A CONTEMPLATIVE AND ARTFUL MÉTISSAGE OF INQUIRY AND RESPONSE

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ABSTRACT

In this mixed media métissage, we offer an exploration of artful and contemplative inquiry and response. We are a group of seven artist-researchers who engage with contemplative practices associated with various spiritual traditions, including spiritual feminist, Wiccan, Mi’kmaw, and Tibetan Buddhist, integral to all of which are beliefs about human interconnectedness with the energies of all sentient beings, the Earth, and beings in the spirit worlds. As artist-researchers, we engage with a range of arts disciplines including poetry, creative non-fiction, storytelling, sounding, visual art, filmmaking, and photography. Together, we invite the reader/listener/viewer—as co-creator—into the potentialities of our métissage: the narratives, poems, photographs, visual art, film, and sounding (audio) files—as well as into the spaces between and beyond.

INTRODUCTION

We are interested in the ways that collaborative inquiry across contemplative traditions and arts disciplines can open spaces for compassionate and heartful transformation in communal, personal, spiritual, and political realms. As a group, we locate our métissage alongside a body of work currently being cultivated by artist-researchers who intentionally invoke other-than-conceptual ways of being and knowing through forms of artful contemplative practice (see, for example, Bhattacharya, 2018; Bhattacharya & Payne, 2016; Bickel, Jordan, Rose, McConachy, & Griffith, 2018; Bickel & Walsh, 2019¹; Franklin, 1999, 2012, 2017; Gradel, 2012; Jordan, 2013; Kelly, 2010; Mitchell, 2017; Neilsen, 2004; Phillips, 2017; Richardson & Walsh, 2018; Traill, 2018, 2019; Walsh, 2018; Walsh & Bai, 2015, 2017; Walsh & Bickel, 2018²; Walsh, Bickel, & Leggo, 2015a³, 2015b). Other-than-conceptual ways of being and knowing are not based on the logic of rationality, nor are they irrational; rather, they are arational. Arationality is emergent and can be found in the realms of the intuitive, sensorial, and spiritual. Philosopher, linguist, and poet Jan Gebser (1984) describes the arational as aperspectival, and atemporal, outside the duality of western rationality and irrationality. We invite readers/viewers/listeners to bring open heartedness and curiosity to whatever arises as they engage with our offerings of image, word, and sound. In working with métissage as a form or container for our piece, we draw on the work of researchers who braid together life writing as groups of researchers (see, for example, Chambers, Hasebe-Ludt, Donald, Hurren, Leggo, & Oberg, 2008; Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, & Leggo, 2009; Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010; Jordan, Richardson, Fisher, Bickel, & Walsh, 2016; Miller 2010). In braiding strands of experience—and, in our case, different art
forms—métissage serves to juxtapose. Open spaces. Generate imaginative possibilities. Highlight differences and points of connection. In relation to a 2010 special issue about life writing and métissage, Miller (2010) says that the theory and practices of métissage, as conceptualized and intricately entwined with/in [the] researchers’ word-and image-braidings . . . highlight paradoxes, contradictions, muddles, surprises and messy complexities of life writing as a form of educational research and practice. Indeed, one of the major contributions that [such] authors make to research, writ large, is their insistence on the necessity of a form of connect-ness that demonstrates life writing as educational inquiry that is at once social and productive of possible new and unanticipated constructions of selves and histories. Such work, I believe, serves as one way of working toward the forging of ethical and just educational relationships across difference as well as through varying research, pedagogical and wisdom traditions and practices. (p. 102)

In our work with and through métissage, we are interested in the potential to “forge[e] ethical and just educational relationships across difference as well as through varying research, pedagogical and wisdom traditions and practices.” In relation to “varying research, pedagogical, and wisdom traditions,” we work to foreground ways of being and knowing that are marginalized in mainstream North American schooling at all levels and also marginalized in academic research, including most forms of qualitative research. As artist-researchers and teachers, we seek to foreground ways of being and knowing that embrace and embody that which is other-than-conceptual, nondual, unseparate-able: for example, intuition, sense perception, and interconnectedness. Through our collaborative, contemplative, artful, multi-media métissage, we create spaces for what has yet-been-unsaid (and unthought, unfelt) to arise. To attend to what is nebulous, vague. Unworded. Beyond.

