

**PHOTO/SYNTHESIS:  
PHOTOGRAPHY, PEDAGOGY AND PLACE IN A NORTHERN LANDSCAPE**

by

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## ABSTRACT

This study represents a personal journey, an autobiographical and pedagogical attentiveness to the experience of walking in the land of northern British Columbia, and to the process of writing and photography as ways to understand philosophically, ecologically and pedagogically what it means to experience a particular lived place in nature.

The pre-Socratic principle of a spiritual exercise is, in this study, an exercise in attentiveness to sources of self in nature, applying specifically the philosopher, Roland Barthes' term, the punctum, for the phenomenon of an intense and personal experience viewing a photograph. A philosophical exploration of my northern landscape, focusing on my photographs, taken as I walk the trails of the Lakes District, is a spiritual exercise articulated as the relationship between energy and light, and represented metaphorically as *photo/synthesis* in three ways:

As *Remembrance* of the northern winter landscape of my childhood; as *Recognition* of the resemblance among elements in nature and a synthesis of aspects of wildness and self in the experience of the photograph's punctum in the metonymy of a stone, a tree and a grizzly track; and as *Recurrence*, a return to the recurring cycles of water and the transformation of self in wild places in nature.

A philosophy as a way of life in nature or *photo/synthesis* reveals the following pedagogical understandings: a) the potential for a deeper understanding of and relationship with nature through photography as a way to understand authentic relationships to nature or wild places in the geography of one's lived place, b) the pedagogical influences of place and geography on the formation of one's self and artistic identity, c) the need for the development of a philosophy of nature which values attentiveness to the land and encourages an artistic process to convey to others the teachings of nature, and d) the need for an integrated, interdisciplinary pedagogy of nature, using a personal and embodied process of writing inquiry and artistic expression for both teachers and students to reflect upon visits to nature, and which emphasizes the role of imagination, visual imagery and metaphor as ways of understanding and expressing one's sense of place in the community of nature.

## DEDICATION

*This dissertation is dedicated to Janene Hazelton, of Francois Lake B.C. within whom the spirit of the land dwells with her compassion for animals, her love of birds, and her knowledge of plants.*

*Without her inspiration, friendship and passion for the trail and without her insight into the wilderness of the land as it acts upon us to form our characters, I would not have been able to articulate those moments of grace in which the universe was revealed in an agate, in a juniper and in a grizzly track.*

*Like the rarest of friends she showed me again what I once had seen but could no longer see.*

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank those who have contributed to my understandings on this journey:

A very special thank you to Dr. Grimmatt who introduced me to the notion of currere and to a process of inquiry which most closely represents my experiences as artist and teacher. I am grateful for his support and encouragement to explore innovative and creative qualitative methods in curriculum theory.

Thank you as well to Dr. Rita Irwin whose artistic sensibilities and creative interpretations of curriculum have been an inspiration to me, to Dr. Stuart Richmond who understands the aesthetics and the spirit of what it means to be a photographer, to Dr. Charles Bingham for his insights on self-fashioning, to Dr. Heesoon Bai who introduced me both to Nietzsche's writings on nature and the pre-Socratic philosophers, to Dr. Allan MacKinnon who brought ecology and environmental philosophy into my field of vision, to Dr. Bernice Wong for her constant support and encouragement, and to Dr. Carolyn Mamchur for giving me the opportunity to explore new aspects of self in photography.

Most of all, I thank Mr. John LeRoy Haggarty, isumataq, and lover of birds, for teaching me through his photographs to remember the land, to recognize the resemblance between our spirits and the larger community of nature, and finally, after he was gone, to accept recurrence, to know that after death in the long stillness of winter is a world of danger and shadow, but also a world of nuance and light that intensifies the sacred gift of surviving and living, in moments of grace, in wildness.

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## **PROLOGUE ~ PHOTISMOS, THE ICICLE**

A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed.

Roland Barthes<sup>1</sup>

### **Decker Lake, British Columbia, 1965**

The Old Decker Lake Elementary School, where I went to school, had two rooms, long, high window panes and a central cloakroom which separated the younger from the older grades. Our young teacher, only twenty four years old and to us an awe-inspiring and incomprehensible outsider from Australia, taught the fifth, sixth and seventh grades in the south room. He flashed his photographs of our winter playing, taken at recess and lunchtime, out of the darkened classroom, onto a white slide screen. The images showed the students in our class, children of farmers and mill workers, in toques and gloves, arms held wide, leaping from the tops of snow piles in the Community Hall parking lot beside the school or soaring from the wooden seat boards of the swings onto high snow drifts arranged by our teacher, in consultation with the snowplough driver, in a strategic location for safe landings. We saw ourselves

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<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 81.

skating with frozen brooms and mittened hands, chasing a black and white ball on the frozen parking lot. We were mesmerized. We had never seen anything like it.

I remember the child beside me, seen on the screen and unknown for a moment; his head emerged gleaming from the snow, familiar yet wild. He was motionless, as though frozen, and for a moment nothing at all like the child I had known all my life. I began to wonder if I had really seen him before. Another girl I knew held a bat, which had to be from our cloakroom. I recognized the catcher's mitt, the back stop, but the face behind the mask, the eyes, that turned head, those pressed lips? All around me our living eyes were fixed and pinned to the illuminated screen looking at our other eyes, as though waiting for the moment when we would split in two and another self, another "me" would flash in to the room. I experienced the recognition that there is an inner and outer world which can co-exist.

As I was pulled inside out and cast upon the screen, I saw a girl high above the snow pile, her hands releasing the metal chains of a swing, her feet shooting from the red seat board. What startled me was my recognition of myself as that girl. She was on a wild journey through the winter sky, leaping free of the highest moment, to fall free onto the mountain of snow. Happy to see myself in that blue sky, ready to fly, I knew I was safe within the danger as I also sat at my desk, not moving, just seeing. In the exhilaration of watching us soar from safety, falling out of that strong sky into cold, white space I now see

we were winter, our small bodies, in transition through space in the photographs, the metaphor for the connection of the human world to the wild, non-human forces in that landscape.

The most powerful photograph to appear during this experience haunts me still. I saw huge icicles, enlarged like monster's teeth, clear and shining, hard and sharp, suspended from the roof of the Old Hospital, a small two-storey house where we children had been born, but where our teacher now rented an apartment. I was familiar with icicles and knew they signified a poorly insulated building, something no one wanted to see suspended on their roofline. Now, in our teacher's photograph, an image remarkable for him, but ordinary for us (we were amused at first that he openly marvelled at ice as he told us his accompanying story of what it was to experience icicles for the first time), became blinding in its visual impact for me. Through his photograph on the screen, I saw the way he saw icicles - enlarged beyond reality, frightening, impermeable and invasive. What had been a natural element in my winter world, (I thought I was the only one who loved ice), became beautiful, almost unbelievable in its aura of wildness seen through my teacher's eyes. I saw in the photograph of the icicle, for the first time, as a sort of illumination, that it was possible to tell one's inner story and that the inner world has both vision and a voice.

As I glanced around the classroom I experienced a reversal of the animate and the inanimate; my motionless classmates in the classroom space

were, however, moving within the photograph on the screen. We were all photographs, large, boldly full of light and alive a second time. I could see my outer self, playing in the snow, but also in the icicle, a part of my being, but not as I now realize, part of my teacher's being. Roland Barthes in his study of the phenomenology of the photograph in *Camera Lucida* says: "A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."<sup>2</sup>

The image of the icicle, although inanimate and not a human being who has been photographed, remains in my mind like a body linked to my gaze with a "sort of umbilical cord" connecting the inner self and outer landscape of my childhood. The light in the image surfaces to my consciousness and remains in my memory like skin. This umbilical cord is the link between the visual world of self, what one realizes is the outer nature of the world and the awareness of one's place within the inner world of self. Light, the carnal medium, links the past and present, self and other: the inner nature of self is unified and connected to the tangible, physical and sensory outer world that one perceives. The icicle has become imprinted with some aspect of myself, like a trace or a track. John Berger notes that in some photographs there exists a "panel of being,"<sup>3</sup> as the humans and their landscape take on aspects of each other's features. In this way my self and ice became linked forever.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 81.

The photograph of the icicle has had an expansive capacity beyond the original image because it connected something within my inner nature to the outer world of nature. It has to do with the tension within the experience of seeing a certain photograph which seems to have the ability to reflect or situate an ontological awareness or understanding of an aspect of self—of one's being. With his photographs, this teacher showed me my own landscape and my self within it. Something in my consciousness responded then and continues to register now in my own teaching practice as I wonder about the curricular impact of a visual world, about what it means to show others our so-called point of view.

Barry Lopez, in *Arctic Dreams*, exploring the role of imagination and desire in the northern Arctic landscape, points to the Inuit term *isumataq*, a teacher of nature, or one who conveys the inner landscape to others: "a person who can create the atmosphere in which wisdom shows itself."<sup>4</sup> My experiences with those early images made me recognize a relationship between the photograph and the formation of my identity in the land in which I have lived, what I now call *photo/synthesis*. Ironically, watching the past through photographs made it immediate, for the students in our classroom watched both the past and the present-past in a glimmering moment of now, slip away. I was confronted with an awareness of the tension between past and present, the living moment and its representation. In such learning moments are born the sensibilities of *isumataq*, the teacher of nature, the artist and the writer. I

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<sup>3</sup> John Berger, *About Looking*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 50.

experienced a moment of illumination, what I have come to call a *photo/synthesis* of pedagogy and photography. I recognized something in nature that hit my heart as if I were the land's skin, blood and being.

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<sup>4</sup> Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 298.

## INTRODUCTION

I think of two landscapes, one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see...The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape...the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes.

Barry Lopez <sup>5</sup>

### Photography and place

This study began as a way to examine what the pre-Socratic philosophers call the practice of spiritual exercises by articulating my experiences walking in the forests and wilderness of Northern British Columbia. I hoped that I might better understand what it is to respect nature, to educate in authentic ways and to live the life of a philosopher. Specifically, the process of my journey represents through text and image my lived experience of "place" in a northern community in British Columbia, situated in the valley known as the Lakes District, between Babine and Francois Lakes. As I struggle to understand my relationship to this geographical place and how this land might be part of my consciousness as a teacher and photographer now living in the city, I question what I have learned in this place, in what Barry Lopez<sup>6</sup> calls the "outer landscape"; not only how "the shape of the individual mind is affected" by place, but also what that

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<sup>5</sup> Barry Lopez, *Crossing Open Ground*, (New York: Random House Inc., 1989), 65.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.



means to me pedagogically, spiritually, and ecologically. I propose that walking in the land, and an attentiveness through photography and writing are spiritual exercises. I refer here to Hadot's distinctions in traditional philosophy as three forms of philosophical discourse: logic, ethics and physics.

Within each there is for philosophers both the theoretical discourse, but also a "lived logic, lived physics and a lived ethics."<sup>7</sup> I attempt to explore the authenticity of the notion of a lived physics and to make visible my spiritual exercises in nature as a way to answer the question: How might the wisdom of the early philosophers be relevant today, pedagogically and ecologically? My journeys and experiences are an exploration in spiritual exercises, keeping in mind Hadot's interpretation of the pre-Socratic idea of lived physics: "The discipline of physics included not only a theory, but a lived physics, a true spiritual exercise which involved a way of seeing the world, a cosmic consciousness, and a procured pleasure and joy for the soul," that "aimed at self transformation."<sup>8</sup> A lived physics has become for me a way of seeing, a way of walking into the land, and an experience in self-transformation represented in this study through text and image.

I focus on photographs I have recorded between Lopez's two landscapes, on the aspects of this land "outside the self" which have been projected to my interior landscape. For me, this is a celebration of light, of the

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<sup>7</sup> Arnold I. Davidson, "Introduction," in *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, Pierre Hadot, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 1995), 24-5.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

insights that surface when I journey into the land. Barthes' "umbilical cord" of light as a "carnal medium," similar to my childhood experience seeing my teacher's photographs,<sup>9</sup> links my adult life to my childhood in this valley of lakes.

In this study, my purpose is to represent a close attachment to this external landscape, to explore how a photograph, as a "projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape" (see quotation above), can elicit the articulation of an inner landscape or sense of place, and how this experience has implications for curriculum, specifically one which represents or records the participant's experience through narrative and image. Nehamas, in *The Art of Living*, refers to the aestheticist genre of the philosophy of living, where writers are influenced by notions of philosophical living but realize ultimately they must create their own approach. As a creative expression through art, it is a style of living, an exploration of character and the development of a unique self through writing: "The art of living, though a practical art, is practiced in writing."<sup>10</sup> My experiences with photographs, an art of living for me, will be practiced, therefore, in writing as well.

In an attempt to explore what it means to experience this land, and how my spiritual exercise of attentiveness<sup>11</sup> to this particular place might be represented, what has become my personal currere will be explored using photographs, reflections and journals. The Latin term currere, the infinitive for

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Prologue, 1.

