

INDIGENOUS POIESIS: MEDICINE FOR MOTHER EARTH

VICKI KELLY

ABSTRACT:

Indigenous knowledge practices are ecological encounters of profound ethical relationality that acknowledge the act of co-creating through living embodiments of Indigenous Poiesis. This radical participation in Indigeneity through the offering of our humble humanity allows us to move into the living intensity of profound reciprocal relationship. Through Indigenous Poiesis, art becomes ecological activism. This Indigenous Métissage weaves life writing, indigenous woodcarving, and experiences of native flute playing, and presencing Anishinaabe stories in the spirit of Indigenous oral tradition.

BIO:

Vicki Kelly is Anishinaabe/Métis, and an Indigenous Scholar in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. She is an artist who plays the Native American Flute; she is a visual artist, Eurythmist/dancer, and writer. She has completed a two-year traditional apprenticeship at the Freda Diesing School of Northwest Coast Art. As an art therapist she is deeply interested in Indigenous understandings of Health, Wellness and Healing.



Figure 1: *In the Discipline of Wind*. Video still from http://www.joenorrisplaybuilding.ca/?page_id=1329
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"It has become clear to me that how we live, how we organize, how we engage in the world – the process – not only frames the outcome, it is the transformation... Engaging in deep and reciprocal Indigeneity is a transformative act because it fundamentally changes modes of production of our lives. It changes the relationships that house our bodies and our thinking... If we want to live in a different present then we have to centre Indigeneity and allow it to change us."

Leanne Simpson, 2017

Indigenous knowledge practices are ecological encounters of profound ethical relationality that acknowledge the act of co-creating through living embodiments of Indigenous Poiesis. What is provoked are potential encounters that ask us to fully engage in elegant enactments of making such that the ceremony of these sacred practices makes and unmakes us. This radical participation in Indigeneity through the offering of our humble humanity allows us to move into the living intensity of profound reciprocal relationship with the great flux of becoming within the circle of life. It is in such powerful acts of attunement that we entrain with the acoustic ecology of polyphonic creation. The human and the more than human are all living enactments or possible pathways of being and becoming; they are teachings offered, sounding through sonic resonance and reverberation. This Indigenous Métissage weaves life writing, Indigenous woodcarving, and experiences of native flute playing, with the evoking and provoking of presencing in the spirit of Indigenous oral tradition (for

example see [flute introduction](#) to Part 1 of this special issue). It is through returning to the ancient teachings of Indigeneity that we learn to radically re-imagine and re-animate our vision of the future for the generations to come. Through Indigenous Poiesis, art becomes ecological activism.

Creation longs for the alchemy of sacred acts, ceremony offered as medicine to our ailing Mother Earth. I ask: What are the Indigenous pedagogies of “Making” that can heal our broken relationships within our human communities, the more than human world, and ourselves? How do aesthetic encounters become sites or ecologies for social healing? How can Indigenous art as a knowledge practice create capacities that catalyze our consciousness towards a new vision of what it means to live on this land deeply relationally, such that it sounds with love songs created through the act of Indigenous poiesis?

Indigenous resurgence is ultimately an invitation to create spaces, ecologies of Indigeneity, that reanimate, revitalize and restore our respectful reciprocal relationship with “All Our Relations.” Thus, this article takes up the challenge offered by *Artizein*, and supports the journal’s notion of “preparing for the possible” by offering Indigenous Poiesis as a praxis that brings forth radical participation in ecologies of the possible as ceremonies of sacred enactment. I deeply appreciate the following linguistic links sited in the call: “*artem* (L.), meaning a skill or craft; *artus* (L.), suggesting a joining or fitting together; and *artios* (G.), describing that which is complete or suitable.” As an Indigenous artist/scholar I endeavour to develop the skillfulness or craft-ability to co-create an artistic practice that joins, or allows me to experience my being within the being of Creation such that I not only fit within the community of “All My Relations” but feel utterly at home and complete within its circle

of life and for life’s sake. The embodiment of Indigenous Poiesis as eco-poiesis, suggests a learning pathway, it offers teachings that can be gifted forward through artistic creation. In this Indigenous Métissage I share the weaving of the teachings gathered, thread by thread through my engagement in Indigenous arts-based and contemplative making through Indigenous carving and native flute playing. I braid these threads of lived experience with Indigenous aesthetics and Indigenous ethics to highlight a living alternative offered through Indigeneity and Indigenous Poiesis to the honourable harvest human beings can gift all creation. These teachings have proven crucial to my own Indigenous resurgence and search for spontaneous being as an Anishinaabekwe, an Anishinaabe/Métis woman.