The métissage that we present here has unfolded in organic ways. It began as a performative session at a conference of the Arts Researchers and Teachers Society (ARTS), a special interest group of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) (Walsh, Mitchell, Traill, Phillips, Bickel, McConachy, & Bartley, 2017). Susan invited graduate students Jackie, Nik, and Robyn to create a multi-media métissage emerging from the contemplative and artful research that each of them was undertaking at the time; the result was a performative text including narrative, poetry, Miksang photography, film, and visual art. Barbara, as respondent for the ARTS performance session, felt called by the authenticity of the work to respond through the practice of sounding. She invited her long-time collaborators, Medwyn and Wendalyn to participate with her in creating an improvised vocal response (sounding) based on impressions from Jackie, Nik, Robyn, and Susan’s multi-media text. In their response, the three women invited the presenters and audience alike to enter the post performative experience as a practice of deep listening and attending to what still lingered in the room from the performance session, with the intention that such lingerings would be amplified through the spontaneous sounding process. As a group of seven performer-respondents, we then agreed to experiment further to see what would arise if we worked together more intentionally and collaboratively. This métissage is the result.

We precede our multi-media offering with brief introductory comments about each of the seven of us in the service of inviting space for the reverberations, echoes, and resonances that abound between and among the variegated strands of our collective—a way of holding space for all such strands to breathe more deeply together.

Of inhaling, exhaling with infinite space through the text that follows.

*
Jackie Mitchell’s vision of education and curriculum is inspired by her background in dance, politics and meditation. In 1994, Jackie and a group of young parents brought their vision into being and founded the Shambhala Elementary School in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where she taught for 20 years. Story, Indigenous and traditional ecological knowledge, environmental learning, and an appreciation of culture are central to her approach, informed by an ecological perspective and underpinned by contemplative practice. As a longtime educator and Buddhist practitioner, Jackie explored these elements in depth for her Master’s thesis and came to formulate the idea of sacred worldview in the curriculum. This perspective is inspired by her lifetime’s work as an educator as well as her recent work in Bhutan where she designed a curriculum for young monks, integrating traditional knowledge with a secular course of study. Sacred worldview offers educators and their students an alternative perspective to the materialism that underpins curricula in the mainstream, incorporating a profound exploration of the interdependence of life forms and systems on the planet. In this métissage, elements of Jackie’s Scottish roots are spun with stories of her time in Bhutan as she sought to understand and integrate her experience of living in that culture (see Mitchell, 2017; Mitchell & Gyaltshen, 2018).

Nik Phillips is extremely passionate about early childhood development, and ways of addressing intergenerational trauma within First Nation communities. In pursuing his commitment to good mental health for children and youth, Nik completed his Masters in Child and Youth Study and has found himself extremely interested in extending work with his thesis, titled Ke’kutnuk (2017). Ke’kutnuk is a storying of Nik’s life that builds on the idea of reclaiming his Indigeneity as a praxis in building strong Indigenous children, while addressing the predisposition to trauma, as he learnt and shared within his research. With determination and drive, Nik is currently employed as the Director of Early Education for his Mi’kmaw Community of Millbrook where he oversees all programs directly linked to children 18 months through to Grade 3. Nik is also the full-time faculty member for the Nova Scotia Community College’s newly developed Mi’kmaw version of Early Education Program—Poqi-kina’masulti’kw tel-kina’mujik mijusa’ji’jik. Aside from his work, Nik spends a wealth of time learning and sharing traditional knowledge and ceremony. He enjoys physical outdoor activities, beading and craft, and of course his family of two beautiful children and his husband (see Phillips, 2014, 2017; Phillips & Davis, 2014).

