics, general systems theory and ecology (Gablik, 1991). A holistic paradigm is emerging based on an organic, interconnected and unified universe. Ecological postmodernism recognizes an expanded gestalt, that is, a perception of movement and wholeness, in every situation (Spretnak, 1991), even while sitting on the floor surrounded by a big chaotic pile of Lego.

## Assemblage

### Reconstructive Method, Topic and Genre

“The assembler is especially akin to the . . . poet . . . in using elements which . . . retain marks of their previous form and history. Like words, [the elements] are associationally alive” (Seitz, 1961, p. 17). Assemblage as a sculptural art form originally developed as an alternative response to strict representational art. Collage and assemblage, like Picasso’s cubism, were techniques used to break apart images and express multiple realities and new ways of understanding the world. In assemblage art, unrelated objects are juxtaposed in non-linear relationships suggesting multiple perspectives and realities within one work of art. Assemblage invites the observer to come up with her own connections between the objects presented, and it opens a space for the observer to have a more dynamic relationship to objects, art and the world. (Seitz, 1961)

As an artist, I am drawn to the dynamic possibilities and immediacy of perceiving the world as emerging assemblages. As I move through the world, I collect bits and pieces of objects and experiences, words and thoughts. I disassemble the world by removing things from the context in which I find them. Re/placing these fragments in new contexts, I become part of the flow of energy that continually creates and recreates becomings.

Assemblage art moves and performs, acts and thus mobilizes possibilities. Objects retain clear associations with their previous forms while being placed in new contexts. Juxtapositions in assemblage art create dynamic fluid spaces – worlds where things are “associationally alive.”

### **Objects as Dynamic Forms**

As element is set beside element, the many qualities and auras of isolated fragments are compounded, fused or contradicted so that...physical matter becomes poetry (Seitz, 1961, p. 86).

In the act of creating assemblages, artists use objects from their immediate environment. These materials are presented to the viewer as pieces of life and pieces of the environment. Each piece implies a larger whole of which it is or once was a part and yet it is now part of a new whole. Decontextualizing and the recontextualizing objects in assemblage art making allows for openings where rhizomatic connections between disparate parts lead artist and viewer across gaps and schizzes into undefined spaces. The piecing together of the work is evident and essential to the whole. How do these pieces fit? What connects them? The viewer also plays an active role in piecing together the assemblage bringing her own connections and connectedness into a dynamic open system of patterns.

## Participatory Consciousness

### Ontology of Non-duality

The consciousness which obtains in creativity is not the superficial level of objectified intellectualization, but is an encounter with the world on a level that undercuts the subject-object split. Creativity...is the encounter of the intensively conscious human being with his or her world. (May, 1975, p. 54)

In processes of engaging creatively with the world, I break down subject-object splits letting go of illusions of separation and detachment and I recover a transformative, dynamic ontology of connection. From a modernist perspective, art is a closed and isolated system: "it connotes a radical independence from others" (Gablik, 1991, p. 62). This way of being which separates self from other, me from the materials with which I work and the world in which I live, is imbedded in the dominant western rational empirical paradigm. My inquiry has lead me to explore and expand moments when dominant objectifying ontologies are exploded through direct, intimate creative encounters where I recover living experiences of dynamic interrelatedness.

Recovering a sense of interrelatedness shifts concepts of self as separate to self as ontologically and "epistemically related to other through self-other unity" (Heshusius, 1994, p. 17). To be and to know in non-dualistic terms is the realm of participatory consciousness. This mode of knowing and being results from letting go of self and moving into a state of total attention to other. "If you have a unifying idea of life there is no such thing as the external world" (Goodfield in Heshusius, 1994, p. 19).

## **Art as Relationship**

In assemblage, the relationship of the viewer to art and of the artist to art making becomes predominant – the artist and the viewer participate directly in the emergence of new connections. When we engage with a participating consciousness things are no longer removed and separate. (Gablik, 1993; Heshusius, 1994) This challenges the mode of distanced objective knowing that has animated both science and art in the modern world. (Gablik, 1991) Modern aesthetics limits perception to modes that are detached and abstract. Gablik (1991) suggests that the vision we need to develop is rooted in responsiveness, receptiveness and care. Our engagement with the world needs to return to the intertwining of self and other, subject and object; to radical relatedness (Gablik, 1991) where we live relatedness by way of a unified, rhizomatic system of patterns and connections.