If arts-based practice and contemplative practice are a pathway to “Artizein,” a way to prepare artful being or becoming as a work of art through practice, then what is the nature of the process? How do we as arts-based and contemplative practitioners become a creation such that our aesthetic and spiritual instrument of perception and understanding would acknowledge an “Artizein”, an artful being or one who is being artful through praxis? As an Indigenous artist/scholar this question lies at the heart of an essential existential inquiry and challenges me to be useful to my family of relations about how my reaching, my yearnings and my learnings have been about becoming fully human and healing. I have found medicine in the “making” and have had the honour of witnessing this profound process in others.

What are the first moments of preparation for artful being? What is the manner or mode that is suitable in the “making” or the joining together of ART and BEING? How have Indigenous Peoples or our Ancestors understood this profound process of

becoming through making or Indigenous Poiesis? What is the nature of the craft and/or what are the skills needed for the rendering of artful being?

I have been tracking Indigenous Poiesis or “making” as a profound participatory pedagogy, a process that makes and unmakes me. “Making” needs the soil of the soul to enact its active alchemy. In its unfolding it renders or transforms us, makes us available or resonant to the world around us. This sensitizing of our aesthetic sensibility creates an instrument that allows us to learn to entrain with the sounding of acoustic ecologies of being. Traditionally an Indigenous Knowledge Holder is one who has learned to hold knowledge such that they become resonant to and with the created world, or more specifically to the environmental and spiritual ecology of their traditional territory or lands. What is this process of becoming resonant, that I have

I grew up in the Anishinaabe territory of the Northern Ojibway or Northwestern Ontario. At that time the land was still untouched by development and thus profoundly potent, powerful and sublime. As a child, I grew up filled with awe and wonder, often utterly astonished at the beauty and magnificence of Creation around me. I was aware of the earth as Mother Earth and all of nature was animated with being and agency. During my adolescence, I became attentive to a subtle shift; my experiences of awe and astonishment at nature’s beauty and grandeur became an acknowledged sense of the presence of a moral agency that animates the natural world. Wandering alone in the wilderness, I had moments of profound spiritual reverence for what I sensed as a sacred landscape filled with being.

Indigenous People of all continents live within a tradition that fosters an awareness of the sacred being of nature and therefore show reverence before her, as Mother Earth. This movement from awe and wonder to reverence is foundational to understanding Creation as filled with moral and spiritual agency and being. Indigenous people have traditionally cultivated, through this Indigenous participatory pedagogy, a profound love and reverence for the land and “All Our Relations.” The environmental ecology is animated by a spiritual ecology of being. This living imagination or mytho-poetic tradition



Figure 2: Lake Lauzon called “Bindewaagagin ” meaning “Lake between the Lakes” by the Mississauga (Anishinaabek). © Vicki Kelly, 2015

learned through playing the Native American Flute in a place-based artistic practice?

(Cajete, 1994, 2015) is found in all the teaching stories of the Anishinaabe People. Through them we learn how to be the best

at being human from “All Our Relatives.”

I have also discovered what Zajonc (2009) and others call the path of reverence. This pathway is part of the participatory pedagogy of Indigenous Poiesis. The first part of this process begins with awe and wonder, foundational to all learning. As children, our radical openness and amazement leaves us awed and filled



