Restorative Learning, Restorative Living: Poetic Inquiry as Embodied Ecology

By

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Abstract

We live during a period of unparalleled, human-caused, systemic disruption of the biosphere and the very processes that sustain life on Earth. As such, it is important that we critically assess the beliefs and corresponding actions that have led us to our present state. By allowing destructive habits of being to disintegrate, we can then direct our intellectual, emotional, individual, and collective energy toward eco-social restoration. Destructive practices can be learned and unlearned. The following essay considers how the convergence of ecological thought and poetic inquiry can support the learning of embodied and restorative cultural practices. Responding to the present state of cultural disconnection from life's organic cycles, it strives to "re-story," in form and content, the dominant Western cultural narrative. Eco-social restoration is discussed within the context of popular environmental thought, traditional education, eco-poetry, and the politics of place.

Resume

L'ère est à la dissociation systémique de la biosphère, écosystème permettant la vie humaine sur Terre. Cet état planétaire est la résultante de l'activité humaine. Ainsi, il est essentiel d'aborder avec un regard critique les actions déterminées par les croyances et agissements populaires nous menant à la situation actuelle. En modifiant des habitudes de vies destructives, nous pouvons rediriger notre énergie intellectuelle, émotive, individuelle et collective vers la restauration de l'écosystème. Les pratiques destructives peuvent s'apprendre et se désapprendre ou se réapprendre. Ce mémoire traite de la façon que peuvent converger la pensée écologique avec la poésie pour façonner les pratiques culturelles relatives à l'environnement. Ce mémoire tente de réécrire, dans une forme narrative, l'histoire de la déconnection entre les comportements des êtres humains et l'équilibre biologique de la survie des espèces. Les fondements de ce travail de maîtrise sont propres à l'éco-sociale, l'épistémologie influencée par la pensée écologique, l'éducation traditionnelle, l'éco-poésie et la politique.

To my family—
Thank you for lovingly seeing me through.

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Whenever I try to find words to say thank you to my parents, my mind goes blank and I can only smile. Mom and Dad, I am smiling because of you.

I would like to honour the Kanien'kehaka Nation and thank them for sharing this beautiful land with my family, my friends, and I. Finally, I do not know who to thank for this "blessing that is breathing," but I do know it is only possible because of "the strain of a seed," water, sun, and good soil.

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Restorative Learning, Restorative Living: Poetic Inquiry as Embodied Ecology

a prayer for healing

begins with the breath
where it turns in your body
where you turn in your body
letting yourself in
letting yourself out

turning and returning
turning and returning

you asked me to remember
so i knelt
opened my hands
placed them on the soil
bent my back
laid my cheek on the ground
and listened for a prayer

a prayer—
breath lifting, filling the body
living sound, coursing upward
moving across the head,
between the shoulder blades,
extending through the spine
in both directions –bilocation
just like you said.

and i don't know which is which anymore
the exhale/the inhale
the sound, the song...
but i do know
that this is some kind of blessing
a blessing that is breathing
that is remembering
remembering the body
and that the body can be a prayer

Rebecca Houwer (2002)[1]

- Prologue -

The year is 2002. I am twenty-six years old living in Toronto, Ontario. I attend the University of Toronto where I am taking an Anthropology class in Popular Culture. I go to class and then to work and then home to my apartment at Church and Wellesley where I spend my nights writing poems. I am obsessed with metamorphosis and metaphors; how an experience can become a poem and a poem can become an experience. Daily on my way home I pass many things on the street: people buying, people begging, things and people bought and thrown away. I spend a lot of time thinking about how poems are bridges, and of meaning (how "we" make it), and how it depends, how we all depend, like meaning, on context.

One evening listening to a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) Radio One program, I learn that what grows on the surface reflects the health of the soil beneath. Different plants thrive in differently constituted soils. What we call weeds are plants that can survive in the poorest of conditions, the poorest soil. It now makes sense to me why they grow abundantly in the non-pesticidally managed areas of the city. Furthermore, I learn that instead of treating weeds as a bothersome nuisance we can see them as indicators of soil quality. Incredibly, they grow where they do because one of their functions is to return life to dying soil. I investigate this biological phenomenon and arrive at a book by Steven Buhner (2002) called *The Lost Language of Plants* which teaches me that a variety of plants offer healing not only to dying soil but to humans as well. Not only do plants contain properties to counter the effects of human illnesses, but they also contain properties to counter the side effects stimulated by their ingestion. Continuing my inquiry, I learn that a healthy eco-system is highly diverse. In contrast with Western mechanistically engineered, unsustainable, chemically-modified,

monoculture agriculture, Native American horticulturalists traditionally planted seeds that grew in cooperative relationships (i.e. the "Three Sisters": corn, beans, squash).[2] In relationship, the Three Sisters nurture each other, enrich the soil, and offer a chemical-free, balanced diet to their human tenders.

In the Anthropology class we connect cultural theory to the city streets. The professor asks us to probe the relationships between the macro and the micro, cultural and social values, norms, systems, the surface and the ground. I start to look at the city in terms of well-being, potential for diversity, for growth and balance. Some mornings on my walk to school, I have to plug my nose from the stench of so much garbage left on the streets. I see people who are homeless, who I imagine feel alone, disconnected, disembodied, and turn to various chemicals and/or activities in order to function in this materialistic consumer society. It occurs to me that our addictions provide no more a solution for our cultural situation than pesticides do for a field.[3] Maybe the weeds and the addictions are indications that we need to slow down and attend, restore quality to our lives and relationships. Maybe if we actually listened to what the garbage and destruction is telling us, instead of shipping it to a landfill or turning away and numbing ourselves, we could find properties within it to help us heal. I think that in order to heal, we must go deeper than the surface, the symptoms, to the composition of the soil, what lies beneath but supports what "crops up."

*

Three years later, the year is 2005. My questions have spiralled and changed but contain the seeds of three years prior. A friend, also looking at "what lies beneath," writes to me that she is "thinking about the boundaries we put around ourselves as human beings/ boundaries/ that mark off/ whom we can love/ and who can love us in

return/ and how/ these boundaries suffocate us/ split us/ from our oxygen source/ from our life force/ connection/ and from that greater conversation with the World. I am thinking about/ individuation/ separation/ and how this great Western Identity Project is causing so much suffering and loneliness and pain..." (Paulette-Coughlin, personal communication, 12 Nov 2005). I make connections between "the great Western Identity Project" and our current "environmental" situation. I am very aware that not only is Toronto "pushing up weeds," but also primarily due to our cultural disconnection, the planet's life-support systems are severely compromised and are in danger of collapse. I begin to study ecology. The root of the word, "eco," comes from the Latin word "oikos" meaning "home" or "habitat": the study of home.[4] Ecology introduces me to concepts such as interconnectedness and interdependence. To me, these concepts taste like drinking fresh mountain spring water after a lifetime of drinking chlorinated city tap water. By thinking about interconnectedness and interdependence, I awaken to an awareness that, contrary to the great "Western Identity Project," I am not alone in the world.

I decide to study environmental education and try to learn how I can apply the concept that I now call "relational consciousness." McGill University accepts my study proposal and I move to Montréal, Quebec. In the course of asking where, when, and how the dominant Western culture became so disconnected and destructive, I reexamine our colonial history. Beginning where I live (my habitat), I learn that Montréal, Quebec, was first named Tiohtiá:ke by the Kanien'kehaka Nation ("people of the flint" or "Mohawk"), the original inhabitants of this region of Turtle Island (what we call North America). Unlike Montréal, Tiohtiá:ke embodies in word the ecological and cultural qualities of the island. It means "place where the nations and their rivers unite

and divide."[5] Montréal means "royal mountain" or land claimed for an imperial power thousands of kilometers away. The linguistic colonization of Turtle Island indicates to me just one dimension of the dominant Western culture's inability to listen attentively and live in cooperation with the land and by extension each other. Language is a connector. If words emerge from a context, a worldview, that denies historical relationships, that denies its "place," the meaning is impoverished.

*

When writing poetry I seek out metaphors. Metaphors act like a bridge bringing two unlike ideas together. They are still two separate ideas but together they create something new. Formally, they contain a tenor and a vehicle. The tenor is the idea and the vehicle is the word that carries the idea. The question for me was: how do I get from the vehicle back to the tenor, from the surface to the soil? What is the relationship? What carries what, why, and how? Words are traces of experiences. They also are themselves experiences. Just as the poem itself is a vehicle for a way of living in the world, the individual is a vehicle for beliefs (stories). I want to use words to carry as much life as possible because I want to carry as much life as possible and be able to give that in my poems: the poem as a (chemical-free) garden.

Thanks to my Anthropology class, I started to make connections between the surface of the city and the stories that shape it, and thanks to ecology, I began to understand the importance of life-supporting, non-dominating relationships. When I look at the city patterns of buildings, streets, cars, and people and to try to decipher the priorities of my culture, ecological health does not appear to be among them. Superficially, people say that it is, but if it were, I think the city would look and feel differently; education would look and feel differently.

- Preface -

As we have seen, there is a correspondence, an important relationship, between "what lies beneath" and "what crops up." Martha Nussbaum (1990), commenting on the novelist Henry James' writing process, offers a similar ecological metaphor. She likens "the author's sense of life to soil, [and] the literary text to a plant that grows out of that soil and expresses, in it's form, the soil's character and composition" (p. 4). Nussbaum further contends, "conception and form are bound together; finding and shaping the words is a matter of finding the appropriate and, so to speak, the honourable fit between conception and expression" (p. 5). Additionally, the act of creating a relationship between idea and form is a political decision. Georgia Grady Johnson (2003) asserts that "a story is an intellectual and political task; the intellectual and political move I am making in telling a story is to situate the meaning within a particular intellectual tradition" (p. 26). In this text I have given myself the task of using words to embody in form and content my present understanding of restorative living and restorative learning. My underlying belief, the "situated meaning" of this soil, of this essay is that restorative living and learning is relational, non-dominating, integrated, iterative, and reflective. Politically, my aim is to realize my thoughts, intentions, and feelings appropriately in the text and in the context of a university system that is reluctant to take leadership on the issues I am addressing (Nussbaum, p. 9). Ellen Dissanayake (2003) contends that taking the time "to care and to mark one's caring" is a form of resistance (p. 33). Caring is important, and indeed in the present culture, it is an act of resistance, but caring without understanding is dangerous. My writing

attempts to embody a life-supporting learning process that unites caring and understanding.

In an effort to find "the honourable fit between conception and expression," this essay is slightly unconventional. While I respect and see the value of traditional essay forms, I do not think that such a form best serves this topic. Forcing or imposing such a form on my questions is akin to trying to grow cucumbers in the desert. While dominant Western culture does have a history of "battling every rain cloud" (Kabbani, cited in Harjo, 2002), I don't think it has served us; I don't think it will serve the ideas that I am trying to share. I do realize that I am writing within a university context. Therefore, with "my place" in mind I have made compromises with the intention of being accessible and understandable to an academic reader. I am not offering a manuscript of poems. What I do offer is a conversation between academic discourse and poetry, intellect and affect, and myself and others. It is very important to me to try to create what Mierle Laderman Ukeles calls a "'philosophical space' that encourages cooperation and values relationships" (cited in Matilsksy, 1992, p. 57). Therefore, I ask of the reader that you suspend your initial judgment, enter into an intellectual and imaginative relationship with the text, and let yourself be affected by the process. Instead of "driving what is with a stick, or leading or dragging or steering what is" (Bringhurst, p. 53) I intentionally allow:

> meanderings, like a river: [where] you may go through eddies and spiral in one place again and again. You may enter white water, full of risk and danger...you may just decide to take the flat water very slowly (Tempest Williams, 1993, p. 123).

Albert Einstein once said that a problem could not be solved at the same level as the problem was created. The level on which this essay operates is one that honours relationships: relationships between the soil and the plants; the text and I; and, the text and the reader. It is a chemical-free garden.

Ben Okri (cited in King, 2003), in his contemplation of the relationship between conception and expression, considers:

> One way or another we are living the stories planted in us early or along the way, or we are also living the stories we planted – knowingly or unknowingly in ourselves. We live stories that either give our lives meaning or negate it with meaninglessness. If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives" (p. 154).

Changing the stories we live by means changing the form, re-visioning the content, and re-imagining our relationships. The text that follows does not take as its priority the achievement of an "A". Rather it is an effort (and it is an effort) to turn away from the dominant Western culture of disconnection and instead pursue cooperative relationships between self and Other, thought and emotion, and culture and nature. The process of relating is a critical dimension, the soil, of scholarship. How well or poorly we manage this process effects the meanings that we make but unfortunately the importance of this process seldom makes its way into the dominant discourse as more than an aside. Honesty in scholarship and relationships requires tremendous dynamism and creativity. Poet, essayist, novelist, and teacher, Simon Ortiz (Acoma) (2004) asks, "Why do we go into the storm? Because you appreciate it and come to know its beauty...Why do we live life?" (in Slovic and Satterfield, p. 48). I ask, "Why don't we go into the storm? Why don't we *live life*?" I don't know.

but i do know
that this is some kind of blessing
a blessing that is breathing
that is remembering
remembering the body
and that the body can be a prayer

It is worth going into the storm.

---

[1] Unless otherwise credited, all poems were written by Rebecca Houwer.

[2] "Corn provides protection from weeds and insects and acts as a scaffold to support twining bean plants. The beans, in turn, produce nitrogen, essential for plant growth. Adding squash to the mix also controls the growth of weeds and fertilizes the soil" (http://www.sciencedaily.com).
[3] See Rachel Carson (1962) on the eco-social consequence of pesticide use.
[4] Webster's New World College Dictionary (2001), fourth edition.
[5] See the First Nations Place-Name project at http://cbed.geog.mcgill.ca/atlasPages/history/article.htm, accessed July 16, 2006.

- One -

Introduction: Seeding the soil

1.1 "We are made of / all this"

Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion

~ from "Eagle Poem" by Joy Harjo (Muskogee) (1990)

Because we are alive during a period in the Earth's history of unparalleled, human-caused, systemic disruption, discussions of eco-social restoration are critically important.[1] The paper that follows addresses the need for values, practices, and processes that support personal and collective eco-social restoration. In order to pull ourselves back from the sure disaster of forgetting, of feeling, "we," specifically a Western, neocolonial, dominating, and exploiting "we," need to remember that there are other humans and creatures living on this planet and that life is inherently interdependent.[2] Eco-social restoration requires that we learn to live in partnership with "all our relations" (King, 1990).[3] By re-member, I also mean that we need to seek integration, to pull ourselves back together as individuals and communities. The consequences of disconnection are tragic and all too easy to see. Any adult living in North America is aware that homeless grandmothers are forced scavenge for food and a place to sleep, children are abandoned in front of televisions, beaches are regularly closed due to pollution, frogs and songbirds disappear yearly, and that tons of garbage is trucked away to landfills daily.[4] This is just the surface.

And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion.
~ Joy Harjo (ibid.)

1.2 The Soil: Conception and Expression

A foundational premise of this paper is that cultural values, learned formally and informally, have significant, far-reaching (in time and space) eco-social consequences insofar as they shape our institutional structures and the patterns and outcomes of individual human and "more-than-human" lives (Abram, 1996). The primary questions this inquiry poses are first, how might we begin, through learning, to value and nurture quality relationships in our lives, and second, what culturally restorative values and practices might we cultivate in order to reintegrate ourselves as humble and generous participants in life's "circles of motion." The approach I take to these questions is the result of a convergence of poetic practice and ecological thought. Together they offer a useful critique of the values promoted by the dominant Western cultural narrative (i.e. learning + ecology + poetry = this thesis). Throughout the discussion, I apply Ruthanne Kirth-Schai's (1992, p. 156) notion of the "self-in-community" to dominant narratives in culture, education, and poetry. I consider how learning and living are interrelated processes, and how consciously relational modes of being support eco-social restoration.

*

As the writer of this inquiry, I encompass multiple, over-lapping identities. Giving mention to the most obvious, I am "privileged" as a student within the context of an "elite" academic institution, a young middle class white woman, and child of Dutch immigrants living in urban North America.[5] The fact that I am a baby bird with still wet wings hatched in the foothills of the (now-named) Allegheny Mountains near the headwaters of the (now-named) Allegheny River is also relevant.[6] As well, I am a miniscule fire-red insect, a storm cloud, a wrinkled old man, and a snail on a tree after rainfall. At any given moment, I contain multitudes of particles that have been cycling

through states of being for all time. How do I know this and why is it important in the context of this paper? For starters, I did not learn it in school (and while I am at it, outside of theory, there is no way that 1 + 1 = 2)[7]; I learned of my interconnection and interdependence within the circle of life, in part, through poetry, but more specifically, through attentive, imaginative, eco-poetic inquiry.[8] It is my hope that as this "organic rumination" spiral-cycles into being, I can show you why and how connective, non-egocentric (individualistic) but *eco*-centric (cooperative) thinking is important (Leggo, 2001). Consider these words by Tim Lilburn (1999) "when you look long enough, faithfully enough at the tree, your seeing bowing before it [letting] the deer's stare seep deeply into you, you lose your name" (p. 22). What you gain is a sense of process, pattern, relationship, and wonder. In order to re-member, to connect more fully, it is important from time to time to listen so closely that we lose our individual names and enter a middle place of empathetic identification with the Other.[9]

letting yourself in, letting yourself out...