Robyn Traill is creating an arts-based meditation called “contemplative film practice,” a practice intended to develop sensitivity to genuine experience, fresh and unfiltered. The seed idea for this creative film-making meditation is “dharma art” as taught by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche (Trungpa, 2008). Since his twenties, Robyn has practiced insight meditations and art-as-inquiry. This view of insight or awareness is a “knowing” beyond relative concepts, mental fabrications, and dualities. The idea is that the closer we come to the truth of who we are, the more we relax the struggle to be something we are not. Robyn is interested in how we might glimpse this non-conceptual, non-local awareness in both the flow and discontinuity of perceptions, and observing how our consciousness expands, contracts, and sometimes loses track of itself (see Traill, 2018, 2019). In the opening poem of the métissage text below; please see a link indicated by a peach coloured text, to a sample of Robyn’s moving images and original music. The film clip is created from the raw footage used in his Master’s thesis films (see Traill, 2018).

Susan Walsh is learning what it means to be a grandmother from a radiant, joyful new teacher. She has long been interested in the ways that language liberates and constricts human being&knowing, particularly in relation to the feminine. For more than thirty years in the academic context, Susan has experimented with languaging as a way of opening into non ordinary ways of being&knowing, a portal for the other-than-conceptual; writing has been with her since she was a small child. Susan also holds many years of disciplined forms of dance in her body memory. More recently, she has become a student of Miksang/contemplative photography as a way of attuning to, communing with the spirits of the land where she now lives. Susan is devoted to innovative research practices that integrate spirituality, art, and healing. In May 2019, she was awarded the title of
Professor Emerita, Mount Saint Vincent University. Susan is committed to living well across different realms of existence in good relation to all beings and the cosmos.

Following the spirit of art since childhood has led Barbara Bickel into liminal spaces of the numinous, the not-yet-known and the more-than-known. Walking a path of radical relationality, she makes art with life, with sentient, and non-sentient beings. Walking a path of radical trust, she inquires into mystery, into beauty. Walking a path of radical learning, she teaches through exploration, through ritual and trance-based inquiry with the guidance and gifts of ancestors. A student of matrixial theory and gift economies, she walks the de-centering path of fearlessness with her life-partner in borderlands between institutions and grassroots community, between home and studio, between Western Canadian prairies and the Rocky mountains on Treaty Seven lands. She recently has come out of a sequestered writing space with her book *Art, Ritual and Trance Inquiry: Arational Learning in an Irrational World* (2020) where she knit and wrote in tandem with the spirit of art.

Wendalyn Bartley is a composer, shamanic singer, creative vocal coach, and writer living in Toronto, whose artistic practice is dedicated to the awakening of the feminine voice. Her compositions are rooted in the contemporary chamber and electroacoustic music traditions, extended vocal practice, and soundscape studies with influences from ecofeminism, mythic story, and energy healing modalities. She brings her deep listening skills and knowledge of the voice into all her practices, offering voice workshops, group rituals, and individual embodied voice sessions. The music on her CD entitled “Sound Dreaming: Oracle Songs from Ancient Ritual Spaces” (Wendalyn, 2012) was created from vocal improvisations made in Malta and Crete at temple and cave sites that once honoured the wisdom of the feminine. She is currently working on a book that descends into the imaginal worlds, weaving together narratives from her compositions, mythic writings, dreams, cultural history, and her visions for the potential of the human voice. Wendalyn received her MMus in composition from McGill University.