Figure 3: *Path to Quetican or “Place of Unusual Beauty.”* © Vicki Kelly, 2015

with astonishment. This allows us to fill our senses fully through lived experience. Wonder changes to reverence when we feel and honour the powerful presence or force of agency that lies within the living phenomenon of the land, it becomes a sacred ecology. We feel the living presence of “All our Relations”; we sound and resound with the inner energy or sounding tone or voice of Creation. Through this we participate within the living effervescent landscape. Often, I was deeply moved by my experience of the northern lights or Aurora Borealis. I felt Creator moving within the luminous swirling choreography that danced across the sky. I was so absorbed in participating in the experience that I felt one with the flux and flow of luminosity over the snow-covered lake. I was absorbed by the embrace of the land and surrendered myself completely to the process, often feeling at one with the

natural world. This is when I experienced the land as sacred. Wonder, reverence, and the participatory pedagogy of being on the land, or in the canoe, gave rise to a spiritual experience of self-surrender and oneness with Creation. In living within the flux of energy that united me to “All My Relations” my instrument for knowing became resonant. The world offered itself to me, and as a young person I always felt I had to

learn how to fully or completely surrender deeply to the process of participating with the Circle of Creation in that place. My job was to withstand the intensity of my lived experience, to actively find my place within the family of life that surrounded me. The ancient granite, was acknowledged as a living part of Mother Earth; her ancient bones were some of the oldest rock on the face of the earth.

These profound experiences of reverence lead to a deeply felt ethic for and an ethical relationality to the land as well as to all the beings

or “All my Relations” living well in that place. The stories of the Anishinaabe created an imaginative landscape in which to honour these teachings and my inner imagination was created in symmetry with the land. This is the task of being human in that place.

In the Anishinaabe world the Creator, Gitche Manitou, imagined and fashioned Creation and sent the first or Original Human, our ancestor, to wander the world and to learn the name or essence of each and every being within Creation. The Original Human was to be open enough to receive the teachings or wisdom of each and every created being. The implicit responsibility was to fashion a relationship to the world, such that the created one, whether a plant being or an animal being would offer to share its essential nature or the teachings of its unique way of being. The dawning

of this wisdom in us is acknowledged as Illumination or knowing as a way of being. Often, in Indigenous Knowledge traditions, the knowing is understood: physically, emotionally, mindfully and spiritually. The wholeness of being human was gifted by these teachings through a beautiful process, an Indigenous Inquiry process. What does this process involve you ask?

It requires of us that we take up the teaching of humility which in Anishinaabe means “becoming like earth,” by offering our humanness to the participatory pedagogical process of becoming human and by following the teachings of “All Our Relations.” This is the experience I often felt while looking up at the northern lights, or at sunsets and sunrises. It was a reverence so profound I felt like I was kneeling in complete surrender

while watching or with-nessing. Seeing animals within their natural habitats, I felt blessed to witness their oneness with the land and how each contributed to the well-being of the Family of Creation. As I walked carefully or sat in my canoe drifting on the waters of a vast lake, a prayerful mood of humility was leading me to reverence for the gifts I received through my reciprocal relationship with the land. I felt deeply humbled and a profound sense of gratitude, an inward reverence through spiritual participation. My learning spirit was moved by and resonated with the land and all the beings living there. This prayerful way of “being with” was my humble offering to the land; a reciprocal recognition that animated me also animated the ecology in which I lived.

