ONE OF MANY, ONE WITH ALL:
(RE)SEARCHING HOW TO LIVE IN THIS WORLD

By

KATHRYN ANNE FULLERTON

B.A., University of British Columbia, 2005
B.Ed., University of British Columbia, 2006

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We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

..........................................................
Dr. Carl Leggo, Thesis Supervisor
University of British Columbia

..........................................................
Graduate Committee Member
School of Environment and Sustainability

..........................................................
Dr. Anthony Boydell, Director
School of Environment and Sustainability

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Abstract

Rational thought has dominated Western knowledge structures and systems for many centuries; our instinctual natures have largely been repressed. The purpose of this study is to find out what my bodymind is telling me about how to live in this world. I use arts based methodology to explore how I experience the place in which I live, to find my voice and to navigate through liminal spaces. As I spent time in the natural environment, I increasingly became more aware of my body and of the many animate beings with which I share this place. If we can understand/know/experience the processes by which we became separate from our instinctual natures, then there might be hope to bring ourselves back to the knowledge that we belong and are a part of all of creation. The website is located at http://www.apprenticeshipinnature.com.
Introduction

“We have placed in you a substance, a seeking, a yearning, and we are watching over it and won’t let it be lost, but will bring it to its destined place” Rumi (as cited in Fadiman & Frager, 1997, p. 96).

I came to the Masters program at Royal Roads University as an educator, with a very practical desire to learn how to develop environmental education programs to use in my classroom. Over the two years in the program, however, a profound shift occurred in the way I saw the world and myself in it. It was that day on the dock – the day when, for a few brief moments, the I ~ who I identified with all my life ~ dissolved and there was no divide between what I was looking at and what I am. I experienced stillness, silence and ecstatic joy along with the profound realization that I am one with all ~ I am nature. Somewhere in my body I knew that experience had something to tell me about being in the world and from that moment I abandoned any old ideas I had about research and began a quest ~ a seeking ~ a yearning ~ to find my voice of expression ~ not from the head, but from the heart.

Artist Statement

‘Cozy’ by Shirley Wiebe, photography by Shirley Wiebe. Used with permission.
‘Cozy’ is an environmental art project that responds to the windstorms of 2006 and the loss of many mature trees in Vancouver’s Stanley Park.
What does someone see when they observe a work of art? How do they interpret and experience it? What emotions arise from experiencing a work of art? Maybe the observer experiences no connection with the work. Maybe the artwork evokes strong emotions and arouses the body into a state of alertness ~ triggering flight or fright sensations ~ or feelings of tightness and contraction in the chest ~ experienced as sadness. It may trigger memories of the past or hope for the future. Whatever it is, the experience will be uniquely personal.

Creating art is a uniquely personal way of interpreting, experiencing and knowing about the world. It occurred to me on the dock that day, the only way to express what I was being called to do was through art. Previously, I had not seen myself as an artistic person so the thought of creating art for my thesis was rather daunting, but the yearning was powerful and I felt that if I did not pursue this creative exploration a part of me would die. As the work unfolded in process it became increasingly more personal, especially as I read writers like Sharon Butala and Annie Dillard.

My research was an emerging process that began with a hunch$^1$ rather than a question. It became evident to me that the hunch couldn’t be articulated into a formal research question; rather it needed to be experienced. The creative piece unfolded as I took one step after another in my (re)searching ~ knowing and trusting that in the seeking there was a message that needed to be expressed. The message ~ my creative work ~ is not meant to represent the views of everyone. All the views expressed here are my own. I do not endeavor to make any absolute claims or statements in my work but rather to give

$^1$ I use hunch, bodymind, intuition, heartmind interchangeably to express what I have come to know as embodied knowledge, which is both dynamic and elusive.
expression ~ or voice ~ to what is true for me in the moment. What is true for me changes as I engage with people, places and things in the world so that I will look back on this piece in one hour, one week, one month or one year with new eyes and different perceptions because I am continually changing how I am in the world. I am hoping that readers will engage with my work in a way that will “invite the other person to think about what one believes and holds to be valid oneself” (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004, p. 39).

We must not forget that the notion of a reality existing independently from us corresponds with the belief that it is possible to achieve authoritative, universally valid statements. These may be used to discredit certain kinds of experience. It is the reference to this reality that is held to make a statement objective and universally valid; in a culture based on power, domination and control, it provides the justification for forcing other people to subject themselves to one’s own view of things. However, as soon as one has realized that there is no single privileged access to reality, and that perception and illusion are indistinguishable in the actual process of an experience, then the question arises what criteria can be used by a human being to claim that something is the case. The very possibility of posing this question opens up a space of common reflection, a sphere of cooperation. The other person becomes a legitimate other with whom I am able to talk. Friendship, mutual respect, and cooperation emerge. It is no longer possible to demand submission; the universe changes into a multiverse within which numerous realities are valid by reference to different criteria of validity. (Maturana & Poerksen, 2004, p. 39)

Just like there is no formal research question, there is no final answer to my research, rather my answer ~ or what I learned from my research ~ is my creative piece. The creative piece is my response to the hunch and how I experienced the longing that eluded any kind of rational, formal question.
I am immensely grateful for my formal education and the opportunity to do this research. I have always loved learning but, up until now, I never had the courage to write myself into the learning for fear of being wrong. I now see that there is no wrong in this kind of work ~ there is only perception and with that understanding comes great freedom. Giving my voice expression has been tremendously liberating, empowering and transformative.

