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## Expanding Perspectives Through Flight: Transformation of Fear Through Arational Ways of Knowing

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## **International Journal of Fear Studies**

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# Expanding Perspectives Through Flight: Transformation of Fear Through Arational Ways of Knowing

**Barbara Bickel**  
(Canada)

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Image 1: Skein of Swans in flight, Gibraltar Point Beach, Lake Ontario. ©Barbara Bickel

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My “awakened dreams” are about shifts. Thought shifts, reality shifts, gender shifts: one person metamorphoses into another in a world where people fly through the air, heal from mortal wounds. I am playing with my Self, I am playing with the world’s soul. I am the dialogue between my Self and the *el espíritu del mundo*. I change myself. I change the world.

-Gloria Anzaldúa, 1987

These winged familiars—Women, Owls, Ravens, and Hummingbirds—share more than the sheen of light on feather. They are of the Moon—Clay Mother; they are of the Earth—Earth Mother; they are of the Wind—Soul. As messengers, they cross the veils—to the North, the



South, East and West. Creating portals in all directions. Allowing those marked with tender lines,  
soft curves, and eyes that see in the dark to fly between the worlds.

-Alexandra Fidyk & Darlene St. Georges (in press)

Myth and ritual are wings of the bird spirit....The one contains the knowledge of language while  
the other embodies knowledge in action.

-Paula Gunn Allen, 1991

Flying is woman's gesture flying in language and making it fly.

-Hélène Cixous, 1997

\*\*\*

I have not had flying dreams since my 30s. I loved flying in my dreams. These recurring dreams of flight were always about escaping. Fear motivated the flying, but once in the air I was free of the danger. To be in flight, unreachable and separate from what or who was pursuing me was always the solution. Yet, the danger or disturbance was never resolved. Committing to conscious inner healing work in my awake state, these flying dreams disappeared and I felt their loss. I missed the sensorial experience of flying in my dreams. Almost 25 years later in the time of the Coronavirus social shutdown I find myself having another flying dream.

In this dream I am at a birthing ritual with women friends. I find myself flying in a barn with ribbons hanging from the rafters that I fly through and among.<sup>1</sup> I realize while dreaming that I am flying but not escaping from my friends below, and they do not think it is odd I am flying. As I transition into a more lucid dreaming state, I am aware I am experiencing a transformation in my ability and reasons for flying. In the dream I feel integrated with the ritual taking place below, as I know I offer a different perspective. Most significantly, in this flying dream I am not escaping danger or being pursued.

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Danger and fear permeates all parts of our lives during this time of the COVID-19 pandemic. Living in a perpetual liminal space of unknowing is a disorienting experience at collective and individual levels. Countries, cities, communities, families and individuals around the globe have been living with uncertainty for more than half a year now. Living with and through the pandemic experience has offered a novel opportunity to stop and face both life and death from alternative perspectives. It gives rise to the question: Can we face our fear and relearn how to be in flight to gain greater perspectives rather than for escape and avoidance as only victims?

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<sup>1</sup> Upon waking I remember my visit to the labyrinth at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in 2013 when I spent the afternoon in the space making art. There were hundreds of long ribbons hung from the ceiling of the cathedral, similar to the ones I fly through in this dream.

The opening epitaphs invoke the gift of symbolic and mythological flight that offers portals for dialogue, creating and writing that intersects with and crosses the unknown, the in-between, the dark, and the dreamtime; to enter the collective fear that is stuck fast in the deep polarization of irrational and rational ways of knowing and being.

Heavy blankets of fear(s) and terror overlay this pandemic, exaggerating and propelling it into its current crisis state. In the first weeks following the shutdown of businesses, realizing it would not be going away, it felt crucial for me to take communal action, to return to teaching art making as a restorative and transformative practice. I had been, for the most part of the year prior, in a place of solitary writing, producing a book on such practices with its telling subtitle; *Arational Learning in an Irrational World*.<sup>2</sup>