Each day I greeted Mother Earth... Bozhoo... Aaniin

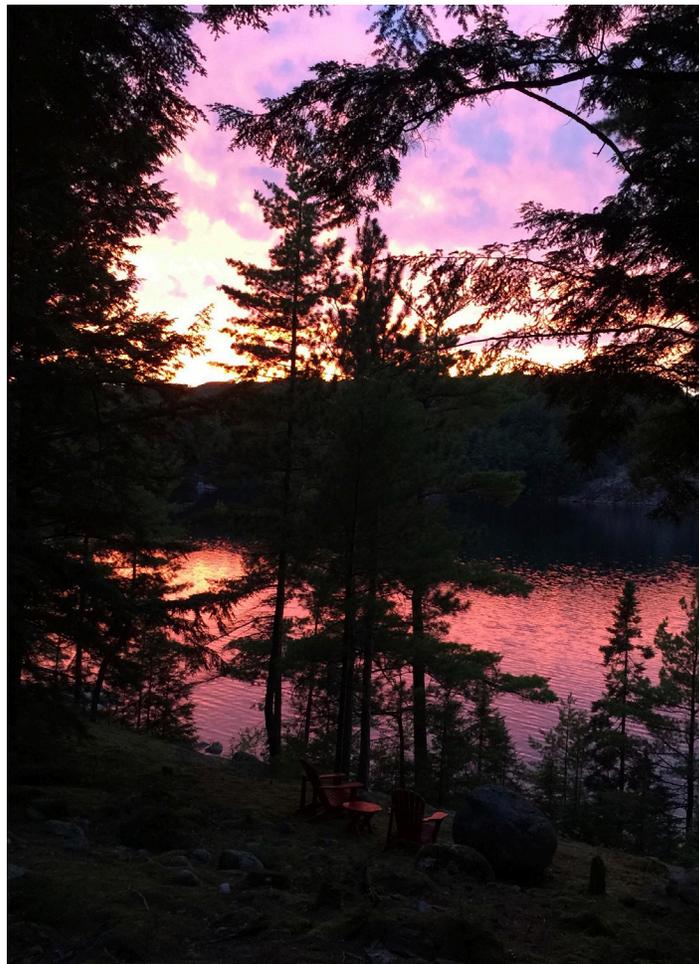


Figure 4: *Stillness*, Lake Lauzon called “Bindewaagagin ” meaning “Lake between the Lakes” by the Mississauga (Anishinaabek). © Vicki Kelly, 2016

What does Indigenous Poiesis or the Indigenous ceremony of “making” offer the soil of the soul? Well, it involves an Indigenous eight-fold pathway or way of preparation by circling the Medicine Wheel twice. It allows one to spiral deeply into the centre of our Indigeneity through embodied acts of ceremonial offering, asking, seeking, making, having, sharing, celebrating and being (Cajete, 1994). And through this process one emerges through a creative response to one’s existential yearning or longing for vision also known as the Vision Quest. One follows the great movement around the Medicine Wheel from the Eastern Doorway of wonder to reverence, resonance, to participatory pedagogy, to self-surrender and the oneness of deep attention and utter absorption. Indigenous Poiesis as a practice involves a series of processes or sites of activity. They are enacted within Indigenous Poiesis or “making” through the ceremony of offering, asking, seeking, making, having, sharing, celebrating and being. This is a process of inner inquiry and also of visioning within Indigenous knowledge traditions; Indigenous Poiesis offers a medicine way.

This learning or inquiry pathway begins with an appropriate orientation to the world and to learning. It acknowledges respectful reciprocal relationships; it invites the setting of intention and the focusing of volition through prayerful asking, seeking, creating and developing understanding, then celebrating one’s learning and emerging vision with reference to the central place of becoming and being. The circular nature of the process around the Medicine Wheel begins and ends with the centring place of inward awareness and contemplation.

Offering is the centering place of inwardness and reverence. This is the origin of prayerful offering where the souls’ intention is honoured and formed. The

longing for vision, dreaming, imagining or knowing is honoured in the energized intention to learn in a way true to our inherent nature and personality. This is honoured through the ceremonial offering of Tobacco to Mother Earth when gathering materials such as wood for carving or before playing the flute in place. One can also smudge with sage to prepare by washing ones being with the healing power of the rising smoke.

Asking is really a prayer. It is the beginning of the journey, asking for illumination, naming the quest, and essentially living deeply with a spiritual sense of intention or goal for the process. True learning requires deep motivation, down to the marrow of one’s bones, with one’s whole heart, soul and spirit. This initiates the process of making ready, preparing the ground, physically, emotionally, mindfully and spiritually. Asking is exploring new capacities and teachings with patience and conviction. One needs trust, faith and enduring patience. Asking is the initiation of the creative flow of energy, thought and imagination. The activity of asking is like preparing the soil, planting the seed, and asking for help and guidance. Each task undertaken develops capacity and skill, and a sense of direction for orientating oneself to the centre of the process. All this is done prior to embarking on the journey as an act of humility. One is asking for life’s sake, and for the gift of being awakened or transformed by the process and/or the journey ahead. Asking as a prayer may accompany the whole journey of “making;” it creates the good hands, good heart and good mind of the Indigenous Poiesis process.

Seeking is the actual process of questing, of looking for what one mysteriously yearns or longs for, that extends or augments one’s current capacity and sense of being. We may not know what we are searching for or

seeking, but we long for a gift, a song, a dance, a teaching, or finding a place or way of being, a felt sense of wisdom, or even a dream to live by. These are all expression of a yearning to learn or a longing for vision, a search for meaning or longing for capacity. In seeking, we are willing to undertake an arduous journey of transformation and are prepared to do what is needed. Often, one is willing to risk all and overcome great hardship, encountering many hinderances or obstacles on the adventure. One wants to learn to listen, to see, to know in specific ways, through specific and often multiple modalities. In seeking, we often learn lessons of caring compassion, self-sacrifice, perseverance, and humility. In my carving and flute playing, I am continually seeking, straining in my entraining, tuning to the sacred act of creating within Creation.