Rishma Dunlop (2004, p. 85) suggests, "poems are theories." At one point in my life, I might have agreed with her, but now I am inclined to suggest that they are more. I have always loved poems. Through writing, reading, studying, and experiencing them, something stirs in me and I am able, paradoxically, to access a wordless place of deeper felt connection with and appreciation for the Other (writer, reader, subject, and process in relationship). I don't think of poems as theories. I do however think of them as embodied, a belief system, an epistemology given form. Through close attention to poetry, coupled with a desire to understand "life" in general, I indirectly happened upon the study of ecology. As it turns out, the two forms of inquiry complement each other quite nicely. They are both forms, and I go into this more thoroughly later in the paper,

of what Jeanette Armstrong (Okanagan) (1999), David Orr (1992), Christopher Uhl (2004), and Franz Capra (1999) call "connective education," characteristics of which include the valuing of close attention, sensual and intellectual engagement, an appreciation of context, and an understanding of interconnection.

Looking at the world (and myself) through the dual lenses of poetry and ecology gives me a greater appreciation for life's complexity, diversity, relatedness, and ongoing dynamism. It has facilitated a shift in my thinking away from rationalism and positivism toward systems thinking, process/pattern oriented, and felt approaches to meaning-making. Franz Capra (1999, p. 4) states, "when you look at a thing what you are really looking at is a process." You are looking at a process of cooperation. Therefore, to return to Rishma Dunlop's statement, a founding belief of this present work is that poems are processes that arise from attention to relationships. Just as I am a process (of being and understanding), this paper is a process. One of the priorities then of my inquiry, rather than to strive to discover a universal truth, is to embody life-supporting processes as I learn and write. Characteristics of embodied learning include acknowledgement of subjectivity, not privileging "rational cognition" over sensory experience, responsiveness to lived context, and, ongoing transformation as relational awareness dances and deepens. As well, it integrates first order knowledge with knowledge removed from personal experience. Embodied learning is attentive to the processes of perceiving, feeling, and responding in/to relationship (Williams, 1974). Moreover, it values and takes into account knowledges that are not generally considered scientific such as felt responses and intuition (Sumara, 2003, p. 91).[10] Embodied learning does not incessantly defer to external authorities but takes seriously lived experiences or "context-phenomenon." Gary Knowles (2001) further reflects, "it is too

easy to quote apparent experts...to lose my voice. Academe overflows with minds unwilling to venture forth without the power of authority invested from others" (p. 99). Recognizing the wisdom of colleagues, elders, and community is important, but it is also important to recognize and value our own thinking, feeling, and being and the quality of relationships that we cultivate between the self and Others. Within academia we can strive to tune-in to our own voices and to the voices of non-traditional "experts." We can work to broaden our definition of knowledge and to transform dominant, hierarchical, and exclusionary discourses.[11]

1.3 The Seeds: Grounding Inquiry

This paper is my attempt to venture forth, to move away from a learning culture that I have experienced as hierarchical and disembodied, toward a mode of inquiry that is restorative and life-supporting. In "academic-speak," this paper is epistemologically grounded in eco-social thought. It takes an eco-social (environment/culture) and poetic (connective, cognitive/affective) approach to inquiry in order to develop a perspective from which to restore/y the dominant divisions between culture, nature, politics, emotions, body and mind, and to conceptualize and present a more life-supporting approach to learning. The themes I have chosen to relate to my concern for restoration include: cultural conceptions of "environment," education, eco-poetry, and the politics of place. I draw on the ecological processes, the living cycles, of breathing, soil and seed, and water as metaphors for the restoration I envision. As I work through the themes and questions, I critically examine and theorize (as per the standard for an M.A. thesis), but I also incorporate and discuss poetry in order to convey that my learning process is nonlinear and multidimensional. By including poems, I integrate and honour aspects of my research process that arise as non-academic felt responses and experiences. Like

leaves and other "woodland sheddings" that diversify and enrich the soil, the poems diversify and enrich my research (Berry, cited in Scigij, 1999, p. 134). I include them to change the tone of my writing, to acknowledge a second mode of questioning that emerges in the form of my own poetic voice and my dialogues with the poetic voices of others. The poems neither provide specific "solutions" for the issues discussed in the text, nor are they included as representations of the values of this text; their inclusion intends to embody the values of the text.[12] Instead of commenting directly on each selection, I invite the reader to organically live and learn with the text, to participate as an active co-creator; and, to allow personal felt wisdom to emerge and shape itself into a cumulative meaning.[13]

When considering how to go about representing my inquiry, I realized that there should be a congruency between the form and content (processual, explicitly interconnected, and layered). We construct knowledge through a wide-range of experiences that we interpret uniquely (Gardner, 1993). This insight directly influences the form, structure, and style of my writing. One obvious way that this affects my text is that rather than isolating my literature review in a single chapter, I have chosen to integrate it within the sections addressing corresponding ideas. I appreciate Leah Burns' (2004) observation that "the format of conventional scholarly work can bring a sense of clarity, but it can also limit or restrict the pathways we use to approach learning or knowledge and, in so doing, it limits our understanding" (p.214). Kieran Egan (1988) argues that abstract forms, when decontextualized, risk disassociating us from "the life world" (p. 111). Instead of removing us from experience, scholarship can be an extension of our relationship with the life world. Egan further contends that "as long as our words are tied to their context of reference" disassociation does not arise (p. 108).

In order for something to be meaningful, to transform the way we exist in the world, we must connect with the process and feel it resonate deeply within us.[14] From my perspective, scholarly work (meaning-making) is a creative and living process that should take a diversity of forms; it is an integrative process not limited to cognition. Therefore, unlike the majority of academic research, which assumes a false position of intellectual and emotional objectivity, I want to acknowledge that this inquiry is a dialectical process that involves making connections between other voices and my ever-evolving thoughts, feelings, memories, and experiences. Ardra Cole contends that in the interest of supporting a diversity of knowledges and learning processes "epistemological equity" must be accorded to researchers who choose to diverge from the standard academic form (cited in Maura McIntyre, 2004, p. 259). While at times (specifically the first two sections dealing with environmental thought and education respectively) I develop ideas discursively, this text also seeks "epistemological equity" through the inclusion of poems, drawings, and personal interludes. I share select experiences and reflections and inevitably "talk about myself" not because I think that my experience is exemplary but because there is not "any body else whom I know as well" (Thoreau, 1970, p. 3).

Structurally, the paper is divided into five sections that are inspired by the water cycle (transpiration, evaporation, condensation, precipitation, and infiltration). Water is integral to life on this planet and metaphorically it is an appropriate vehicle for the structure of my paper because not only is it life-supporting but it is restorative and inherently transformative. The first section "The Spirit Moves Through/Transpiration" provides a general outline of the broader issues in Western environmental thought. Here, I consider the impact of our cultural narrative. This section is extremely important

because it fleshes out the context within which learning and poetry take/make place. Second, in "The Spirit Rises/Evaporation" I look at the structure, form, and outcomes of different approaches to education. Specifically, I am interested in values and modes of inquiry (eco-social and connective) that support life continuing in a good way on this planet. The third section titled "The Spirit Changes Shape/Condensation" considers the intersection of poetry and ecology in a practice called eco-poetics. This section gives an overview of eco-poetic theory and includes a discussion of selected poems, concluding with my understanding of the convergence of these two practices. "The Spirit Falls/Precipitation" engages with the often over-looked political dimension of eco-poetic work. This section further challenges Eurocentric thinking, the culture/nature dichotomy, and the tendency in the majority of eco-poetic theory to side-step issues of historical and social justice. I delve deeply into the politics of place and the implications of valuing listening, witnessing, and alliance-building. The final section, "The Spirit Enters/Infiltration" concludes with reflections on the main points of each section, reiterates the connections between restorative learning and eco-poetic practices, suggests further questions, links them to my current work, and spirals onward.

While the world is finally (infinitely) unknowable, these words and images trace a journey of learning to "notice, attend, appreciate, and care" (James Hillman cited by Gablik, 2002, p. 163). Here, I seek to be conscious and attentive to relationships, to learn as the world learns, and to turn my being toward instead of away from the cycles that sustain my life.

you began in salted waters
emerged upon a shore
small stubborn vessel, liquid born
it took you months to discover what legs were meant for
now, years later with ground thoroughly traversed
recall your ocean of origin—

how you are and were always
more of water...

This paper is a result of learning to fall apart and come back together (decolonize/restore)[15] and of listening and dialoguing. It is a beginning and a continuation, an invitation to myself and to you to live and learn *with* each other and *with* the world...in a healing way.

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[1] Instead of environment, nature, or ecology, I use the term "eco-social" throughout the paper because it makes explicit that culture and ecology are interrelated.

[2] I want to acknowledge that my use of the word "we" is both problematic and intentional. While I recognize that generalizations are never fully accurate, and that properly I can only speak for myself, on occasion I use the collective voice in order to emphasize my felt connection and responsibility to the dominant North American culture with which I am a part.

[3] "All my relations" is a translation of Mitakuye Oyasin, a Dakota phrase that means "we are all connected." This phrase has been adopted and expressed as a refrain or acknowledgement by many Indigenous nations.

[4] According to Stephanie Whittaker of the Montreal Gazette, Montreal "sends a little less than 300,000 tons of garbage to landfill sites yearly."Don't Wait For Garbage Strike Before Reducing Waste,"*Montreal Gazette*, 7 September 2002: LexisNexis.

[5] In some ways, participating in the academy is a privilege. Membership in this elite institution (ideally) requires a dedication and commitment to contemplation, to humble inquiry, to lingering, to process, and to integration. Ideally, it requires non-ego driven attention. However, the majority of people I meet in the "ivory tower" are mostly concerned with their own status and success. Therefore, I feel that my membership is a handicap. This university (McGill University) is presently situated socially and culturally in a way that is not (though individual students make significant efforts) integrated, reciprocating, or responsible to the surrounding community. It is an alien creature. Here there are thousands of energetic thinking young people known not for their integration, but for their outstanding dis-integration, their fraternity parties, and general disregard for the immediate community, let alone the larger political context of their four-year time allowance for "education." Presently, this university makes very little effort to be accountable for its role in its community.

[6] This land had many names before European colonizers arrived here. Like a kind of invader species that so concerns us when it arrives in the form of purple loosestrife or zebra mussels, Europeans entered this place both running away from a land that was riddled with inequality and non-cooperation and with the Western religious conception that they had found a promised land, a New Canaan, a terra nullus. Instead of listening to the people that were already living harmoniously with the land (though some settlers did), they named this place America, and set about dominating and exploiting her many gifts. Colonizing Europeans instituted an exploitive uni-directional relationship between the land and the colonizers whereby the land gave and the colonizers took. See Deloria, V. Jr., (1995), Dickason, O. (1996), and Churchill, W. (1992). On aspects of this in early colonial 'New England', see Daniel Morley Johnson (2003). "'Your Land's the Wildernesse': Land and Language in the Great Hill Country," MA Research Paper, McGill University.

[7] See Nussbaum's (1990) treatment of Aristotle with regard to heterogeneity and perception of incommensurability. No two things are identical; therefore, 1+1 is a reductive concept that eliminates/erases difference. Symbolic representations are always incommensurable with what they are representing. The quality of meaning depends on the relationship between sign and

signifier (see Pearce on signification). It is therefore important when trying to communicate difference that one does so humbly, respectfully, attentively, and with a clear sense of place (this idea is developed in sections III and IV).

[8] I differentiate between poetry (the outcome) and poetic inquiry (the process of attending to and imaginatively representing re-visioned and/or re-newed relationships).

[9] The concept of the "Other" may seem counter to the notion of interconnection that informs ecological discourse. For me, this concept is a point of struggle. I strive to acknowledge and appreciate the sovereignty of the non-Self/Other, but also acknowledge and appreciate the quality of the relationship. Hommi Bhabha (1994) calls the place where the s/Self and Other connect the "third space," Joni Adamson (2004) calls it the "middle ground," and Martha Nussbaum (1990) likens it to "interstitial tissue." I am interested in recognition of difference and yet the possibility of restorative alliance. This position is neither dualistic nor homogenizing.

[10] Embodied education is a new phrase for concepts that are very old. For example, these concepts have existed for centuries as part of Native Sciences and of healing/scientific practices in the whole world except the West! See Gregory Cajete (1994). *Look to the Mountains: An Ecology of Indigenous Education.* Asheville, N.C.: Kivaki Press.

[11] See Edward Said's analysis of colonial discourse in *Orientalism* in which he reveals the complicity between academia and colonialism, which further suggests collusion between politics and official knowledge (Young, 2001, 74).

[12] They do not represent the values of the text; they are the values of the text. In other words, "the medium is the message" (McLuhen, M., 1962).

[13] See Roland Barthes (1973) on the role of the reader as interpreter and meaning-maker.

[14] William Carlos Williams (1974) considers poetry to be the embodiment of knowledge.

[15] See Chödron, P. (1997). *When Things Fall Apart.* Boston: Shambala.

- Two -

The Spirit Moves Through/Understanding "Environment" (Transpiration)

Poet's Chair

My father's ploughing one, two, three, four sides
Of the lea ground where I sit all-seeing
At the centre field, my back to the thorn tree
They never cut. The horses are all hoof
And burnished flank, I am all foreknowledge.
Of the poem as a ploughshare that turns time
Up and over. Of the chair in leaf
The fairy thorn is entering for the future.
Of being here for good in every sense.

Seamus Heaney (1996, p. 47)

To be here ("eco") "for good in every sense"... to be here for *good*...to be here...*to be...in every sense here*. Here, in this time and place, it is summer and the air is warm and humid. Nearly every other day a torrential rain pelts the city, saturates the ground, overwhelms the storm sewers, and forms rivers that rush across the surfaces of the streets. The water cycles (up and over, ocean to cloud to river to ground to ocean), runs down the mountainside, seeps into the earth, moves through the roots of trees and kindly toward patient seeds that tremble and surge, ready themselves.

It seems to me that the majority of humans living *here* are not doing so *in every sense*. *Here* cannot be merely a word, a decontextualized, relationless concept in our mind. *Here* emerges from the interplay of living relationships; living is not limited to thinking. How can we remember, tremble and surge, and ready ourselves to participate in the ecological cycles we live within and are part if *here* is understood only as an abstraction? The following section outlines how the dominant narrative pattern in Western culture problematically conceptualizes and enacts a limited understanding of "environment." By moving though issues of ecology, sustainability, cultural ecology, and eco-social ethics, it becomes apparent that a radical cultural shift is required if we are to reciprocate and be *here* for good in every sense.

2.1 Ecology and Cultural Narratives

"in my veins, in my bones, I feel it / the waters seeping upward."
Theodore Roethke (1966, p. 39)

Ecological restoration may in fact begin with cultural re-story-ation. According to Cherokee novelist and scholar Thomas King (2003), "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 2, 32...). We live in stories and by stories; they are, in part, traces of experiences, actions, beliefs, meetings, choices, words, and more. They come from life and are one way that it becomes meaning-full. Humans and stories are interdependent processes; we depend on stories and they depend on us. Egan argues that stories integrate thought and feeling and that their great power "lies in [their] ability to fix affective responses to the messages [they] contain and to tie what is remembered into emotional associations" (p. 104). Stories carry/embody (tenor/vehicle) the meanings we make in the world. What are the dominant stories of Western culture and what do they tell us about our beliefs and values? Some stories, for example traditional Western "master narratives," dichotomize profit and loss, right and wrong, centre and periphery, privilege and unprivileged, and intentionally usurp, dominate, and undermine other equally valid stories, stories that embody non-dominating ways of life. The dominant narrative pattern within Western culture, the story that we live, that we teach to our children, seems to be more dissociative than integrative, and evidence little regard for the circles of life, for the blessing that is breathing.

This narrative pattern when believed, performed, and embodied plays itself out in the examples I mentioned earlier: the homeless grandmother, the abandoned child, the polluted beaches, the tons of garbage being hauled away from our cities, the more-than-human beings losing their lives, and the millions of alienated people in the Western world numbing themselves through one addiction or another. Wendell Berry (1977)

believes that "these disconnections add up to a condition of critical ill health, which we suffer in common— not just with each other, but with other creatures" (p. 137). He probes deeper into the consequences of our cultural fragmentation and I quote him at length:

> For the relief of suffering that comes of this conflict, our economy proposes, not health, but vast "cures" that further centralize power and increase profits: wars, wars on crime, wars on poverty, national schemes of immunization, further industrial and economic "growth," etc.; and these, of course, are followed by more regulatory laws and agencies to see that our "health" is protected, our freedom preserved, and our money well spent" (p. 138).

Berry also contends that "cultural solutions are organic processes not machines, and they cannot be invented deliberately, or imposed by prescription" (p. 131). Walter Ong (1982) suggests that the technologies that remove us from relationships with the life world "are not mere exterior aids, but also interior transformations of consciousness" (p.82).[1] In Canada and the United States, our "interior transformations of consciousness" have produced a cultural narrative whereby we tell ourselves that we are among the most advanced and progressive nations in the world. If this were true, why would we need an estimated five to seven more planets to sustain our consumption if every nation in the world matched our hunger for money and things?[2]

we are excavators
paradoxical shifters
so eager, so desperate, so rarely satisfied
sand tight in the corner of our eyes
remains reminding
we are clay
shaped into vessels
intended to carry/be carried
we delve
labour tirelessly through layers
push and pull ourselves to rock bottom
seeking our centre
its unclenching
our unclenching

if only we can prove or locate
value:
fossils oil ore
these worth exchanging—

a story for the finding too

As all things cycle (as breath and water cycle), the narrative pattern that supports dissociation and domination cycles through Western culture. The stories we learn and live, that we take to heart, are structured in ways that privilege competition instead of cooperation, hierarchy instead of mutual aid, efficiency instead of imagination, and immediate individual material profit instead of long-term community well-being.