Medwyn McConachy is an artist, poet, adventurer whose peripatetic life has been lived from the UK to Ontario, Alberta, British Columbia, and the North. Medwyn’s art is inspired by her relationship with the natural world. Whether it be the foothills of Snowdonia, Wales, or a tiny stream trickling its way through springtime budding on Vancouver Island, the presence of mystery and wonder flows into and through her textile workings, photography, performative installations, and poetry. She is influenced by Barbara Bickel, India Flint, Robin Wall Kimmerer, and the traditional practices of Celtic and North American First People. She is currently working on a collection of eco-printed and dyed textile pieces and poetry invoking the magic and wisdom of nature’s teachings. Medwyn lives as a settler on the unceded traditional territory of the Lkwungen speaking people on Vancouver Island.

Co-founders Barbara, Medwyn, Wendalyn, and Nané Jordan, along with Cindy Lou Griffith of the Gestare Art Collective—are a feminist collective of artists. Their source of artistic collaborations come from their shared engagement with the Divine Feminine and the Earth, gestated in the labyrinthine container of wombspace. They developed their co-sounding frequencies within the sacred womb space of this collective whose combined practices include visual, textural, vocal, performative, moving, ephemeral, earth-related, and time/space based mediums (see www.gestareartcollective.com).

* Together, the seven of us invite you—as co-creator—into the potentialities of our métissage: the narratives, poems, photographs, visual art, sounding (audio) files—as well as into the spaces between and beyond. We trust that our offerings will evoke fresh associations, resistances, ideas, feelings, images, journeys. Through an iterative
process of revisioning and rewriting over months and years, the voice of the text whispered, and then spoke more loudly, as our individual voices merged, commingled, shifted, and began to dissolve into something new, changeable. As a reader-co-creator, you are now part of this living process. Your creative participation is integral to the collaborative rendering of the text and to the collective spirit with which we initiated this project.

Welcome.

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Spirit of the Wind and Air, come to this place. You are in our breath. You cool our skin and make us move.

Spirit of the Sun and Fire, come to this place. You are the heat in our belly. You are our passion.

Spirit of the Ocean and Water, come to this place. You are our blood. You are the flow of nourishment.

Spirit of the Planet and Earth, come to this place. You are our bones and muscles. You allow us to stand, give us a home.

Spirit of Space, come to this place. You are our openness. You accommodate everything.

 Spirits of the Elements, we have forgotten that you are what we are made of. So, for the moment, let us talk to you as if you are separate from us.

May this remind us that our care of you is the same as our care of ourselves, our families and everything that we love.

May we always remember that there is no happiness if you are not happy.

May our care of the earth, water, air and energy not be a hassle, but be joyful and delightful.

*
When I found interest in our ways of life, I was fixated on the physical realm of who we are. I was fixated on the materialistic attributes of our people: the clothing, the crafts, the meals, the hunting, the fishing. I remember I would visit my Elders and ask many questions, and they would kindly answer them, but also add the “did you know”—acknowledging ourselves beyond the physicality of our culture.

Because of my own ignorance, my Elders opened the doors to offer alternative conversations about family, spirituality, and our environment. As I grow older, I now see the true meaning of our conversations, in saying that we were more than just separate beings. As Vicki Kelly (2010) shares, our education and our way of understanding positions us between an environmental ecology and spiritual ecology. And so, the process of reclaiming who I was required me to go back to our Mi’kmaw way of thought and start over—blending the realms. Marie Battiste and James Henderson (2000) share that “stories are enfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experiences; they also renew, awake and honour spiritual forces” around us (p. 77). In other words, the need and readiness to be immersed in the Mi’kmaw education system was the only way I would truly be able to build on this search of knowing.

My experience of living in Bhutan with the monks and hearing stories about their view of reality makes me realize that what I take for granted, coming as I do from a Western scientific standpoint, is not necessarily how they understand the world to be. They are far closer to another reality which is open to possibilities of strange happenings, magic, and a close relationship with a world of spirits, gods, and the power of natural phenomena in
an embodied form. Everywhere you look, prayer flags are part of the landscape, in order to magnetize the blessings of the local spirits and deities.