<sup>10</sup> Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>11</sup> Hadot, *op. cit.*, 83.

curriculum, defined as running the course, is a way of learning which focuses on "...relations among school knowledge, life history and intellectual development."<sup>12</sup> One of the ways teachers can better understand curriculum is in the related stream of scholarship known as autobiographical theory and practice. The autobiographical text illustrates the importance of focusing on our experiences as personal currere: "All experience is the product of both the features of the world and the biography of the individual. The experience is informed by the past as it interacts with our present."<sup>13</sup> Inspiration for my currere can also be found in what Carolyn Ellis describes as an evolving form of qualitative research focussing on an interweaving of the personal and academic, in which the primary purpose is to understand self, using first person voice and expressed in various forms including poetry, photographic essays, personal experience narratives, ethnographic poetics, and literary tales.<sup>14</sup> In this way the autobiographical text becomes a form of pedagogical journey and my personal currere that journey make visible in the act of walking into the woods and in the textual document articulating that journey.

In Herman Hesse's novel, *Siddhartha*, the young man Siddhartha on his quest to understand his place in the world, wonders: "But where was this Self, this innermost? It was not flesh and bone, it was not thought or

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<sup>12</sup> William F. Pinar, *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Discourses*. (New York: Peter Lang, Inc., 2000), 515.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 515.

<sup>14</sup> Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. N.K. Denzin and Y.S. Lincoln. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1998), 739. See, for example, Ellis' extensive references for examples illustrating these qualitative methods.

consciousness...one must find the source within one's Self, one must possess it."<sup>15</sup> Returning home now more frequently after most of my adult life spent teaching in the city, I begin to ask some questions: How does one find the sources of self? Have I become separated from the natural environment to the peril of my spiritual awareness and even my physical survival? What is an authentic experience in the wild? What experiences in nature are essential to the development of my students' identity?

### **The pre-Socratics ~ spiritual exercises and walking into the land**

Walking into the land, practicing attentiveness through listening, stillness and writing as spiritual exercises, can be ways to live philosophy and to experience what the early Greeks called philosophy as a way of life. Pierre Hadot, in his work on the role of philosophy in daily life, examines the pre-Socratic philosophers and their emphasis on the relationship between the formation of self and our perception of nature.<sup>16</sup> For the ancient philosophers, a "lived physics" is a lived spiritual exercise, a philosophical practice to experience and see more fully the natural world. For the early Greeks, it is, says Hadot, not in "producing the theory of physics, but is that of the cosmos, nor in producing the theory of acting well, but it concerned actually speaking well, thinking well, acting well, being truly conscious of one's place in the cosmos."<sup>17</sup> Philosophy in

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<sup>15</sup> Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha*, (New York: Bantam Books), 7

<sup>16</sup> Hadot, *op. cit.*, 283. See, also, "The Sage and the World," 252-263.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, "Introduction," Arnold I. Davidson, 24.

this view is not merely a cognitive activity, but an experience of the formation of self as an essential aspect of the art of living.

A formation of self is achieved through spiritual exercises which metamorphose our vision from a human view of reality to a "natural vision of things, which replaces each event within the perspective of universal nature."<sup>18</sup> This is an existential choice to follow a path of life, to embark on a journey which both embraces a life of spiritual exercises (actions and conduct) and transforms the inner self. The Stoics emphasize a self-realization in which we know we are part of humanity and the cosmos; we can focus on the moment, living as if we are seeing the world for the first time and for the last time. We are "...conscious that, in this lived presence of the moment, we have access to the totality of time and of the world."<sup>19</sup> This self-realization is an ability to see the world as nature does. The ability to see in this way is a result of spiritual exercises which influence the "...transformation of our vision of the world" and thus our inner self.<sup>20</sup> Here "spiritual" indicates a universal dimension in which one is situated within all of the natural world. The end result has to do with the manner in which one conducts one's life.

Spiritual exercises, according to Hadot, include "learning to live" (the Stoic and Epicurean perspective that philosophy is an "art of living," a way of living one's life, rather than the interpretation of texts or teaching theories of

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., "Introduction," Arnold I. "Davidson, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 82.

philosophy), "learning to dialogue" and "learning to die." Attention in the moment is the basis for all Stoic spiritual exercises,<sup>21</sup> what Hadot calls the "practice of dialogue with oneself," and a meditative practice that helps us learn to live "freely and consciously."<sup>22</sup>

A lived physics is learning to be receptive to the immediate experience and to the inter-relatedness of the human being and the universe:

This is a new way of being-in-the-world, which consists in becoming aware of oneself as part of nature, and a portion of universal reason. At this point one no longer lives in the usual, conventional human world, but in the world of nature...one is then practicing "physics" as a spiritual exercise.<sup>23</sup>

How then is it possible to encounter a lived physics with 'the exterior' world of nature? This study, as a spiritual exercise, is a dialectical exercise, both an inner "practice of dialogue with oneself" and an outer (dissertation) dialogue, but also a way to bring to light or make visible a process or path to a certain self-transformation. Two ways to practice spiritual exercises in the twenty-first century are to walk in the land in an attentive manner and to practice writing and photography as forms of inquiry. Nature is a source of inner power essential to the transformation of self, a source of inspiration for a lived

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<sup>21</sup> Hadot refers to Philo of Alexandria's list of specific spiritual exercises which include: research, reading, listening and attentiveness.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 211.

physics, for the articulation of a lived essence of place, what some phenomenologists today refer to as *genius loci*.

The Romans believed in a *genius loci*, a spirit of place which gives life to people and places and "determines their character or essence."<sup>24</sup> Today, the concept of place is important in autobiographical curricula as well. Kincheloe and Pinar's research highlighting writers' accounts of living in the American South shows a strong connection between place and the feelings experienced in that place: "An autobiographical understanding of pedagogical practice is clearly informed by the complexity of place."<sup>25</sup> According to Pinar, more research is needed to explore the literal and symbolic meanings in specific places: "Place is a concept that might prove suggestive for scholars of other regions of the USA and the world."<sup>26</sup>

The purpose of this study, therefore, is to weave a remembered history, using both photography as a reflective, spiritual exercise and narrative as a way to express a lived physics of this northern landscape in British Columbia, Canada. Florence R. Krall suggests: "It may in the end be the wild places that hold the key to creative self-realization and biospheric harmony."<sup>27</sup> The phenomenology of a sense of place, (a *genius loci* through walking, photography and narrative) can express the experience of the more literal or physical

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<sup>24</sup> D. Seamon, "A Phenomenology of Lifeworld and Place," *Phenomenology and Pedagogy*, Vol. 2, no. 2, (1982): 135.

<sup>25</sup> Pinar, *op.cit.*, 533. (See, for example, the American South as place and pedagogy in the work of Susan Huddleston Edgerton, Kathleen P. Bennet, Willie Morris, and literary theorist, Lewis Simpson.)

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 535-6.

relationship I can have to a particular landscape, as well as a more metaphorical relationship: my perceptions and memories of what it is to live in this, to me, wild place and in the spaces between photography and land where interactions and tensions (*photo/synthesis*) are situated. *Photo/synthesis*, as metaphor, in this context, is my way to articulate not only the influence of wild places that emerges through my experiences, but also a way to define a curriculum of nature to help us educate our children.

*Photo*, from the Greek for "light," emphasizes the light in the northern landscape as its own entity, but also the light needed to create the photograph, and finally, the notion of illumination and insights or understandings which emerge in my currere. Synthesis is the interaction of energy and light, a sort of photismos (bringing to light) of the unity of my self through a photograph with the more universal, often wild, aspects of nature, as well as the pedagogical possibilities for an embodied, interdisciplinary and unified currere of nature for young people. Metaphor acts powerfully to make sense of experience and to illuminate the interplay between experience and theory. Metaphor, for instance, is described by Laurel Richardson as the "backbone" of writings in the social sciences: "Theoretical schemata are always situated in complex, systematic metaphors."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Pinar, *op.cit.*, 535.

<sup>28</sup> Denzin and Lincoln, *op. cit.*, 929. Richardson gives the word illumination as an example: "...the use of *enlighten* for knowledge is a light based metaphor, what Derrida (1982) refers to as the heliocentric view of knowledge, the passive receipt of rays."



*Photo/synthesis* emphasizes the active energy of light, the energy of transformation, but also of the movement of the body in the land. Sheets-Johnstone suggests "we discover ourselves in movement."<sup>29</sup> And, countering prevalent views that perception dominates cognition, she argues that everything cognitive leads back to movement, to animal nature. Our bodies through movement "...are the very source of our being in the world..."<sup>30</sup> *Photo/synthesis* is the bringing to light, through movement in the land of embedded and embodied meanings: it is "walking in a sacred manner."<sup>31</sup>

*Photo/synthesis* has ecological imperatives as well: In this view, the earth is home, a dwelling place for the spirit, and the place which provides the opportunity to establish a relationship with the "other." The earth is a "spiritual bedrock" says Stephen Trimble, and a source of strength for children<sup>32</sup> In "Ecology: Sacred Homemaking," Thomas Moore urges a shift from the use of the word environment (with its materialistic connotations) to the word ecology, (which Moore explains derives from oikos: management of the home or dwelling, and logos: a mysterious quintessence in being, law or nature, sometimes referred to as dharma, tao or esse). Moore suggests the word ecology reflects a way of thinking that is "...the soul's constant longing for and

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<sup>29</sup> Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*. (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999), 136.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>31</sup> Jim Cheney, "Sacred Land," *Colloquium on Environment, Ethics and Education*, ed. Bob Jickling. (Whitehorse, Canada: Yukon College, 1996), 66.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen Trimble, "Sing Me Down the Mountain," in *Words from the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing*. (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. "Smith, Inc., 1988), 170.

establishment of a deep sense of home” and “a more philosophical consideration of our desire for home and for all the ways in which we can experience it.”<sup>33</sup>

### **Alienation from nature ~ the need for wild places**

I hear so often how our modern culture has become alienated from what once was an authentic, necessary, physical response to the world of sky, earth, trees, and rivers. In school, young people learn the history of industrialization and of world wars, they analyze the absurdity of existence in modern literature, and they deconstruct the world around them from an impersonal and so-called objective and scientific point of view. Their responses are primarily paraphrases of reality, at best, superficial interpretations. The experiential aspect of their curriculum is overlooked by educators. There is little attention in secondary curriculum to nature or art. Furthermore, the prevalent view that nature is a useful, objective “other” separate from our psyche, soul or inner self, that it is a commodity to be ignored and even controlled or destroyed for economic benefit seems to be alienating our young people and inhibiting their opportunity to live in harmony and balance with the natural world. In particular, for many people in urban schools, the elements of nature in the schoolyard are invisible, a mere backdrop for the institutional setting.

What is needed is a perspective for educators which includes a phenomenological understanding, a balance between body and mind, a

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<sup>33</sup>Thomas Moore, “Ecology: Sacred Homemaking,” in *The Soul of Nature*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 138.

participatory framework and a positive and life-affirming ontological vision for young people so they can have opportunities to struggle with experiences which may help them make connections between their consciousness and the cosmos and also between their inner nature and the outer world of nature. A new way of thinking, a way of knowing and being in the land, of connecting one's self to nature, may be needed to ensure human survival. Living the philosophical life is an art of living that can transcend survival, intellectually and spiritually.

Philosophy can help us understand not only our alienation from nature but what may be the modern identity crisis we face today in our relationships with the natural world. Concern that humans are alienated from nature is a relatively recent issue in philosophy and in explorations of self and identity. According to the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, a conflict exists in the modern identity between our dependence on so-called infallible reason and our deeper understanding of nature. In *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modernity*, he urges us to consider our relationship to nature not only as a source of moral good but as the urgent ethical issue for modernity. Particularly evident since the Protestant Reformation, claims Richard Tarnas in *The Passion of the Western Mind*, is a scientific perspective of nature which portrays man as the "knowing subject against the object of nature" with the divine authority to dominate a nature meant to be used for the benefit of mankind.<sup>34</sup> According to this view, a dichotomy between humans and nature

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<sup>34</sup> Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind*. (New York: Ballantine Books, 1991), 267.

exists as two cultures or sensibilities within the modern individual. The result: mankind has become "...a divided animal, inexplicably self-aware in an indifferent universe."<sup>35</sup>

Phenomenologists, researchers in participatory epistemology, eco-theologians and environmental philosophers refer to the dichotomy between humans and nature as a mind/body dualism.<sup>36</sup> According to the ecologist and philosopher, David Abram, alienation from nature, for instance, has wounded the psyche and prevents the integration of self with nature; nature is merely a "stock of resources" and the modern mind perceives itself confronting a "non-human nature...circumscribed by technology and civilization"; furthermore, we have become "hypnotized by a host of human-made technologies that only reflect us back to ourselves," leading us to "condemn other sensibilities to the oblivion of extinction."<sup>37</sup>

The environmental philosopher, Max Oelschlager, describing our modern predicament as alienation or "ecological malaise," identifies a further concern: the relationship of humans to nature is overlooked by philosophers. An attempt to address this malaise or the damages of the worldview of the duality of body and nature, the so-called 'subject' and 'other', can be seen in the work of phenomenologists since the beginning of the twentieth century

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 378.

<sup>36</sup> For instance, Brian Swimme, Thomas Berry, David Abram, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Rudolf Steiner.

<sup>37</sup> David Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. (New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc., 1966), 22.