Ecology provides an alternative story to the dominant Western narrative. As stated previously, ecology literally means the study of the home. In addition to the "more usually understood [environmental] features such as soil, climate, and food supply," it also takes into account "social, cultural, and (for humans) economic and political considerations" (Fletcher, 2004, p. 128). From this perspective we can understand "home" as the result of multiple, interpenetrating, interdependent relationships (both social and environmental) that are in process, never final or closed, dynamic, and always becoming (Luke, 1992). As opposed to modernist positivistic perspectives that, generally speaking, delineate, fragment, isolate, quantify, and individualize, an eco-social (and particularly feminist) perspective recognizes and strives for integration, pluralism, wholeness, interconnectedness, and quality within relationships (Merchant, 1996). Eco-social intersubjectivity goes beyond merely acknowledging that context matters, but that humans are part of a larger network of living things. Our dissociation is a historical phenomenon related to impoverished relationships with the life world. Levi-Strauss (1966) contends, "the mainspring of the acts, thoughts, and feelings of early man was the conviction that the divine was

with society" (p. 37). Being at home in the world requires far more than a mortgaged structure with an address; it requires a non-dominating, interdependent, cooperative approach to places and relationships.

An eco-social way of being recognizes that culture and nature are co-constituted. Culture embodies a consciousness informed by environmental experiences (Armstrong, 1995; Thaman, 2002). Kiowa writer N. Scott Momaday (cited in Lippard, 1990, p. 105) reflects:

> The events of one's life take place, take place.... They have meaning in relation to the things around them. And a part of my life happened to take place at Jemez. I existed in that landscape, and then my existence was indivisible with it. I placed my shadow there in the hills, my voice in the wind that ran there, in those old mornings and afternoons and evenings.

Similarly, Joy Harjo, a Muscogee poet, artist, and educator observes, "we are obviously affecting the landscape, and the land us, though that aspect is least acknowledged in the Western world. The connection is deep, unassuming, powerful, and symbiotic" (cited in Coltelli, 1996, p. 79). In order to embody life-sustaining processes, environmental and cultural ecology (eco-social) must be understood as neither discrete nor in opposition but connected and in relation.

The ways that we come to know about the world are directly influenced by relationships that exist between and among places and people. We are part of the environment. Simply stated, we could not live if it were not for the sun, the rain, the air, the trees, and other beings. Moreover, knowledge is embedded, contextual, and situated. Culture acts as a filter through which experiences are processed. Our cultural representations are our values taking material form. Directly and indirectly, they communicate information about our individual and collective consciousness. From them we can learn about how narrowly, broadly, significantly, or insignificantly people in the

we can learn about how narrowly, broadly, significantly, or insignificantly people in the Western world understand the concept of eco-social intersubjectivity. Cultural production, as both process and product, reflects our epistemological and ontological perspective on life. As stated by Konai Thaman (2002), cultural products are not merely "social abstractions; they are embodiments of our sense of self in the world" (p. 241). I will return to how this interestingly relates to education in the next section.

When interpreted semiotically as a text, the Western world's "culture of detachment," alienation, and individualism represents nothing short of anthropocentric egocentrism (Hill, S., Watson, S., & Wilson, K., 2004). The rivers, the air, the ozone layer, the endangered species, cultures, and places are evidence that the capitalist ethic that supports exploitation, resource consumption (where people and places are understood as resources), and unlimited expansion is disconnected from life-supporting processes and is unsustainable to say the least.

2.2 The Sustainability Discourse

> *It seems frightening yet strangely appropriate that perhaps the most enduring monuments that the West will leave behind for future generations will not be Stonehenge, the Pyramids of Giza or the cathedral of Chartres, but rather the hazardous remains of our industry and technology...vast gardens of ashes and poisons. This legacy of ours could last for 12,500 generations. Instead of the sacred sites of Borobudur or Ajanta, we have left to the future generations Rocky Flats and the Hanford Reservation. The tests of the Environmental Protection Agency are the sutras of the late-twentieth century (David T. Hanson, cited in Gablik, 2002, p. 77).*

Reading refuse sites as a text, in my mind, can only generate one meaning: Western culture is not concerned with sustaining life on this planet. However, as argued by post-structuralists (Derrida, Barthes), depending on the perspective one is coming from (historical, cultural etc.), texts can generate multiple meanings. For example, one

sign of destruction. Similarly, there are competing definitions of sustainability; it "is not a single movement or approach...but, is as varied as the communities and interests currently grappling with the issues it raises" (Van Der Ryn, S. & Cowan, C., 1995, p. 4). Ideally, sustainability would refer only to practices that support life (all life, not just select populations) continuing and flourishing. However, as Wolfgang Sachs points out some people interpret the purpose of sustainable development as to *sustain* development, specifically economic development (cited by Luke, 1992). Unfortunately, unless you include sustaining hierarchy and exploitation in your definition of sustainability, the Western approach to development has typically been quite destructive. From this perspective, sustainability is not about valuing life, but instead about perpetuating what Suzi Gablik (1992) calls "the dominator system" which "socializes us to pursue our own ends, to dominate and prevail, even at the expense of others and the earth. The parts function without regard for the interests of the whole. Survival is equated with dominance and power to control the environment" (p. 81).

Thaman, writing from a Pacific Island Indigenous perspective, states that the word sustainability is not translatable into her language because the concept is implied in the way(s) of her culture. Whereas eco-social sustainability is self-evident and naturalized in her culture, the division of culture and nature is naturalized in the West. Her worldview inherently values "trust, reciprocity, creativity, restraint, compassion... rooted in human relationships as well as relationships between people and their environments" (p. 245). This perspective is the antithesis of the dominant (and dominating) Western model of sustainability that conceives of development as linear economic "progress." Jeanette Armstrong, (1995) an Okanagan writer and artist, cautions that "if we don't recognize the destruction around us, if we don't see it as

destruction, if we see it as progress, or necessary, or something wonderful, then we're in terrible terrible danger because our lack of vision renders us helpless" (p. 287).

2.3 Eco-Social Ethics

Lullabye wept as asia
buckled,
rockabye einstein and all.

One for indigenous,
two for goodbye,
adam and eve and dodo.

Fly away mecca,
fly away rome,
lullabye wept in the lonely.

Once the iguanodon,
once the U.N.,
hush little orbiting gone.

~ Dennis Lee (2003, p. 58)

"Hush little orbiting gone..." Facing the potential tragedy expressed by poet Dennis Lee, Joaquin Esteva, Javier Reyes (2004), and others call for the "development of a new ethic in regards to both humans and non-humans and the development of values and practices that assure the well-being and continuance of all life" (p. 103). Likewise, Dennis Meadows, Donnella Meadows, and Jørgen Randers (2004) in their book *Limits to Growth* say that we need "a basic change of values in connection to the environment" (p. 8). Eco-social ethics is a response to the work of ecologists who have demonstrated that Western culture needs to recognize that it is "no longer tenable to maintain an environmental separation of humankind and nature" (Bonnett, 2003, p. 633). It critiques Western anthropocentrism and extends value to include more-than-human lives and the environment. It challenges the view that life-systems are valuable only in terms of their "use" for humans. Given the fact of our dependence on our environment, it

must be pointed out that were we to be truly anthropocentric, we would respect that it is in our best interest to ensure the highest possible quality of life for everything in the biota (which sustains us).

what seed can root in the wind?

A second claim made by eco-social ethicists is that life-systems have inherent value beyond their resource potential to humans. This position sees subjects as ends instead of means. Experience is understood as intersubjective, co-constituted, and cooperative, instead of dualistic and competitive. Michael Bonnett calls attention to a Buddist adage that is particularly illustrative of the type of relationship we should strive for: "man should relate to nature in the same way as a bee collects pollen from the flower, neither polluting its beauty nor depleting its fragrance" (pp. 655-656). This exemplifies a perspective whereby humans are not the sole proprietors of worth and meaning.

In his seminal and regularly referred to work, *A Sand County Almanac*, Aldo Leopold (1949) proposes the following environmental or land ethic: "that land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics" (pp. 224-225). Moreover, "a thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise" (Leopold, ibid.). Leopold values the integrity of life-supporting systems, biotic communities that include humans and non-humans. Essentially, a thing is right if it supports mutually beneficial interconnectivity and is wrong if it destructively disrupts symbiotic and homeostatic (cooperative dynamic equilibriums) relationships. Herein I would emphasize again, that "life" is not taking place "out there." Part of preserving life means we must attend to the ways our stories lead to actions that are

preserving life means we must attend to the ways our stories lead to actions that are destructive on all levels. Moreover, and following Karen Warren's (2000) critique of Leopold, we need to move from ethics that preserve to *ethics that care*. In this way, we think of self, Other, feelings, and intellect in relational terms. Adding another dimension to an eco-social ethic is Alan Durning (1990) who takes into account temporal concerns. Quite rightly he conceives of an eco-social ethic by which "each generation meets its needs without jeopardizing the prospects of future generations" to meet theirs (p. 91).[3] Likewise, Derek Bell (2004) defines eco-social ethics as coextensive with "intergenerational justice" the intent of which is to ensure for the future "the basic conditions needed to establish and to preserve a just basic structure over time" (p. 45). Bell's conception of intergenerational justice is closely related to eco-social justice, which I address in Section V.

2.4 Culture as Symbolic Ecology

the force that through the green fuse drives the flower
drives my green age

Dylan Thomas (1953, p. 10)

Our tools to make meaning, the structure of English language itself, undergird Western culture's problematic understanding of environment. Post-structural theorists argue that the English language predisposes Western culture to dualistic thinking. Binary oppositions such as mind/body, man/woman, humans/animals, culture/wilderness, and civilization/nature, compartmentalize rather than integrate our conceptions of the world. Goody argues that approaches to knowledge and science founded on the dichotomization of "two different modes of thought...[are] inadequate" (cited in Egan, p. 92). Derrida (1976) further suggests that within Western dualistic thinking there is an implied hierarchy within the oppositions whereby one concept

attention to the self and Other as existing in relationship. In the excerpted lines above, Dylan Thomas recognizes that he is driven by the same force that "drives the flower." In spite of the conceptual dualism possibly implied by the structure of the English language, poetry, by relying heavily on imagination and metaphor, often manages to respect the fantastic "otherness" of the world while at the same time acknowledging our "withness" (Lilburn, 2000). In other words, poetry can circumvent dualistic thinking, support relational consciousness, and help us to perceive, value, and embody quality attention to feelings, thoughts, and context. This kind of attention promotes awareness of eco-social intersubjectivity. Ecosystems, in contrast to the Western systems of representation, are not founded on binary oppositions. A given input does not automatically generate a given output. Ecosystems, like meanings, are relational; they are anything but formulaic, standardized, or fixed. Their stability and sustainability depend on interactivity, variability, creativity, exchange, and synthesis at points of difference. Furthermore, both processes depend on strong relational exchanges. A beautiful illustration of these dynamics expressed through an ecosystem is told in the story of the nurselog, which I quote at length:

> *For a nurse log, the line between life and death is very thin indeed. It is virtually impossible to tell where one begins and the other ends. Life moves through it like wind through a forest or light through a mountain stream. This log was born into its present life some two centuries ago...a red cedar, it blew down perhaps 40 years back and remained alive for several years before its tree-life flickered out. It has only begun to transform.*
>
> *By then, a host of bark borers, ambrosia beetles, and carpenter ants had begun their work, drilling through the protective bark, devouring the tender cambium, clearing dark tunnels through the wood, making a dwelling place for fungi, bacteria, and uncounted microbes to decompose the cellulose, blurring the line between one form of life and the next.*
>
> *Whole worlds of new life flourished inside, while on the surface, a dozen different mosses—leafy Mnium, stately Tree Moss, electric green Broom moss, elegant Feather moss—a half a dozen lichens of indescribable shapes, a couple of humble liverworts, and maybe even a*

Broom moss, elegant Feather moss—a half a dozen lichens of indescribable shapes, a couple of humble liverworts, and maybe even a slime mold made a bed for the tiny, vulnerable seeds of evergreen huckleberry, cedar and hemlock.

There is more life in this log now, in far more forms, than ever before in its history. The soil it will leave behind when it has finally rotted, taking almost the same amount of time it took to grow in the first place, will be three times richer than before in nitrogen and phosphorus. A single handful of that soil will hold more living individuals than there are humans on the entire planet and enough miles of fungal threads to span the [North American] continent. Those threads, called "mycor-rhizae," may link the fir towering over your head with a mushroom at your foot with a nearby rhododendron, with a distant alder in a clearing...

~ in L. Daloz (2003, pp. 31-32)

The nurselog provides a stage for participation and cooperation instead of competition and domination, but more than that, its very "nature" is generous and reciprocative. Relationships can be both experienced directly and indirectly (imagined), tangible and intangible. For example, I did not know about the millions of microbe lives that a nurselog supports before reading the story. Standing in a forest, I am ignorant of the innumerable interpenetrating and supporting systems pulsing around me. Most of the relationships that effect my life, I am not even aware that I am experiencing. How many people, animals, minerals, and plants did it take to make the computer I use to type this essay? Paulo Freire (1998), who coined the term "concientizacion" which politicizes participation, states, "to be is to be with" (pp. 57-58). When we recognize that we are with, we can then consider *how* we are with. I do not think this is something we can or should try to do alone. Listening and dialogue are essential for learning how to be with. From a Western cultural perspective the process of understanding the extent to which we are embedded in the life world and of coming into relational consciousness is not unlike the process of developing the critical consciousness championed by Freire. It requires openness to new, unseen information, a balancing of

respects the ethical and political dimension of the information. Our sense of self is then "understood and experienced as connected to culture (living traditions) and ecosystems" (Bowers, pp. 174-175).

We are nurselogs amongst nurselogs. However, the dominant narrative pattern in the West conceives of the environment as not us, but rather as Other than us. Robert Disch (1970) contends that "if [Western] Man is to survive...this crisis he will do so by developing an ecological psyche, one that will allow him to bridge the gap between his illusions of separateness from and superiority over what he has come to think of as "nature," and to recognize that he not only is tied to nature, but that he is nature" (p.17). As long as the illusions of separateness go unchallenged, human domination and hierarchy with respect to the environment will continue to be naturalized in Western thinking. Carolyn Merchant (1996) believes that many of the problems associated with notions of sustainability in industrialized societies are the result of this naturalized dissociation and domination. Culture, as previously stated, produces and is the product of representations of how we come to know ourselves and the world around us. The concept of symbolic ecology recognizes the interrelated nature of cultural representations (linguistic, visual, aural, etc.) and the environment. It therefore requires us to critically engage with the underlying assumptions that make the dominant paradigm possible by addressing the values they embody (Hill & Johnston, 2003).

we reason
collect clues
consult maps
surfaces
this grows
(is)
next to that
a line here
a scratch there
animal mineral vegetable

indicators
a young bloom
still wet
pinched
between finger and thumb
examined/deciphered
this probing
not quite a science

dig here

Merchant further contends that the way to "break through the illusion of separateness and dualism [represented in the symbolic ecology of Western culture]...is to establish partnerships characterized by reciprocal relationships that underlie the experience of caring and being cared for" (p. 128). By approaching cultural production from a perspective of "relational ways of being" (Hill, S., Watson, S., & Wilson, K., 2004, p. 61), we can begin to re-story (restore) our notions, or lack thereof, of eco-social intersubjectivity. Eco-social sustainability requires that we ground our symbolic ecology (i.e. poems, schools, interactions, and curriculum) in non-dominating values such as relatedness, participation, collaboration, care and attention (Smith, 2004). By integrating these values and practices into our worldview, we can transition from ego-centrism to eco-centrism; we can move from an overwhelming sense of disconnection to an awakened a sense of connection (Luke). Like the nurselog, we can commit our lives to the creation of life-supporting relationships. The next section explores how we might conceive of attendant learning practices.

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[1] The English novelist George Gissing writing in the 1890s responded to his experience of industrialization by "insisting on the degree to which people have become machines, in harmony with the machinery amid which they spend their lives" (cited in Fletcher, 2004, pp. 101-102). It is obvious to me that machinery lacks the capacity to empathize and develop reciprocating non-dominating relationships...See also McLuhen's treatment of the social impact of media technology on community and Baudrillard's (2001) writings on social dissociation that he calls "simulacra."
[2] For your eco-footprint see http://www.myfootprint.org/.
[3] The Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Seventh Generation Guardianship principle holds that "the first mandate.... is to ensure that our decision-making is guided by consideration of the welfare and

well being of the seventh generation to come." See the Bemidji Statement on Seventh Generation Guardianship released July 6, 2006 during the 14th Protecting Mother Earth Conference, convened by the Indigenous Environmental Network in Bemidji, Minnesota. Accessed online at http://www.ienearth.org/bemidj_statement_7th%20gen_guardianship.doc.

- Three -

The Spirit Rises/Connective Education
(Evaporation)

Let the beauty we love be what we do.
There are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.