One night there was a fire at the monastery, and later I learned that one of the monks, aged about 15 years old, had brushed the electrical wires with a bamboo frond that he was using to beat at the fire, and he had been electrocuted. He was momentarily knocked out but was otherwise unharmed. On waking up, the first thing he did was to run to the nearest house, dip his feet in a pail of water, and walk across the wooden veranda of the house. He was not sure if he was alive or dead, but if he couldn't see his footprints, then he would know that he was no longer in the world of the living.

*
So much has happened since I had the honour of working with Jackie, Nik, and Robyn at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am now of the Canadian prairies again, the place that grew me as a teenager and young adult. I miss the waves of the Atlantic Ocean at the edges of the place called Nova Scotia, feel its absence in the cells of my body. And though I don’t feel at home here on the prairies again yet, I am slowly learning to attune more deeply with the land, with the spirits of this place.

Jackie, Nik, and Robyn—each with their own strong groundings in spiritual and artful practices—gifted me with teachings that have ongoing reverberations in my being&knowing—and in my daily practices and interactions in&with the earth and spirit worlds. Nik’s commitment to his Indigenous ancestors and their ways, his confidence in artfully storying his own Indigeneity. Jackie’s courage and spirit of adventure, her open-hearted narrative wonderings about teaching with heart and art. Robyn’s wanderings in the vastness of big mind, his joyful, exploratory play with paint, film, music.

*a black capped chickadee hangs
upside down on the crabapple tree outside
the window tiny claws gripping
a dried berry in the warm
coolness of a February day*

We three gather prior to the presentation in the student housing space where Medwyn, Barbara (and Susan) are staying. We have each read and spent time with Nik, Jackie, Robyn, and Susan's woven text prior to coming together here in this space. We stand with our feet firmly grounded, facing each other in a triangle formation. We share reflections on words and ideas that have captured our attention from spending time with the presentation texts, images, and videos. Although we have not sounded together as a threesome in a number of years, we easily slip back into attunement breath by breath. With our interior selves still resonating with the words of the co-authors, we take three deep breaths and begin to interweave our voices through emergent vocal sounds. Our voices follow the threads of an unspoken reply that resonates with the vibrational current connecting us to Nik, Robyn, Jackie, and Susan. We record our soundings responses in audio. The resulting three 5-minute sound recordings shared in this métissage are deliberately produced with minor editing to reflect the fresh co-emergent quality of our sonic responses. Each of the three soundings appear in this métissage. The recorded strand of our second practice, Sounding 2, is placed at the close of this woven métissage. Sounding One contains the cell phone bell alarm at the 5 minute mark as we practiced on that day, staying within our given performance time as respondents.

\[\text{Sounding 1}\]

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Stay with the heart

without agenda

be that space

you are the art that is

each moment.

You are space looking at itself

from nowhere

spontaneous

brush stroke or thought

. . . arises

dance with the play of phenomena

Glimpse the space too vast

for “self and other” to gain a solid purchase

How can you know before the occurrence of a knower?

Who’s observing the knower?

From where are they looking

and at what?
Who just asked that?

Settling into this undefinable space
is the lion's gaze
  empty    luminous
  awareness
  without center  (Traill, 2019, pp. 127-128)

* 

Absent from light, harmony, patience and reliance.
  Watch me as I ignite.
  Ignite my flame from within.
I feed it with my yearnings to learn my cultural ways.
My need to understand who I am and where I come from.
Red, the colour of my skin, the passion for fighting for what I believe in.
Turquoise, to bring me healing.
Yellow to shine a light in the darkest places of all.
The flame begins small, like a small spark and progresses to a flame of resilience and love.
Finding foundation, We’jitu ta’n tett weta’peksi.
This is me - Ni’n.