(Merleau-Ponty, 1964; Husserl, 1960). Explorations in the notion of participatory epistemology offer another perspective on ways to synthesize experience, perception and the body. In this view, the reality of nature is not that of a separate entity; instead, the validity and meaningfulness of one's direct experiences in nature emerge with active participation of the human mind. Nature's reality, in this view, is more than a phenomenal experience, expressing its meaning through human consciousness and human language to reflect the "universe's unfolding meaning."<sup>38</sup> Instead, these writers suggest nature seems to have its own reality separate, in part, from that of humans.

### **The idea of wilderness ~ photismos**

One of the ways to address these concerns of "ecological malaise" and the alienation of humans from nature is through the awareness of places in nature which reveal nature's reality and the use of a language to try to define and articulate what that reality means to us: to express nature's "unfolding meaning." The possibilities for self-transformation and reflection in wild places suggest a need for wilderness experiences which reconcile body and land, self and wilderness and which may help us overcome what Oelschlager refers to as either alienation from nature, or what Taylor describes as the resulting fragmentation in the modern identity. Physical experiences interact with our vision to affect consciousness and this experience can be articulated through art,

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<sup>38</sup> Tarnas, *op. cit.*, 433-436; on Rudolf Steiner's epistemological perspective of the modern mind.

metaphors or narrative (as spiritual exercises) to express an understanding of what it is to be human in relationship to nature.

Perhaps artists, poets and writers open to some sense of a lived physics in nature have possible answers to the connections between encounters with wild nature and human consciousness. What is needed, it seems, is a human experience which clarifies the value of the idea of wildness as a search for meaning, a "...defense of absolute value, a defense of cosmos that is something beyond human measure and not scenery."<sup>39</sup> What is also needed is the expression, through what Taylor refers to as a "subtler language"<sup>40</sup> of art and metaphor, to represent in this study, the sacredness and mystery of the reciprocity of humans and wild places.

In coming to understand my experiences walking in this land I have had to make the distinction between terms used sometimes inter-changeably for the natural or non-human world: words like nature and Nature, wilderness and wildness, the earth and landscape. Within the context of this study, "landscape" is used in the sense that land has a human history, that what we see is partly the extension of some aspect of our human culture; "nature" is the organic living world composed of such elements as earth, wind and weather; "Nature" is the conceptual construct of the idea of nature, such as we might use in a discussion of Wordsworth's poetry; "wilderness" is a physical area of nature primarily

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<sup>39</sup> Max Oelschlager, *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology*. (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 340.

<sup>40</sup> Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*. (Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1991), 81-91.

uninfluenced by human contact; and "wildness" is an aspect of wilderness within the self: "The wild is everywhere, always below the surface from the human point of view," says David Rothenberg, in "Idea of the North." It is an experience that "...surfaces when we accept that darkness and light make no sense without each other, when we see how each extreme can carry us away."<sup>41</sup>

To experience wildness is to experience what Sharon Butala calls the place where "words stop": the "...moment when, out in Nature, not shooting, collecting, studying, naming or farming, we realize that an entity is present, or that Nature is alive, even that Nature has a memory."<sup>42</sup>

Peter Mathiessen, walking in Nepal in search of the snow leopard ("At Crystal Mountain"), experiences in meditation an illumination of the living moment: he becomes aware that mountains exist separate from his human self. He sees in mountains something wild, an overwhelming "permanence" that endures:

The secret of the mountains is that the mountains simply exist, as I do myself: the mountains exist simply, which I do not. The mountains have no meaning, they are meaning; the mountains are. I try to understand all this, not in my mind but my heart, knowing how meaningless it is to try to capture what cannot be expressed, knowing that mere words will remain when I read it all again, another day.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> David Rothenberg, "The Idea of the North," in *The Soul of Nature*, eds., Michael Tobias and Georgianne Cowan, (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), 61.

<sup>42</sup> Sharon Butala, *The Perfection of the Morning: An Apprenticeship in Nature*. (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1994), 64.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Mathiessen, *The Snow Leopard*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1981), 218.

Despite the inadequacy of words, we continue to try to translate from heart to mind, from experience to words as a way to share our experience of wildness and to be part of a larger human community, a community of land and humans. Butala's experience on the Canadian prairies, and Mathiessen's in Nepal show that wildness is everywhere and that spiritual exercises such as attentiveness, meditation and walking into the land, can take many forms as we learn ways to "live freely and consciously" beyond individuality.<sup>44</sup>

Walking in nature and encountering wildness, sources for self-expression through art, help us articulate what lies within us as possibilities of being are brought to light. Two artists who translate the experience of walking into the land as art (in text and image) are Hamish Fulton and Richard Long.<sup>45</sup> These artists show us that a physical experience of nature, and perhaps especially wildness, give an insight into what it is to know and understand the essential, mutual relationship between the human and the natural world. The pedagogical power of place is evident in their work and examples of what students can experience and contribute to community life: through walking into the land and transferring these experiences into artistic media, they can learn about and become participants in the life force of their place.

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<sup>44</sup> Hadot, *op. cit.*, 86.

<sup>45</sup> Hamish Fulton: See *Touching One Hundred Rocks*, a series of photographs which speak to how movement in the land can be articulated visually. See also, Richard Long: *Walking the Line*, and *Richard Long: Walking in Circles*.



David Gruenewald, in "Foundations of Place," asks, "What are our places telling us and teaching us about our possibilities"?<sup>46</sup> Places teach us, they are pedagogical, and understanding place is "key to understanding the nature of our relationship with each other and the world."<sup>47</sup> Children especially need to experience place or have "tangible experience and symbolic touchstones" in nature, says Gary Nabhan (*The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Places*), to be at peace with the outer world.<sup>48</sup> Children need wild places to understand what it means to be human, to experience a sense of responsibility and respect to the natural world, to know and articulate this knowledge of self in wilderness to others and to develop an awareness of the essential relationship which exists between language, wilderness and identity. Wildness is best experienced in nature, but like the formative experience of my childhood with my teacher's photograph of the icicle, images of nature can also speak to a wildness in us, as we recognize Barthes' umbilical cord, the "carnal medium of light," which can connect us through the photograph, to nature. The idea of wilderness, therefore, seems essential to our epistemology, what we know of the world around us; to our awareness of the ontology of the human, what it means to experience wildness and to our definition of a moral identity; and what it means to live, as humans, a life of respectful interdependence and in a community of spirit with wild places and the natural world. Wendell Berry notes

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<sup>46</sup> David A. Gruenewald, "Foundations of Place: A Multidisciplinary Framework for Place-Conscious Education," *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (2003): 639.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 622.

that experiences in wilderness lead to the reflection that we are alone wondering what our place is in the universe; it is the realization that in wilderness we experience what is unknowable, elusive and difficult to express in words.

Wilderness is:

...the creation in its pure state, its processes unqualified by the doings of people...And seeing that the creation survives all wishful preconceptions about it, that it includes him only upon its own sovereign terms, that he is not free except in his proper place in it, then he may begin, perhaps to have a hand in the creation of himself.<sup>49</sup>

For Thoreau, wilderness is those wild places uninhabited by humans, where one experiences an awareness of a "Pure nature" that is not a "mother earth" but an earth made out of a primeval chaos that is "savage, and awful though beautiful."<sup>50</sup> Experiences in nature might be for emerging writers or artists a sort of lived physics: an attentiveness in nature that enables them not only to articulate an attunement with wilderness or develop a mindful respect for nature, but also to have a "hand in the creation" of themselves.

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<sup>48</sup> Gary Nabhan, *The Geography of Childhood*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 40.

<sup>49</sup> Wendell Berry, "The Journey's End," in *Words From the Land*, ed. Stephen Trimble, (Salt Lake City: Gibbs M. Smith, Inc., 1988), 230-1.

<sup>50</sup> Henry David Thoreau, "The Maine Woods," in *The Norton Book of Nature Writing*, eds., Robert Finch and John Elder. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 192-3.

## **Photography as a spiritual exercise ~ a sense of place**

What is the meaning of a photograph and how might it be a way to articulate symbolic touchstones and a way of knowing in a lived physics of landscape? The photograph of nature is a source of attentiveness for a human (inner) and natural (outer) vision and a source of articulation of self that is often overlooked. To photograph nature is a spiritual exercise, an exercise in attentiveness, a way to live a life of philosophy, and a way to represent the integration of one's inner and outer experiences living in a particular (for me), northern place. Responding to photographs of nature, especially some aspect of wildness in nature, can help integrate oneself with nature.

The photograph has had a powerful role in art, literature, and history. Less known but as important is its emerging role in visual ethnography and environmental philosophy as a phenomenological and reflexive tool to understand the history of the lived experience of individuals and their sense of place. The photograph, writes John Collier, helps to "set oneself inside another's visual world."<sup>51</sup> Collier, using photography as a research method in visual ethnography, claims if an image "can contain a thousand references," then the photograph will help not only to provide details about past events which might be forgotten or overlooked, it may also be used to analyze our relationship to the past, and to know self through uniting the inner and outer experience it

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<sup>51</sup>John Collier Jr., *Visual Anthropology: Photography as Research Method*. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), xvii.

stimulates.<sup>52</sup> The use of a photograph as a reflective tool is a powerful way to explore the phenomenon of a geographical place as home, and the land as a community of inter-dependent organisms.

### **The punctum of the photograph**

Perhaps the most powerful account of the phenomenon of the experience of a photograph is that of the philosopher, Roland Barthes' punctum of the photograph. The selection of my photographs in this study, to represent sources of self or experiences of community, wildness and place in a northern landscape, is inspired by Roland Barthes' use of the term punctum in *Camera Lucida* (a phenomenological study of his experience of photographs,) in which his response to a photograph is defined as either pertaining to the studium (in which he can "participate in the figures, the faces, the gestures, the settings, the actions" with a "commitment" but "...without special acuity"), or the more powerful and emotional response of the punctum (which will "break or punctuate" the studium like an arrow that pierces the viewer). One may seek the studium, according to Barthes, and participate in the photograph's setting, but the unplanned and spontaneous punctum rises like "sensitive points" to "wound" him.<sup>53</sup> The power in the experience of the punctum is that it gives the

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<sup>52</sup> John Collier Jr. and Malcolm Collier, *Visual Anthropology: Photography as Research Method*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1986), 6.

<sup>53</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 26-7.

viewer an "insight" or understanding that is personal and particular to each person and to the photograph which prompts this individual reaction.

In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes inquires into a few significant photographs to discover what might be their fundamental feature, seeking an answer to: "What does my body know of photography?"<sup>54</sup> After his mother's death, Barthes has an intense desire to really know her, whom he had loved beyond any other, by finding in a photograph some essence of her being that he had not yet seen. The discovery of an old photograph from her childhood creates a powerful emotional response with the force of an insight, unlike his response to the many other photographs he has studied. He describes this experience as the punctum of an old photograph of his mother as a child in which he "rediscovers" an essence of her being in a childhood gesture. The punctum of this photograph, this experience of the essence of his mother, becomes his Ariadne, or the "thread which drew me toward photography."<sup>55</sup> The punctum or "unexpected flash" he experiences is both in the detail (a gesture, a fragment of the image) and of time. His punctum is an awareness of an anticipation: "...she is going to die." It is "this *will be* and *this has been*," what he experiences as both the "absolute past of the pose" and "death in the future."<sup>56</sup> Thus, for Barthes, the equivalence of the past childhood and future

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 8-9.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 96.

death along with the essence of the goodness of his mother's character in her child's gesture is, *for him*, the punctum.

Barthes insists his punctum could not exist for anyone else; it is a unique and individual interaction between himself and a certain photograph. In this way, the photograph can reflect or situate on a certain level one's relationship between self and the world. In this way my photographs have been selected, after several years photographing and walking in the land, on the basis of the punctum each provokes when I view them now and the way in which each punctum is a photismos, or a certain bringing to light of an insight. Barthes writes: "However lightning-like it may be, the punctum has, more or less potential, a power of expansion. This power is often metonymic."<sup>57</sup> Barthes' account of the phenomenon of the photograph in *Camera Lucida*, according to Jacques Derrida, with its motifs of studium and punctum, shows the "limits of a speaking interiority" and a way to articulate silence.<sup>58</sup> The punctum of the photograph is an encounter with self. In this way, each of my photographs has the power of expansion, and each punctum is metonymical for my experience of wildness and the understandings or insights I experience in nature.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>58</sup> Jacques Derrida, "The Deaths of Roland Barthes," in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. Hugh J. Silverman. (New York: Routledge, 1988), 273.

## **The punctum of the land**

Barthes' experience of the punctum may apply to the experience of photographs of the landscape as a pre-Socratic spiritual exercise. The punctum of landscape, my affective response to focused attention on a certain photograph, is the opportunity for self-realization. In my photographs there is for me a punctum of detail and time as well, but Barthes' equivalence of past and present (a "catastrophe" that prompts a shudder that is part of every punctum in a photograph and indicates perhaps that the anticipation of death is more powerfully present in some photographs),<sup>59</sup> is overshadowed by the impact of the equivalence of a wildness connecting my two landscapes: an inner landscape of self, and outer, external wilderness in nature. The photograph has the metonymic power to translate this silent understanding to a consciousness that can be articulated in language.