Keep walking, though there's no place to get to.
Don't try to see through the distances.
That's not for human beings. Move within,
But don't move the way fear makes you move.

Turn as the earth and the moon turn,
Circling what they love.

~ Rumi, Trans. Coleman Barks (1997, pp. 278-279)

As I sit *here/home,* eco/oikos, this summer peaks and wanes. I am thirty years (maybe more) of the air, sun, water, animals, minerals, and vegetables. The cycles continue even though I haven't asked them to (up and over, ocean to cloud to river to land to ocean). I wonder to myself why, though I learned about the water (hydrolic) cycle and the breath (respiration) cycle in school (and passed the tests), I never learned of the "hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." I don't think this is a matter of separation of church and state; it is a matter of survival. Instead, I learned about composition, how to position words into essays and my thinking into an order. I learned about seeds becoming trees and the leaves receiving light (photosynthesis) and giving back by falling to the ground and decomposing into/becoming (the nitric cycle) again soil for the seed. These wondrous cycles were flattened into 8 ½ x 11 pages with fill-in-the-blank, multiple-choice questions, or short answer essays; the aim was to get an "A". Most of the information provided by the accepted, not hidden, curriculum was actually quite amazing and might have been meaningful and relevant to my life if anyone had made an attempt to situate it within a broader eco-social cultural, philosophical, and political context. However, the information was decontextualized, alienated, and alienating. Lacking connection, the exercises seemed to me spirtless, pendantic, deadening, and ultimately manipulative.

3.1 Dominant Values and Practices in Education

What kind of nation is this
deleting love from its curriculum
the art of poetry
the mystery of women's eyes
what kind of nation is this
battling every raincloud?

~ Nizar Kabbani, quoted in Joy Harjo (2002)

Learning cannot be separated from being anymore than humans can be separated from nature. Thinking back on my experience, I can see that I responded to the lack of congruence, lack of imagination, lack of respect, and lack of integration presented by my formal schooling by actively resisting "the system" and seeking out opportunities outside of school where I could more fully engage as a whole person. In school, I had the unnerving feeling that the parameters placed on my being/learning were not helping me to grow.[1] Rather, they were helping me to conform to the needs of the market place and also paradoxically through excessive emphasis on individual achievement lose, or never form, an ethic, that I now believe to be essential, of "self-in-community."

The concept of self-in-community is especially problematic if we do not understand ourselves as active participants in a "community," if we are fixated solely on uncovering our individual identities but are unable to see how our "self" is the result of other affecting and cooperating "selves." Due to the rhetoric of de-contextualized individualism and anthropocentrism in dominant Western culture, the concepts of both self and community are highly ambiguous.[2] John Dewey (1916) rightly points out that "words like 'society' and 'community' are likely to be misleading; they have a tendency to make us think there is a single thing corresponding to the single word" (p. 174). Community, according to Giovanna Di Chiro (1998) is relational and place-based.

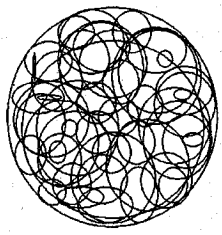
Moreover, it emerges from "geographic, cultural and emotional convergences in the ideas and practices of humans in relationship with specific environments" (Di Chiro, p. 138). Community emerges from relationships. Each individual exists with and in a multitude of contingencies that together constitute her experience of community. When we strengthen communities and develop an appreciation (cognitive/affective) for the depth of our interconnections, our shared experiences, we strengthen individuals. Strong communities (i.e. dynamic, cooperative, and creative, etc.) are the result of strong relationships between selves and non-selves. Moreover, each individual has something valuable and unique to contribute to her community. Not only has technology emancipated us from "place," it has emancipated us from each other and therefore ourselves. Chemicals and machines now take the place of what would have been human and more-than-human relationships. How can we preserve and strengthen community, and therefore an understanding of self-in-community, if we do not re-learn how to participate in cooperative relationships?

Community, understood as the embodiment of relational consciousness, was not a priority of my formal schooling. My experience of school was that it promoted disequilibrium, the cognitive domain dominating other knowledges. I was led to believe that if I did not "master" the given curriculum and get straight "A's," I would get an "F" at life. What is the point of getting straight "A's," if when I walk out into the world, I cannot relate to nor recognize neither the world nor myself? This is exactly what happened. My formal schooling up to and including my undergraduate degree saturated my brain with dissociated concepts that led me to feel displaced, even de-placed. Only recently have I been able to recognize how profoundly unsustainable it is to compartmentalize and systematically isolate the self and the Other, human and more-

than-human, not to mention the mind, body, and spirit. Instead of celebrating that our embodied spirits can and should rise, change shape, and spiral into being, culturally we naturalize intellectual, ecological, and economic colonization, industrialization, and corporate domination at the expense of life's processes, ourselves included.

Diagrams of my Ontological Journey

Pre-school



Grade 1

Aa Bb Cc Dd Ee Ff Gg
Hh Ii Jj Kk Ll Mm Nn
Oo Pp Qq Rr Ss Tt Uu
Vv Ww Xx Yy Zz

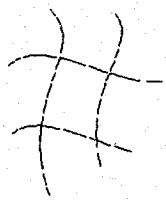
Grade 4

+	-
X	/

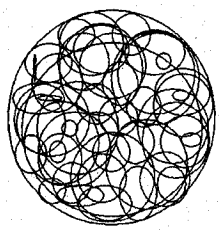
Grade 10

A+	*A*	*A-*	*B+*
B	*B-*	*C+*	*C*
C-	*D+*	*D*	*D-*
F+	*F*	*F-*	*E+*

Undergraduate



Graduate



The diagrams above illustrate the changes in my perception of knowledge; I move from a young sense of being, to a self-conscious self-ordering, to a more mature self-conscious sense of being (like water, I cycle, turn, return, and renew). My critique of

formal education follows a similar course. This section elucidates, by comparison and contrast, the founding values and outcomes of first, traditional education and second, eco-social inquiry/connective education.

In my experience of education being linear, dominating, and uni-directional, I am not alone. Educator Sam Keene (1970, pp. 38-39) recounts an incident he experienced in the first grade. During penmanship class a warbler perched on a branch outside the school window. As a young boy, he was mesmerized. The bird sparked his imagination. Classically, the teacher scolded him severely and put him back on task. What is lost when the wonder of a bird is intentionally excluded from a students' learning experience, when we are consistently discouraged from singing with the world? More than simply a "teachable moment" is lost; our relationship with the world and ourselves is diminished. We learn to dissociate from the life world and to adapt to disconnected structures. The result being that we become disconnected and no longer know our place nor understand the importance of the self-in-community.

> *Oh! Blessed rage for order, pale Ramone*
> *The maker's rage to order words of the sea*
>
> *Words of the fragrant portals, dimly-starred,*
> *And of ourselves and of our origins...*
>
> *~ from the "Idea of Order at Key West" by Wallace Stevens (1967, pp. 98-99)*

My teachers told me that their mania for control, for imposing order, was "for [my] own good" and that they "knew better." They gave me assurances that "mastering" such-and-such would provide me with a competitive advantage and the opportunity to "compete" for and "score" a decent job with a salary sufficient to be able to afford a suburban house with a garage and a car. How does this help me to "be here for good in

every sense"? How does it help me to feel wonder and gratitude or in the words of Mary Oliver (1992, p. 55):

> ...how to pay attention, how to fall down
> into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,
> how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,
> which is what I have been doing all day.
> Tell me, what else should I have done?
> Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?
> Tell me, what is it you plan to do
> with your one wild and precious life?

Begging the question, "what would an eco-social life-supporting approach to learning look like" necessarily leads to a critique of dominant, controlling, linear, rationalistic, unbalanced forms and structures of education. In North America, education functions in and for society by producing informed (indoctrinated) citizens. It seeks to ensure economic progress by supplying a skilled (trained and obedient) labour source for the industrial sector. David Carr (2004), commenting on the apparent priorities of the public education system observes,

> It is arguable that much modern educational theory, policy and practice has gone the way of *affectively disengaged* rather than engaged reason. Western liberal democracies seem to have been guided by an *instrumental economic rationalism* that is more utilitarian than Kantian, and more concerned with the production of producers and consumers than with the cultivation of contemplation (p. 236).

Increasingly, schools are a place of knowledge management where learning is equated with work. Students must "get down to business," "pay attention," and do their "homework." No one teaches that "knowing is *not* a paying job with pension and benefits; it is not a steady state" (Bringhurst, 1995, p. 59). Instead of being taught to turn with the world, with each other, with the cycles, students are taught an efficient, sanitized, power-driven, and standardized (hugely biased and in many cased non-

factual) curriculum, i.e. cultural story.[3] Schools focus almost exclusively on developing the student's verbal, mathematical, and scientific competencies. Students are taught to pursue standardized outcomes instead of connective organic processes. Instrumentalist values in the classroom, explicitly and detrimentally, favour the cognitive over the affective and profit over sustainability. Though, as stated by Rishma Dunlop (2004), and not generally acknowledged by standardized curriculums,

> The embrace of beauty can be education. This beauty is found in our constant revision and interrogation of our own positions in relation to others, so that our minds and hearts and empathies are opened to others (p. 95).

In my experience, even art education that supposedly intends to cultivate aesthetic appreciation and the "embrace of beauty" was treated with the utmost instrumentalism. I remember in primary school that my art teacher's idea of "art" was to have us bring in magazines from which to copy images. We would choose a picture that we wanted to draw and then impose a grid on top of it. Then we took a blank piece of paper and drew a grid on it. Our task was to transfer the image square by square from the magazine picture to our drawing. The result was usually a fairly bizarre (no matter how hard we tried) and unnatural looking image.

Upon reflection, this method of "art," far from "opening our minds, hearts and empathies to others," took as its teaching model the "information transfer" or "banking" approach to education described by Freire (1970) where there is a one-to-one exchange between what the teacher gives to and gets back from the student. My art teacher didn't encourage in us the full-bodied, unfolding, creative process of discovering "ourselves in relation to others," but rather *taught us a system of imposing order*.[4] In content and form, students are taught that the mind and body are separate. Similarly, nature is constructed as Other: a "resource to be used, harnessed, conquered, tamed,

measured, distributed, and owned" (Nozick, 1992, p. 14). Furthermore, cultural concepts such as property, ownership, wealth and intelligence are understood in hierarchical and private terms. This highly anthropocentric education model naturalizes disconnection, alienation, and psychological splitting (Bowers, 1995). It has no time (because "time is money") for intimacy, appreciation, contemplation, connectedness, or process.

instructions to the seed:
follow the leader. make us proud.
don't get distracted. don't fall behind.

In form, Western cultural values institutionalize and privilege high-status, market-driven knowledge and delegitimize other ways of knowing by making them economically nonviable. Within the learning paradigm supported by the dominant value system, knowledge "acquisition" is conceived of mechanistically rather than organically. This standardized, regimented, linear, competitive, efficient, and Western science-oriented approach does not see knowledge as living and transformative but as inert and/or some "thing" to be wilfully constrained. Moreover, the teacher possesses it and it is the student's "job" to jump through the pedagogical hoops to demonstrate her degree of mastery and achievement. Students "pass" if they can repeat to the teacher information that s/he already had instead of integrating and creating a personal understanding from their unique location. If this model is empowering, it is empowering to someone other than the students.

...water has a way of changing things and my map is
rivers and rivers so many rivers i've lost sight of my land...

3.2 Life-centred & Connective Education

In contrast to a modern education that "tended to produce unbalanced, underdimensioned people tailored to fit the modern economy," David Orr (1992, p.130) argues for a life-centred agenda in education, a connective education, designed "to heal, connect, liberate, empower, create, and celebrate." He goes on to say,

> education relevant to the transition to a sustainable society, demands first, an uncompromising commitment to life and its preservation...By a commitment to life I mean a commitment, pervading learning and research at all levels, to health harmony, balance, wholeness, and diversity as these qualities apply to both human and natural systems. Following Schweitzer, a commitment to life rests on a deep sense of the sacredness of life expressed as love, nurture, creativity, wonder, faith, and justice...More than an attitude, it signifies a motivating and energizing force underlying education and research transcending narrow concerns of professional acclaim, career advancement, and institutional aggrandizement" (pp. 133-134).

Furthermore, the aims, according to Orr, of "connective education" are to become aware of "the patterns which connect," to strive for "personal wholeness... [and also], to reflect the rhythms of life itself, moving between sobriety and mirth, wisdom and foolishness, work and play, sacred and profane, [to gain an] awareness of limits and limitless hope, suffering and celebration" (pp. 138-139). Whereas connective education recognizes and values patterns of interdependence and seeks to embody a cooperative eco-social life ethic, it is implicitly political. Gregory Smith theorizes that connective education has the capacity to facilitate a recognition of the degree to which our "own welfare rests on the welfare of everyone and everything around [us]" (p. 33). Furthermore, such recognition may lead to the "rejection of a position of domination in favour of one predicated on interdependence and reciprocity" (Smith, ibid.). Learning to value and care for human and more-than-human Others poses a challenge to the learned Western values of standardization, efficiency, and competition because when

you understand yourself as an active, interdependent and interrelated participant, you are less likely to accept a dominative, exploiting, and alienating status-quo.

3.3 Eco-social Inquiry: Turning as the Sun, Moon, and Earth Turn

Look, the trees
are turning
their own bodies
into pillars
of light

~ Mary Oliver (1992, p. 177)

Life-systems, ecosystems, are constantly in process, transforming, renewing, being and becoming. Rather than linear and progressive, nature is cyclical. In theory, nothing is ultimately useless, lost, or destroyed, but *re-formed*, changed. While matter may not be lost or destroyed, interdependent, reciprocal relationships can be. Therefore, our concern must be that in the cycle of re-formation and transformation quality is maintained or increased rather than systematically degraded. Eco-social inquiry, like connective and life-centred education, differs from the instrumentalist approach to learning in that it values cooperative and mutually beneficial relationships between the parts and the whole. It provides a "frame of sense-making" that considers "non-linear, cyclical, unique opportunities, mutualistic relationships, and margins and edges as the sites where creativity and productivity are highest" (Hill, S., Watson, S., & Wilson, K., p. 49). Eco-social inquiry nurtures a philosophical space founded on cooperative and dynamic, non-dominating relationships (Hill, S., Watson, S., & Wilson, K., ibid.). As noted by Maxine Greene (1995),"a dialectical relationship marks every human situation: it may be the relation between individual and the environment, self and society, or living consciousness and the object-world" (p. 52). Orr contends that a truly cooperative learning space within a dialectical relationship requires the ability to

perceive and acknowledge "the existence and interests of the Other" (p. 90). Furthermore, a non-dominating philosophical and relational space created between the self and non-self bears many of "the characteristics of a good conversation" (Orr, ibid.). He observes that in conversation we define ourselves "in relation to another." A good conversation is honest, dynamic, reciprocative instead of uni-directional, requires thoughtful listening and response, and is unhurried. Like an ecosystem, the form and structure of a conversation emerge from the interplay of the parts. According to Orr, the process of entering into an embodied non-dominating and reciprocating conversation with the non-self is "a restorative and healing art" (p. 91). Through "good conversation," we may develop relational consciousness and understand that human life is a result and process of "dependent co-arising" (Macy, 1990). As a component of eco-social inquiry, embodied relational consciousness can help us to conceptualize alternatives to techno-economic, instrumentalist, individualistic, functionalist, and material ends-over-means dominant pedagogical approaches. Eco-social inquiry encourages systems thinking, pattern recognition, imaginative learning, dynamism, reciprocity, and the healthy integration of parts and whole. It invites us to engage our entire beings in the processes of living, learning, and sharing.

3.4 Feeling-Full Engagement, Imagination, and Eco-Social Inquiry

Humans contribute minimally, if at all, to the overall functioning of the environment, yet our impact is both extensive and intensive. Derek Bell says that eco-social inquiry challenges us to think critically about our contribution to ecological issues not the least of which is loss of life. To do so we need to cultivate what Bonnett calls "consciousness." Bonnett argues that awareness is a precondition of critical thinking and

Bell asserts it is essential to eco-social education. However, a precondition of awareness, as pointed out by David Carr depends on the

> effective liberation from what Iris Murdoch has called "the fat relentless ego" (anthropocentrism). [Liberation] depends rather upon proper attachment of human sentiments to something beyond ourselves: this may occur in the genuine love of one soul for another, or for the starry heavens above but either love stands to be enhanced by *feelingful engagement* with poetry, painting or music (p. 237) (italics added).

Presumably the enhancement Carr speaks of results not from the particular poem, painting, or song but from the "feelingful engagement" ("cognitive feeling" i.e. connection) that is a precondition of the consciousness that will allow us to critically engage eco-social issues. Since instrumentalist approaches to education privilege cognitive knowledge over sensed/felt/embodied knowledge, let us now consider how imagination might help us to achieve integration of the two in our approach to eco-social learning.

the bridge will save us
and words are that bridge

the bridge will save us
and colours are that bridge

the bridge will save us
and we are that bridge

Darlene Clover (2003) citing Maxine Greene writes, "the imagination allows people to seek social and environmental redress, critique and challenge and design new forms of civic engagement, collaboration and learning and gives credence to alternative realities" (p. 11). Imagination empowers the individual by providing her with a vision of a possible alternative. Whether that is an imagined connection with another whereby the self is extended, or an imagined self-in-relation to the circumstances of one's life,

imagination functions as a bridge, a vision, an opportunity. Imagination can be the impetus for change.