Regular teaching and dwelling within the arational with others has focused, challenged, and nourished me these last few months as I have travelled with more than 25 invited co-creators, living in different geographic locations, as we co-participate in a project into the unknown spaces of arts-based co-inquiry. As a collective of co-inquirers, we have been learning how to live in uncertain times, while acquiring knowledge and guidance from arational realms; such as art, dream, trance, Nature, ancestors and the body. The arational, which is most often conflated with the irrational, is distinct from, yet negotiates between and alongside the irrational and the rational (Gebser, 1984). Historically, it has typically not been acknowledged within the Western canon of philosophical thought despite its ability to be a mediator between the dualistic rational and distress-filled irrational ways of knowing and being. The arational is ontologically an inherent modality and intelligence accessible to all. Despite the dominant Western colonizing agenda of rationality, the arational has remained active and accessible in Indigenous worldviews and in their teachings and practices (Anzaldúa, 1987; Four Arrows, 2016).

One of the purposes of this essay is to encourage study, exploration and practices in fear studies that draw from and learn with the arational. Opening to inquiry, learning and unlearning in arational realms can interrupt and transform the irrational individual and societal behaviors which are contributing to the global ecological crisis and the recent COVID pandemic. Within the arational old/new understandings and insights can emerge that actively support living well in the midst of the environmental and social political crisis that has brought us to a disorienting tipping point in the current pandemic. As feminist Indigenous poet Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) poignantly warns, “Let us hope that the left hand, that of darkness, of femaleness, of “primitiveness,” can divert the indifferent right-handed, “rational” suicidal drive that, unchecked, could blow us into the acid rain in a fraction of a millisecond” (p. 69). At this time of unchecked and cascading crisis, and impending nuclear war, the arational is ever-present as a way of knowing and being. Patiently it is biding its time for a renaissance through human’s awakened relationships where left and right hands conjoin with all sentient and non-sentient beings across time and space.

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<sup>2</sup> *Art, Ritual and Trance Inquiry: Arational Learning in an Irrational World* by Barbara Bickel will be published by Palgrave MacMillan in early fall 2020. <https://www.palgrave.com/us/book/9783030457440>

## Communal Practices

Shortly after the shutdown of the Canadian city I live in, in March 2020, my life partner, R. Michael Fisher and I decided to make an on-line offering to the larger community. It has been a weekly practice of arts-based inquiry, teaching, learning and unlearning. We offered it as part of a larger *Restorative Lab Project* through *Studio M\*: A Research Creation Lab Intersecting Arts, Culture and Healing*.<sup>3</sup> The purpose of this particular research creation lab is to provide an online setting for communal practices involving arts-based healing approaches. We knew that we and others would benefit from a communal practice to make our way through the social isolation of the quarantine period of the coronavirus pandemic. The lab's objectives include:

- restoration of ourselves, self-authority fostering, emotional and collective support,
- potential healing through this transition time, while learning to learn what is most useful and create adaptively (accessing creative intelligence) in crisis,
- document the experiences, the art created, and the processes as they evolve so that others may benefit in the future from what is learned in this project.

Communal practices connect us metaphorically to the fungal mycelium network of connectivity that is always in relational communication in the soil beneath our feet. Connecting through a co-created field of care and compassion, communal practices help nourish, restore and sustain ecosystems by attending to the health and well-being of the individual with the whole. Communal art practices suffered a demise in the dominant rational capitalist individualist Western worldview that attempted ethnocide of Indigenous communal practices (that included the arts) and privileged the separation of art from life, propagating the genius (predominantly male) artist-hero myth, while denying women's hand-making and utilitarian creative practices such as pottery. Feminist poet, Gloria Anzaldúa in her 1987 book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*,<sup>4</sup> explains her Indigenous way of living art and notes how "Western cultures behave differently towards works of art than do tribal cultures....Tribal cultures keep art works in honored and sacred places in the home....They attend them by making sacrifices, libations....they bathe, feed and clothe them. The works are treated not just as objects, but also as persons" (p. 68). Art is integrated and impacts all parts of life. Art in isolation from life denies the capacity for humans to wit(h)ness<sup>4</sup> and learn relationally. The Western feminist art movement, influenced the communal practice of consciousness raising and by the civil rights movement, radically altered the trajectory of individualist Western art and re-opened the channel for relational art to re-enter the cultural scene.