In certain photographs of the land I feel a catastrophe that mediates, for me, through the punctum, not only the idea of Barthes' confrontation between self and mortality, but between self and wilderness as well. The punctum of details in the photographs of the landscape of my childhood reveals a relationship between self, nature, and photography: a *photo/synthesis*. Writing my relationship with nature through walking into and photographing the land, is an autobiography, and the silent photograph of nature is a way to articulate, through Taylor's "subtler language," the voice of the self

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<sup>59</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 96.

and to clarify, or bring to light, the connections I share as a human with the broader community of nature. Photographs evoke silences and voices of the inner self - a means to understand what it is to experience self through the exploration of landscape and narrative in a lived place and to show our loyalty to our own particular place or community in nature

David Orr, environmentalist and author of *Ecological Literacy*, advocates in education a place-centered approach that encourages students to be loyal to and defend a particular place. He points to the ways in which indigenous cultures marked transitions from childhood to adulthood in a certain place:

A child became an adult in a place... Education ought to allow for bonding with the natural world. E.O Wilson believes we have an affinity for life, which he calls biophilia. In other words nature tugs at us. Biophilia is the gravity that pulls us toward nature. We not only live on this planet, but this planet lives in us, in our minds, our imaginations, our dreams and in our genes.<sup>60</sup>

As a photographer and teacher, my spiritual exercises in nature consist of walking into the land, in the place to which I am most loyal, and reflecting on and recognizing the "gravity that pulls me toward nature." I see resemblances and unity between objects in nature and between myself and the object of my sensations in nature, through the experience of the punctum of a

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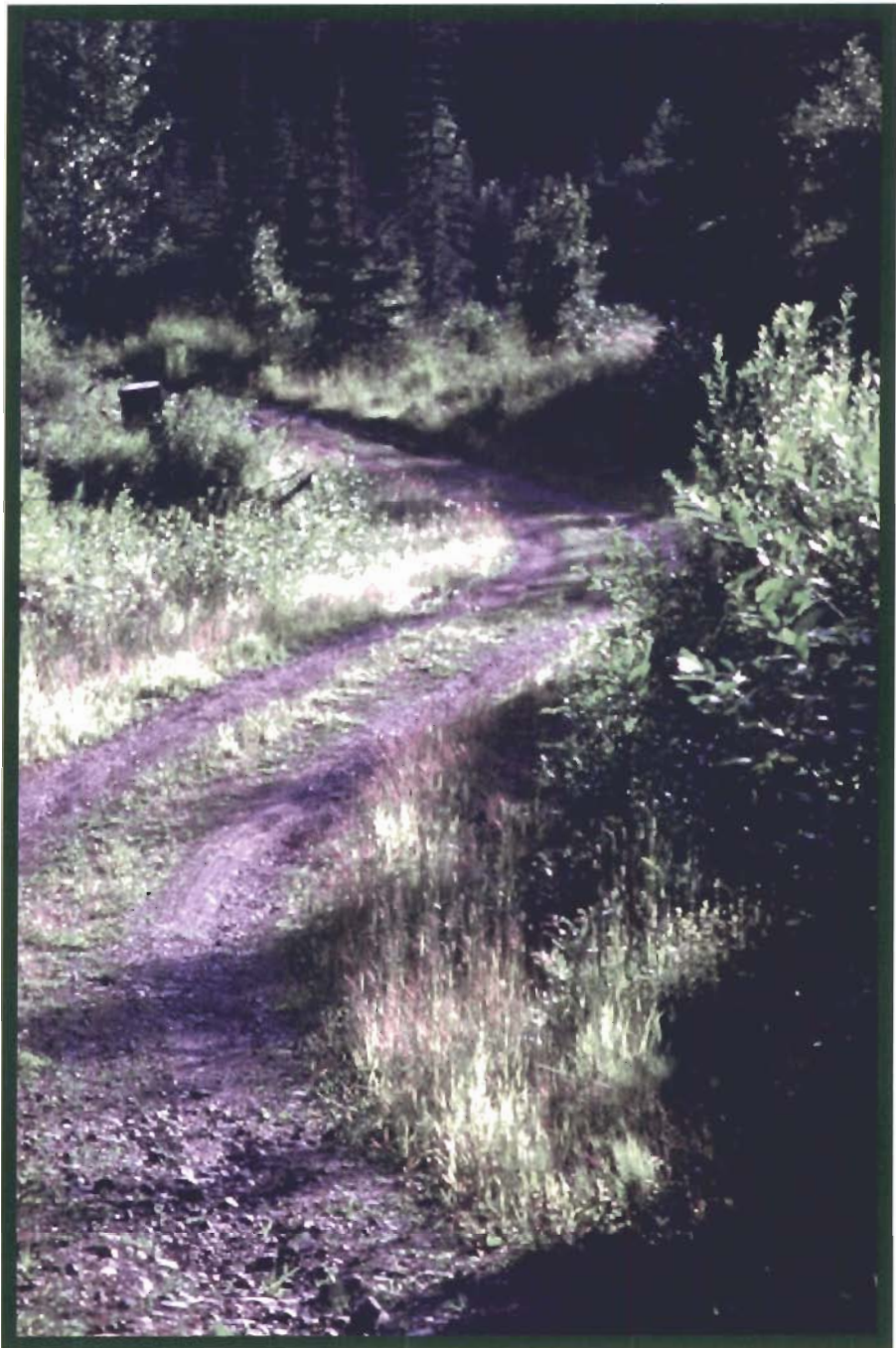
<sup>60</sup> David Orr, "Interview," in *Listening to the Land*, ed. Derick Jensen. (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2002), 27.



landscape photograph (either in an existing photograph or in a photograph I have recorded) and by articulating that punctum in writing. Reflecting on a photograph, a detail arises, metonymical in its ability to expand to reveal an understanding of nature that has been hidden or invisible in a stone, or a tree or a grizzly bear track. Orr reminds us that an ecologically literate society needs changes in curriculum which will engage us more closely with the world. My walking journey engages me with that world, that place where I am learning to follow the advice of ecologists LaChappelle and Puzey to "...really live in place, not following any ideas or ideals out of the human head"; instead, they suggest the way to live in the moment is to "Instead follow the pattern that nature in your own place gives you."<sup>61</sup> The patterns in my spiritual exercises can be found in trails and pathways into the land (Figure 1).

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<sup>61</sup> Dolores LaChappelle and Julien Puzey, "Interview," in *Listening to the Land*, ed. Derrick Jensen. (Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing Company, 2002), 245.



**Figure 1 ~ Trail, Old Tie Road**

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## **Photo/synthesis**

One way to think of an art of living, therefore, is through the exploration of patterns in my own place, by walking and writing and by focussing on specific visual experiences and the life memories evoked by a photograph. Seeing patterns of light and movement, feeling my umbilical cord to nature, Barthes' "carnal medium of light," and actively moving in the land, are ways to live in the moment.

Photographs can evoke, and transform through light, aspects of the inner self and its place and community. Reflecting through writing and photography on the northern landscape in which I was born I am reminded of Hadot's comments on the pre-Socratic philosophers interest in attentiveness and "second sight" as spiritual exercises. In this way *photo/synthesis* represents the influence of nature on the formation of my self within this inter-community of land and people, and on the spiritual exercises that enable me to live philosophy as a way of life or as a living currere.

Lopez refers to isumataq, one who can convey the inner landscape to others: "a person who can create the atmosphere in which wisdom shows itself."<sup>62</sup> Isumataq share what one has come to know and understand, travelling into the land, desiring to see and to imagine. The isumataq would seem to understand what it is to have reciprocal vision with the land, to express, with

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<sup>62</sup> Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 298.

what Charles Taylor, calls a "language of personal resonance,"<sup>63</sup> the epiphanies and intuitions that result when one's interactions with nature are authentic.

### **A personal currere**

My currere is situated with images and text focussing on ice, stones, wood grains, a grizzly track and water, metonymic details which provide the possibility for an expansive gaze and segue into spiritual exercises (reflections on the punctum of the photograph as a way to practice attentiveness), and as an art of living the philosophical life. These metonymic visual details represent a growing understanding of a) a deep, spiritual connection to nature made visible (photismos) through creative and artistic expression in photography, b) the pedagogical influences of place/ the geography of childhood/ wildness, and c) ways to learn to see and the ethical responsibility to convey to others (isumataq) the teachings of nature. My personal currere is my expression of philosophy as a way of life: a *photo/synthesis*.

Spiritual exercises in this study include walking into the land with an attentiveness to what the Greeks call photismos, the visual "coming to light" of an understanding; in this case, a moment of photismos or awareness in the land is brought to light through the experience of the punctum of the photograph of nature or for the photographer, through the act of photographing. For me, the punctum of wildness links nature, animals and humans. The metonymy of the

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<sup>63</sup>Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*. (Ontario: House of Anansi Press, 1991), 90.

images is both in their fragment of the larger landscape and in their mimesis of inner self. *Photo/synthesis* is therefore, illustrated in the following three sections using the Greek term *photismos*, for the visual coming to light of an understanding:

### **REMEMBRANCE**

*Photo/synthesis* and ice: a way to remember the earth in writing, in contemplation and in art. The focus in this section is the impact in the winter of nature on childhood, specifically in the winter landscape: the sensibility of black and white, stillness, contrast, long winters; an attentive space for silence, solitude, and for philosophy as a way of life.

### **RESEMBLANCE**

The Stone, the Wood Grain, the Grizzly Track: This section focuses on the resemblance among elements in the landscape and a synthesis of aspects of self in the experience of the photograph's punctum in the metonymy of: a stone, a tree, and a grizzly track united through *photo/synthesis*, their own resemblance and qualities situated within the dominant wildness of winter ice and summer water in this northern place. *Photismos* here is a coming to light of an understanding: the punctum reveals a wildness beneath our superficial view of nature. According to the Belgian Surrealist painter, Magritte, we cannot truly see the world due to the screen of representation that prevents us from seeing nature as it really is, a screen that has for many people replaced reality. For

instance, a landscape painting or a photograph for some can become more "real" than the subject itself. His theory of art (*ressemblance*) involves juxtaposing objects not ordinarily situated together, but which, when seen together, reveal an essential connection or "*ressemblance*" so as to effect a recognition in the viewer that what has been invisible, can now be illuminated and present.<sup>64</sup>

## **RECURRENCE**

The closing section returns to the lake of my childhood, its melting ice, spring break-up and the return of the water in a timeless cycle, a recurrence of the rhythm of nature and a metaphor for *photo/synthesis*: the source of the world's energy and light, the spirit of place and the relationship between self and the broader, natural community.

Living a life of philosophy in this land is, partly, in learning how through photography and memory the land speaks to us, teaches us, or reveals to us our inner selves, and partly, in conveying that awareness to others. Ann Banfield suggests the photograph functions similarly to the way a sensation becomes a visual image and adds: "The image captured and fixed on the photographic plate is like the image fleetingly recorded on the retina of an eye. The referent is not an object but a sensation."<sup>65</sup> *Photo/synthesis* is both a metaphor for that sensation made visible, and a textual account or currence of a

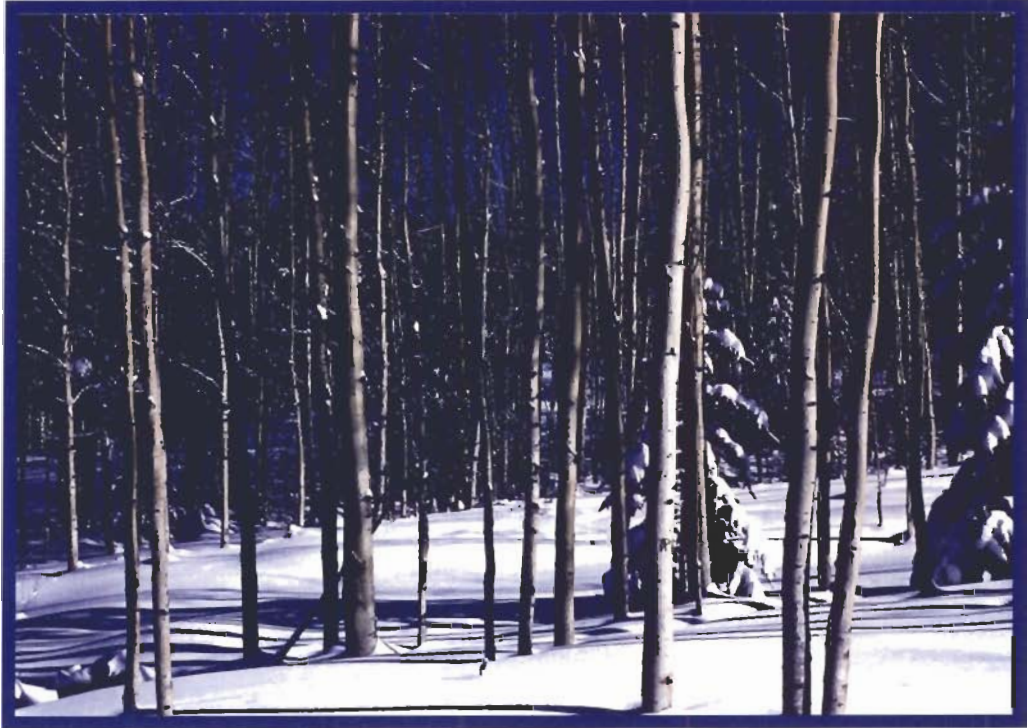
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<sup>64</sup> Rene Magritte, *Ecrits complets*, ed. A. Blavier. (Paris: Flamarrion, 1979), 110.