John Dewey claims that imagination is "a phase of natural events capable of extracting from existing conditions unrealized possibilities for meaning" (quoted in Granger, 1999, p. 52). Granger also cites Coleridge's assertion that "all conscious experience has of necessity some degree of imaginative quality [...] imagination is the gateway through which meanings find their way into present interaction" (ibid.). Imagination synthesizes the old and the new and transforms an original orientation or perspective. The Other, when experienced in the absence of imagination, remains Other. The imaginative act connects apparently disconnected beings, entities, ideas, materials, etc. We must admit that we can never fully know the reality of another. However, by attending to our emotional responses and our imagination we can perceive and come to value our interrelatedness (Nussbaum). Through an "imaginative leap" and an acknowledgment of the autonomy and difference of the Other, we can connect on shared, rather than individualistic and projected, terms. Donald Blumfeld-Jones (2004) cautions us not to romanticize the Other and see him/her/it as a mere reflection of ourselves, but that we "treat [s/he/it] with respect and love precisely because he or she is a mystery to us" (p. 275). Direct experience, and an imaginative leap out of ourselves, allows us to respect the integrity of the Other's difference while also valuing our relatedness. Through, for example, storytelling or making and sharing art, imagination provides opportunities for us to experience a new scope of meaning.

> Imagination is a way of being oriented toward things, seeing and feeling them, as they constitute an integral whole. It is the extensive blending of interests at the point where self and world come together [...] an imaginative experience is what happens when varied materials of sense quality, emotion, and meaning come together in a union that marks a new birth in the world (Granger, p. 53).

Imaginative engagement provides a "stimulating disturbance" that reorders previous knowledge, establishes equilibrium between past and present, and new meanings and relationships emerge (Granger). Imagination gives entrance to alternative, possible worlds. It has a circular effect by extending us beyond our present reality to an intimate, cognitive and sensory, engagement with the perceived Other and then connects us back to ourselves with a changed perspective on our place of departure. It's a process of relating and cannot rightly be conceived of in before-and-after terms.

In form, imaginative learning is a dialogical and growth-oriented process. Human creativity, like connective and eco-social education, emerges from this process and is a result of knowledge-in-relation. As humans are a part (and a result) of ecological processes, it is not surprising that Coleridge (quoted in Granger) equates creativity with the following common metaphor:

> Like a plant, the imagination generates and produces its own form, drawing in and then transforming the alien and diverse elements of its surrounding environment. It is nourished by sensory material much like a plant is nourished by soil, water, air, and light. It enables the seed of the mind to germinate and blossom like the unfolding of a flower (pp. 50-51).

Human creativity and feelingful engagement can potentially serve as imaginative conduits "to discern the universal through the particular" (Granger, ibid.). However, not only do we need "better ways of imagining nature and humanity's relation to it," we need to be able to respond accordingly (Gilcrest, 2002, p. 24). I think that in the case of eco-social issues, it is improper to perceive and appreciate interconnectedness and not act in solidarity with life-supporting people, stories, and processes. The arts have the potential to lead us to embodied awareness. However, beyond awareness we need to be able to think critically and respond organically and responsibly, in and for our community(ies). This is not merely a case of identifying the problem or even identifying

with the Other. It is a case of recognizing ourselves *with* the Other and complicit in their and our collective degradation. Imagination is imperative, in terms of connective education, to first, the development of a sense of interrelatedness and second, to a responsible re-visioning and restory/ing of a cooperative, non-dominating culture.

3.5 Academic Research and Relational Consciousness

> *... The actor is*
> *A metaphysician in the dark, twanging*
> *An instrument, twanging a wiry string that gives*
> *Sounds passing through sudden rightnesses, wholly*
> *Containing the mind, below which it cannot descend,*
> *Beyond which it has no will to rise.*
>
> *~ Wallace Stevens (p. 174)*

Eco-social inquiry and connective education, like art, are infused with the intention to discover relationships or understand how existing relationships influence others. The discovery or production of new relational understandings is the foundation of meaning, of knowledge. Meaning-making is not mere identification, but transformation. Whether by uniting opposites or by emphasizing contradiction, humans (researchers, artists and poets alike) by virtue of our mere existence create new relationships. In the poem quoted above, Wallace Stevens says that art is "the finding of a satisfaction"; it is the active finding, or making of a "right relationship," a balance. The satisfaction found results from the *interaction* of the actor and the instrument. It is interesting that the act of finding is not singular but multiple; it produces "sudden rightnesses." The act of finding/creating transformative relationships requires a perceptual orientation that is not either/or, but both/and. Such relationships are not founded on binary oppositions (subject/object) but directly engage the interpenetrating nature of being, "work-the-hyphen," and challenge dualistic thinking (Fine, 1999).

Knowledge production is a creative process. Transformative research is dependent upon the ability to study relationships, make connections, and to intentionally ignite change (new or stronger mutualistic relationships) through the process. Hopefully, the change will be life-affirming, but that depends on one's interpretation/understanding of the term "life-affirming."

Quality learning (research) requires quality relationships. However, in both the dominant Western culture and the dominant Western academic research culture we have fostered what Lasch calls the "minimal self" (cited in O'Sullivan and Taylor, 2003, p. 11). The minimal self "rejects or disregards elements of our humanity that are self-affirming and life-sustaining—the quality of relationships to each other and to our context, our inherent capacities to heal, renew, and evolve, and our worthiness to simply sojourn as integral inhabitants of the earth" (ibid.). Like a nurselog, inquiry grounded in relational consciousness, instead of controlling or dominating, interactively participates, is aware of and respects limits, is in process, and is ethically oriented toward the dynamics of discovery.

Like all living forms that have evolved on this planet, humans are highly adaptable. This is both positive and negative. We have adapted to a cultural story that supports modes of being/learning that are alienated from life's cycles. As Freire (1998) notes, adaptation to dominating situations can constitute a "denial of humanization" (p. 72). Humanization or embodied relational consciousness and its attendant responsibilities necessarily includes supporting our "capacities to heal, renew, and evolve." One of the paths to healing and restoration for the minimal self is to develop a sense of "place" through feelingful engagement with particulars (Others). It must also be noted that though I have elaborated on the need for balance, connection,

imagination, and feelingful engagement in education, I do not mean to suggest that the reversal of the intellect/felt hierarchy is a solution to our destructive habits of learning and being.

"burn your maps, that is not what I mean"
~ Gwendolyn MacEwen (1969, p. 30)

What eco-social and connective approaches to learning value more than anything are diverse, cooperative, interdependent, co-constituted communities made up of balanced individuals who understand, honour, and cultivate their interconnection. Like most eco-social pedagogues, I support an interdisciplinary and place-driven (non-universalizing) curriculum that complements the connective values and practices described in this section. As Rumi wrote in the opening quotation, "there are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground." And the spirit rises!

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[1] I acknowledge that not every school is as traditional as the one I experienced. I also recognize that I responded to it in ways that were unique to me.
[2] See Robert D. Putnam (2000). Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community. New York: Simon & Schuster, and bell hooks (2003). Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope. New York: Routledge.
[3] See Daniel N. Paul (2000*). We Were Not The Savages: A Mi'kmaq Perspective on the Collision between European and Native American Civilizations.* Halifax, N.S.: Nimbus Press.
[4] We grow up to balance checking accounts, live in suburbia, and believe that it is "natural." We believe that order and control is superior to cooperation, partnership, and alliance.

- Four -

The Spirit Changes Shape/Eco-social Poetry
(Condensation)

From "The Spirit of Place"

The mountain laurel in bloom
Constructed like needlework
Tiny half-pulled stitches piercing
Flushed and stippled petals

Here in these woods it grows wild
Midsummer moonrise turns it opal
The night breathes with its clusters
Protected species

Meaning endangered
Here in these hills
This valley we have felt
A kind of freedom

Planting the soil have known
Hours of a calm, intense and mutual solitude
Reading and writing
Trying to clarify connect

Past and present near and far
The Alabama quilt
The Botswana basket
History the dark crumble

Of last year's compost
Filtering softly through your living hand
but as well here we face
instantaneous violence ambush male

dominion on a back road
to escape in a locked car windows shut
skimming the ditch your split-second
survival reflex taking on the world

as it is not as we wish it
as it is not as we work for it
to be

by Adrienne Rich (1981, pp. 41-42)

4.1 Poetry and Place

"Reading and writing/ Trying to clarify connect...." (Rich, ibid.)

Up to this point in the paper, I have been trying to clarify for myself and the reader those aspects of the dominant narrative pattern in Western culture that when performed in the world have serious consequences for both life-processes and the ways we structure and approach learning. Adrienne Rich's poem above expresses her perception of connections and tensions between human culture and more-than-human nature. Importantly, she sees them as relational instead of oppositional. Rich links human peace and environmental peace, human violence and more-than-human nature's exploitation. In the following section, I discuss the ways in which the process of poetry writing (and reading, but primarily writing) can bring us into relationship with "radical others" and embody many of the values of "connective" education. I explore how "poetic attention" can inform eco-social inquiry and how the writing of a poem can be a trace of embodied eco-social values (McKay, 1995).

Barbara Kingsolver (2004) writes, "among the greatest of gifts is to know one's place" (p. 40). Coextensive with "knowing one's place" is to have a sense of connectedness with "time present and time past...both present in time future" (Eliot, p. 11).[1] Knowing our place is to feel the interrelatedness of times, places, peoples, and stories and to be at homê (eco/oikos) in a world that we love as ourselves. It is a dynamic and creative process of developing intimacy in our relationships. Intimacy depends on "feeling with." It cannot be achieved intellectually but must be embodied. Through knowing one's place we understand and feel the extent to which we conspire – "breathe with each other" (Macy, 1991).

*

Consider our breathing, which might appear the most personal and intimate of acts, since the atoms of oxygen we draw into our lungs moves on to sustain each cell in our innermost body and brain. Yet that very breathing links us directly and immediately with beings of the past and future; in each sniff and sigh and lungful they participate.

Wondrous are the mathematical givens of our presence to each other in this way. Reflect on the fact that the average breath you breathe contains about ten sextillion atoms, or ten to the twenty-second power. Now reflect on the amazing fact that the Earth's atmosphere itself is of a size to contain the same number of breaths. This remarkable symmetry... means that with each inhalation you take in an average of one atom from each of the breaths in our world, and with each exhalation send back the same average of an atom to each breath. This exchange repeated twenty thousand times a day by each of the Earth's billions of people produces such an "interbreathing" that, as scientists conclude, "each breath you breathe must contain a quadrillion atoms breathed by the rest of humankind within the past few weeks and more than a million atoms breathed personally sometime by each and any person on earth.

The circulation of air through normal atmospheric turbulence provides the diffusion that allows this to be so, as scientist Guy Murchie explains. And he goes on to evoke what this can mean: "Your next breath will include a million odd atoms of oxygen and nitrogen once breathed by Pythagoras, Socrates, Confusius, Moses, Einstein, or anyone you can think of...And going on to animals, you may add a few million molecules from the mighty blowings of the whale that swallowed Johah, with the snorts of Mohammed's white mare, from the restive raven that Noah sent forth from the ark..."

By the same token atoms of each breath you breathe will find their way into the lungs of beings yet to come, in whatever century they may walk the Earth....Sustained within the web of life, we breathe with each other (Macy, p. 230).

*

You who let yourselves feel:
enter the breathing that is more than your own.

~ Rilke, Part One, Sonnet IX.

*

When I talk about poetry I am not simply referring to thin-spined small books with short-lines that stylistically employ various poetic devices. The kind of poetry I want to explore here, the kind of poetry that I think will help restore a dynamic balance within our techno-rationalistic lop-sided culture, is processual, caring, relational, humble, honest, attentive, reciprocating, connective, and embodied. It has all the characteristics of a good conversation. As much as I am interested in the outcome (poem), I am

equally interested in the "pre-poem" process, the ground that supports "what crops up." Because the poetic attention of the "pre-poem" is felt and comes into being in a place beyond human language, I look to the translation of those experiences in poems; I believe there is a correspondence between the two (tenor/vehicle). I am talking about a process whereby the writer is changed, where the poem is a trace of an intimate (felt), and transformative relationship that turns as the sun and earth and moon turn, that cycles like water (ocean to cloud to river to land to ocean), like seasons; I am talking about a restorative process that connects and heals.

4.2 Eco-Criticism and Poetics

Before looking at the convergences of poetic attention and eco-social learning, it is useful to briefly consider how other writers have contributed to current thinking about the practice and theory of eco-poetry. Eco-criticism and eco-poetry are relatively new concepts. While there is a long history of writers being inspired by and writing about "nature," since the Enlightenment nature was generally romanticized and/or understood as Other. Eco-criticism arose as environmental consciousness took hold in North America in the 1970's.[2] At that time, Western literary critics were responding with alarm to the state of the "natural" world. They decided to offer an earth-centred response to modernist domination, alienation, and individualism, by valuing the context (external "nature") and subjectivity (internal "nature") of post-modernism but going further by taking issue with hyper-individualism and the literary semantics of deconstruction. Instead, eco-critics aimed to problematize the ways we conceptualize place, nature, culture, wilderness, civilization, self, Other, rational, and irrational. Simon C. Estok notes (2001) that "ecocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, firstly by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather

than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections" (p. 220). Therefore, a priority of ecocriticism is not literary deconstruction but cultural restoration.[3]

Because the field is only just emerging, there is no authoritative definition of eco-poetry and because it applies ecological thought to writing, the definition is apt to be more fluid than fixed, more diverse than singular. For the purposes of this paper, Scott Bryson's (2005) characterization is quite helpful. He suggests that eco-poetry/poetics consistently acknowledges interconnectedness, is humble in the face of the wonder of life, and is skeptical of technical "progress" for its own sake. Bryson insightfully argues that eco-poetry is at once a form of opening to an awareness of the expansiveness of life and a form of place-making, of focusing on a particular experience, thing, person, or place. As a process, eco-poetry is relational, non-dominating, dialogical, reciprocating, and transformative.

Within eco-criticism there is a conflict about whether more-than-human nature is Other or if humans and human cultures are also expressions of nature. However, both sides of the argument agree that the relationship is important. I believe that humans are part of nature; though we resist, we are bound to the same fundamental processes of life and death as the rest of (what we currently understand) as "nature." It is important also to remember that without humans the rest of nature could (if we do not do too much damage) continue. We, on the other hand cannot under any circumstances exist independently. We depend on a diversity of other life-forms for our survival.

Both eco-critics and writers acknowledge that a tension exists between writing from an individual human perspective and anthropomorphizing more-than-human nature. Wendall Berry observes,

> It is a mistake to proceed on the basis of an assumed division between nature and humanity, or wilderness and domesticity. But it is also a mistake to assume that there is no difference between the natural and the human. If these things could be divided, our life would be far simpler and easier than it is, just as it would be if they were not different. Our problem, exactly, is that the human and the natural are indivisible, and yet are different (cited in Bryson, p. 37).

In my mind, this observation reinforces the importance of how we come to know our place. We are inter-related and yet distinct. I believe that there is tremendous value in the individual and her response to her embeddedness in the life world. David Orr argues that all education is environmental education; we just have greater and lesser degrees of awareness. Does this mean that all poetry is eco-social poetry? Is New Yorker Frank O'Hara's verse eco-poetry (Quetchenbach, 2002)? O'hara does not commune like Thoreau with a pond but he does express a depth of awareness about his environment which, though urban, is a dimension of nature. This is an issue of perspective. Poetry can be understood as an expression of human "nature" just as a blossom is an expression of a flower's "nature." Egan proposes, "we begin as poets" (p. 125). Through imaginative participation and an aim for communion, the founding consciousness of humans is inherently poetic. Our thinking is poetic, meaning it depends upon imaginative communion. Egan argues that it is only through excessive rationalistic conditioning that we dissociate from our connection with the life world and lose a sense of ourselves as poets. In other words, we lose our sense of place. Eco-social poetry as a restorative practice and process seeks to regain our founding relational consciousness as participants in the life world. Furthermore, I think it emerges from a keen awareness of the tension between what Bryson calls space (what we can never know) and place (our desire to feel at home with the world), the destruction of life in all forms, a deep care for Others, and a commitment to cooperative working partnerships. Eco-social poetry understands that emphasis on a de-contextualized

individual human life dips easily into solipsism and compromises our ability to build relationships. Will such a perspective add value to life in the present, or even better in seven generations?[4] Still, we know our own perspective best and we should be cautioned to speak on behalf of anything or anyone else. Putting words in the mouths of Others can come across as romantic hubris, idealization that avoids relationship; making grand universal proclamations is not useful either. A writer's understanding of place depends on her understanding of her self-in-community. Knowing our place is not an either/or matter of knowing ourselves or "knowing" Others. Instead, knowing our place is inherently creative (everything changes) and it depends on an ability to be *with* emotionally and intellectually, to enter into non-dominating, appreciative, respectful and reciprocating relationships and call on all our senses and imagination to do so.