Making involves creating new or novel creations as a result of one's visioning. Making is the work of good hands, good heart, and good mind; it creates a series of works of deep significance that symbolically or metaphorically inform one's knowledge of self and/or the world. We access our creativity and resourcefulness in making; we develop skill through the patience of practice. The song, dance, artifact, or effect that we create emerges from our vision and it changes not only our own lives, but the lives of others. Through the act of creating, we elaborate or fine tune what we have learned or cultivate the capacities we have developed. Making is magic, marvelous and mysterious. It is also hard work. Each of the first four stages is enacted as a prayer, with a mood of reverence and devotion to the process.



Figure 5: Vicki 'making' an eagle blanket pin for the regalia she is weaving. ©Aaron Nelson Moody, 2019

Having is when we learn from enacting our vision or creating something, where our understanding is increased or we have learned something or honed our skill in some capacity. We also learn or develop a sense of our own selves, and witness how our own soul has developed capacities or sensibilities that extend or augment what we had or were previously. Through "making" we develop self-acceptance and/or find maturity in understanding through creating our own circumstances, by initiating our own process and participating in its pedagogy. Through "making" we come to have more maturity and become conscious participants creating our own worlds, inwardly and outwardly. We also develop the courage to accept the responsibility for becoming co-creators with others, with the world. We learn to re-cognize and manifest our unique potential; we learn how to apply our personal power and may even empower ourselves through what we make from our emerging vision. We can also empower others as well. This process may

also involve discerning decision making, and the cultivation of incubation time for implementing our vision within a specific context. Our having is always ecological to our “making” process; it is resonant to the forces that created it or gave it voice.

Sharing our vision and what we have learned or created becomes a part of the ceremony of life and the living spirit of community. We share the life we have sought or created with others, and sharing may involve a diversity of practices, forms and dimensions. It is essentially revealing or teaching others what we have learned or created. We are all teachers and we learn to generously share with others what we have gathered as songs dances, stories, rituals, or sacred art and also what we have become through developing new capacity. Teaching and sharing are part of the process of becoming more whole, spiritually mature and wise. The Indigenous act of witnessing or sharing in ceremony is when we acknowledge the act of carrying the teachings received with a sense of reciprocal responsibility. One is expected to tell the story of the sharing and spread the teachings through oral tradition.

Celebrating is the natural consequence of moments of “making,” having and spiritual sharing; it can appear in a diversity of processes, through protocol and ceremony. It can be an individual or community process and celebrate the mystery of life through creation. Celebrating honours the journey that each of us takes in our unique ways and lifts up the process through ceremony, and throughout this lifting up we celebrate ourselves like one does another in a traditional Blanketing Ceremony. Celebrating is a way of spreading the light, gifting the surroundings, often through ceremony. In the Indigenous world our response-ability is to complete the Circle of Creation through enacting ceremony and

giving back to the circle of life for life’s sake through sacred ritual.

Being is joyous and victorious, thankful and generous with deep inward reflection and honouring of the embodied gifts of the process. Indigenous Poiesis honours different, distinct and diverse states of being and acknowledges the journey of becoming, transformation, illumination, reconciliation, resurgence and healing. It allows us to access the centring place of our being with newfound clarity of purpose, soul maturity and heightened spiritual capacity. It strengthens our sense of the wholeness of self, our place in the world, and allows us to make more fulsome contributions to the circle of life and “All Our Relations.”

Finally, there are multiple modes or modalities for this process of Indigenous Poiesis; there are infinite paths and ways to walk this journey to the centre of our everyday lives. This process of the “ceremony of making” has been a part of all cultures and communities. It is also a very long and arduous quest of learning to be human that has been going on for millennia.