<sup>65</sup> Ann Banfield, "'L'imparfait de l'Objectif: the Imperfect of the Object Glass,'" *Camera Obscura*, Vol 24, (1991): 67.

personal journey: the embodied experience of what it is to walk, to see and to be in a *genius loci*, a spirit of place.

## I REMEMBRANCE



**Figure 2 ~ Winter Aspens, Decker Lake**

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## **Photo/synthesis ~ Ice**

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind on the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it.

N. Scott Momaday <sup>66</sup>

## **The Place ~ The Lakes District, Northern British Columbia**

At the beginning of the twentieth century European immigrants settled into the isolated and often harsh environment of North Central British Columbia. A self-sufficient and self-reliant people, they acted upon the northern world to survive, enduring long winters, and constructing close community ties by building barns, harvesting and dancing together. The end of World War Two brought my parents, born and raised in Southern Ontario, to this northern valley in British Columbia between the Babine and the Ootsa Lakes. My father, adjusting with difficulty to civilian life after his experiences overseas on the Front, came to this land in 1952 to work outdoors to improve his health. My mother followed several months later with my older brother and sister. After seven generations in Canada on my father's side (Irish) and eight on my mother's (English and Scottish) they emigrated from Eastern to Western Canada.

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<sup>66</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 83.

One of the children born to this second wave of pioneers, I grew up among first generation immigrants, themselves still young, in a condensed frontier in time and space, a time suspended, self-sustaining and relatively untouched by world events, technology or changes in Canadian government and economics. As my parents' first child born into this northern land, I entered a geographical space without my ancestor's memories of an Old Country and with only the shadow of my parent's memories of their world of "The East": Southern Ontario. I grew up in the early years without a consciousness of an urban Canada; even a Canada with a history was an Eastern history, a place "other" than this landscape of my birth where one spoke rarely of a history before the lifetime of those who lived in our small community of one hundred or so residents. Living in a space where place names or monuments were not emphasized, with spaces where no one had walked or dwelt before has perhaps given me a unique perspective that few young people have today. The town of Prince George, one hundred and fifty miles south west, center of the lumber economy in the north, was an alien and distant place. Victoria or Vancouver were unimaginable places, as distant as the East, Norway, Sweden, Ireland or England, the Old Countries of the adults within my landscape.

I grew up in a three room cabin overlooking a lake (Figure 3). We lived without plumbing year round and with cold, running water in the summer. During the winter, my father, when he came home for lunch from the mill, carried our water in buckets to the cabin from the lake, up the icy steps.



**Figure 3 ~ Haggarty House, Decker Lake**

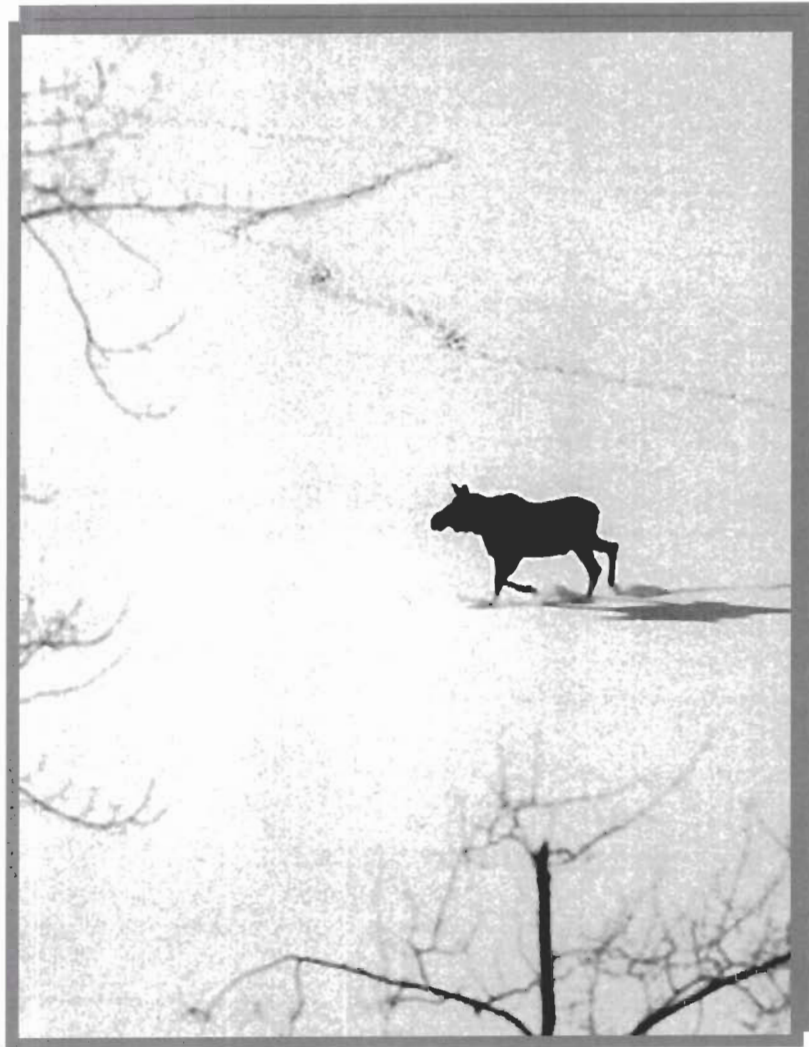
© Roni M. Haggarty

I often accompanied him. The swing of the axe over his shoulder made a resounding blow through the ice into the waterhole. Chipping the edges of the lake's ice created a spray of white sawdust, and its hardness and endurance seemed less impermeable. The ice, however, always returned, growing in overnight, forming first a skim, then deepening and angling inward toward the deeper, more solid center. Ice seemed to grow from the bottom in rings, black roots forming ever tighter, concentric circles, like a tree emerging into a murky blue and white light.

It seemed to have its own source of energy and light in which to grow, as if it were separate and permanent. I learned over time that ice must yield to the return of the water, to the recurring sources of energy and light.

My mother has said how some people in this land dread the ice because it hems them in. Inside our cabin, surrounded by the whiteness of the landscape, we did not feel trapped or enclosed. It brought a blinding light to clear days and changed the way we experienced the world of winter. My parents took three hour shifts, sitting up overnight to stoke the fire in the wood stove. Mother would put her feet up on the oven door and do crosswords. I do not remember ever feeling cold even though temperatures plunged to 60 below zero and my parents ruefully observed the poor insulating quality of sawdust and wood chips. Instead, I remember with delight the ice patterns on the windows in the side room which we closed when it was colder than minus 25 degrees Fahrenheit.

On warmer days, the ice formed beautiful patterns on the window panes; on colder days, when I scraped the ice on the inside of the window to see the lake, the ice sheared and sprayed beneath my fingernails leaving trails like the patterns of insect movement in old lumber on the side boards of shacks and woodsheds. Through the winter scrapings the drama of the winter landscape was often illuminated by the appearance of a single animal, usually a moose, which altered perspective and visual scale, looming larger than reality, and providing movement and patterns for my imagination (Figure 4).



**Figure 4 ~ Moose on the old Skating Rink**

© Roni M. Haggarty

Gazing out the cabin window I was taught by the land to focus my mind, on what was both happening to me in an inner world and in that outer white and still world. My passion for ice and snow, formed here, penetrates my being and later intensifies with my experiences as a competitive cross country skier, training and moving through this winter space on my skis, my body for countless hours in movement, physically within the winter. I wonder now about my child's self formed in a winter space between the cabin that sheltered me from nature and the body's physical movement within the ice and snow. The word *outdoors* frames the movement between what we usually consider inner and outer space. The door is the membrane across which we make our transition into what some call a harsh environment or wilderness, a membrane like the reciprocity between the land and the inner creative impulse. The body acts as a membrane between this inner and outer space as so do the body of the trees, cut into boards or as sawdust and chips which insulate our shelter. Ironically, inner is outer, time is space, the opaque is transparent, and this landscape is both invitation and danger.

The land, with its powerful will, is an insistent teacher. Rigorous, silent, subtle and forceful it teaches tolerance and acceptance, and most of all, attentiveness. The indoor self can surrender to become a part of the mind of nature: ice is the condensation and essence of light, not just in the crystal flakes on the windowpane, but in the wolf tracks, blue and white in the snow crust above Driftwood Creek, the fanning, crinkling Northern Lights at midnight over

the Babine River, the murky Milky Way over the summer night sky at Decker Lake, and the bear's skull carved as if from ice, both opaque and transparent, beside the abandoned homestead in the hills above Francois Lake.

The memory of these images as part of a physical experience in a certain landscape can affect our body and emotions. Our imagination is at work here, a somatic memory, "...the recollection of a natural inborn ability inherited from ancestors, a recollection of the body's memory, of the abilities embodied there."<sup>67</sup> Barry Lopez, writing about the Arctic landscape, rejects the idea that humans create language in their mind then project it onto reality, or onto a landscape created by the imagination. Instead, Lopez suggests, "the landscape is not inert, and it is precisely because it is alive that it eventually contradicts the imposition of a reality that does not derive from it."<sup>68</sup> Language, rather, like the written record and the images of the lived physics represented in this study, evolves through interactions with the land.

In *Arctic Dreams*, Lopez shows us that language is what speakers make of the land. Inuit metaphors of the Arctic landscape, for instance, create a poetics of perception: *water sky* describes a distant body of open water in sea ice that will cast a dark shadow over the horizon; *ice blink* refers to ice lying over the horizon producing a soft, white reflection in the air above it; and *sky maps* are the pattern of light and dark in the sky. The land enters memory,

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<sup>67</sup> Gary Nabhan and Stephen Trimble, *The Geography of Childhood*. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.), 144-5.

<sup>68</sup> Lopez, *op. cit.*, 277-8



imagination and dreams influencing how we journey through the world and how we see ourselves in space and time. To Lopez, the land, like poetry, is "inexplicably coherent, it is transcendent in its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a consideration of human life."<sup>69</sup> The language in which we express our experiences in nature bridges for me my two landscapes, inner and outer, to become a lived physics of space and time through metaphor, story and art.

A child learns by making sense of nature's space and so the winter landscape taught me to fill empty space, or at least see that what seems empty is not -- to see dark windows illuminated by thunderstorms, to see distance as intimacy, to see the lake's paradoxical constant flux, to see the details in the tension between black hills, black skies and white land. Lopez, exploring imagination and desire in a northern landscape in *Arctic Dreams* tells us of the need for the Inuit's intense consciousness of vision in the wilderness. I compare my attentiveness to the Inuit's attentiveness to the land, his eyes, constantly flickering over the countryside, like field glasses. Good hunters can see caribou several miles away on the open tundra. Watching ice and snow throughout my childhood for over six months of the year taught me in a way to use my eyes like field glasses on the landscape.

For those who did not grow up in this land, it might seem stripped of visual stimuli; for me, it is an intensely intimate landscape, a synthesis of emotion, space, light and time. In the seemingly empty expanse of landscape is

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 274

an invitation for meditation and mindfulness. The tension between indoors and outdoors is in my attempt to define wilderness as a living force, to crystallize moments for me when meanings of the land's wildness and what it means to be human in relationship to that land emerge later in time, in walking into the land again, in writing perhaps, or in a photograph. Lopez points out that in the Arctic the open winter spaces produce a certain *umwelten* or way of seeing the world.<sup>70</sup> One's self outdoors in a northern land must leave behind the rectangles of indoors to move in a space essential circular, spiral or undulating. Within that space, the enclosed lines of homesteads and barns and woodsheds seem incongruous and even intrusive.

The idea that perspective is highly individual and that nature's spaces are circular and spiral rather than enclosed, rectangular or square influences a child's perceptions in this landscape and is related to the way in which I now approach a relationship between memory and photography as a spiritual exercise. John Berger, in "The Uses of Photography" suggests a use of photographs that is radial, as memory works. The goal is to "respect the process of memory which it hopes to stimulate," and to keep the photograph in the context of the experience.<sup>71</sup> Memory, perhaps, is neither unilinear nor rectangular; the experience of the photograph is radial, expanding metonymically to situate one's experience in the *genius loci* of a place.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 268-9; a concept developed by Jakob von Uexkull in 1934.

<sup>71</sup> John Berger, *op. cit.*, 66.