4.3 Poetic Inquiry as Connective Education

Poet Seamus Heaney, in his 1995 Nobel Prize acceptance speech, conjures an image of himself as a young boy climbing onto an arm of the family sofa to listen to the radio. He makes an analogy between tuning-in (outside/inside) to the radio and tuning-in to himself, stories, the world, languages, histories, thoughts, feelings, and Others. As Heaney realized, one must "get close to the actual...in order to concentrate [one's] hearing" (Heaney, 1995, p. 2). The "actual" for Heaney is an open form, a wonderfully diverse, heterogeneous, down-to-earth, sensual world. The ability to "tune-in," to know one's place, requires attention to particulars. Attention to particulars does not preclude emotion and imagination, but rather being "earnest and devoted to things as they are," necessarily includes them (Heaney, p. 3). Tuning-in, a way of learning one's place, requires one to be slow, dynamic, and open. It fosters a mutual discovery of oneself,

the Other, and oneself *with* the Other in dialogue. Such an orientation allows us to become aware of the specificity and diversity of life. It also brings us constantly to a place of tension between knowing and unknowing, the blurry border-zone where difference and sameness, interpenetrate and effect each other. As an active and present-to-experience state of being, Heaney praises the ability of poetry to be "at once a buoyancy and a steadying" (p. 11). He credits it for making an order, for helping him to find the frequency that cuts through the static, to "tune-in." Poetry offers a process that helps us to listen closely, "strain towards a strain," sense, perceive, reflect, respond, and establish relationships within and from experience (Heaney, p. 10).

Seamus Heaney, like many other poets, does not self-identify as an eco-social poet. However, he does acknowledge and value that poetry can help to "re-orient us within our world" (Bryson, p.12). The process of poetic engagement, of relationship-making, that Heaney describes promotes an awareness that "when we try to pick out anything itself, we find it linked to everything else in the universe" (John Muir cited by Capra, p. 3). Carl Leggo refers to the process of "re-orienting us within our world," sinking into relational consciousness, as "organic rumination" (p. 80) and Don McKay calls this "poetic attention."

Through poetic attention it is possible that we will develop feelings of care for the Other. Mary Oliver explains in an interview:

> Before we move from recklessness into responsibility, from selfishness to decent happiness, we must want to save our world. And in order to want to save the world we must learn to love it—and in order to love it we must become familiar with it again (cited in Bryson, p. 76).

Poetry then offers a way to reacquaint ourselves with the world and with ourselves. Perhaps one of the reasons why more people don't read or write poetry is because our techno-rationalistic dominating cultural narrative has taught us to be skeptical of, even

suppress and disregard, our emotions and the nurturing of mutualistic relationships. We don't even know where to turn to re-member. Each man for himself and freedom for all! Or, alienation from life's deep processes for all? Poetic attention often leads one to feel and to connect and, perhaps more frightening, to encounter (almost certainly) massive destruction which will understandably (initially) lead to feelings of despair and powerlessness. Like the weeds mentioned in the prologue, these feelings are indications that restoration is required.

Because the environment cannot rightly be conceived of as dis-connected from culture, we can also look to ourselves to see the wilderness (human "nature"). What we will see is many people lacking quality connections in their lives, the disintegration of community, alienation, and the psychic splitting that results. We could choose to focus only on plants and animals and we would see similar destruction. Heaney says that poetry arises from being "earnest and devoted to things as they are." Likewise, Adrienne Rich notes in the excerpt from "A Sense of Place," quoted above, that there is a connection between "Protected species / Meaning endangered" and the violence of "dominion on a back road." Facing the destruction of the world "as it is not as we wish it to be/ as it is not as we work for it to be" is utterly tragic.

...they imagined maps made of veins
and themselves inside the body now between;
a vessel to be moved in and by
shaped on land, formed from a belief
that all they needed was water:
water to lift them, teach them
the secret to renewal, the secret to everything
to droughts in a growing season,
absences of species, languages, peoples, love—
and they believed.
that was before their minds
began to refuse the most apparent
connections, thought sides into existence.
then came the rending, tug-of-war, the mind pulling ...

at the body and the body pulling at the mind.
both refusing what is.

One of the questions then, after Mary Oliver's assertion that in order to save our world we have to love it is how do we love "the world as it is" when it is so greatly affected by our cultural violence? How can we make sense of the destruction? What happens if poetic attention makes you want to turn away rather than toward? The "secret to renewal ... / to droughts in a growing season / absences of species, languages, peoples [and] love" is to learn how to connect, to change without losing our integrity, to change in a way that we gain integrity, to transform and to restore. Poetry can offer both a "buoyancy" and a "steadying." The buoyancy is the "stimulating disturbance" offered by a new perspective, connection, or experience. Elizabeth Lange (2004) states that in order to transform, to move from *taking from* the world to *sharing with* it, from being alienated to consciously participating, we need to become aware, as exemplified by the nurselog and our interbreathing, of our "radical organic relatedness...to time, space, body, and relationships" (p. 30). This awareness is a kind of restoration, a kind of steadying.

While poetic attention can connect you with the dis-function as expressed by Adrienne Rich of the lived dominant cultural narrative, it can also connect you with much deeper processes, the processes that our lives depend on. By stimulating and steadying, poetic attention can lead to both an awareness of our "radical relatedness" and of our "self-in-community." Then we can "tune-in" to "what is" really happening and appreciate that "the universe is one whole, as it were, and is in some sense unbroken" (Bohm, 1985, p. 7).

Appreciating that the universe is "in some sense unbroken" does not justify irresponsibility. Interconnectedness doesn't imply sameness. We are both/and, with

and Other. We exist in relationship but remain distinct in our consciousness and experiences. It is important that the metaphors we use to describe phenomena don't encourage us to romanticize or speak on behalf of Others (Blumfeld-Jones, 2004; Heller, 2004). Being "earnest and devoted to things as they are" requires that we "know our place" and our honour differences. Monica Heller (2004) outlines how romantic notions of Others prohibit us from attending carefully to what is (pp. 16-17). Romantic fantasy and projection is really "the aggrandizement of the individual ego" which can actually deter you from connecting (Gelpi, 1987, p. 518). Individualism that is not contextualized as "self-in-community" becomes schizophrenic. *If we are cannot relate, can merely project, we really cannot learn.*

What poetic attention can help us to learn, according to Don McKay is of both our radical relatedness and the world's "radical otherness." He notes that in Western culture we think of power as knowledge. The kind of cultural knowledge given power in the West, our dominant narrative pattern, is controlling and possessive. We tell each other that we can all be free if we are capitalists. More specifically, we can all be "free" if we disconnect, numb our feelings, think only of ourselves, transfer the grid, fill in the blanks, disregard the messages in poisoned water, and the psychic and physical dying of ourselves, each other, and the more-than-human world which is caused by our lack of consciousness and practical skills, like the courage to be truly attentive and respond cooperatively. The path of least resistance for Western civilization has been manipulation and avoidance instead of reciprocity, adaptation, and relationship. Bob Steuding contends that "the general drift of Western civilization, that is, its unconscious desire is to render the wild world tame and to bend nature to its will" (cited in Quetchenbach, p 4). McKay counters this will-to-control (as opposed to will-to-live) by

asserting that because there is wilderness in everything the idea that we can possess knowledge, people, things, and others is flawed. He defines wilderness as that which "has the capacity to elude the mind's appropriations" (p. 21).[5] This definition sounds a bit like chaos, but as pointed out by Berry wilderness is "a deeper coherence and harmony" (quoted in Bryson, p. 40). How much we can know of the wilderness depends on how much we can let go of our ego, embrace "eco," and respect its deeper coherence and harmony.

Instead of being divisible, wilderness and civilization exist on a kind of continuum. McKay notes that even our tools evidence "wilderness especially when we think of their existence in time and graduation from utility: breakdown" (ibid.). When we give up our will to manipulate, our investment in false certainty, and choose to cooperate with the wilderness "you can go somewhere that you don't know about, that you can't expect, that you can't control, that you don't want to control (because, in fact, you can go further if you don't control it, and if you just follow it)" (Phillips, 1993, p. 160). Life and learning are a process and ultimately we cannot fully know or possess anything, even our lives. That all things change should not be understood as a green light for destruction, but an invitation to tune-in and to experience "the dancing at the heart of being" (Bringhurst, p. 53). The awareness that life is an open rather than closed system that resists control importantly leads to a sense of humility, a sense of place that is grateful, cooperative, and inherently creative.

Poetic attention, according to McKay, has a way of helping us to change our "angles of perception" such that we experience the autonomy of the Other, "it's rawness, its duende, its alien being" (ibid.). We become aware of our "self-in-community," that our place is one among and with Others. To McKay, "poetic attention

is based on a recognition and a valuing of the Other's wilderness; it leads to poetic work that is not a *vestige* of the Other, but a *translation* of it" (p. 25).

And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages

That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion.

~ Harjo (1990, ibid.)

Languages of the wilderness are not human languages. Therefore, a different form of literacy is required. The paradox is that because we are humans we think and communicate in human languages. Aldo Leopold says, that we should "think like a mountain." John Seed (Seed, J., Macy, J., Fleming, P., & Naess, A., 1988) concurs and argues, "unless we can identify with an eco-system, disaster is inevitable" (p. 7). While I prefer not to get into a discussion about whether or not humans can literally think like a mountain or speak with one, I do think that we can be attentive to patterns, "ernest and devoted to things as they are," "the world as it is," be respectful of the wilderness in the "radical Other," and identify with the human and more-than-human world. Eco-social poetry, or poetic attention, according to McKay does not avoid "anthropocentricism but enacts it thoughtfully" (p. 26). In other words, it respects limits and is responsible to community understood as humans and more-than-humans in relationship. Because we are human, we communicate in human languages. In order to be understood, we need to limit our creative expressions to those that can be accessed by and meaningful to our human community. If I were to write a poem in what I thought was a "tree-language," few humans would be able to make sense of my experiences with the trees. McKay further explains:

> the persistence of poetic attention during the act of composition is akin to the translator's attention to the original, all the while she performs upon it a delicate and dangerous transformation (p. 26).

In this way, the poet recognizes and honours radical Otherness and does not try to speak "on behalf of." A translator who does not attend carefully to the language (words, content, form) of the Other fails to translate and instead indulges in rampant egotism. An approach that focuses only on one's loquacious verbosity and imaginative capacity is not conducive to nurturing, humble, open, and reciprocating relationships.

To point to the constructedness, the human-ness, of representation, poets can use the technique of metaphor. Metaphor makes clear that we cannot speak for another. It shows that human language is a symbolic system that is "not commensurate with the real" (Dragland, 2001, p. 3). The Other will always elude our symbolic grasp. With metaphor, poets demonstrate an attempt to truly recognize Others all the while respecting their autonomy and uniqueness. By using metaphor, the poet bows to the irreducible nature of the other. Dragland further explains,

> Metaphor's first act is to un-name its subject, reopening the question of reference. It's as though we were able to refer beyond reference, to use sameness against itself to bring the other, and a sense of the other (that is, its smell as well as its content) into the totality. Thanks to metaphor, we know more; but we also know that we don't own what we know (ibid.).

To un-name is to enter non-referential experience. When we un-name we are more likely to feel (rather that think) wonder for what is. We can suspend our obsessive wording of the world and be with it, "earnest and devoted" to the experience. While poetry is worded, it can help us to arrive at a feeling that is not referential, that simply is. The poem can be a form of acknowledging both the sovereignty of the world and of honouring our inter-relatedness.

When we listen carefully inside and outside to "languages that aren't always sound but other / circles of motion," we enter a kind of wilderness. There we can appreciate that knowledge is not final, and that like the rest of the world we are in process, in cycles of being, each moment precious. Poetic attention pulls us into relationships with the world that are anything but fixed or finally knowable. Instead, we are humbled in the face of a life's great mystery. Scott Slovic in his examination of Wendall Berry's work, describes this process:

> Closer and closer the writer examines his place, only to realize ever more powerfully that his senses alone will not complete his homecoming. What he must finally realize is that he and the inhuman inhabitants of the place are there together, participating together in the life of the place. As time passes, he begins to perceive not only the natural world as being distinct from himself, but its relationship to him, so that he concludes the essay implying continued movement and change: "We [the writer and an old sycamore] are moving in a relationship, a design, that is definite—though shadowy to me—like people in a dance" (cited in Bryson, p. 12).

"Moving to the tune is knowing; trying to move to the tune is thinking. But there is not just one tune to move to, nor just one thought to think" (Bringhurst, p.59)

cha-cha-cha

4.4 Poetic inquiry as Embodied Ecology

Albanese (cited by Quetchenbach, 2000) says that humans are "nature looking into nature" (p. 8). Not only do humans participate in something like a dance, something like a conversation, something like a cycle, but we also are the dance, the conversation, and the cycle. Franz Capra (1999) thinks that pattern recognition is important in connective education. One of the patterns of a living system is transformation. He explains:

> every living system occasionally encounters points of instability, at which time some of its structures break down and new structures emerge. The spontaneous emergences of order— of new structures and new forms of

> behavior— is one of the hallmarks of life. In other words, creativity—the generation of forms that are constantly new—is a key property of all living systems (p. 5).

However, we cannot have too much instability. Living systems maintain homeostasis, dynamic equilibriums ("balance"). That is what the breath cycle does for our body. We are structured around the dynamic interchange between oxygen and carbon dioxide. When we are hot, we perspire. We shiver when we are cold. We have to maintain a certain order so that we can live. Homeostasis is maintained differently in each form/process (there are many tunes). Creativity is not endlessly productive, but limited by its form. Elizabeth Lange notes that in evolving forms restoration and transformation are necessarily in a dialectic relationship. In other words, if you keep having the proverbial rug pulled out from under you, it may take you longer to figure out how to use your legs (conventionally), than if the intervals between the disturbances are less frequent. One way that living systems maintain a steady state is through biofeedback mechanisms. In a time of drought, lack of resources, females cease ovulation. This is a biofeedback mechanism. Perhaps poetry, by bringing us into relationships and helping us to see ourselves and our places, functions as a kind of feedback mechanism. Not only does it naturally emerge, but it holds us steady, dynamically, as per Seamus Heaney's observation that poetry is both a "buoyancy and steadying."

Poetry can steady us as we bear witness to the destruction around us. As well, it can be a way of balancing cognition and affect. This process can be seen as a form of self-stewardship, which in turn is a form of eco-social stewardship. Through connection, by listening and responding on all levels, eco-social poetry attempts to counter the story of de-contextualized anthropocentricism. Humans' natural rhythms are embodied, not limited to intellectual gymnastics. By believing the latter to be true, we disrupt our own

natural feedback mechanisms. We lose our ability to feel ourselves-in-community, to identify with more-than-human others. We adapt to and naturalize destruction. To emphasize the cost of disrupting our feedback mechanisms (i.e. feelingful engagement and sense of "self-in-community"), I return to Jeanette Armstrong's insight, "if we don't recognize the destruction around us, if we don't see it as destruction, if we see it as progress, or necessary, or something wonderful, then we're in terrible terrible danger because our lack of vision renders us helpless." Without an ability to connect, to restore and transform our culture, we lose our place. Conversely, when poetic attention leads to participation, to dancing *with*, it embodies a life-supporting ethic. Like an ecosystem, the eco-social poet and poem is cooperative, dynamic, responsive, fluid, non-controlling and improvisational. Instead of trying to control or possess the radical Other, eco-poetry offers a "means of dealing with human longing... by adapting the human understanding to what is; by changing people rather than the life world" (Steffler, 1995, p. 50). The connective process eco-social poetry supports provides a way of tuning-in, of co-in-spiring, of stimulating and steadying, of transforming and restoring "the world as it is not as we wish for it to be" (Rich, ibid.). As a kind of stewardship, poetic attention helps us to become aware of our participation in life's great patterns, to connect and enter the homeostatic "still point of the turning world" (Eliot, p. 15).

Except for the point, the still point,
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.

~ T.S.Eliot (ibid.)

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[1] Eliot is criticized for being a high modernist humanist (Quetchenbach, 2000). When he was writing poems, science was dismantling and expanding Western conceptual paradigms. Eliot apparently resisted this. I see this less as a move toward anthropocentricism and more as a desire to let the world maintain it's wildness, autonomy, radical otherness, and mystery. Eliot's poems express an awareness, a pattern recognition, of the cycles that sustain.

[2] For a history of eco-criticism, see *The Ecocriticism Reader*, 1996, Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, editors; *Beyond nature writing: expanding the boundaries of ecocriticism* , 2001, Karla

Armbruster and Kathleen R. Wallace, eds.; *Ecofeminist literary criticism : theory, interpretation, pedagogy*, 1999, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy (eds.).

[3] Up until the mid-1990's the majority of eco-criticism dealt with fiction. Though recently there have been several books published discussing "eco-poetry," they are still relatively few in comparison. Furthermore, not all the texts use the term "eco-poetry." Gifford calls it "green poetry"; Buell calls it "environmentally oriented poetry"; Murphy calls it "nature-oriented"; and Gilcrest calls it "ecological poetry" (Bryson, 2005, p. 2). Quetchenbach and McKay use the term "nature poetry." I use the term eco-social as per my previous explanation.

[4] See note 2, Chapter 2.

[5] Scott Bryson, mentioned earlier, refers to the awareness of wilderness, the worlds' "radical otherness," and unknowability as "space."

- Five -

The Spirit Falls: Re-membering, Re-storying, and Renewing "Here" (Precipitation)

They tore out our tongues.
When we spoke,
my love and I, darkness swelled.
Thunder became our footsteps. This
ceremonial dance of my dead.
[...]
Listen to the bones.