Figure 6: Becoming Thunderbird in the ‘making’.
©Vicki Kelly, 2015

Why does the practice of Indigenous Poiesis and the honouring of our Indigeneity matter today? It is because it creates human beings

that are porous to the teachings of Creation and the circle of life. It allows us to fully participate, through our Indigeneity, in the ceremony of living with “All Our Relations.” Perhaps even more essential to the process of Indigenous Poiesis is that it creates an organ of imagination in which dwells the living signature or essence of being that we are gifted by Creation. We hold the gifts in our Be-Holding deep within the soil of our souls and spirits through the act of imaging or the act of knowing.

Imagination has a place because imagination is a place, and because everything is connected to everything else, the encounter with the imagination is a living communication within a sentient landscape...where one has everything to do with who one is... When mind, spirit and land... are understood to be as they have always been, as coevolutionary, there emerges a principle that guides imagination in its duty to integrate nature's realities and ensure the perpetuation of those realities and so all of Life. The stories that perpetuate themselves through human beings are our environmental contribution. (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 370)

We are an extension of the land and the land dwells within our inner world of imagination, thriving in our spiritual ecology of being. Ceremony can also be understood as an embodied enactment and as an act of imagination.

I walk the way of ceremony, through flute playing, carving, and being present with my relations; the pedagogy of ceremony teaches me the co-imagining of Indigenous Poiesis. Ceremony is a way of reciprocal recognition, of witnessing and walking with others in the act of deep reflective knowing. Responsible relationality gives birth to meaning... nested into each practice or ceremony is the practice of reciprocal recognition. When we witness each other in the act of celebrating Indigeneity, reciprocally, our possibilities of Indigeneity grow. We honour the heart of

our homeland as we welcome the resurgence of our original teachings; there we learn to love Creation as Creation was created.



Figure 7: Becoming Thunderbird is emerging. ©Vicki Kelly, 2015

Earlier, I acknowledged the Nishnaabowin word *Aaniin* that comes from *Aa*, the sound that places us in a spiritual context, or Indigenous universe. *Ni* is a taking notice of the sounding. *Aaniin*, as a greeting, is taking all the thoughts and feelings of your journey in the sounding universe and learning to see or recognize yourself. *Aaniin* also means that one transforms the capacities created through the journey as a way of perception, as a way of knowing in the act of reciprocal re-cognition. *Aaniin*, I see you through the capacity to re-cognize in you what I have learned within myself.

Aaniin is a continual process of unfolding, a commitment to the kind of relationality through which we dedicate ourselves to seeing and hearing the unique gift of all our lifeways as a practice, through

Indigenous Poiesis. Ultimately, *Aaniin* is way of honouring what has been given lovingly to us by the spirits and “All Our Relations” within Creation. Thus, *Maa maa ya wen du moowin* – is the process or art of recognizing, a practice of deep understanding and being fully aware; and *Aaniin* – the reciprocal recognition of seeing or hearing the essence of creation’s lifeways, and honouring Indigeneity as a transformative act is a pathway that ultimately leads to the practice of *Mino-bimaadiziwin* – living the good life, while serving the community of life.

Why does our attention to Indigenous Poiesis matter? It matters because without the capacities it fosters, we are not able to take up our greatest responsibility of being able to co-imagine our contemporary ecologies in a way that ensures their sustainability for future generations, for the next seven generations.

Native American intellectual tradition still continues to express the North American Landscape in intellectual and spiritual reciprocity where the more-than-human grants qualities of mind to the human... Thinking with and believing in the diverse minds that assemble ecosystems allows humans to understand what their animal teachers, and spiritual helpers guide and instruct, in ways of “being” of the continent. (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006, p. 368).

Indigenous people understand that Creation expects human recognition to perpetuate their appreciation in thankful acts of reciprocity. The spiritual ecology that is created (Cajete, 1994) is modernity’s guide to recovering the necessary relationship between healthy ecologies of land and human minds. Thus, to heal the earth, we would need to expand our collective imaginative understandings of Turtle Island, or North America. Here Indigenous Poiesis becomes ecological activism.

Indigenous Poiesis is a place or site of inquiry into a reciprocal recognition with the natural world so critical to our collective future and the next seven generations.