*We further wanted to foster the rejoining of art with life....*

Michael and I envisioned the communal practices of the Restorative Lab Project as Happenings, situating them within the Western art historical framing of a Happening, that emerged in the time of the 1960s cultural revolution. They were orchestrated and articulated by artist and art historian

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<sup>3</sup> <https://studiom.space/>

<sup>4</sup> Wit(h)ness is a matrixial term Bracha Ettinger (1999) describes as an approach to being in co-presence that involves the intentional creation of space for deep listening and compassionate conjoinment with the other, be it human or more-than-human other.

Alan Kaprow as an event-encounter. Happenings involve an embodied, visual and auditory experience co-created by the maker and the receiver (Ehninger, 2014; Sontag, 1962). They are meant to break down barriers between artists and audience, and although initiated by the artist, the art event is participatory and the Happening becomes the art. Wanting to further foster the rejoining of art with life we decided upon teaching the practice of *Spontaneous Creation Making*, initially developed by Michael in the late 1980s and then further developed together (Bickel & Fisher, 1993). Spontaneous creation is part of life and the conscious practice of it offers a sacred framework to conjoin life and art as creation making that is an inherent healing. At its core this practice invites, holds, and moves with ritual, reverence and respect. We have facilitated, taught and been transformed by this simple yet abundant creative practice in and with communities, off and on, for more than 30 years. We have always offered our teaching of it outside of a capitalist frame and within a *gifting* counter framework, which we now articulate and situate as part of a matrixial gift-economy. “A matrixial gift economy is created within and through a maternal ecological healing paradigm rooted in practices of *originary compassion* (*com-passion*) and care” (Bickel, in press).<sup>5</sup> Matrixial theory as a relational theory emerged from Bracha Ettinger’s art and psychoanalytical practice and informs all of Studio M\* (M = matrixial) offerings (Ettinger, 2006; Evans & Ettinger, 2016). As such, this practice offered as a Happening has gifted and healed us alongside being a gift and healing opportunity for others. During this time of social distancing, the Happenings have taken place on the digital platform of ZOOM, with people from Canada, USA and Australia (see image 2 & 3).

It is our desire that this gift as a Happening extend and nourish others beyond our immediate reach. This essay is a reflection on my experience of this Restorative Lab Project and the bi-weekly Spontaneous Creation Making in Quarantine.



Image 2: Screen shot moment of spontaneous creation making group sharing in June 2020.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Read more on matrixial theory, and matrixial empathy-with-compassion, in Fisher & Bickel (2015).

<sup>6</sup>



Image 3: Spontaneous Creation Making in Quarantine poster, April 2020. ©Barbara Bickel

*Significantly for me and others, birds and/or flight emerged in the spontaneous creation making process.*

### **Spontaneous Creation Making**

Follow the art.....  
 Follow the materials  
 Follow the dreaming  
 Follow the teaching

“Follow the art” is the overarching suggestive directive of this practice. Combined, these directives are lines of flight we have shared regularly during the bi-weekly Spontaneous Creation Making Happenings. They assist in crossing veils into other worlds and opening to arational ways of being, knowing, and unknowing. We have come to trust art and its process to lead us to what wants to be expressed and attended to. The materials are our co-creators, they in/form us, moving with and



through our bodies to the creation. We invite attending to the unconscious active learning state of dreaming and follow the teachings that emerge in, through and from the arts, dreams and nature. When we enter these lines of flight, we can reach terrains that recognize fear, informing the rational and steadying irrational responses. Significantly for me and others, birds and/or flight emerged in the spontaneous creation making process. Early on in the Happenings birds appeared in our conversations and helped us in reflecting upon our changing living environments in the time of COVID.

*Birds began to appear in the art created by many of us....*

We found ourselves attuning to the active presence of birds in our neighbourhoods like never before. We became curious of what birds thought of the radical changes taking place in ‘normal’ human behaviour. Birds began to appear in the art created by many of us (see images 4 & 5). The world of nature has been a primary teacher for Indigenous peoples to understand how to live with fear and transform it, so it is not surprising that birds, as teachers in this time of fear of the virus, entered our awareness and often informed us in the spontaneous creation making experiences. Four Arrows (2015) wrote how “Other-than-humans” represents the ultimate teachers of [both fear and] courage and phenomenon that contributes to life’s inherent beauty. Every life form from trees and rivers to insects and fish [and birds] model varying degrees of courage or fearlessness. Lessons can be learned... (p. 56).