Our respect for the land, and even more so, our ecology, shaped us just as much as we shaped it. Our language, L’nui’suti, is a verb-based language that derives from the land we live on, and the life around us. For example, the Mi’kmaw word for whale, is putup—its pronunciation portrays the sound of bubbles being released from the blow hole of the whale under water. Another example is ptqu’k—this pronunciation alludes to the sound of a wave crashing against the wall of a canoe out in the water. Once we have acknowledged that we are not superior to these beings, then we can begin the process of connection and growth, which opens the door to our foundation and our language. We’jitu ta’n tett weta’peksi.

*
Being immersed in the Bhutanese culture, so foreign to me, has made me reflect upon how learning happens in the young child. In the absence of language, I am thrown back on using other means of communication and ways of learning. Like a child learning a language for the first time, I watch and listen, trying to make sense of what is happening around me. There is a sense of yearning, straining to understand. I listen, almost as if my ears are on stalks, as the words of the Sharchop language flow over me. Occasional words and phrases pop out that are familiar and from those I try and piece together what is going on. I feel sometimes, that if only I could flick a switch, everything would become clear.

* 

I watch the part of myself that wants to be distracted from the practice of writing. The sun is shining, so I go outside, pull some wandering vines from the rock garden. The ground is wet, so the vines come out easily. I think about how I will take breaks in my writing by coming out to the garden at intervals. My fingernails have dirt under them, so I go inside and wash my hands. Eat an orange.

I can write quite a bit today, I think as I make a piece of toast, open a jar of marmalade. I recognize this desire for distraction. A kind of fear of doing what needs to be done. I can feel my tears as I sit back down to write. The place I get to sometimes when I bring myself back again, yet again to the breath in meditation. A place of tenderness, rawness. I am keenly aware of the need to touch that place, to know it, relax into it. That's where I need to write from. (excerpts from Walsh, 2018, p. 23)
Breathe. Let go of the tension in my shoulders, my jaw. I can feel my heart beating hard, making me breathless, faint even.

I'm afraid of letting go of the ways I am, the comfort of it. I can hardly see the keyboard right now, and yet the path is clear. I do not know where this will lead. (excerpts from Walsh, 2018, pp. 23-24)

Beyond word, thought and expression, the toning arises from the morning, the waves, the undefined grey space of the horizon. Vocal ululations tune their bodies to the moment, dance, synchronize with the wind. The banner, held aloft, flickers with the threads of birth and memory. Pieces of a child's blanket? Something that has been washed and used and worn out into wisdom? The birds answer. They thread through the release as if carrying dreams to the dakini realm. Their bodies are swaying with energy now. There is commitment. Their voices coax, quiver, shake. Yes! This sadhana of dream time release to the elements is real! The rags are a conduit from the heart to the heavens. Please be careful now! Cradle this cloth soaked in heart’s blood! There is no for-getting. There is no-thing to remember. All is precious, delicate, piercing. At once I am playing with my daughter. We giggle. Fly. I kiss her, and she shines bright. Where did that come from? My eyes are brimming, and dakinis flock through the space like arrows to the vital point. Everything gets slightly crazy, animal tremors daring all fixation and boundary. And then there is rest. Held by the earth. Refreshed by sleep and silence. The formless fibres, the aura, the subtle bodies are combed, caressed. Such knowing hands. I feel myself extend into the surrounding space. I radiate beyond my skin. They wait, assess the space between themselves. Where did we go? What is left? Call the Image mothers. Call to their blood and beauty. Their wrinkles, scars. The dream flag is held aloft. Reach! It is lineage born fresh. This is what gave me birth. I want to wrap my mother in this cloth. I want her to know. What? That the dakinis are calling to her? She will be cared for? Death is not an end. Pain is not a punishment. Vividness is its own reward. But we must dissolve the mandala. Everything returns. Waves to the sea. Clouds to the sky. Without this I might try to hold on. I want to keep my tears, but I am called to a different simplicity. The scroll is gathered like a coil of joy. A completion without which all might be lost. Reverence has nothing to fear, and yet. They carry the cloth toward me. For me. Through me. Nothing left but to dissolve. And be held. What am I to do with this? Can I raise my daughter like this, do my laundry like this, walk to work like this. I am a man. Humbled. I have things to learn. Maybe now I will sit and watch.