“All my relations!” “We Are All Related”

The pathway of being human is gifted by teachings from the being of “All Our Relations” and the great Mystery Gitche Manitou. However, today I sense we are not attending to the teachings fully. Thus, in closing I would like to share a teaching story that I think is deeply relevant to current situation and why this edition of *Artizein* as well as arts-based and contemplative practices in general are so needed in our time, and how they offer important Medicine to Mother Earth...



Figure 8: Becoming Thunderbird is awakening.
©Vicki Kelly, 2015

Traditionally when there were troubling times, Waynaboozhoo appeared and taught his people how to offer tobacco to the earth as an act of prayerful reciprocity, and how to gift tobacco to fire, offering the rising

smoke as a prayer to Gitchie Manitou. He gifted the people with the sacred pipe wrapped with sage that he received after his life-long search for his father. The sacred pipe is often offered to those in the circle to seal peace and good will; it is used to offer prayer to Creator through the rising smoke. Creator gifted human beings with the Seven Grandfather or Grandmother teachings on how to live the good life and taught us the way of ceremony to help us stay on the Good Red Road.

However, time and again human beings find their way to war and destruction; time and again human beings forget the teachings and turn their backs on "All Their Relations." At such times, Gitchie Manitou threatens to flood the world, to once more wash it clean of our deep disrespect and destruction of Creation and its intentions. Creator becomes angered at how such a beautiful gift could be so twisted and corrupted. So, Creator instructed a very powerful spiritual being to destroy the Earth after the Sun rose four times. Some say that this being was the father of Waynabosshoo, and it looked as though all of life on earth would be destroyed again.

Just before dawn on the fourth day, the Mi-gi-zi (Eagle), flew out of the crack between darkness and light—that edge between night and day. He flew straight into the sky. He flew so high he flew completely out of sight. He flew straight toward the burning face of the Sun and to the Creator just as the Sun was about to come over the rim of the Earth. Eagle screamed four times to get the Creator's attention. Creator saw Mi-gi-zi and held back the Sun. At the time of this Be-da'-bun, false dawn, Mi-gi-zi talked to Gitchie Manitou and said: "I know the earth is full of evil and corruption. I have seen all this in my travels. But, I have also seen that there are yet a few people who have remained true to the original instructions. I still see the smoke of tobacco rise here and there from humble people, who are still trying to live in harmony with the created

Universe. I plead on behalf of these few, that you call off the destruction of Earth. Let me fly over the Earth each day at dawn and look over the people. As long as I can report to you each day that there is still one person who sounds the Waterdrum or who uses tobacco and the Pipe in the proper way, I beg you to spare the Earth for the sake of the unborn. It is in the Unborn that there is still hope for the Earth's people to correct their ways."

Gitchie Manitou pondered what Mi-gi-zi had to say. Creator then instructed the spiritual being to hold back his fury. Gitchie Manitou entrusted Mi-gi-zi, Eagle, with the duty of reporting to him each day the condition of the Earth's people. The miracle of the sunrise happened again for the Anishinaabe. We owe our lives and lives of our children to Eagle. This is why Mi-gi-zi, Eagle, is so respected by Indigenous people everywhere. This is why the Anishinaabe People make a whistle from the wing bone of the eagle. They sound the whistle four times at the start of their ceremonies. They do this to remember Our Relative, Mi-gi-zi, Eagle, his teaching and the role he plays in the preservation of the Earth and the People, The Anishinaabe.



Figure 9: Becoming Thunderbird. Made of Alder tree, acrylic paint, horse hair. ©Vicki Kelly, 2015

This story teaches me that our artistic/contemplative praxis matters to future generations, to the Unborn, and to Mother Earth herself. Indigenous Poiesis, or “making,” and such contemplative arts-based practices, are like the offering of Tobacco into the fire of Creation; they create the possibility of a medicine way. In the rising smoke our daily prayers are carried and offered humbly to Creator, Gitchie Manitou, the active agency of sacred being that we honour within Creation and in service of “All Our Relations.” I am filled with gratitude in bearing witness to my colleagues over the years, and especially at the retreat with colleagues this journal is honouring. It is this love of praxis and the radical participation in its pedagogy that has inspired me so profoundly. I have often felt the loving eyes of my colleague, Carl Leggo, as he so whole-heartedly mentored me into my life in the academy with such loving kindness and generosity of spirit. I feel such deep gratitude to the honourable harvest that is created by my colleagues, by my collegial family, celebrated and honoured here. May our words rise with love like sacred smoke and the offering of Tobacco.