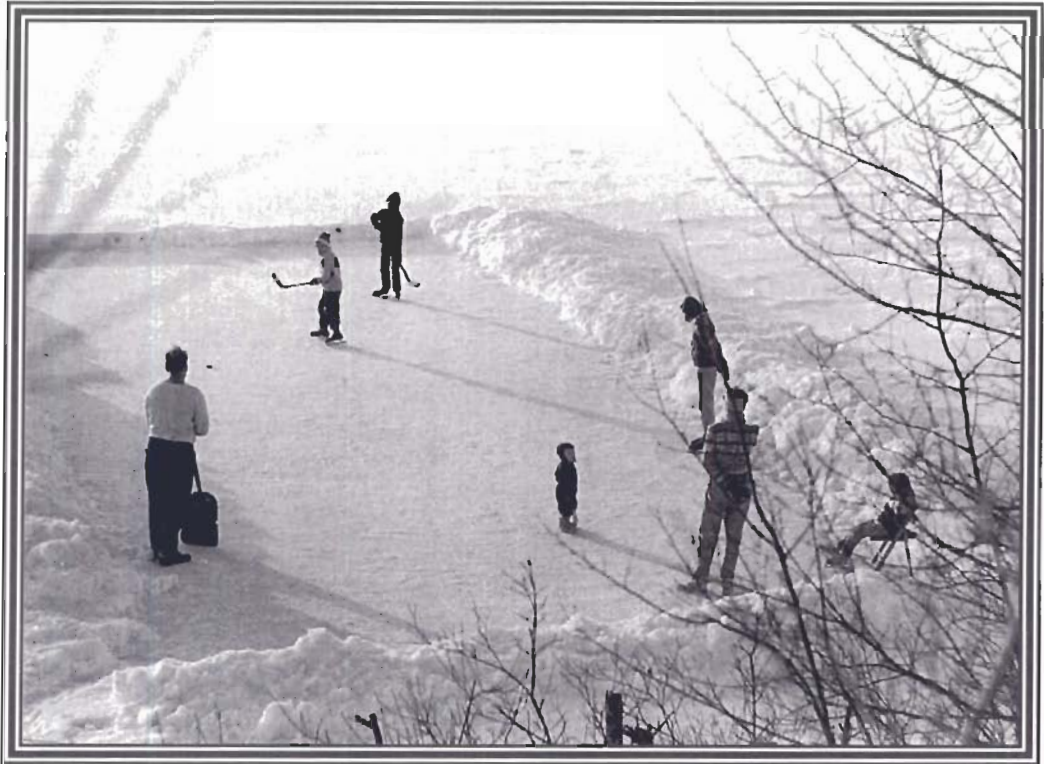
On one level, a photograph orients us, telling us what our world is like, and how we live within it as a self-portrait or mirror reflection. The photograph as a copy, repetition or reproduction can be a window to the self. On another level, self is experienced through a phenomenology of the photograph. The photograph of the winter landscape is metonymical for the fragment or detail which yields or expands to give the viewer an autobiographical awareness or insight. The Stoics refer to the practice of attentiveness as *prosoche*; it is a "concentration on the present moment and the key to spiritual exercises or philosophy as a way of life" and the art of living, as a philosophical act, is not "...situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and being."<sup>72</sup>

### **Photismos ~ Ice**

In ice is the *photo/synthesis* of the focussed moment, *prosoche*, and self. At the bottom of the steps by the waterhole my father and our neighbour, clear an ice rink for us to skate. It is the focus of our young winter lives (Figure 5), resting like a room in space, a scraped and powdered glass floor, the snow yielding its arms to the snow shovels to become snow banks resting on four sides.

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<sup>72</sup> Hadot, *op. cit.*, 83.



**Figure 5 ~ Skating on Decker Lake**

© Roni M. Haggarty

When the ice is cleared of snow it is quite clear that we skate on water hardened and partly transparent. Like the house, however, it is a rectangular space in nature. Skaters prefer circular, spiral and undulating movements on the hard ice. Skating is best on the open ice when the lake freezes quickly without bumps and a brief snowfall covers the surface; then one flies freely on a skating lake. Hard ice blades on hard ice carry small children softly through cold air, their arms flung wide into free and open spaces. Beyond the confines of the rink is the opportunity for skating that is closer to wilderness, when the body can move in a natural space with the land itself. Crystals, snow flakes, ice on the wind, skates carving and signing, the wild tracks of childhood freedom are written through a soft covering of snow onto the surface of the frozen lake. In the expanse of ice I experience a photismos: the concentrated spirit of wildness. For Berger, a landscape becomes the image of the face of a life and the expression in a face becomes a concentrated spirit: it is "Whatever in space informs the whole photo and is "part of the skin of their lives."<sup>73</sup>

The punctum for me in the photograph of the ice is in the paradoxical sense of time on one level, seeing that the ice, its concentrated spirit present in the photograph, is unchanged; yet, I know it will disappear each year. Part of the punctum is in the posture of the two adults, their backs to me now: Our neighbour, on the left, before Lou Gehrig's disease took his strength, my mother on the right, shoulders square, living in the absence caused by my

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<sup>73</sup> Berger, *op. cit.*, 50.

brother's death. It is in the man's aliveness and his innocence of the way in which he will die. A photograph has an ironic element of Barthes' "gestural duration," preserving life while producing death; reminding us of our own mortality. Once we are dead the photograph immortalizes us,<sup>74</sup> containing within it the "emanation" of a living presence whose "...radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here..." says Barthes; "...The duration of the transmission is insignificant...the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star."<sup>75</sup> The stillness of the landscape awaits an impression, a trace upon its wildness.

The punctum here is intensified by these memories and by the shock of time and what Barthes calls "death in the future." Part of the punctum is in the eternity and power of the ice and the insignificant human effort to shape its wildness into something familiar and manageable: a square space. The power of the punctum, however, is in the way the landscape is the "face of a life" and in the concentrated spirit of the landscape made visible in our human gestures. The incongruity between an expanse both intense and boundless, and its capacity to affect my body, strikes me. For a moment we are a fragile expression in the winter's space, breathing and moving within the skin of our lives and in this photograph's aura. Now the photograph makes visible to me what probably escaped the photographer's intentions: what it is to *be* in the

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<sup>74</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 92-3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 80-81.

landscape, an essence of what it is to live in the tension between a human being and wilderness. In this way, landscape has a punctum as powerful for its insight into being as does the punctum of mortality in Barthes' photographs of human beings.

Berger remarks on the power of certain photographs in which ordinary moments become extraordinary in their quintessential quality to "enter so deeply into the particular that they reveal to us the stream of a culture or a history which is flowing through that particular subject like blood."<sup>76</sup> The punctum is not just memory, or loss, and not just a response to the people we see, but in where they might be situated in an autobiographical moment in which we experience their uniqueness. Part of the punctum is in the shock of the realization that it is ice that makes one a writer or an artist; that it forms the creative self. The act of photography now, is for me, an art of living in which my existence and my identity at times overlap, as in a palimpsest.

The photograph of ice is a lens in which to view one's self. The distance within which a punctum is activated by a photograph has reflexive and autobiographical components. A fragment of my photographer's autobiography is contained within a photograph of the land in which I dwell. A photograph also activates a narrative, a way to create my life through writing. The photograph of the ice is metonymic for the landscape of my childhood; it is inseparably the self and autobiographical in its ability to evoke memories and stories. I see myself in

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<sup>76</sup> Berger, *op. cit.*, 46-47.

a landscape, and simultaneously, I am the landscape: it is a self portrait with the significance of the human face. The photo, Barthes says, is "myself as other, a cunning dissociation of consciousness from identity."<sup>77</sup> This space accentuates both a loss and an awareness of the meaning of one's life; in the distance or gap between oneself as viewer and the photograph of the past one is both self and ice.

One of the ways to condense the space between inner and outer layers of consciousness in nature is to walk into the forest, onto the ice and over the mountains. Walking in the land is a way to explore the mystery of the reconciliation of the human to the wildness of nature, to be situated on the earth so as to truly see in a way that is self-transforming. In *Arctic Dreams*, Lopez explains that what draws us into landscapes is a longing for simplicity in our lives, for intimacy and for renewal. Attentiveness, or listening in respectful silence, opens the land to reveal that wisdom. He describes the undercurrent of knowledge in the Arctic landscape and the alteration of time that results from the effect of this wisdom on our perception: "If the mind releases its fiduciary grip on time...it is possible to transcend distance - to travel very far without anxiety, to not be defeated by the great reach of the land."<sup>78</sup> The art of living in this landscape is in releasing our "grip on time," in learning how through photography wild places speak to us, teach us, reveal to us our inner landscape.

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<sup>77</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 12.

<sup>78</sup> Lopez, *op. cit.*, 258.



The following chapters are my landmarks or moments of photismos. Sources of my "inner landscape" are experienced through the punctum of the photograph: the stone, the wood grain, and the grizzly bear track. To photograph, as a spiritual exercise, is to recognize who one is. In the recognition of a resemblance is the lived physics: a synthesis of self with the qualities of wildness.

## II RESEMBLANCE



**Figure 6 ~ Bear Claw Tracks on Aspen**

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## Photismos 1 ~ Stones, Decker Creek Trail

Les choses sont habituellement si cachees par leurs utilisations, que les voir un instant nous donne le sentiment de connaitre le secret de l'univers. Faire voir les choses equivaldrait en somme a prouver l'existence de l'univers, a connaitre un secret supreme.

Rene Magritte <sup>79</sup>

Spending more time in the summers recently at my childhood home in northern B.C., as my father moved into a more advanced stage of Parkinson's Disease, I began asking him and our elderly neighbours about the early years, recording their voices and memories. I concentrated on the lives of the tie hackers, men who came to northern British Columbia to work the lodge pole pine, hauling ties in the winters for the construction of the railway to Prince Rupert. I felt a need to write their stories and to record the voices of this land. Jim Cheney, in his work on First Nations philosophy and environmental ethics refers to stories of the land, their embodied ethics, as a mindfulness or "walking in a sacred manner."<sup>80</sup> For people with a tradition of close and intense encounters with nature the stories do not merely reflect the world; they perform their identity, they transfer knowledge of self and culture to future generations as the embodiment of morality and ethical behaviour. This view of the land as

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<sup>79</sup> Magritte, *op. cit.*, 343.

<sup>80</sup> Jim Cheney, "Sacred Land," in *Colloquium on Environment, Ethics, and Education*, ed. Bob Jickling. (Whitehorse, Canada: Yukon College, 1995), 66.

sacred is a way of knowing and understanding that nature can generate the knowledge embedded within myths and stories and thus within our identity.

My desire to walk in a sacred manner, in the spirit of mindfulness and creativity, coincided with the desire to renew a childhood friendship. With an old map of recreation trails as our guide my friend and I soon expanded our quests to old roads and unrecorded country we remembered from our childhood. I began to see and experience in a new way this land between the Babine Fur Trading routes and the Cariboo Gold Fields, unexplored by white people until three quarters of a century ago, in what is now known as the Lakes District in North Central British Columbia. Before long, the tie hacker's stories faded and my own stories emerged as I responded to the need to engage in a deeper conversation with the landscape of my childhood.

### **Walking on the earth**

In the old days I would ride the tie roads above Decker Lake on horseback, oblivious to the history or meaning they would later have in my life, moving from the west, accessing the power line which first crossed this country in my childhood, cutting in to the tie roads which once led north towards the Old Babine Road. Now, decades later, longing to walk the forests of my youth, I drive with my hiking companion, (my childhood friend), and her mother, to the top of a gravel road and park at the power line above Peché Creek. I guess at

the trail that leads north a few hundreds yards further. As I enter the dry underbrush, I am transported to that former time.

Before long a feeling of disorientation comes over me. Cat blades have pushed sections of the clearings into piles and re-growth forest from an old clear cut confuses the trail. I feel, like the forest looks to me, rearranged, cut up and disoriented. I try desperately to recover and remember old landmarks. The old forest and the trails I had thought timeless and indestructible seem carved and destroyed for logging or perhaps a development of some kind. I feel fragmented. Charles Taylor in *The Malaise of Modernity* explores the notion of the so-called fragmented modern self brought on in part by what he calls the dominance of "instrumental reason," a way of thinking in which efficiency, as a measure of success and a means to an end, or "cost-benefit analysis," can take precedence over our lives, perhaps making us "insensitive to the needs of environment... even to disaster." We might, he warns, "stave off ecological disaster if we could recover a sense of the demand that our natural surroundings and wilderness make on us."<sup>81</sup>

Overcome by a sense of "ecological disaster," I turn to Peché Creek to ground myself in its space. The land has changed, losing its touchstones of familiarity. I am reassured by the presence of the creek, a pivotal "symbolic touchstone" in my childhood. When I was eight years old the force of its flooding erased the main road, the mythic power of its energy capable of

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<sup>81</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.*, 90.

isolating us from the nearest town. I imagine myself at the baseball diamond in Peché Fields: the memories of my father and the men in my village playing softball there in the summer, the way the river drifting from the north through the lower fields by the lake created the atmosphere for cottonwoods to border its edges, the way we used to run over rocks and trout.

Although obstructed by logging, its former power and energy gone, Peché Creek is still lovely and untouched in places. I am overwhelmed by a longing for both its wildness and the memories of our community culture within its space, feeling the tension as well between the past and the present. The creek is my touchstone as I return from the sadness of the loss of the cabins I have loved, and the memory of the clearing with its outbuildings. I see the old homestead field on the far side of the creek, the rhubarb patches gone to seed, their bold stalks returning each year to rise defiantly above the tall grasses.