Implicit in assemblage is interrelatedness, not only of disparate things but of all things. By participating in assemblage as artist or viewer we engage in a practice of establishing and honouring bonds. As I engage in deep relationship and radical relatedness through creative acts, I listen to a larger voice. Listening opens me to a voice that resonates through my body, not loudly but deeply, from within and all around me, an aesthetic, empathic voice that speaks to a larger sense of being, through a connection to a larger world, to universality. That is what I experience when I am writing and creating and I let go of myself and open to other.

### **Ex-stasis**

Entering an act of creation, I am committed and dedicated to bringing something new into being. Bringing something new into being commits and connects me to world and self. I give my self to an encounter. (London, 1989) I am acutely aware with my whole being, becoming whole. I am inside connections and connecting inside. The more deeply I commit to a creative act, the more I am able to activate deeper aspects of my awareness. (May, 1975) This deeper consciousness has been described as ecstatic. Not the typical, contemporary definition of hysteria but “ex-stasis: to stand out from; to be freed from the usual split between subject and object which is the perpetual dichotomy in most human activity” (May, 1975, p. 48).

Feeling free from the subject/object split after an act of creation I write:

#### Letting go

I move around the fallen oak and gather the bones and bark. I sit in the place. I move the trunk of the tree. It is about the size of me. I pick up the broken pieces, the bits of bark that have fallen off, attracted by the white gray and the darkness. I piece the bark back together on the ground, examining each bit of old flesh, then letting it fall into place.

Falling ... the tree has fallen, the bark has fallen, the act of creating the piece is a falling into place. I am falling ... away from the negativity. I am falling from the pedestal that I stand on proudly resisting, proudly criticizing. May I fall gracefully, as did this oak, and my pieces break apart, then come back together into another, different kind of whole.

## **Responsive Heart**

To step out of an objectifying way of seeing and being in the world challenges dominant epistemologies and ontologies. “Giving primacy to relationships and interaction...reverse[s] the way...artists see their role, and implies a radical deconstruction of the aesthetic mode itself” (Gablik, 1991, p. 62). David Levin calls for ways of seeing that are released from acts of reifying and objectifying, vision that is truly engaged with the world and responds from that depth of engagement and relationship (Levin in Gablik, 1991). Once relationship is given priority, art becomes more alive and dynamic. When art is grounded in a responsive heart, rather than an objective eye, it is a way of seeing others as part of ourselves. Such an act redefines self as relational rather than solitary and “engages in the world from a participating consciousness rather than an observing one” (Gablik, 1993, p. 307). Reawakening our capacity to be compassionate, to share what another is feeling, to live and fully participate in our interconnectedness is fundamental to a postmodern ecological vision. (Gablik, 1991)

## Poetry as Non-Duality

Poetry, like art making, is a direct, inclusive perception and participation (Richards, 1979). Richards differentiates between acts of understanding and acts of participating. She looks to poetry as well as art making to illustrate how we can directly participate in the interconnectedness of things. She says, “We commit ourselves to poetry not in order to understand the poet’s point of view. We commit ourselves to participating in life and poetry is a means. We cannot remain separate from the poem if we sing it” (Richards, 1979, p. 92).

I remember experiencing this participation beyond understanding early on. I was in Grade 10 English when we were asked to interpret poems. One of the other students turned to me and said, “How do you do it? How do you know what the poets mean?” I felt like a fraud because I didn’t know what the poets meant. I simply carried on the poems by responding to them. I was participating freely in the unknown place and wordlessness of poetic images. I was not trying to understand. “Understanding separates the observer from the observed” (Richards, 1979, p. 136). Instead we might interact directly, knowing things shift and move and evolve, recognizing infinite possibilities of rhizomatic connections, wondering rather than separating things by trying to understand. Poets speak figuratively and metaphorically and by so doing, by calling things by names other than their own, they are expressing that all things are part of each other. By participating in life through poetry as through art making we become a part of dynamic realities.