The young monks are curious about my life and Canadian lifestyle in general. Often the conversation will start with the words, “In your village...?”

“In your village, Madam, are there many houses?”
“Many, many houses. It’s a town, a big town.”
“Do you have a car?”
“Yes.”
“How far do you have to walk from your house to your car?”

I am not sure how to answer this in this Bhutanese context, but I say, “My house is by the road.”
This makes sense to them. Here, there is only one road. It goes from east to west across the country, winding around valleys, up mountains and over passes. Houses in this far southeastern part of Bhutan are perched on the sides of the mountains, joined by a network of footpaths and “shortcuts” as they are called.

Everything needed for living is carried to its destination either on the shoulders or on a bamboo pole slung between two people. Furniture, gas canisters, 40 kilogram sacks of rice, children, building materials—all are carried to the houses on the backs of these tough and resilient people.

“Madam,” one boy asks, “Did it take a long time to get here from your village?”

How to answer this? In these days of airplane travel, time does not equal distance covered by foot as it does for these Bhutanese children. I answer, “I came in an airplane. It is a long way from Canada to here.” How will they put those pieces together in their imaginations, I wonder?

* *

At the centre of my gaze I am guided by my intuition. The inner knowing that has been seeded in my DNA.

I walk this path, and it feels so right. I feel connected, as if I were walking it with you, my ancestor. Let me walk this path you have built for me, allow me to follow in the footprints you’ve created.

Wet-taqane’wasi

Mi’kwite’tm ta’n kisi teliaq remembering the past
the past of my family
first the Bernards—doodoo—
the dodo or even the tutuis—
then came the Phillips

We are connected by more than just our blood relations. However, with years of colonization we resort back to our ancestral connections to remind us that we are still here, alive, well and free.

*


* 

Contemplate a spinning wheel
made completely from bicycle parts.
Falling apart, reimagining and transforming
speed and movement forward
into a different reality.
All the tangled fibres
teased out
transformed
spinning consciousness into awareness.
Sacred outlook.
Ecology as curriculum.
Contemplate
interdependence, compassion.
Everything matters

*
In the classroom where the métissage presentation has just taken place, we rise and stand in an open triangle formation in front of the audience. The audience is invited to close their eyes and enter an inner place of deep listening to receive the sounding response to the presentation. We begin with the source of breath. Breath that connects us to each other, each person in the room, and reaching as far back as the beginning of time. From this acoustic interconnected space we extend across time and place, sounding the stories of spiritwork brought to sight and audability on this day.

\textit{Sounding performance}

* 

We gather in the morning and set off down the road from the monastery to the main road. The river is a silver thread in the valley far below. At the road, we take a path that goes steeply down to a farmstead. We pass the farmer's garden full of corn, beans, and the ubiquitous chilli, then a large field full of newly sprouting corn plants, and descend into a fragrant orange grove. It hums with insects, butterflies, and birds. Wild orchids grow on dead stumps.

Below the orchard, we enter into the jungle. It is shady under the canopy of tall trees, and vines and creepers trail down from above and snake across the almost invisible trail. It is very steep, and I am preoccupied with keeping myself from pitching headfirst down the mountain. This is hard as there is so much to look at, and my attention is constantly diverted by my young companions:

“Look, here is where a wild boar has been digging to make a sleeping place.”
“There is a porcupine's hole in that tree.”
“We use this plant for medicine.”
“Woodpeckers' holes in that tree, Madam.”
“This is elephant poop, Madam. Very big.” I was glad that it was obviously quite old….
“What do you call this in your language …. we use this for …. this is a …. ”