Following the creek on the rise above the western ridge is the faint outline of the old trail unknown to many people in Decker Lake, some say a game trail, others a trail for berries. It is still a mystery trail to me, resplendent with Bog Orchids, Parnassus, Arnica, Lupines, Violets, Wintergreen and Coralroot. One must journey, says Nietzsche, to participate in history and perhaps most especially to journey in one's own neighbourhood: "The individual is like a deep well, sunk down through stratum upon stratum of dark earth, the deeper the

older, and fed by innumerable underground springs."<sup>82</sup> Walking into the land yields a photismos, a bringing to light, an insight into my inter-relationship with the inner strata of the earth and its plants. I begin to understand Cheney's "mode of knowledge" in which rocks, ancient and inscrutable, represent a deeper form of existence, a "different order of understanding."<sup>83</sup>

### **Photismos ~ Agate**

At a bend in the creek, where we can easily descend the bank, my friend's sharp eyes spot a gray stone with a tiny roundness, like an egg, in the center. Hurling the rock against a boulder, I split it in half to reveal the inner space. In a moment the agate is released, brought to light, resting in the half shell space within the larger stone as though in a nest. My friend offers me the stone and with the excitement of a child I rejoice at this gift of friendship, forgetting for a moment the disappointments of the lost cabins, the trails destroyed by logging and the time that has passed. It had seemed the spaces in this landscape could only be retrieved and remembered, no longer seen in the present. I had thought I had lost the connection between my inner world and the outer world in which I used to feel at home. As the agate expands within my gaze I feel an overwhelming sense of the earth's timelessness.

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<sup>82</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, cited in Graham Parkes, *Composing the Soul: The Reaches of Nietzsche's Psychology*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 126.

<sup>83</sup>Jim Cheney, "The Journey Home." In *An Invitation to Environmental Philosophy*, ed. Anthony Weston. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 145.

The agate is beautiful, a brilliant and almost miraculous contrast to the outer rock in which it is born. It takes a very long time to become its fibrous, cryptocrystalline self, made of layers of quartz, a type of chalcedony mineral that fills cavities or veins in metaphoric rocks. The cavities, formed by high heat and volcanic action over time accept water drops that filter and seep into its inner rock spaces, developing a pattern of rounded, concentric, granular circles. Agates were coveted by adults and children in my childhood and to the southwest from our lake a picnic spot on Tschesinkut Lake named Agate Point had the aura of discovery and hidden treasure. I remember baskets and glass jars of polished agates sliced in half to reveal the inner colours at my Uncle John's house. The stone restores something I had forgotten-- an awe and curiosity that makes me want to know what it is to create an agate.

I did not think, in my childhood, much about the formation of this land. Stephen Trimble, in "Scripture of Maps, Names of Trees," emphasizes his early connection in childhood to the natural world. In a land where, he says, "geology overwhelms biology," he was part of the "land itself – bones and ligaments of naked Earth...Geography seeped into me, a bedrock awareness of landscape and place."<sup>84</sup> Although my Uncle John was passionate about rocks and my cousin followed this passion to pursue a degree in geology, and my brother brought agates to my mother from his ramblings, stones did not interest me. Unlike Trimble, for me, biology overwhelmed geology. I was drawn to animals



as a child, poring over B.C., Forestry documents on moose, bears, and wolves, or to the birds, my father's passion.

The birds' egg agate made me wonder about the tension between what appeared to be unchangeable and timeless in the stone and the wildness of a movement, imperceptible and powerful, which forms this land over time. What violence and power, what force was necessary to create this agate? There is a shudder, something in me that responds with relief and joy to the aesthetics of its beauty, but underneath some sort of nagging primal memory frightens me in my realization that wild is not pretty; it is an experience both exalting and frightening. In wilderness is a juxtaposition of beauty and power, both a stability and violent change inaccessible and untouchable by humans that many people need to experience so as to define themselves as human beings. Thoreau, in his attempt to define wildness, in his essay, "The Maine Woods," says wilderness is matter that is "'vast, terrific" and "primeval, untamed and forever untameable nature."<sup>85</sup>

I am reminded that the savage and untamed forces behind the formation of earth, energy and the elements of air, water, and fire, are often compared to the soul's formation. In the myth of Timaeus, we see the inner and outer elements of the earth, reconciled through forces of nature within us. It is the myth of a divine craftsman creating the cosmos: at the core of that cosmos

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<sup>84</sup>Stephen Trimble, *The Geography of Childhood*, eds. Gary Nabhan and Stephen Trimble. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 19

<sup>85</sup> Thoreau, *op. cit.*, 192-3.

is the soul, surrounded by air, earth, water and fire. The soul, however, exists both at the core, and as a larger force that envelopes the four elements. In this way the inner space of the soul extends beyond the cosmos. Graham Parkes' in his study of Nietzsche's nature philosophy says: "The human soul is of the same nature as the soul of the universe."<sup>86</sup>

If consciousness can be transformed in a moment, then in my friend's gesture to hand to me the agate is a photismos, a moment of coming to light and a recognition of the resemblance between the agate and the human soul. The agate is both the source and the metonymy of my experience: it is agate and much more, a synthesis of wilderness, friendship and my visual, artistic and spiritual responses to this land in my lifetime. It refers me to my ability to be attentive, to be able to see what seems invisible at first but, paradoxically, is blinding in its visible presence once revealed. Vision, says Thoreau, is perhaps even more important than language. The sights, sounds, smells and textures of life, he says, are intuitive registers for consciousness. They are the "unmediated language of reality and thus the substance of prose"; thus, he asks: "...what discipline of poetry or life routine can compare with the discipline of looking always at what is to be seen?"<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Parkes, *op. cit.*, 128.

<sup>87</sup> Henry David Thoreau, cited in Max Oelschlager, *The Idea of Wilderness*. (London: Yale University Press, 1991), 156.

## **Photo/synthesis ~ Francois Lake stones**

A similar experience happens when the photographer views the outer world, when through the interplay of light and dark, an inner invisible world is revealed. Late one summer, on the north eastern shores of Francois Lake I am exploring, with my friend, an abandoned homestead. Situated on the remains of an old trail system, only fragments of the passage through the trees, once called the Red Hills Trail connecting Fraser Lake and Francois Lake, remain. In the bright light before a summer thunderstorm, I am drawn to the refraction of light and the rich colours of the stones underwater on the shoreline of the bay. In the abstract speckles, a pattern the painter Jackson Pollock might have tried to imitate, I see the colours of the entire landscape in which I move. In the stones, smooth and rounded over centuries by the water's massaging waves, small enough to fit into the palm of my hand, is a world of nuance and light (Figure 7).

Parkes shows us the importance of stones to Nietzsche's use of the elements of the earth in his philosophy. Rocks represent an aspect of the soul: rock as the "reservoir" of soul energy at the core of one's being, the granite of one's fate which is closely related to his idea of "eternal recurrence." Rocks, in his work *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, are the unalterable nature of the past.<sup>88</sup> Zarathustra realizes that in the stone sleeps an image.

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<sup>88</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, cited in Graham Parkes, *op. cit.*, 134.



**Figure 7 ~ Stones Under Water, Francois Lake**

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The artist also sees the sleeping image, creating a self like a sculptor with a block of stone or a photographer imprinting on paper the image of the resting shoreline stones seen in a moment that endures. What emerges from the photograph is a sleeping image of one's self as the stones, mountains and geology of this land. The image is metonymical for a change within myself and for a moment of artistic connection bringing what was, at first, invisible into the visibility of light.

The photograph is the transformed natural world, condensed and in focussed form, such that I can meditate and be attentive to a moment of its time in a photographic space recorded and perhaps part of some future consideration. Much later when I return to the urban part of my life something in my meditation on the photograph will seem to bring to light my relationship to the land as an artist. I need to experience the rock, and articulate that moment in a visual way, through the photograph, in an intimate moment in which I see the stones as I have never seen them before.

As a photographer, I don't always choose what to receive and I am not always in control of transforming that perception into an experience. Instead, there often seems to be an active force sending me a visual message. This mutual gesture is what the land means to me; it is a moment lacking in self awareness and only later am I conscious of self. Perhaps time is at the heart of the punctum of this photograph for me. In the click of the camera is the punctum of time, says Derrida, "the form and punctual force of all metonymy in

its last instance." In the moment of the photograph I carry with me a memory of what was once visible: "Time: the metonymy of the instantaneous."<sup>89</sup> If, as Collier claims, a photograph "can contain a thousand references," with one photograph being "a minute time sample - a hundredth of a second slice of reality," then the photograph will help not only to provide details about past events which might be forgotten or overlooked, it may also be used to analyze our relationship to nature, and to know self through uniting the inner and outer experience stimulated by a photograph.<sup>90</sup>

Philosophy seems to be part of the life force of nature, the result of what nature does to our perceptions. I think of the Francois Lake stones, what I experience when I photograph them and what comes to light when I view them later. In the punctum, nature transforms the stones and the water intensifies the wild beauty of dormant colours. The water's light paints them alive. Hadot comments on a sort of conversion from a state of unconsciousness to a perception of the world "for itself" that can take place in our consciousness. It is a perception "for the sake of perceiving," in which attentiveness enhances and transforms the way we see the world and the details in it. Hadot says it will "bring us to a more complete perception of reality, by means of a kind of displacement of our attention."<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Derrida, *op. cit.*, 288-9.

<sup>90</sup> Collier, *op. cit.*, 6.

<sup>91</sup> Hadot, *op. cit.*, 254.

## Learning from a stone

In the bird's egg agate is the aesthetic whole of a life: it is metonymical for an expanded gaze, the soul's core, the force of nature to create what seems immutable, permanent. Parkes tells us of the Greek idea of the human situated within the cosmos, who paradoxically contains the cosmos as well, with "certain images that have reaches as vast as those of the outside world."<sup>92</sup> The agate is the unity of seemingly separate forces, ironic contrasts made unified, transformed and metonymical for the process of photosynthesis in nature: light and earth and energy creating its own reflection, synthesized and transformed into a living image which we as humans, similarly transformed matter ourselves, can perceive.

Taylor suggests nature can give artists far more than the opportunity for the expression of sentiment or feelings; it is the catalyst for the expression of self-realization as well as freedom from an identity disengaged from the natural world. This expressiveness has a cosmic dimension: nature is both within us and within the larger cosmos. The layers and fragments of the formation of the agate are not divisions, instead these fragments we perceive in our consciousness are unifying elements. This is one way to combat the divisiveness, the alienation, and the malaise of modern society. Walking in a sacred manner as a step toward the re-integration of my self in this place, more than just a way of knowing, is a way of being, a way of seeing and living in the

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<sup>92</sup> Parkes, *op. cit.*, 131.

land. I carry this understanding with me when I place the agate, my symbolic touchstone from my journey into the land on my desk where it is close to me, and when I seek in geology now, the metaphors that link the land's formation with the process of living the human life.



## **Photismos 2 ~ Wood grain, Jackpine Lake Trail**

We have scarcely begun to discover what it means to be an organism on a very small planet, from which there is no escape, no alternative.

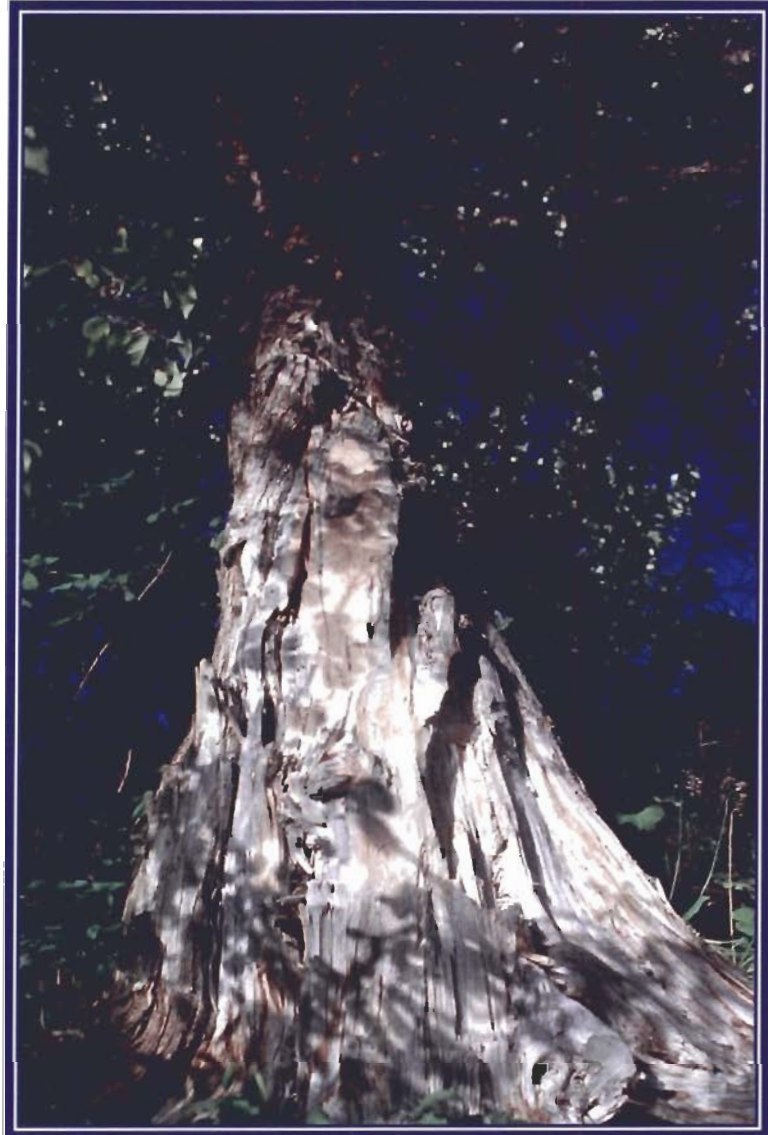
Paul Shepard<sup>93</sup>

### **Walking on the earth**

On the northern shore of Francois Lake west of the Red Hills, an old wagon road, now an overgrown trail, follows the ridge above the lake. On a sunny, dry point on the trail above the shoreline we look for our landmark where we will descend to visit a very old juniper; it is the flat rock bench my friend remembers from years ago where children posed, as if on a table top, for photographs. Each year the juniper looks a little different, older and faded but with its power, its will, evident and forceful in its upright glory (Figure 8). I am concerned for the juniper; there is talk of men coming down the lake to cut it down now it is so old, for it will make beautiful material for their wood working projects, perhaps a cutting board, a platform and hook for hanging bananas or a wooden box for grandchildren. This year I take a small branch and we will put it in water to re-root, to save its spirit and replant it.