**Oak**

Skin and bone  
fall apart in my hand,  
rotting flesh  
broken  
and raw.  
I shed  
critical  
layers;  
stiff  
as I resist,  
then release,  
piecing together  
newness  
from death.

## Patterns

### Turning Toward

While both subjective and objective knowing share the same alienated consciousness based on “the possibility of a regulated distance between self and other” (Heshusius, 1994, p.15), participatory consciousness involves a somatic, non-verbal attending to the world that requires letting go of the focus on the self in order to turn fully toward the other (Schachtel in Heshusius, 1994). This letting go of the duality between self and other and encountering fully that which we have perceived to be outside of us leads to strong feelings of aliveness and deep awareness.

Nachmanovitch (1990) experiences a flow of vibrations when improvising music. “It vibrates my whole body like a leaf in a storm. I don’t know what to call it – power, life force” (p. 33). He goes on to suggest that these vibrations are not in the realm of energy; although they are carried by fluctuations of energy, but they are in the realm of information, of patterns of creative process inherent in nature.

The pattern of the ocean, the pattern of the orange trees, of the sea gulls, arises organically; it is self organizing. The self organizing activity arises, slowly changes, suddenly shifts, learns from mistakes, interacts with the ways of its fellows and its environment. (p. 33)

Participatory consciousness is a way of being in the world that requires an attitude of total openness and receptivity where one is “turned toward other” (Heshusius, 1994, p. 16) not in order to appropriate but to merge. “Participatory consciousness means to be and to know, however temporarily, in non-dualistic terms” (p. 17).

Through creative acts, I reconnect to a unified sense of life and participate in a merging of self and other as described by Buber (1970), London (1989), May (1975), Nachmanovitch (1990), and Richards (1979). Art making develops my ability to perceive more fully and enter into whole being dialogues with my materials and the world. When I participate fully in dialogues with the materials I work with, reciprocity and interconnectedness become evident. Direct encounters of deep relation lead to insight, that is, seeing into ourselves and to compassion, perceiving others in their wholeness. (Richards, 1979) Attuning and responding to natural flows of forming and transforming in creative acts allows me to participate in art making and in the world in a living way. Richards (1979) refers to this participatory consciousness as freedom: “a state of being in which our relatedness to life is unobstructed” (p. 34).

## **Open Systems**

The way we encounter the world around us affects what we see. Art making and participatory consciousness are ways of knowing and being in mutual relationship with the world, allowing it to enter into us as we enter into it. (London, 1989)

Doll (1993) describes reality as constituting “open systems” which by their nature are transformative: “change not stability is their essence” (p. 14). Change is also the essence of creative acts. Art making is a direct experience of the simple complexity of transformation. When we engage in creation, we are directly connected to movement and metamorphosis. As shapes and colours change and each moment bares something new, we are constantly required to remain open and to yield to the process.

“The primary challenge in open systems is not to bring the process to closure but to direct the transformations in such a manner that the becomingness of process is maintained” (Doll, 1993, p. 15). Art making allows me to participate directly in transformations. The becomingness of process is maintained beyond the moment of art making to subsequent experiences of perceiving and interacting with the world.

### Three Creative States

I experience Doll's (1993) ongoing becomingness of process through three stages of creative acts: active, passive and reflective.

#### Active State

During the active stage of creativity I am involved in, engrossed by, part of, engaged with, subsumed by an act of bringing something new into being. I play and open and wonder, place and stroke and laugh, cry and stretch, listen and respond. Yes, that's more like it, *respond*, a verb that knows it is not me, alone, but we. Creativity occurs in relation, in response to, in communion with.

In the active stage of art making I am attending to a unified world, the world as work of art emerging from previously submerged connections. I touch and feel weight and texture; I listen for expressions of sound; I move with materials and energies. My vision becomes kinaesthetic sensing. Movement allows me to feel the energetic vibrations of the material, to move with those vibrations and to become part of the material.