What messages or teachings regarding fear and fearlessness might the birds in natural environments and our imaginations be trying to pass on to us? What might they be making visible and audible to us in a new way? How can they become teachers for us in this time of crisis and teach us to respond with compassion and fearlessness rather than fear?

*I do not know this man and I am deeply disturbed by his  
off-hand sharing of this news....*

The ongoing process of creating the Covid Corvid.....the sawing of the medallion went well!

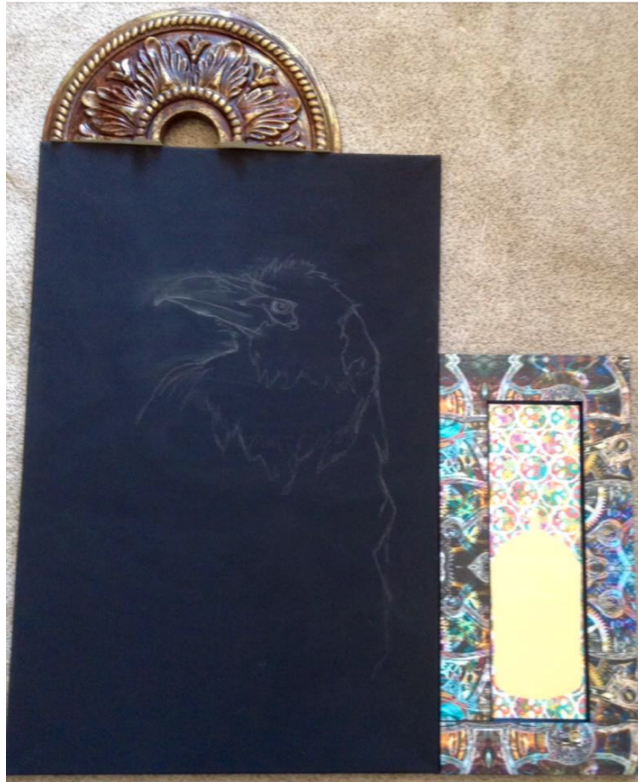


Image 4: Spontaneous creation making screen shot from Facebook, April 4, 2020. © Shannon MacKinnon.

crow photobombs eagle

fragments of sky catching the flight of actual birds, wondering what they are thinking of all this?

(FB cropped the border, now its part of this version!)



Image 5: Spontaneous creation making screen shot from Facebook, April 2020 © Bruce Entus.

As birds have appeared so frequently for me in this time of COVID, this essay has become a space for me to delve into their teachings. In reinterpreting Aztec beliefs, Gloria Anzaldúa “invents a transformational, communal theory of art: she describes writing as a fluid process between writer and reader, a “constant dialogue” between her selves, her readers, and the words she writes. These words have the potential to transform us: the images we read communicate “with tissues, organs, and cells to effect change” (Keating, 1996, 182-183). Performatively writing into my experience of bird visitations in my spontaneous creation making experiences, I am transformed. I am changed and the world is changed as the boundaries dissolve between me, the art and you the reader. I next share art that emerged in the spontaneous creation making process as it holds and centers my encounters with birds as they have revealed my fears alongside the emergence of fearlessness that is transforming and expanding my perspectives.

*Spontaneous Creative Emergence in early April 2020*

The day of this Happening I learn from my downstairs neighbour that he had tested positive for COVID-19. I do not know this man and I am deeply disturbed by his off-hand sharing of this news and knowing he is alone and that he does not seem to be taking it seriously. It brings forward my own fear and worry that the virus is now in close proximity to my home and that me and my family are closer to the risk of infection. During the Happening event that day I took my 30 minutes of spontaneous creation making time and began to work with a small handful of white clay. I do not look at what my hand movements are doing as they respond to the clay material. When I do open my fingers and look, I see the fetal-like form of a bird-headed goddess emerging.

A number of months earlier, while creating with my artist collective on a retreat, a bird-headed goddess emerged in a similar way. That bird-headed goddess was buried as an act of gratitude for the gifts the Earth has given to the Gestare artist collective over the years. The next day my bird-headed goddess was ritually buried in a communal grave at the base of a majestic old oak tree in a cemetery with the other goddess figurines created by the women in the collective.