All My Relations. We are All Related. Aaniin



Figure 10: Tending the Sacred Fire. ©Vicki Kelly, 2018

In my concluding, I would like to share one final Anishinaabe teaching and dedicate it to Carl Leggo.

Long, long ago, Mi-gi-zi carried the pleading prayers of an Elder and the Anishinaabe People. At a time when things were not well with Creation, Mi-gi-zi drew near to an old man sitting by the shore of a great lake. As Mi-gi-zi swooped down low he heard the earnest words of the Elder asking for Creator to help the People as they had lost their way and were starving and sick. Eagle decided to carry these prayers to the Gitchie Manitou, and so rose high into the sky and flew directly toward the burning face of Father Sun. Mi-gi-zi gathered courage and prayed that as they were carrying the good words and earnest prayers of the Elder and the People, they would be protected. So, summoning courage, Mi-gi-zi made a mighty swooping arch right into the backside of the Sun and there cried out four times to the Creator asking that the prayers be heard. Creator considered all this and decided to send Mi-gi-zi back to the Anishinaabe to remind the People of the teachings of the offering of Tobacco, the ceremony of the Pipe, and the medicine way to healing. As Mi-gi-zi was about to leave Creator spoke: “Because of your courage and service to the People, I am going to transform you into a Thunderbird, Animikeekaa. Your voice will be like thunder and your keen eye will now flash like lightning across the sky. From now on, you will be the one who hears the prayers of those who pray for the People and you will carry my gift to them in dream and the power of Vision.” And so, Mi-gi-zi, now Thunderbird, or Animikiikaa, flew back to the People and offered the gifts and blessings of Gitchie Manitou. Since that time, when the Thunderbird, Animikiikaa, shakes the world with thunder causing lightning to flash across the sky, when the thunder roars and lightning strikes the earth, the wise ones know Thunderbird,

Animikiikaa, is near and then they make offering and pray for a dream, a vision to live by. They gather the sacred medicines to make their Medicine Bundles for the healing of the People, themselves and Mother Earth.

The first teaching story, and its call, the cry of the Eagle, was with me during the time of Carl's last days and passing. Each morning, and often throughout the day, I would take my flute and turn toward the West, the place of the setting sun. I would acknowledge the proud presence of Mount Baker, look across the mighty Fraser River towards Richmond, to the ocean at Steveston and beyond. As I played and prayed to the Seven Sacred Directions, I was aware of Carl doing the work of laying down his beautiful life like tobacco in offering to Creator and placing it carefully before the Community of Life he loved so dearly. And as he did this work, my dear colleagues and I did our work through prayers, poetry and poiesis. We honoured Carl because we knew him as an Elder who prayed for his people; through his wisdom he saw clearly. Courageously, he held a dream and lived a vision, and in so doing he honoured the teachings of Thunderbird, Animikiikaa. Carl, in his prayerful reaching as poet, artist, scholar, Grandpa, and most importantly beautiful human being, was doing as he has always done, indicating the medicine way of love and healing that is our human work, our offering to our People and for "All Our Relations." He, and yes, we, are living in prayer and making our humble offerings. I believe we are called to heed Eagle's call and have the courage, as Carl did, to ask Thunderbird to gift us with visions and a volition that acts like medicine

for our times. I believe that we, like he, do the work of Indigenous Poiesis for the People, and that we walk prayerfully in ceremony each and every day to discover the medicine that will heal Mother Earth, and in so doing heal each and every one of us.

Throughout his life Carl gathered his Medicine Bundle; he offered ways and words that did indeed touch our hearts and imaginations. Offered in love, they have worked like a precious alchemy in the soil of our souls, and germinating there they will inspire us to reach for the light of day and gift Creation with new life and healing.

For life's sake All Our Relations Aaniin



Figure 11: Becoming the Offering. ©Vicki Kelly, 2018

Notes

¹This article is the third in a trilogy of pieces. The first is a chapter in the book "Arts-Based and Contemplative Practices in Research and Teaching: Honoring Presence" co-edited by Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel and Carl Leggo in 2015. The second is a sonic and visual introduction in Part One of this special issue entitled "An Offering and A Prayer" linked in this article.

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