When I am deeply and kinaesthetically engaged with the materials with which I am working, I release my focus on myself as central organizing force and become decentred, an active participant in a universal self-organizing pattern as described by Bateson (2002) and Doll (1993). I let go of conscious plans or intents, relinquishing control of the material and becoming part of a creative event. By having open, broad and dynamic sensory receptivity, I tap into the deep innate patterning of information that is present in every encounter. I become part of a "dynamic reality in constant flux – a flux that is not random but is in itself a pattern of patterns" (Bateson, 2002, p. 35).

Engaging creatively with the world I ask, “How are objects related to each other and their surroundings? How am I related to these objects? What patterns connect us?”

Bateson (2002) concludes that such questions are aesthetic questions, resulting from an aesthetic sensibility where one meets things of the world with recognition and empathy.

I respond to patterns of connections somatically and kinaesthetically. My body enters a conversation with materials. World outside converses with world within. Moving and exploring, reconnecting connections. Somatic and aesthetic cues direct objects into place and colours onto canvas. There are no words, only non-verbal voices and acute bodily listening,

multi-sensory listening

where eyes hear

yes from yellow;

nose tastes

cool stones;

fingers see

beyond what is;

and ears hear

tapping on a keyboard

now.

## Passive State

Once I leave the productive space of a creative act, I continue to encounter the world with heightened alertness and sensitivity. Everything slows down and energy flows freely. I am out of the creative womb, body alive, open and aware, skin shining and fresh, sucking in air, tingling. Creative umbilicus still connects me to the world. We are still one. Blood and energy nourish communally. Unity is.

Encountering the world and myself through creative acts connects me more deeply with the world and with the *potentia* in every moment.

*Potentia*, like so many other words, has had its meanings separated out, and has come... to be both potency and potentiality...both the power present and the power latent, that can but has not yet come into being. In Latin these are the same word. And this is the wisdom. For the potentiality is also a present power with which we must deal and to which we must speak. (Richards, 1962, p. 6)

After creating, I remain open, turned on, tuned in to a dynamic vibrating world where permanence relaxes into ephemera. Making has opened me to birth and death, holding and releasing, to patterns and *potentia* beyond what I commonly see. No stasis. No definition. Becoming blurs beautifully into unknowingness.

I like not knowing, not understanding, being stretched, reaching for what is becoming beyond me because in reaching beyond, I release my hold on static realities and move on. "I" has left. Edges soften, blending into something larger. I lose my self. I am decentred. There is no centre. Everything is relation. We are. Life becomes art and is art becoming.

## Reflective State

I sit down to write, shifting again. I come back to self, to self-consciousness. What happened? How can I write this? How can I write of and from a unified dynamic place? I start with details, remembering mindfully the sensations and thoughts and then, a story comes forth, birthed from that place. And I record. I am creating again. I am engrossed, lost again, responding, attuned to spaces of connection. Things are moving again. I am back on track, in tune, turned on.

As I actively create, I enter into an intimate and reciprocal relationship with the world. As I listen and respond, assemble and disassemble, my senses attune to patterns and connections. I actively participate in the ongoing creative pulse of the world. As I move out of the active phase of creating I hold a creative consciousness. Everything becomes a creative act. I encounter the world in the act of becoming, “Ha! I caught you in the act!” Moving, growing, transforming, shifting, non-static, undefined becoming.

As I reflect on what has happened, I begin with no language to describe a space, a consciousness, a way of being that is beyond words and so I uncover, discover and recover words and language and story that speak from where it is I have been. In this process of describing I am, once again, allowing connections to emerge, evolve and expand from within, around, above and beneath me. I am walking inside experience, participating in co-emergence. I am part of an emerging story, new connections. I am back in the act of creating, of developing a relationship to the words and the story. Telling becomes a vehicle to encounter, to tune in, to listen, to explore and to expand into *potentia* and to unearth new connections.



## Reassembling



## Living as Creative Act

### On the Way to Work

Every day I ride my bike to the Navy Base in Esquimalt to work. This week the mornings have been beautiful, clear and warm with a slight breeze coming off the water. It's exquisite looking out over the ocean from Esquimalt at the ragged purple, snow-capped mountains across the strait. Yesterday, however, the view was somewhat eclipsed. There was an American aircraft carrier sitting just off shore, ominous in the morning heat, a great grey mass the size of a small city carrying 4000 people and 40 fighter planes. "Aircraft carrier" is one of those terms that had little meaning for me until I saw one and, even then, it seemed surreal.