I love how this newly birthed bird-headed goddess cradles in my hand and that her center is concave like a vessel. I want to protect her, like I want to protect my family from COVID, and I wrap her in a fragment of knitted red wool, creating a soft nest for her (see image 6). I place her on an altar in my home to dry. When the next group Happening takes place later that week, I decide to bury her under a formerly majestic and now severely pruned Manitoba Maple tree in my backyard and create a headstone of stones to mark the site.



Image 6: Spontaneous creation making on April 2020. Photo taken in front of a COVID positive neighbour's door. ©Barbara Bickel

A few weeks later I found myself in another burial ritual under the same tree. A female Tennessee Warbler hit our patio window and sat stunned on the patio deck. It was cold and windy outside so we picked up the injured and submissive bird and held her in our hands (see image 7). Less than 30 minutes later she took her last breath. My partner, Michael and I then carried her to the old pruned tree in our yard and buried this beautiful creature next to the stone markers at the bird goddess burial site. That evening we watched a bird documentary as a way to honour this tiny bird that had lost its life due to a collision with our human-made window. Such windows are a convenience to humans and deadly to many birds. We learned that this small migrating bird is at risk of extinction.... and our part in her premature death became more poignant. Messages from birds are there to be listened too in so many ways in our lives. Another bird death took place again that same week before we managed to put a raptor bird silhouette on our windowpane to deter these song birds from the line of flight to death. We were facing our negligence and learning first-hand how slow humans are to act, even with the facts, when it is the 'other' that is under threat and not us. Some call this speciesism.



Image 7: Death of a Tennessee Warbler in May 2020. ©Barbara Bickel

*Spontaneous Creation Emergence in April 2020*

What are we hiding from? Is the question that surfaces as I reflect on the image of the performative gesture (see image 8) that emerged during another Happening. I perform for my wit(h)nessing co-inquirers on the computer screen. My eyes were covered until I move backwards and slide open my hands and allow myself to see the others watching and listening to me. I feel protected behind my entwined and locked fingers as they block my ability to see beyond myself. I have been suffering from a headache for a number of days and my ability to be in the world very limited. After stepping backward into the space behind me, I fold my body over and reach down to connect with the energy of the Earth. I gather the Earth energy up with my arms and let it wash over my body. Bringing myself upright I use my right arm and hand to pull the pain from its stuck place in the right side of my skull. I enact this aggressive gesture 8 times and on the 9<sup>th</sup> time my arm remains extended and transforms into flight (see image 9).





Image 8: Performative Gesture. Spontaneous Creation Making on April 2020. ©Barbara Bickel



Image 9: Spontaneous Performance into Flight. Spontaneous Creation Making on April 4, 2020. ©Barbara Bickel.

What takes place in this performative spontaneous creation can be filtered through Four Arrows' (2015) theory of *trance-based learning based* on what he names CAT. CAT is the acronym for Concentration Activated Transformation and FAWN situates itself within the original four directions of the general Indigenous worldview: Fear, Authority, Words and Nature. Spontaneously performing, while being witnessed by others, brought me into a state of CAT initiated by my Fear of pain and suffering, while my somatic Authority moved me into a Nature-based transformation. In becoming bird, I rewrote (re-Worded) my experience of being a victim to the heavy pull of gravity and the pounding pain of the headache.

*Spontaneous Emergence in May 2020*

I re-watch the video recording of the spontaneous performance where I am transformed while wearing the Dakini/mute swan mask I created. I don't feel the video recording captures the hissing mute swan sounds I was making-- but the energy of the communication is there. She is ferocious, as are the traditional Dakinis, who are sky goers in many traditions; they are a fierce liberating female energy and messengers with the power to bring forth transformations.<sup>7</sup>



Image 10: Dakini Mute Swan Messenger Mask. Spontaneous Creation Making on May 17, 2020. ©Barbara Bickel