I have a hunch that there are implications and possibilities for further research in this domain, but where my journey leads I do not know. What I do know is that if I don’t lull myself to sleep I will intuitively know what to do and a structure of how to do it will emerge from that knowing. I can trust that if I take one step after another it will lead me to magnificent and unknown (to me) places, and I will be amazed.

In order to remain true to my process, I have taken certain liberties with regards to formatting this paper. It does not follow conventional APA formatting but is more reflective of the flowing style that emerged in my creative piece.

Overview

This thesis journey began with a desire to reconnect, to slow down, to sink into the rhythm of life, to ruminate, question, and give time and space to things other than my rational mind. Sometimes I think I have become my mind; I am not my mind. I did not know how the desire would emerge but because it came from a center place within me, I knew if I ignored the call a vital part of me would once again die. The quiet stillness within, which I spent most of my life running from, needed a medium to express itself.
and I chose to honour that rather then listen to the contrary voices that were telling me I would surely fail.

This is an exploration ~ a passage of time ~ to reawaken, re-imagine, and co-create a sense of belonging. A longing to bridge the divide that keeps me separate from...

my body,
the earth,
community,
the life blood that pulses through my veins,
each other,
who I really am,
my breath,
spirit.

My story will unfold as an emerging expression of

Images
Sounds
Videos
Poetry
Quotations
Ruminations
capturing the exquisite beauty, exacting imperfections and complexities of this place I call home. I will capture these expressions as collages and present them on a web site. Each web page will convey a different theme and may or may not be hyper linked to other web pages with similar themes.

“To open ourselves to the work such as the inquiry we read here ~ work by its nature is generous and generative and keeps the wilderness inside of us alive ~ will feed our faith in human possibility” (Neilsen, 2008, p. xvii).
Methodology

Simply, I think we live with too many lies, and, therefore, with little sense of who we are and who we can be. We need to tell our stories more. And we need to tell more stories. In the end, the stories we write and tell about our living experiences will teach us how to live with more creativity, confidence, flexibility, coherence, imagination, and truthfulness (Leggo, 2008a, p. 21).

I needed a form of inquiry which would help me see what it might be like to reclaim my place in relation to the Other and enter through a door into the wild unknown ~ away from what is familiar to me.

I needed a medium to tell my story,

to hear my story

to have my story be revealed to me.

I needed an inquiry that would take me to the edge…

All this inquiry asks is that we attend, that we listen (Neilsen, 2003), attune ourselves so that we may come to our senses (Neilsen, 1998) (p. xvi). To engage in living inquiry is to learn to let go, to leave the spurious safety of research ~ that crumbling roof over Education that often separated us from life and rarely protected us anyway ~ and to enter an open field, ear and wings bristling (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xiv).

There are the most exquisite little yellow birds flitting around the giant maple tree outside my window right now. What a marvel of creation. Surely the birds awaken each new dawn and know intuitively what to do. I think we have gravely misused our rational
mind and given it too much power and forgotten to listen to our bodymind/heartmind/our animal instincts that intuitively know what to do. And now the birds have flown away...

to find another tree or place to be.

How did we lose contact with this part of ourselves and how do we regain it? Is it just making a conscious decision to listen? If we can understand/know/experience the processes by which we become separate, then there may be hope to bring ourselves back to the knowledge that we belong and are a part of all of creation. What better way to understand the process than to experience it? Perhaps if people were invited to write about their places then we can create a much better sense of environmental education and our place in the world.

“A/r/tography as practice-based research is situated in the in-between, where theory-as-practice-as-process-as-compilation intentionally unsettles perception and knowing through living inquiry” (Irwin & Springgay, 2008, p. xxi).

(Re)Searching

David Abram in The Spell of the Sensuous, asks the following question: “How, that is, have we become so deaf and blind to the vital existence of other species, and to the animate landscapes they inhabit, that we now so casually bring about their destruction?” (1996, p. 27). It is from this place of wondering that I approach this thesis. Abram speaks of the “habits and linguistic prejudices that now structure our very thinking” (1996, p. 28). I humbly see that if I am immersed in western civilization, then I have also been affected by these habits and linguistic prejudices. I see the necessity to
examine my thinking. Abram says we must go to the “edge of that civilization, like a magician, or like a person who, having lived among another tribe, can no longer wholly return to his own” (1996, p. 28). A perceptual shift is necessary. I packed up my U-Haul and sojourned 1425 kilometers north to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city life and began my journey to the edge.

An Offering

I give this work as an offering of what I have given my heart to over the last year. I invite you to walk with me, beside me, on my journey of attending ecologically to place.

My journey of seasons,

attentiveness,

and solitude.

The website is located at http://www.apprenticeshipinnature.com. The compositions are arranged chronologically, as I experienced my journey, but I encourage you to wander freely ~ to go where you are led ~ as there is no beginning and no end, rather this work is a series of fragments and a small part of a larger journey I am on.
Appendix

Sony CD-R with PDF copies of webpages.

Sony CD-R with Domain file.
References