They tore flesh, breasts became pouches, hung
from their belts. Our bellies spilled.
I hung myself.

Blankets kill us. I am a large scab.

Mass graves. Fingers dig still
through the many bones.

Burned our crops. We live on mice.
We hold a Begging Dance.
Still our bellies echo.

Shot our children as they gathered wood.
Tore babies, crushed their skulls against the rocks.
The great mother sends more gods
to sprinkle water
on our heads

The land weeps. I am choking, choking.
The buffalo are a mountain of bones.
My son is shot for killing their cow.

Excerpt from Blue Marrow by
Louise Bernice Halfe (Nehiyahaw[Cree]) (1998, pp. 18-19)

5.1 Re-membering

the spirit moves through / the spirit rises / the spirit changes shape / the spirit falls

Before we go any further, let's pause and consider where we have been. In the first section, I attempted to contextualize the "environment" idea and draw attention to why it is critical that we seriously engage with it. For a variety of reasons, dominant Western culture has a problematic understanding of its relationship to the life processes from which it emerges. By making dependence a bad word we fail to see ourselves as breathing *with*, as interbreathing. Next, I looked at the structure, form, and outcomes of different approaches to education and proposed values that would support a much needed shift in cultural priorities to "connective education." Third, I considered the intersection of poetry and ecology in a practice called eco-poetics and how aspects of this thinking are congruent with connective education. In each section, I put forward the idea that we need to change our stories and, it follows, our structures, but to do so we need practical skills. Practical skills for finding the homeostatic "still point of the turning world" (Eliot, ibid.) and embodying eco-social inquiry include: the integration of cognition and emotion; an ability to identify through attention and imagination with "radical others" and to understand and appreciate "self-in-community"; the ability to enter into mutualistic cooperative relationships; to recognize and value patterns in the world that support life-continuing equitably; and, to view life as a dynamic (non-dualistic) process.

If you accept my emerging logic-feeling, then you recognize and value the ability to listen, to empathize, and to connect with yourself and radical Others. These are wonderful qualities, and indeed, they provide a solid foundation for embodying dynamic life-supporting partnerships, but they are not sufficient.

They tore flesh, breasts became pouches, hung
From their belts. Our bellies spilled.
I hung myself.

And yet.

Mass graves. Fingers dig still
through the many bones.

And still.

Burned our crops. We live on mice.
We hold a Begging Dance.
[...] our bellies echo.

It becomes clear when we attend to "the world as it is" that we need to take responsibility for our interconnectedness and move from passive recognition to active engagement, from caring to understanding. The opening poem by Louise Bernice Half bears witness to empty stomachs and weeping land. She expresses a reality that is the result of the neo-colonial dominant Western narrative. In the section that follows I consider the political implications of "knowing our place" by coming into an eco-social awareness of both the self-in-community and the autonomy of radical Others.

I began this inquiry by asking how we might begin, through learning, to restore a balance within ourselves and our communities, how we might reintegrate and participate in life's "circles of motion." At this point in the paper, I want to further challenge the dichotomization of nature/culture. First, I discuss "poetry of witness" and how it provides an important relational space between the personal and the political. Second, I share my experience of defamiliarizing the cultural narrative I grew up with. Third, I turn to the voices of people who bear witness to their personal and cultural first-hand experiences of domination as a result of the (dominating) Western narrative.

5.2 Poetry of Witness/Withness

We need to learn in ways that respect differences and at the very least cultivate an ability to share space (Alfred cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 5). As previously stated, eco-socially transformative and just education requires having the ability to not only recognize, feel, and study existing relationships but to actively make connections and build new relationships founded on mutual recognition, respect, affirmation, and support. This means that at times we will have to come out of the fields that we have been wandering in all day, acknowledge our "withness," and offer solidarity to others who are being exploited because the dominant Western culture is neither listening to criticism nor sufficiently challenging its own narrative. Because, as I have argued, civilization and wilderness exist on a continuum, human nature and more-than-human nature are not mutually exclusive. I have insisted on linking the ecological and the social and have noted that there is a direct correspondence between more-than-human exploitation and human exploitation. The ability to recognize the relationship between these two realms of oppression is very important. In the words of Ynestra King (1990, p. 121),

> At this point in history, the domination of nature is inextricably bound up with the domination of persons....[T]here is no point in liberating people if the planet cannot sustain their liberated lives, or in saving the planet by disregarding the preciousness of human existence not only to ourselves but to the rest of life on Earth....

As such, it is critical that we develop the skills to listen and attend, to enter into non-dominating relationships, and to bear witness to ourselves of the destruction that our culture directly and indirectly renders on other cultures.

Poetry of witness is quite different than traditional individualistic lyrics focused on love, loss, and the meaning of life. Poet Carolyn Forché (1993) suggests that by

witnessing the present destruction, suffering, and disregard, poetry can extend "the solace of camaraderie" (p. 17). Poetry of witness does not attempt to speak on behalf of the Other but "in the spirit of communality" intentionally expresses an understanding of self-in-community (ibid.). Rather than defining the poetic and the political as mutually exclusive, poets of witness provide "a middle voice [that] expresses participation" (Fletcher, 2004, p. 10). The poet attends to the specific situation and enters into a reciprocating relationship with the Other. Instead of exoticizing and taking advantage of the exploitation of another, the poet of witness intentionally offers support. She does not turn back her back and return to the fields to wander.

Much of the ecological pedagogy and poetry that I have read critiques the conceptual nature/culture duality, but perpetuates the dichotomy by still focusing predominantly on the nature that is "out there." It bears witness to the destruction of more-than-human lives but rarely human lives. Eco-social pedagogy and poetry has yet to sufficiently either listen to or learn from structurally dominated and oppressed Others, human Others, who are able to speak our language (because we forced them to), and who are experiencing ongoing exploitation as a result of the lived stories of Western "civilization" (Harjo & Bird, 1997, p.25).[1] Attending to non-dominating narratives serves as a feedback mechanism that enables us to see and evaluate the dominant Western culture from another perspective. Terry Tempest Williams (2004) contends that for the sake of the survival of life on this planet "the most important thing is that we learn to ask ourselves 'are we really listening to each other'" (quoted in Slovic and Satterfield, p. 67)? Poetry that asks itself this question, that really listens, and tunes-in, is an eco-social poetry of witness.

5.3 Re-storying

I grew up in rural Pennsylvania. My family home was nestled into a valley of the Allegheny foothills, next to the Allegheny River. Just off the main road into the nearest town, which I traversed daily on the bus to school, I remember seeing an old two-story farmhouse completely in shambles and overgrown with bushes. In a clearing to the side, a dweller had erected a teepee. I asked questions about this and everyone said the man was white. He had grown-up on the farm with his German immigrant family that had since moved out of the area. When his parents passed away, he inherited the land, quit farming, and built a teepee.

My family lived upstream from this man. The flood plain of the river has very fertile soil. My father worked a field there and planted corn and broccoli. Occasionally when he was ploughing he found arrowheads. He brought them inside to show my brothers and I. I didn't know what to think about them. They were from another time. We kept the arrowheads in a box on top of our bookshelf. One summer, archaeologists came to the area. The government wanted to build a new bridge. They sent experts to check to see if the project would disturb something (besides the ground and the animals). My dad took the little box out to the archaeologists to ask for information. They took the box away and days later returned with information like estimated dates of the objects and the region where the flint used to make the arrowheads may have originated.

Other than these two occurrences, the white man's teepee and the arrowheads, the only other inkling I had that Western culture had not always been here was the culturally sanitized Thanksgiving story of "Squanto" who helped the pilgrims survive their first year in the "new world." What I understood was that "Squanto" like a Biblical angel

came and helped the pilgrims and then disappeared. Somehow I believed that "Indians" were an imagined story. My brothers played cowboys and Indians. I couldn't connect this story with consequences to real living people. One hour away from my parents' home is the Seneca Nation, displaced many times over, most recently for the construction of Kinzua Dam which provides hydro power for all of Western Pennsylvania. When I was a child I went on school trips to the dam's reservoir and no one told me the history. The "official" story that I learned in so many ways never mentioned any of this.

It wasn't until I went to university that cracks started to appear in the Western narrative I had hereto accepted. I had a conversation with a fellow white student who was majoring in Aboriginal Studies. He told me that colonization was alive and well. This was the first time I had heard the "myth of the disappearing Indian" challenged. It was a "stimulating disturbance." It made me uncomfortable and through listening to many people in written text and spoken word since then the cracks have widened and helped me to see Western culture in a very different light. The story that I had naturalized was not natural at all!

5.4 Eco-Social Poetic Inquiry/What is found 'here'?

William Carlos Williams (1976) writes, "it is difficult / to get the news from poems / and yet men die every day / for lack / of what is found there" (p. 150). I interpret Williams' verse very simply to mean that culturally we are imbalanced and disconnected; there is neither enough news in poetry nor poetry in the news and people are dying psychically and physically because of a lack of balance, a lack of connection. However, there are poems where we can "get the news." As a feedback mechanism, such poems

offer correctives to the dominant story. The people who are on the front-lines experiencing the same exploitation as the polluted rivers, dying songbirds, and degraded land have voices and they are speaking.[2] Beth Brant (1994) a poet, essayist, novelist and Bay of Quinte Mohawk from the Tyendinaga Mohawk Territory in Ontario, Canada writes, "when we hold up the mirror to our lives, we are also reflecting what has been done to us by the culture that lives outside the mirror" (p. 10).

If we are to truly know our place, we are going to have to listen not just to the rivers and songbirds but to the voices of people whose lives reflect the ways that Western culture's dominating narrative is imbalanced and diseased. Feeling with, connecting, does not mean connecting only to non-challenging, warm and fuzzy feelings.[3] It means acknowledging our own and Others' distress and working toward reciprocating, respectful, cooperative, and restorative alliances. Eco-social poetry cannot promote a worldview that is either/or, but instead is both/and; it must link human and more-than-human destruction. According to Smith, we must develop empathy and with integrity "reject positions of domination in favour of [positions] predicated on interdependence and reciprocity" (p. 33). We cannot be selective. That is like treating people for drinking poisoned water only to send them home again to drink more. It's like sending financial compensation to people whose land we appropriated and live on without their permission.[4] By ignoring the cultural and structural aspects of ecological destruction, we are caught in a vicious cycle where any progress we might make to restore an ecosystem is quickly undermined and we are back where we began or in worse shape with more time degraded. This plays itself out in environmental education that teaches us how to recycle but does not also challenge the underlying cultural beliefs that consumption, exploitation, unlimited growth, and dissociation are natural. We need

to be able to look the present reality in the face and track all the ways that the destruction is interconnected and bound up in a cultural narrative that is inherently exploitative.

In attempting to know our place we must acknowledge that environmental and social history are inextricably linked. There are voices speaking languages connected to this land that were here long before Columbus "discovered" it. This nation called Canada exists because European colonists took (force comes in many forms) the land from the Nations that were here (and still are) prior to Western contact. If we are to listen to the land, we must also listen to the people who have witnessed and lived the consequences of Western "progress," "civilization," "Manifest Destiny," the story of the "new world." Though regularly disregarded, there are hundreds of nations indigenous to "North America" and thousands of responses, past and present to colonization. Simon Oritz considers that the true story of America is inextricably bound to the story(ies) of Native Americans:

> I mean when the Grand Canyon Dam was being constructed, the idea of it, there was some sort of story that was taking place at the time. Well, the story continues, and we're part of that story...We are the story taking place, and we can even say that we are the story itself...but the real true story of America has never been told. And one of the reasons that it has never been told is because the Native American is, in a sense, not included in the story. And yet, we are the story of America. The Native American culture and its values and its philosophy are the story of America, although facts and figures can be cited to dismiss that idea" (cited in Slovic and Satterfield, 2004, p.42).

By listening to the stories told by Indigenous peoples about their experience of colonization, we can start to appreciate the nature of the Western beast. When we connect, identify with, appreciate (not appropriate!), and respect the radical otherness and autonomy of Indigenous and other oppressed peoples' perspectives, we can de-familiarize the dominant narrative and imagine that "another world is possible."[5] Malea

Powell of Eastern Shawnee and European American ancestry envisions the possibilities of alliance:

> ...maybe we can learn to take hold of one another and emerge at the beginning of a new story about ourselves, not a prime narrative held together by the sameness of our beliefs, but a gathering of narratives designed to help us to adapt and change as it necessary for our survival (2004, pp. 57-58, cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 5).

Survival from the perspective of alliance-building is founded on respectful, mutualistic relationships; it is neither selective nor dominating. Relationships that become alliances encourage transformation by challenging us to see ourselves from a de-familiarized perspective and to support each other humbly in solidarity. Like connective education, alliance respectfully engages both our withness and radical otherness.

Transformative alliances depend on the ability to listen, consider, and respond to critique. Michael Doxtater (Kanien'kehaka [Mohawk]) (2004) contends that Euro-scholarship has not been open to critique. Instead, it has supported its own power through self-validating mechanisms. Doxtater asserts that it has traditionally ignored "Indigenous knowledge for the purpose of promoting its own narrative structures based on Western knowledge that decides what is true" (p. 629).[6] The act of prioritizing, positioning, excluding, and including is clearly politically motivated. Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz (2003)[7] explains that the dominant Western cultural narrative underlies an ideological rationalization for imperialism:

> The extent of this pervasiveness is not easy to perceive because such rationalization is deep-seated. Its roots are intertwined with the accepted, conventional modes of thought and the consciousness of a people. Thus, they are located in the false patriotism and racism that sink deeply and imperceptibly into the individual's sub-conscious; in the traditions, values, and even aesthetics of the cultural environment— an environment evolved over centuries during which self-designated "superior" cultures assumed the right to penetrate and dominate "inferior" cultures.

Without the ability to actively listen, re-story, re-vision, and re-imagine, we risk uncritically assimilating a narrative that unjustly confers unequal status and entitlement and perpetuating acts of cultural violence that harm not only the people being dominated but ourselves as well. Relationships with Others give us opportunities to see the extent to which we are also colonized into thinking that freedom equals power over Others, that the world is a static, quantifiable, objective thing, and not a dynamic, spirited, interconnected spiralling process. As I observed in the previous section, if we cannot relate (which requires humility and imagination), we put tremendous limits on what we can learn.

5.5 Renewing 'Here'/ Politicizing Tiohtiá:ke/ Montréal

Presently, I live in Tiohtiá:ke which is unceded Kanien'kehaka Territory. Regularly I walk on the mountain presently named "Mont-Royal." When I get to the top, there are openings in the trees and I can look out over the city of Montréal, Québec. I see copper-plated church spires, bridges, highways interweaving, highrises with bank logos piercing the sky, condominiums galore, a roller coaster in the distance, and occasionally a glimmer from the water of the St. Lawrence River. Peter Blue Cloud, also a member of the Mohawk Nation, lives in the Kahnawake Mohawk Territory on the opposite shore of the St. Lawrence River. I quote below a poem he wrote about his experience of this place titled "Searching for Eagles":

A pair of blue herons should
be feast enough for anyone's sunset.
Still, I chant an inner prayer
to glimpse but once, a circling,
soaring eagle close to
this river at my doorstep.

This bit of Mohawk territory, encircled
by cities, towns, freeway and seaway,
cannot be what my ancestors dreamed.

They, who intimately knew eagles,
how would they reconcile today
without the loon's evening cry?

I pretend this river at my doorstep,
for it is a backwash of the seaway,
not flowing but pulled back and forth
by passing ships. No more the taste
of fresh fish, what swim here are
sickly, polluted, and dying creatures.

Few stars penetrate the man-made
haze of light. No owls hoot the night.
What may resemble peaceful sleep
is the reaction to troubled reality
No, no more eagles soar here, only
those kept harbored deep within.

In Harjo and Grauer (2001, pp. 38-39)

It is important that when we attend to "the world as it is not as we wish for it to be/ the world as it is not as we work for it to be" (Rich, ibid.) that we recognize, identify with, see, listen and so on, but also that we ask questions. Why do "no more eagles soar here"? Why is this happening? Who is accountable? How did we get here? How can we work toward restoration and renewal? David Orr argues with regard to ecological devastation that "moral revitalization is necessary but not sufficient" (Orr, p. 151). He goes on to say that we need to make leap the from "I care" to "I will do something" (ibid.). However, he does not suggest, and I think he should, that in between caring and doing *we need to attentively listen* to the people, on the outside of Western culture, who have a unique perspective less encumbered by the dominant narrative pattern and who are potentially more able to see and articulate the conceptual and structural mechanisms through which Western culture is disconnected and domineering (Johnson, 2006). If we proceed without listening then we are not attending fully to "what is" and we are no closer to restoration. With the gift of the

critique we receive (if we listen), we can examine our culture and begin a process of decolonization. Like my child self, many of us in Western culture have naturalized and internalized values that promote detachment, dissociation, and destruction. If we are to restore/y life-supporting balance we will need help from others who know too well the costs to everyone of a culture that has neither respect for the autonomy of Others nor an understanding of healthy limits.