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/dakini>

She is experienced as “horrorifying,” “powerful” and recognized as “breathtaking,” and “a visitation from a powerful, protective being, Shaman, deity-demon, dakini” by the wit(h)nesses of my spontaneous creation performance. Later, I take a selfie photo of me wearing the dakini/mute swan mask. She is scary looking. Looks a bit like Darth Vader from the Star Trek film (see image 10). The mask is an assemblage (as was the theme for material of the art creations made that evening by others) and a combination of art I had made many years ago; a Venus goddess mask and a cloth transfer image of the Dream Scroll, along with 2 Mute Swan feathers collected while I was at an artist residency on Lake Ontario. The image in the lower part of the mask is a cloth photo transfer of women students, who facilitated Nap-Ins with the Dream Scroll as part of one of the art classes I taught at the university. They wanted to re-perform Dakini energy with the large fabric scroll that is filled with hundreds of people’s dreams. They stand in a line behind the Dream Scroll and pose as a many armed and legged goddess. Nap-Ins (another communal practice begun by the Gestare artist collective) are about conscious communal dreaming. Dakini energy appeared and was performed at the first Nap-in in 2009.<sup>8</sup>

It’s interesting that a mask covers my mouth. A different kind of mask than the protective health masks being worn during the pandemic. I made an opening for my mouth in the second layer of cloth underneath so I could speak, but only hisses came out in the performance. One of the co-inquirers said I sounded like Darth Vader as my voice was mediated through the digital audio system transfer through to her computer. I had a few rough days following this spontaneous creation making experience. I was on the phone listening to my older brother share his health struggles and fears as he was in the midst of being ill with the COVID-19 virus. The virus literally knocked him out of his life for a full 6 weeks and has continued to affect his health as he has experienced relapses and symptoms since his initial recovery. He spoke of being a Guinea pig for science. I found myself horrified and really angry about the state of the world and was unsociable and grumpy as I went about my days. During the next spontaneous creation making Happening later that week, after coming out of the opening communal grounding practice, I found myself in an emergent vocal sounding process during the creating time. The sounding included the hissing I had done a few days earlier in the mask performance, and from that hiss the following poem emerged giving voice to the messenger. I did not wear the mask when I performed this poem for the spontaneous creation making group. In this poem performance I was the deliverer, the narrator of the message. Through the poem I was able to share the complex and multi-layered experience of rage, guilt, fear and grief that I had been filled with but was personally overwhelmed by that week.

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<sup>8</sup> Visit the Gestare Art Collective website to know more about Nap-Ins. [www.gestareartcollective.com](http://www.gestareartcollective.com)

Hsssssss

mute swan hissing

flying dakini      messenger

Wake-up      Wake-up!

Awaken to your interbeingness

You are not separate

You are tightly entwined

Hssss hsssssss

we are afraid

we are so afraid

we board ourselves up tightly      alone

so tightly      we think we are

imprenatrable

we think we are

safe

Hsssssss

we have been entered

she is in us

transforming us as we hide

Hsssss



*Spontaneous Emergence in Early June 2020*

It a beautiful evening and I go outside the house to create during the spontaneous creation making Happening. I begin to gather rocks that I want to use in tandem with the white clay. I have decided to make another bird-headed goddess figurine and find myself gathering a few stones. Coming back into the house I take a handful of clay and similar to my prior experiences with hand molding I allow my hands to play with and respond to the clay, only this time I embed the stones into the clay. I mold clay around a small triangular shaped stone for her head and I press the clay around the larger triangle-shaped stone for her torso. I use a small round stone as a sacred gift bundle for her to hold between her hands. She will then dry with these stones and the shrinking clay will hold the stones more tightly in her body. This bird-headed goddess presents herself with the energy of the elder crone/wise woman (see image 11).

I bury her on Summer Solstice as part of the gratitude practice my artist collective is scheduled to do on this Earth Sabbat day (see image 12). Each of us engaging a gratitude practice where we live. My gratitude practice has continued to be a ritual burying of these bird-headed goddess figurines that keep emerging in the communal spontaneous creation making Happenings.