I got all excited about taking my kayak out in the harbour and paddling up next to #74 in order to physically experience the scale of the thing. I wonder what an aircraft carrier smells like. One of my colleagues informed me quite earnestly that if I were to go anywhere near the thing, I would be shot. More likely arrested but he likes to dramatize. So instead, we stood there staring at it. Awestruck. Dumbfounded by its size and presence. Impressed, I guess. There's a hole right through it, you know. A big round moon of a hole from port to starboard and through that big mass of darkness, I could still see the mountains.

**In School**

I sit here after curriculum class with my back resting against the heater, warming my spine. My right side is tense. Tonight one of the students said, “Until we feel the issues, make them personal, we won’t get anywhere.” I am humbled. Too tired to make it personal, to allow you in and me out. I feel disconnected. How come the moment that resonated for me most tonight during class, the moment when I was able to connect personally, bodily, deeply, was when I left the concrete building at break, stood on the causeway and looked up at the blue sky?

I’m here.

I’m still

here.

**Inside Out**

For a year I cried  
every morning  
before school.

I don't remember  
the details  
just fear and confusion

I played  
the game though,  
and played it well.

I like games  
they take my mind off  
What's really happening?

How did I get A's  
in everything  
when I wasn't being me?

A's for my smile and my curly hair,  
for being quiet and social  
when I was supposed to be.

Oh yeah, and A's, of course,  
for colouring  
inside the lines.

No one ever asked  
How I saw the tree  
outside the window.

No one ever asked  
about the tears.

## **In Conversation**

In metaphor we experience a gestalt shift from one distinct intellectual and emotional complex to another ‘in an instant of time’. A metaphor, then, is also a meta-image. It is multiply resonant. (Zwicky, 2003, p. 4)

I remember, as a child, standing next to my father as he talked with friends. He would insert metaphors or puns into conversations as often as he could, sometimes to the dismay of those with whom he was talking. I watched and listened as he tossed around seeming non-sequiturs. If the other person tried to figure out what he was talking about, the conversation would ebb. If, on the other hand, they entered willingly into the shifting space of metaphor where connections are made beyond the limits of words – if they relinquished the need to understand – the conversation would open up and flow. The spaces where words fail to go became sites for play, not so much for communicating clear ideas. I realize now, metaphor is not limited to the use of figurative language. It is a way of being, of moving around in the unknown and allowing connections to appear through the gaps left by dynamic juxtapositions.

Metaphor transports us across a space, creating connections where there were none before. I have come to understand metaphor as a way of being in the world and art making as a way of practicing metaphoric being. Metaphor is a vehicle for nomadic thought, rhizomatic connections, openings, for stretching beyond rational knowing.

Metaphor explores the partiality of truth (Zwicky, 2003, p. 16). A metaphor shows us one way of seeing something other than its literal sense and implies there are many others. Richards (1962) speaks of poetry/art doing the same thing. This is the “multiple resonance” that Zwicky refers to in metaphor. When I create a piece of art, I

am taking a thing and participating in its metamorphosis. Often the connections unearthed during the process are not singular or linear, but multiple and resonant on many levels. As I move around in the unknowns of expressive creating, I am often surprised by what occurs, what comes to light and to life. Making art is like being inside a metaphor, it is a conversation with the physical world full of puns and gestalt openings.

## Walking

For me walking is a creative act, that is a practice of engaging with the world with a participating consciousness.

Walking is a mode of making the world as well as being in it...Walking shares with making and working that crucial element of engagement of the body and the mind with the world, of knowing the world through the body and the body through the world. (Solnit, 2000, p. 29)

As I was reading Solnit (2000) last night, I was relieved to be reminded that walking makes the world. I had just been out alone for two hours walking and thinking and fully experiencing the night. I am so much more comfortable when I am in my body, out of my mind, being and knowing aesthetically, participating kinaesthetically and empathically in the world. Walking is a creative act, an intimate encounter with the world. When I walk I experience the world at three miles an hour. I am relating to the world through movement, through my body. And I am making the world as I move through it.