In my exploration of eco-social pedagogy and poetry, I noticed that the discourse tends to be highly Eurocentric, revolving mainly around white males and ignoring all but a few Indigenous or non-European voices. For all our talk of "knowing our place" we fail to recognize the social history of the land we are attempting to restore. Angus Fletcher (2004) provides a case in point by stating in his recent book *A New Theory for American Poetry: Democracy, the Environment, and the Future of Imagination* that "it needs to be remembered that America got started in an utterly new way, as the experience of the new world, a new idea. The country had a weird sort of virgin birth..."(p. 132). Historically and culturally White America did start anew, but not without a relationship to what existed here prior to colonization. Poet, novelist, and artist Jeanette Armstrong (Armstrong and Grauer, 2001, pp. 110-111) contests the notion of an ahistorical, virgin-born "America." She challenges the popular story of Western "progress" in the "new world" in the her poem titled "History Lesson":

Out of the belly of Christopher's ship
a mob bursts
Running in all directions
Pulling furs off animals
Shooting buffalo
Shooting each other
left and right

Father mean well
waves his makeshift wand

forgives saucer-eyed Indians

Red coated knights
gallop across the prairie
to get their men
and to build a new world

Pioneers and traders
bring gifts
Smallpox. Seagrams
and rice krispies
Civilization has reached
the promised land

Between the snap crackle pop
of smoke stacks
and multicoloured rivers
swelling with flower powered zee
are farmers sowing skulls and bones
and miners
pulling from gaping holes
green paper faces
of a smiling English lady

The colossi
in which they trust
while burying
breathing forests and fields
beneath concrete and steel
stand shaking fists
waiting to mutilate
whole civilizations
ten generations at a blow

Somewhere among the remains
of skinless animals
is the termination
to a long journey
and unholy search
for the power
glimpsed in a garden
forever closed
forever lost.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to dismiss or ignore Armstrong's words. To engage her position as you might a more-than-human Other who is radically interrelated

to you presents quite a challenge to the dominant Western narrative. Armstrong's poem, coming from a place similar to so many people who have experienced colonization, reminds me of the refrain Thomas King repeated at the end of each of his CBC Massey Lectures. Throughout the series he told audiences stories (sometimes humorous, sometimes serious) about various characters who in some way illustrated an aspect of dominant Western culture's problematic (mis)understanding of and relationship with Indigenous nations and people. Each story was different but they all ended with a variation on the excerpt that follows from the second lecture:

> ...What's important are the stories I've heard along the way. And the stories I've told. Stories we make up to try to set the world straight. Take Will Roger's [or Peter Blue Cloud's or Jeanette Armstrong's] story, for instance. It's yours. Do with it what you will. Make it a topic of a discussion group at a scholarly conference. Put it on the Web. Forget it. But don't say in years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now (2003, p. 60).

I have heard stories that "try to set the world straight." Though I do feel blessed, I cannot be idle and merely wander all day idyllically in fields. If we respectfully listen to Others, we will likely hear a very different perspective on the dominant Western narrative. Recovery depends on the courage to respond, to bear witness, to take responsibility for what we have heard. It requires that we learn to understand and value our interconnectedness and to have real cooperative, transformative and restorative relationships with Others (Johnson, 2006).

The story that capitalism, rationality, and hierarchy are natural and life-promoting may be persuasive and intellectually compelling but it has terrible consequences. It supports a system that is running off false and superficial, almost desperate power. Thomas King cautions that stories are not benign but have real consequences in the world. Therefore, "once told, it [a story] is loose in the world. You have to be careful

with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories you are told" (2003, p.10). As Taiaiake Alfed notes, the dominant narrative pattern compromises everyone involved:

> Our modern culture, for both the victims and the perpetrators, consists in a denial of the past and of its moral implications. It is an aversion to the truth and who we really are and where we really come from...We are afraid of our memories, afraid of what we have become, afraid of each other and afraid of the future (2004, p. 90, cited in Johnson, 2006, p. 9).

Places, like stories, are not unidimensional. In order to learn our place we can't selectively focus only on those aspects that are unchallenging. Doing so amounts to denial that only perpetuates cycles of disconnection. Only by locating ourselves within our cultural history will we be able to also locate ourselves in our bio-regional more-than-human community. Restoration can only occur if become responsible for our eco-social interrelatedness.

5.6 "Alive poems"

Eco-social restoration, recovery, and remembering are interlinked. In process, form, and outcome, poetry creates relationships. Eco-social poetry can serve as a non-dualistic middle ground. It can bridge the traditional individualistic lyric of love and loss, and the generalizing, declarative, polemic, political manifesto. As a middle ground, eco-social poetry can attend to "here" and respond with integrity. With a participatory consciousness, it can offer a process of attending to and restoring relationships, and the self-in-community. In Western culture, the creation of reciprocating, careful, attentive, embodied, and non-hierarchical relationships is highly political. It directly challenges the supremacy of objectivity, rationality, de-contextualized individualism, and profit driven alienation. Living poems (that participate with the living world, the circles of motion) change the world by shifting personal and cultural priorities from power over to power

useful preconditions for restorative eco-social alliances. Given that our culture has a dysfunctional understanding of "right relations," practices that support respectful, mutual relationships are extremely challenging.

The poem is a trace of a relationship. As a reader you can experience how imaginative, dynamic, reciprocal, and respectful the writer's understanding is of her place. As a connective and restorative practice eco-social poetry can provide a process for shutting down 'the fat relentless ego' and stimulating us to re-member, to reintegrate, in healthy ways with our human and more-than-human communities. Joy Harjo (1993) expresses this beautifully in her poem "Remember":

> ...Remember the earth whose skin you are:
> red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
> brown earth, we are earth.
> Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all have their
> Tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to them.
> Listen to them. They are alive poems.
> Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She knows the
> Origin of the universe. I heard her singing Kiowa war
> Dance songs at the corner of Fourth and Central once.
> Remember that you are all people and that all people
> Are you.
> Remember that you are this universe and that this
> Universe is you.

Harjo bears witness to "the world as it is" or could be when we have the will and practical means to restore/transform our stories and relationships. So much depends not on "the red wheelbarrow" being only a red wheelbarrow but on the stories we believe and live (interpretation, relationship, listening, and dialogue), and on our ability to co-create life-supporting embodied relational stories.[8] Listening and cooperating, acknowledging the sovereignty of Others (human and more-than-human) and our responsibility to live joyfully in non-dominating, connective ways, re-visions the dominant Western narrative and offers in its place a life-supporting poesis/praxis (stories/ actions).

The gift of knowing one's place is the gift of learning to re-orient our worldviews. When we engage all dimensions of place we increase our capacity for compassion, connection, humility, gratitude, wonder and active participation in cycles of renewal.

> Remember that all is in motion, is growing, is you.
> Remember that language comes from this.
> Remember the dance that language is.
> Remember.

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[1] Why do the majority of eco-poetry texts focus on Robinson Jeffers, Gary Snyder, W. S. Merwin, Wendell Berry, Mary Oliver, and A. R. Ammons? With the exception of Oliver, all of these authors are white settler men of the dominant culture and class.

[2] I am not likening the people most directly affected by Western domination to more-than-human Others any more than I note the relationship between all humans (regardless of cultural background) and more-than-humans.

[3] Literary scholar Craig Womack (Muskogee) commenting on the dominant Western culture's avoidance of political responsibility notes, "America loves Indian culture. America is much less enthusiastic about Indian land title" (cited in Fagen, 2004, p. 14).

[4] Imagine that you have a beautiful home. Travelers arrive and ask to stay the night. You show them hospitality. Slowly they take over your house and relegate you to a lean-to in the back lot. Then they say they want the lean-to also and they forcibly relocate you to a place with no resources. They give you an identity card and tell you what you can and can't do. They try to define you but never talk with you. They destroy your home and poison the land and the water (the water runs to your new location). They treat you as if you are a child, offer you money, and tell you that you are wrong when you say that the home is yours. They tell a different story...

[5] As explained in David Graeber's (2004) *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, "another world is possible" is a reference to the World Social Forum and a refrain of a popular folk song sung throughout the America's.

[6] See also Momaday (1971), Allen (1991), Alvord and Cohen Van Pelt (2000), Sioui Wendayete (1992), Harjo and Bird (1997), Thornton (1998), Mihesuah (1998), Cook-Lynn (1997), Jaimes-Geurrero (1999), and Warrior (1995).

[7] Accessed online at http://www.monthlyreview.org /0703dunbarortiz.htm.

[8] William Carlos Williams' famous imagist poem tries not to romanticize or anthropomorphize the Other. He strips the wheelbarrow of its context, denies interconnectivity, and represents it as an ahistorical alien object.

- Six -

The Spirit Enters/Conclusion
(Infiltration)

*

When I was five years old, I dug a hole in my backyard just large enough to hold my body. I camouflaged a piece of particleboard with grass-clippings in order to conceal the opening. Daily for one summer, almost as ritual (but not quite), I returned to the damp hollow, lowered myself inside, and pretended to be a seed.

*

When I was five years old, I would lower myself into the earth. I remember feeling safe and excited; I trembled and surged, readied myself. If I were a plant-seed, this hollow would have been ideal for me. Obviously, I am a human seed and therefore needed a different "soil" in order to grow. Coming out of the earth, the cultural soil that I encountered was a dying soil. The dominant Western culture treats children and soil in much the same way. Schools put us in rows and teach us to put ourselves in rows. Instead of privileging non-dominating relationships founded on the ability to care, attend, and understand, we are taught to compete, rationalize, individualize, compartmentalize, and theorize. The valuing of efficiency and profit, without attention to the deeper consequences of such a worldview, leads to disconnection, alienation, fragmentation, and a degraded quality of soil. In this environment, it is difficult for humans and more-than-humans to grow.

When we encounter a problem, we generally look for a solution. If the problem is weeds, we have three options. We can deny that they exist. We can forcibly remove the weeds by either physically pulling out their roots; we can treat them with a chemical that will kill the present generation, but not the next. Or rather, like the weeds themselves, we can attend to the quality of the soil and in our living give as much as, or more than, we receive. The first two options perpetuate a cycle of opposition and violence. The third option requires cooperation.

If we are to restore quality to our cultural soil we will need to re-story how we live and learn, how we come to understand that "the greatest of gifts is to know one's place" (Kingsolver, ibid.). Knowing our place depends, as we all depend, like meaning, on context. It also depends on our ability to co-create non-dominating mutualistic relationships. Our cultural context has the potential for richness and diversity. What we lack is a lived awareness of our participation in the life world, in the cycles we depend on, and the ability to engage in respectful, cooperative, connective relationships. Instead of responding superficially to our impoverished cultural soil by manipulating it with controlling and dominating chemicals ("battling every raincloud" (Kabbani, cited in Harjo, 2002), we can respect its "otherness" and our "withness" and consciously connect and cooperate. There is no formulaic solution for eco-social restoration. A degraded soil does not return to robust, life-supporting health just because we will it to. Just as the poem is not a theory but a process, learning practices that support cultural restoration cannot ultimately be theorized; they must be embodied processes that value quality in our community relationships.

Eco-social poetry, in process and practice, offers a middle ground, a third space, an interstitial tissue from which to see the conceptual dualities that we have constructed for what they are: impoverished. Because on a deep level, poetry aims for communion, it can be understood as "a bid for sanity, an endorsement of sharing, of life" (Steffler, 1995, p. 50). Here, I emphasize the endorsement of sharing. Sharing eschews possession and embraces generosity. Furthermore, in communion we do not generalize or homogenize, but appreciate, attend, recognize and care for the particular differences of Others. Etymologically, communion and community derive from the same root. To commune leads to community. Therefore, when eco-social poetry aims for communion,

it inadvertently fosters relational understanding and the emergence of intentionally cooperative communities.

Poetic attention may facilitate communion with more-than-human Others, but without sharing that experience with human Others (i.e. "eco-social"), we fall slightly short of what is possible. In the absence of community, poetry writing can be a lonely activity. Taking the questions that have emerged from the present inquiry into consideration, along with the critique of cultural individualism, I decided to initiate an eco-social poetry dialogue group. I have invited a group of Montreal-based ecologists and poets to come together to share and support each other in further exploration of eco-social issues as they relate to poetry. Begging the question "how do we know our place," we will begin to re-story the dominant Western cultural narrative. Moreover, because the eco-social poetry dialogue group is working together, we are not only accountable to the land, but also to each other. In the words of one of my collaborators, "we can shake and wake" each other. We have agreed to begin the process of de-colonizing our minds and bearing witness to both the inner and the outer consequences of eco-social dissociation. By consciously attending to the quality of relationships with each other and to our eco-social context, we can nurture "our inherent capacities to heal, renew, and evolve" and a sense of ourselves "as integral inhabitants of the earth" (O'Sullivan and Taylor, 2003, p. 11).

As previously stated, the dominant Western cultural narrative, that privileges individualism, excess, and techno-efficiency, does not foster the kind of relationships that are required for meaningful eco-social transformation and restoration. Likewise, an instrumentalist approach to education that suppresses imagination, ignores beauty, and standardizes wonder does not help us to perceive the connections between our everyday

actions and the eco-social consequences of those actions. Moreover, restorative and transformative practices must be embodied; they cannot be simply intellectual. Living in cooperation presents a greater challenge than learning an abstracted concept of "cooperation." To learn a life-supporting story, we must live it together.

Poetry as an embodied eco-social practice can help us to tune-in to ourselves and to each other. It can be a "buoyancy and a steadying" (Heaney, ibid.) as we move from "the world as it is" to the "world as we wish it to be" (Rich, ibid.). Instead of controlling Others, poetic attention helps us to honour difference and develop feelings of respect and care for the Other. As Mary Oliver says, "in order to save our world, we must love it." Imagining that "another world is possible" is a refusal to be complicit in its destruction. However, in our imagining we must still be "earnest and devoted to things as they are" (Heaney, p. 3). Caring and marking one's caring is an act of resistance (Dissanayake, ibid.), but it is also an act of witness and witnessing that requires the ability to "get close to the actual... to concentrate [one's] hearing" (Heaney, 1995, p. 2). In addition to nurturing the skills of listening on multiple levels, we must also cultivate the courage to respond, to move from feeling "with" to living "with". Recognition and response are a "buoyancy and a steadying," a transformation and a restoration. Steffler, noting a dialectical relationship between transformation and restoration, says that poets and readers of poetry "know that love can be put into words and retrieved from them" (p. 53). Bearing witness to the needless destruction and suffering of Others and putting it into words is in itself and act of solidarity and of love.

Albert Schweitzer (1987) believes that "in and behind all phenomena there is will-to-live" (p. 308). By witnessing the will-to-live that is in all things, even in dying soil, eco-social poetry embodies a life-supporting ethic. This ethic is not sufficiently evident

in the dominant cultural narrative nor the dominant approaches to education. If it were, our biosphere would not be so severely compromised, North American Indigenous Nations would be recognized and honoured, children would not be abandoned in front of televisions, water would not be polluted, species would not go extinct at the rate that they do and so on and so on. Restorative learning and restorative living depend on cooperative relationships. Wendell Berry considers:

> Connection *is* health. And what our society does best to disguise from us is how ordinary, now commonly attainable, health is. We lose our health—and create profitable diseases and dependencies—by failing to see the direct connections between living and eating, eating and working, working and loving" (p. 138).

The practices of living and learning that we must foster are those that seek out connections (Orr, p. 73). Berry goes on to say, "only by restoring connections can we be healed" (ibid.). The connections that we need to restore are the conceptual divisions between culture and nature, cognition and emotion, self and Other, and living and learning. Though we may not be aware, we are living in a world that is "in some sense unbroken." Because we are inherently interconnected, we need to be able to recognize and feel ourselves with each other and act accordingly. When a species goes extinct, the collective quality of life on Earth decreases. We are each other's community. Practices that support connection, support relationship, community, and quality of life. In our living and learning, we can become attentive to the quality of our participation in the ecological cycles that sustain our very lives.

Eco-social poetry is a practice and process that seeks out communion and therefore embodies the will-to-live. As long as poetry is being written there remains a human and cultural will-to-live, because "the poetry of true despair is simply never written" (Gilcrest, 2002, p. 22). Seeds may lie dormant until the conditions exist for

them to sprout, but they do not give up the will-to-live. Trees do not give up the will-to-live, neither do birds, nor rivers, nor weeds. Neither should humans give up the will-to-live. The gift of "knowing one's place" depends, just as meaning depends on context, and we depend on relationships with each other. Restoration is not an individual action, but an ongoing communal process. We do not have to, nor should we, live our lives dissociated from the life world.

The water, the breath, and the stories continue cycling. The arrowhead taken from the field by my childhood home, the wonder of morning and little fire-red bugs, the garbage on the streets of Toronto, and the mystery of the poem that lives "with" despite the destruction all around: these de-compose into the soil of this essay. The water cycles (up and over, ocean to cloud to river to ground to ocean), runs down the mountainside, seeps into the earth, moves through the roots of trees and kindly toward patient seeds that tremble and surge, ready themselves. Turning and returning, we find ourselves ever at a new beginning.

a prayer for healing

begins with the breath
where it turns in your body
where you turn in your body
letting yourself in
letting yourself out

turning and returning
turning and returning

you asked me to remember
so i knelt
opened my hands
placed them on the soil
bent my back
laid my cheek on the ground
and listened for a prayer

a prayer—
breath lifting, filling the body
living sound, coursing upward
moving across the head,
between the shoulder blades,
extending through the spine
in both directions –bilocation
just like you said.

and i don't know which is which anymore
the exhale/the inhale
the sound, the song...
but i do know
that this is some kind of blessing
a blessing that is breathing
that is remembering
remembering the body
and that the body can be a prayer.

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