Image 11: Crone Bird Goddess. Spontaneous creation making in June 2020. ©Barbara Bickel





Image 12: Spontaneous creation making ritual burial of the Crone Bird Goddess in June 2020. ©Barbara Bickel

### *Spontaneous Emergence in June 2020*

A few weeks after the burial of the crone bird-headed goddess I find myself returning to the white clay during a spontaneous creation making Happening. Once again, I begin by handling and forming the clay in my hands. I want to create wings for this next bird-headed goddess. During this time of COVID I have been consciously working on building winged awareness into my body movements and visualizing my shoulder blades as gliding wings. Receiving guidance from a teacher who is successfully helping me alter my habitual chain of muscle recruitment, set in place by early neck and shoulder injuries that contribute to my headache suffering, I am unlearning life-long habits that have caused much suffering. She is my unlearning teacher, reteaching me how to be in my body with awareness of the healing power of my breath and visual imagination.<sup>9</sup>

Pinching clay out from the center, fully formed wings emerge in this new being. Solid legs form and a small tail emerges. I begin to press into her soft flesh with the led tip of a pencil, making simple patterns and details for body parts; eyes to see, claws on her feet to grasp and a yoni between her legs for pleasure and fertility. The end of the pencil has lost its eraser head and I use this circular form to create the suggestion of breasts getting ready to nourish. I turn her over in my hand and imprint circles down her back seven times to activate kundalini energy centers. When I

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<sup>9</sup> Teaching Spontaneous Creation Making within the model of the gift economy has gifted me with the meeting of an amazing restorative yoga teacher Cristina Gonzalez. I have watched her performing during spontaneous creation making sharings; her open arms expanding in joyful sensual flight, despite her moving in the confinement of small rooms in her home during the pandemic lockdown.

share her in the group circle, others see cobra-ness in her. As I write this essay, I make a link between the first bird-headed goddess, who was in an infant state and vulnerable in her fetal-like form, and then the bird-headed goddess who exuded the bent and wise energy of the elder crone. I now recognize this most recent bird goddess as a one who has been created with body parts that allow her to take flight. Later I take her outdoors for a photo shoot in the yard and perch her on the side of the burial tree and let her fly through the sky (see images 13 & 14). She is the first bird-headed goddess I have created who has taken flight.

*Gradually I find my capacity for activities that I have had to discontinue in my life due to pain are returning.*



Image 13: Spontaneous creation making in June 2020. ©Barbara Bickel





Image 14: Spontaneous creation making play in June 2020. ©Barbara Bickel

### **Expanding Perspectives through Fearless Engagement with the Arational**

The most recent bird-headed goddess lives with me in my house for the next month. Sometimes she is perched near my writing desk, most of the time she is perched near plants looking into the living room library. My restorative yoga sessions are on hold and I continue the body and awareness practices I have been taught by my teacher daily. Gradually I find my capacity for activities that I have had to discontinue in my life due to pain are returning. I am contacted by the health center that had cancelled a session with my osteopath in April due to the non-essential health care shut down. I book an appointment knowing that my body is more primed for a healing adjustment to assist me in releasing and realigning my body for future pain free winged flight. Wearing a mask while on the table covered in vinyl for easy sterilizing, the shoulder injury that has caused me the most chronic pain is being worked into by the therapist. He asks me how the injury happened and I immediately recall it and as I tell him the story, simultaneously the injury (that he tells me was embedded in my bone) releases.

The shoulder injury took place during a ritual performance with a collaborator, Tannis Hugill, during my dissertation studies on women's multi-faith spiritual leadership (Bickel & Hugill, 2011). The performance called *Re/Turning to Her* took place on a labyrinth on the grounds of the school of theology where my study was taking place.<sup>10</sup> In the ritual performance the story of the descent of the goddess into death as her response to having been shunned by Christianity was told. In the performance I am the grieving maiden priestess who calls her back to life. During the celebratory dance after her resurrection we fly back and forth between each other while holding the tension of a long skein of cloth between us. I was in flight the moment the shoulder (wing) injury occurred. As I write this, I search for a word to describe the long strip of white fabric we held between us as we flew across the labyrinth's surface. I decide upon the word *skein*. I am not sure how to spell skein so I look it up in the dictionary. Here I learn that skein also means a flock of swans in flight and this brings the Dakini/mute swan who emerged in these recent Happenings into direct conversation with the wing injury I have been holding onto and living with for 13 years.