Walking.

Time to wonder  
and wander about  
space and place.

Body moving  
energy,  
gently displacing  
matter.

## **Running shoes**

Instead of always pursuing the world, we may on occasion allow the world to be generated spontaneously from the natural activity of our mind and the natural, inexorable flow of the universe (London, 1989, p. 76).

The other day I was driving down Fort Street, and I stopped at a traffic light. I looked up and saw a pair of green Converse high top running shoes dangling from a power line, in the background the pale moon floating in the soft blue of the afternoon sky. Except the moon wasn't in the background. The physically separate planes that held the shoes and the wire, the sky and the moon apart all came together as if pulled out of their separateness and reassembled in close proximity to each other. The juxtaposition of the moon with the shoes bridged a physical distance beyond my comprehension. Simple yet disparate elements – green shoes, pale yellow moon disc, fine black line transecting blue sky – came together. Instead of these objects existing independently, they combined into a single gestalt. Relating contrapuntally, each retained its original character while complementing the others and creating a rich dynamic relationship.

## Play

Last week my friend Linnea came by. She's two years old and likes to wander around my apartment checking things out. At one point, she was drawn to one of four thin coloured wax slabs I had leaning against the wall. She very carefully pulled the blue one off the wall and laid it down on the floor. Then, as her interest moved on to other things, she turned and unknowingly placed her foot right in the middle of the piece of wax. I heard a subtle splitting sound, more from the sight of the whitened crack down the middle of the slab than of anything audible. Linnea carried on and the two blue wax halves lay on the floor. The disappointment I felt quickly waned as I noticed how the pieces had taken on shapes of their own, different from the three other unbroken wax slabs.

After a few days of eyeing the broken slab out of the corner of my eye and deliberating what I would do with the pieces, I stacked the three remaining wax slabs and the pieces in a corner. I was doing the dishes later that day and feeling particularly stuck with my writing when it came to me that the other pieces could be broken as well. My energy perked up and I went and found the slabs. I quickly chose the yellow one which had developed a curve in it. I lay it concave on the floor. I placed my foot gently in the middle, feeling the pressure of the curve under my foot, the delicateness of the piece of wax and the weight of my body deliberately shifting onto a surface that would not hold.

There was a moment of soft tension before the whole split into four beautiful pieces. I looked down to find curved lines, edges and points. There were four pieces to move around instead of one. There were gaps between the pieces. I was looking in a

new way, my eyes moved around the pieces and I considered how they might be rearranged. I started to play. I leaned the yellow fragments up against the two blue pieces that Linnea had made, then all of them against the one remaining whole red slab. I moved the pieces around to find places where they looked and felt most comfortable. I broke the last slab, the green one and created a piece in another corner. I lay all the pieces on the floor and made a mosaic path across the room fitting each piece in next to another.

As I stepped on the wax slab, I released the energy holding the wax in its static and the energy holding me in a place of creative frustration. I needed to disassemble the rigid form of the wax slab, creating fragments and openings for surprise and play, to discover the multiple combinations of possible forms. Since then, I have taken the pieces apart and placed them in different formations. Each time a child visits, they are drawn to the wax fragments leaning on the wall in the living room. They continue to be a source of play and creative acts.

To a child's imagination a twig is a man, a bridge, a telescope. This transmutation through creative vision is the actual, day-to-day realization of alchemy. In bricolage, we take the ordinary materials in our hands and turn them into new living matter...The fulcrum of the transformation is mind-at-play, having nothing to gain and nothing to lose, working and playing around the limits and resistances of the tools we hold in our hands.

(Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 87)

## **With a Friend**

Last week I went hiking with a friend. We caught the bus to the Lynne Valley to get away from the city, to walk in the forest. The bus ride took almost an hour and we talked the whole way, catching up on the details of our lives. When we arrived at the park, it started to rain, full heavy west coast rainforest rain. As we walked, telling stories of family and friends and thesis writing, we got wetter and wetter, licking juicy fat raindrops from our lips. At a grove of old growth fir trees, we stopped to feel the warmth of the huge trees and to take shelter from the rain. Standing next to each other, hoping for the wetness to subside, we listened to the rain in the trees, the details of our stories falling away as we let the elements take over. As I looked at Danielle, my senses heightened from the walk and the talk and intensity of the place, I felt her warmth and vulnerability. I looked more closely and listened, licking another raindrop from my lip. As I took her in, as much of her as I could, her solid edges softened as though in the fog, the boundaries between Danielle, the rain, the fir trees and me faded and then disappeared.

## Persons in Process

In a moment of decentring, then, of eroding absolutes, of disappearing absolutes, we have to discover new ways of going on...as persons in process, always on the move. (Greene, 1994, p. 217)

It is not enough to know that authority is eroding, that absolutes are disappearing or that our sense of these is shifting. We need to practice being persons in process, becoming. Creative acts are ways of participating in becoming and revealing new ways of going on.

In her discussion on art making and pedagogy, Richards (1962) links the experience of creating as intimate encounter with the world in transformation to the way we might see and interact with other humans. Through pottery making and poetry, Richards says we can enter into a direct relationship with our world. In creative acts we do not look at our work from the outside trying to understand, we enter right into it, participating in a dialogue. We live the reality that there is more than we can see emerging before us.

*This morning when I woke, I wondered what this work is, what shape it is taking. Doubts come pouring in, "What am I trying to say? I don't know if my work is finished. Will I ever know?" Now, as I read over the last paragraph and write these words, I am back inside a dialogue. Not looking from the outside and trying to understand, but entering right in and living inside a world where more than I can see is coming forth.*

As I live inside creative metamorphosis through thesis writing, poetry, metaphor and art making, I slowly let go of fixed and rigid images of being and envision humans

becoming. I ask myself, “How can I forget when I stand next to another human being, I am witnessing the same potential being lived and enacted as I witness in art making?” Inspired by Richards (1962) I consider, “Can I see myself and others as transformative craft, as evolving art forms?” I am shifting out of a world frozen solid by immutable definition and entering into the movement and the potential inherent in becoming human. This, I suppose, is my own emergence.

### **Writing Into Unruliness**

Academe overflows with minds unwilling to venture forth without the power of authority invested from others and I remind myself of this fact and of the primacy of experience. “Let the experience flow over you first,” I hear myself say to graduate students and teachers “before anything else, make sense of your analysis of experience.” So easy to forget my own advice. So I write. And I ask questions. (Knowles, 2001, p. 99)

Over and over I lose faith in the fact we are becoming and not stuck, static, limited, bound beings. This is why I write and create, to see, experience, and practice emergence and becomingness. Over and over again I seek opportunities for movement and change, alchemy and potentiality.

**Show me the way, damn it!**

I'm sitting here in the cold with nowhere to move,

I can't see.

I am not drawn toward anything,

I can't move.

It's getting dark.

There is no indication of where to go,

and I'm angry.

This is not how it's supposed to be. I'm supposed to know.

Someone is supposed to tell me,

to help me,

to stand back

and

look,

help me to see.

I need help,

there is no way.

I need help to see,

this is a way.

**Keep writing.**

This is it, I guess, me sitting here at my computer tapping away. My favourite lime green cup comes in and out of my consciousness, as does the sound of the fridge humming. So, this is becoming – nothing particularly exemplary about sitting here on a dark Sunday evening, with the taste of ginger tea in my mouth and furry teeth because I haven't brushed them. Writing. Words on a page. Not even a real page, but a back-lit screen with a crazy virtual puppet up in the corner of the page dancing around and making random odd noises. This is it. It is? What happens when I sit here and write? I touch some of what happens. I taste the fur on my teeth "letting the experience flow over me first."

How is this experience? As I sit here writing, how am I becoming? After days of pain and worry and anxiety that the thesis won't become, I ask, "Where am I? Where is this story going?" I struggle. Attend. Care. Sit and listen. Walk and write. Gather, play and assemble. What is happening?

My story is being allowed out.

My story is being aloud.

My story.



## **Epilogue (yet to be/coming)**

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