* 

I walk the ravine behind my house notice the snow crystal diamond in the light of the early afternoon crusty chunks melting then freezing again in the dryness of the prairie air footprints in the snow different sizes of boots on the path dogs' paws scamper etchings of mice voles barely noticeable imprints of bird claws maybe magpies I walk some more let the late winter sun warm my head my hair my back through my jacket I breathe light let it radiate within beyond in the soft stillness a drumming sound calls to me
I walk further into the trees  stop  listen  
take a few more steps till the snow falls  
into my boots  soaks the tops of my socks  
fast flashes of black white red  
rhythmic drum beat  a pileated woodpecker  
the trunk of a dead birch tree  
large small chunks of bark fly into white  

* 


*
I search for radiance—to visualize the world into fullness with a musical gesture, a proclamation. Sometimes it is a wordless ache in the breath. Sometimes it is accompanied by a flashing thought burning bright.

“The world is sacred!”
“Tears are blessings.”
“Vividness is its own reward.”
“Fear is not punishment.”

Something juicy appears and comes into being—into pitch, rhythm, timbre, polyphony, text—declaring this moment worthy, that nothing need be rejected.
I am habitually coming into being. Radiating into the world like music improv.
Musicians can be like the trumpeter and flag bearer at the vanguard of a campaign to conquer fear. Music is like a kiss that inspires courage on contact.

*
Above the clouds I can see now.
Everything that is below me.
I see the tree that I have grown.
Its roots deep within the ground
The trunk—wide, round, and full
The canvas burning with life.

I look from Ke'kutnuk and realize I have something special.
Do you see what I see?
Do you see my tree?
The tree that I have grown,
The tree that I have shaped and nurtured all this time.

Do you see what I see
Do you see my tree of life?

Jekue' - jekue' stand with me, look from Ke'kutnuk with me.
Now can you see it?
Because I can.

It is by no mistake the Creator put one of the most important organs at the centre of our physical selves—our heart. Our heart is the place that drives us to push further when we can’t any more. It is the place that holds love, compassion, empathy, and understanding. It is also by no mistake then, that the heart is only inches from our heads. Together they are meant to work together to align our mind, body, and soul.
Finding heart,
finding your inner passion—Wije’wm ksalsuti.
Msit No’kmaq.

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I attend to Miksang—contemplative photography—as a practice. Take time to form an intent for a Miksang walk: may I synchronize with the world. Attune. Notice what arises. Flashes of perception that stop the eye—invite me to pause, breathe. Form a photo. A relationship with the camera and the phenomenal world. Be with&in. This now.

I feel the subtle (and not-so-subtle) ways in which “my” energy interacts with the energy of that-to-which-eye-attend-with-the-camera.

The intimacy of the moment. (Do leaves actually move in response to attention?)

Co-emergence. Affecting one another on energetic levels. The responsibility inherent in this. Making conscious choices.

What does this mean for research? For living well in the world? (excerpts from Walsh, 2018, p. 135)
gounding 2

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Endnotes

4. Individual researchers also create métissage texts by braiding together different aspects of their own experiences (see, for example, Kelly, 2010).
5. See the editorial for the special issue on life writing and métissage (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010).
6. Please see the link to a sample of Robyn's contemplative film work as described above.
7. As noted previously, there are three links to sounding/audio files in this métissage. Please click on the link for each one as you encounter it.
8. The preceding text arose as an improvised, exposition-of-consciousness style contemplative artistic practice while witnessing a thirteen minute Gesare Art Collective film—a spontaneous performance ritual of releasing dreams, entitled, the threads of a dream (Bickel & McConachy, 2012 at https://vimeo.com/44233735). I (RT) was moved to search out this work after experiencing Bickel, Bartley, and McConachy do a sounding practice at the conference of the Arts Researchers and Teacher Society (ARTS) of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) (Walsh, Mitchell, Traill, Phillips, Bickel, McConachy, & Bartley, 2017).

References