The day following the release of the injury that had been hiding for years in my bone, I have a phone call booked with Tannis. For two years we have been doing research and preparatory trance work in the dance studio to reconnect and heal with and through our maternal ancestral lineages. We have not embarked on a collaborative project since *Re/Turning to Her* and this extended one has been taking us deep into the bones of our ancestral given gifts and burdens and the responsibilities they entail as descendants of colonizers living in North America. The recovery of my shoulder for the work we are doing together feels like a validation of the difficult creative co-inquiry work we have been engaging. It is also an encouraging reminder that the work of letting obstacles and blocks go is taking place whether we consciously know it or not.

#### *Spontaneous Emergence August 2020*

The bird goddess that has been with me the past month in the house is ready to take her next flight before she is ritually buried as part of my artist collective's Gratitude practice on Lunar Lammas, on August 3<sup>rd</sup>. I am in the end days of completing this essay and I wake up the day before Lammas and realize she is to be buried at the sit-spot I bike to regularly at the nearby creek. A place where I have been studying the Bank Swallows in flight as they fly in and out of their nests on the creek's clay cliff embankment.

*My perspectives on life and death are greatly expanded....*

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<sup>10</sup> See short video documentary of *Re/Turning to Her* <https://vimeo.com/25045001>





Images 15 & 16: Barbara at Nose Creek with bank sparrows and bird-headed goddess, August 3, 2020 © R. Michael Fisher



On the day of her burial, Michael and I ride to the creek. The swallows do not let our presence on the top of the bank disturb their flight. So, I dig a hole into the side of the bank and bury her while the sparrows fly in and out of the bank beside us. I pick a bouquet of wild flowers and place them in front of the Earth filled burial hole. I am awash with deep gratitude for the spirit of the clay Earth, the birds, the gift of flight they offer and for the bird-goddesses, who keep emerging through my spontaneous creation making. My perspectives on life and death are greatly expanded by the interconnected nature spirit of fearless purpose on this Earth.



Images 17, 18 & 19: Bird-goddess burial, August 3, 2020 © R. Michael Fisher

## **“You still have wings, use them”**

I am visited by a colleague, Darlene St. Georges the weekend before the Lunar Lamas burial of the bird goddess and I introduce them to each other. Upon seeing the bird goddess, Darlene exclaims “she is raw energy.” Raw energy, Darlene equates to spirit unfolding through the creative process (Boyd, Sinner & St. Georges, 2018). She expresses this through poetic reflection on her own creative process: “Seized by her energy/silhouettes of lucid dreams/unfold before my eyes/abundance of blue skies/air/breath/Breathe” (p. 44). Lucid dreaming, spontaneously creating, imagining oneself with wings flying through the blue skies—all are sourced by humans through arational ways of knowing and experiencing that can expand our perspectives on fear and transform our understandings of life, death and all the moments in-between. Wise words I received from my sister in a dream from the other-side of the veil, after her too early death 10 years ago, pulls my story further along the spiral’s circle. “You still have wings, use them.”

Lifting into flight through a transformative dialogue between image and text has been the result of writing this essay expressing the significance of the inclusion of the arational within the emergent field of Fear Studies. It is my desire that these performatively written words and images invoke a desire in the reader to explore the arational realms as a transformative mediator between fear and fearlessness. The arational holds the raw direct energy that we all can be strengthened and informed by as we are called to unlearn patterns of behaviors and actions that lead to ill-health in ourselves and the world. The spontaneously created art shared in this essay is a gift in the form raw energy birthed within the communal Happenings—relational event-encounters of engagement and wit(h)nessing of each other and nature. R. Michael Fisher shares in one of his YouTube channel teachings. “I often teach of a Solar Fearlessness (modality) as the more 'masculine' and a more tender *Lunar Fearlessness* (modality) as the more 'feminine.’”<sup>11</sup> This essay falls into the more tender Lunar Fearlessness approach to transformation. A restorative lunar energy being called forth to aid all of us caught in a human fear-fanned and out of control flame of solar energy. If COVID-19 as a total phenomenon is more than just a virus, a pandemic, and a nuisance and threat—then, as it seems in my experience, at least, it serves a greater purpose of transformation of self in relation with all, for which I am grateful.

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<sup>11</sup> To read more about “Lunar Fearlessness” see R. Michael Fishers 2018 boo, “Fearless Engagement of Four Arrows” published by Peter Lang p. 127 – 131.

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Image 20: Bird-goddess fearless perspective, August 3, 2020. © R. Michael Fisher

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