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<sup>93</sup> Paul Shepard, "Interview," in Derrick Jensen, *op. cit.*, 259.



**Figure 8 ~ Juniper, Francois Lake**

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Juniperus Scopulorum, a long-living conifer in the cypress family, can live for as long, it seems, as an agate: two thousand years. The reproduction in most trees and plants is by alternating generations, within the same flower or a single tree, as in the pine which has male and female cones on a single plant.

The juniper, however, is unique among trees both for its red/purple cone berries and its nature as distinctly male or female. This juniper by the lakeshore is, with its skin tone branches in blue spaces, most timeless in the late afternoon when its silhouette is softer, but a silent stillness cannot keep the fear, the vaguely physical discomfort, from me that everything is changing. I remember that a tree, which reaches its height, ironically waits for lightning, like the young man who awaits Zarathustra's lightning to strike his psyche into a new awareness, a new wisdom.<sup>94</sup> The punctum of this juniper is for me in the juxtaposition of its vulnerability and its wildness. For me, to see this tree anywhere but solitary, ravaged by time and wind off the lake, a rare and powerful example of survival against the odds, is to detract not only from its splendour and will, but to detract from my life as well.

I am grateful such a tree survives in this place. The consciousness of the juniper's existence transforms my awareness of what it is to be human and alive on this earth; I am restored and reminded of the wilderness in me that responds to it. Oelschlager reminds us of the "wilderness within the human soul

and without" that is long repressed in so-called civilized peoples.<sup>95</sup> The realization of this nature within me is a form of expression, made visible in my attempts to formulate or articulate the inner voice within. Without my response to the juniper, I exist in Weber's state of "disenchantment" where "the world, from being a locus of 'magic', or the sacred, or the ideas, comes simply to be seen as a neutral domain or potential means to our purposes."<sup>96</sup>

### **Photismos ~ Juniper**

I want the permanence and the insulation the juniper seems to have; so, to ease the discomfort I try not to just see but to listen as well. There seems to be some security in the sound of the pebbles grating, and the rattle of tumbling, dry leaves across the jumbled stones. I hear the blackness of rocks in the lake water pools and the gray, rumbling undercover of clouds over Francois Lake. I am reassured by the fragile juniper offspring rising toward the light through the darkness of the shadows of the spruce and fir trees on the trail above the lake. Zarathustra in his discourse with the young man in "Of the Tree on the Mountainside," draws our attention to the tree which strives for height without seeking with its roots the depths, the dark and hidden layers of the earth which house our soul.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*. (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1972), 69.

<sup>95</sup> Oelschlager, *op. cit.*, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Max Weber, cited in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 500.

<sup>97</sup> Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, 69-71.

Hesse's Siddhartha, as well, reminds himself, when he first realizes that experiencing the world with both his thoughts and senses is a necessary part of knowing Self, that to follow his inward voices is necessary; after all, the Buddha had listened to a voice within himself which commanded him to rest under a tree, he had obeyed the voice within, and was prepared when it came.<sup>98</sup>

Lying on my back on stones beneath the shelter of its branches, I photograph the Juniper. The artist, or an attentive observer, sometimes realizes that nature looks at him. The phenomenologist, Merleau-Ponty, in "Eye and Mind," gives the example of the painter Klee, who, while in the forest, believed the trees were responding to him and that the universe could enter humans. Merleau-Ponty further explains what the verb to see means: "Vision is a mirror or concentration of the universe... the same thing is both out there in the world and here in the heart of vision."<sup>99</sup> A reciprocal act of seeing may also occur between the observer and the nature she observes.

How separate is the reality of the juniper from my consciousness or from my perception of its existence? It beckons me, and through the act of photography, I respond. The gesture has an independence and a reality separate from me in part, into which I want to enter, as into a relationship. In "Flies in the Market Place," Zarathustra advises us to go into solitude and be like the tree: "Forest and rock know how to be silent with you. Be like the tree

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<sup>98</sup> Herman Hesse, *Siddhartha*. (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), 48.

<sup>99</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1964), 162.

again, the wide-branching tree that you love: calmly and attentively it leans out over the sea."<sup>100</sup> As well, Nietzsche compares the "robust will" to a growing tree which can "refresh" an entire landscape in "The Greeting." Zarathustra, in his realization of the will and eternal nature of the universe becomes the pine tree, "tall, silent, hard, alone, of the finest, supple wood, magnificent." I touch the juniper with my eyes as well when I record a photograph. It refreshes my inner landscape. It is part of the intense emotional and physical longing I feel to the landscape of my birth and to the physical world; a longing, perhaps more intense and more enduring than that one might feel for most people. A gesture from the juniper reflects my reality, my Self. Perhaps each photograph I record of a landscape is a physical response to that land which runs through my nerves and emotions, the tree's bark an extension of my own skin.

### **Photo/synthesis ~ the wood grain**

By 1908 the Grand Trunk railway extension had begun from Prince Rupert and the Last Spike, south of my home, at Fort Fraser, would mark the completion of this connecting iron path from Eastern to Western Canada. The railway consumed timber, voracious in its need for ties upon which to lay the tracks, and so its iron trail was built with road beds and timber to be hauled on paths cut through the forest. I think of the timber cruisers coming into this country following the railway, staking the land, posting their claims and notices

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<sup>100</sup> Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, 78.

of ownership over trees. Who were these men hiking through the Yellowhead Pass to camp ahead of the railroad, cutting the forest? What did these men moving through this northern sub-boreal forest think about the trees beyond a source of money and the freedom it would give them to move into another part of the country?

How differently from me, it seems, these early settlers perceived the trees. The men who worked or used the timber to meet the need of the railway, the broadaxe men of the Twenties and Thirties, mostly Scandinavian and English, were offered land at low prices by the government. They came to northern B.C. to find they had not been given good land.

In return for ten dollars and agreeing to reside six months a year for three years on their one hundred and sixty acres they received a Crown Grant. Defined by the broadaxe, their cutting tool used to fell trees, in need of a living, and responding to the demands of the railway, they picked the best lodge pole pine and created a language and a way of life to lay the wooden bed for the iron rails. Talking to tie hackers is to enter a world of hewing ties, picaroons, roughlocks, and scoring axes. A world of art and precision in a winter landscape enabled them to move their sculpted lodge pole ties, a forest of pine, for construction of the railway.

I compare their impact on the trees of this land to the people that of my generation who buy the forest to make money from clear-cutting its timber, and to the ravages of the pine beetle which turn the forest trails from green to

red, the colour creeping over the hills south from Tweedsmuir Park and into the mountain across Decker Lake. I am reminded of the warning by the Surrealist, Nougé: "The universe has changed...the tension of human life has changed. Beware of the foliage, of the landscapes of an endless summer, which are not, to the extent you believed a second ago, at the mercy of the first snows and of your tears."<sup>101</sup>

Overtaken now by the forest are the remains of the hasty buildings constructed by the tie hackers. The tie roads are trails now, unless obliterated by logging blocks. Within the wood frames and boards and dovetails, the details of the timber used to build the tie hackers' shelter within the very forest they would cut down for the railway, is a world expressing the relationship between this forest and the humans who inhabit its space (Figure 9). In the abandoned pile of ties at Jackpine Lake, I seek a clear moment in which the forest of the past is present or the nature of the tree once standing in this forest dwells.

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<sup>101</sup> Paul Nougé, *Rene Magritte ou les Images defendus*. (Bruxelles: Les Auteurs associes, 1943), 51-3.





**Figure 9 ~ Wood Grain, Jack Pine Lake Trail**

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Nature is alive here, minute creatures struggling for existence beneath the surface of the bark, living off the dying wood (Figure 10). Their movements carve a choreography as the living gestures of their particular landscape emerge from the wood fibers. These grains in the wood offer a moment to ponder the order of the universe: within the peeling wood skin is the cosmos. This punctum of the photograph is in the way it evokes a mysterious longing, a voluntary or involuntary response to childhood memories. In a grain of wood is my self. The expressivity of the wood grain is the tree's subtler language. The punctum is metonymical, capable of expansion: it enacts a paradigm of self and other, of life and death. The "paradigm of life/death is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print,"<sup>102</sup> says Barthes. In the resemblance between the wood grain and the wildness of the earth beneath the trees a sensation returns, a recurring photismos of a wildness, and the sheer joy of the capacity in living things for endurance or survival. The punctum returns to consciousness not what is dead but what is forgotten, a paradigm of life and death not reduced but enlarged; it is other as self.

The force of nature's consciousness is often separate from one's perception of it, but the punctum of the wood grain restores the forgotten experiences of my passion for the trees on the ridges above Decker Lake where I spent hours wandering on horseback, or lying in the grass on side hills.

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<sup>102</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 92.



**Figure 10 ~ Wormholes, Old Babine Lake Road**

© Roni M. Haggarty

In the punctum of the wood grain are the inner columns of these trees in the northern forest with the scent of mossy tendrils, pine needles and warm soil that rest between the roots of the spruce, the fir and the pine. I would leave my horse grazing in a clear space, clench handfuls of the green moss, tangy and cool but soft and fibrous like living eiderdown. The scent gathers most intensely between the shafts of light, the hot arrows piercing the black, bearded fir branches to the auburn cone seeds below. In the dark spaces beneath the lowest branches, the earth, the needles, the moss, the bark of the trees, and a sweet pungent odour of hibernation and stillness swirled and settled against my face, cool then warm from the sun. I can still smell the earth, at once both living and dying.

These moments of my time on earth in one place and in one moment, suspended and conscious through a photograph, are reassuring. Whatever chords the cool shadows may have evoked are dispelled by the motes of dust suspended motionless in the shaft of light beside my eyes. Trimble in his work with children and nature explains that this sense of self in response to the earth is developed in complex ways as children find their identity in nature. They develop an understanding of diversity in the natural world, engage in experiences that validate their relationship to that world, and develop an attentiveness to the power of other lives. In addition, he notes this attentiveness to nature helps resolve a paradox of self, the psychological balance needed between knowing and being.

In nature, children define what it is to be at home in the world, and for Trimble, discovering the literature of natural history was his way, as a child, to find a way to articulate this belief of earth. How do we understand what it is to be attentive and to see? How do we articulate this belief of the sacredness of the earth? Merleau-Ponty's discussion of vision and painting has important connections for the idea of wilderness and for what it means to truly see nature. In "Eye and Mind" he explains how the artist, specifically the painter, can look at the world without the obligation to appraise it: "Immersed in the visible by his body, itself visible, the see-er does not appropriate what he sees; he merely approaches it by looking, he opens himself to the world."<sup>103</sup> In a similar way the photographer meditates (a spiritual exercise) and is receptive to experiences with the land not only for an aesthetic appreciation of its beauty, its pastoral or nostalgia or idealized qualities, but its elements and power and fear as well.

Both the body of the human being and body of the land are in a process of an evolution of organic and inorganic elements in nature: "That tree bending in the wind, this cliff wall, the cloud drifting overhead: these are not merely subjective; they are intersubjective phenomena – phenomena experienced by a multiplicity of sensing subjects."<sup>104</sup> Thoreau sees that "the earth is not a mere fragment of dead history...but living poetry like the leaves of a tree which precede flowers and fruit, not a fossil earth, but a living earth..."<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *op. cit.*, 162.

<sup>104</sup> Abram, *op. cit.*, 38.

<sup>105</sup> Thoreau, cited in Max Oelschlager, *op. cit.*, 330.

The tree teaches us to listen and to understand there is time to prepare the self for a moment of the awareness of one's unity with all life. The tree personifies *photo/synthesis*: through energy and light it endures and survives, absorbing its source of self from the community of nature around it. Similarly, "The photographer's 'second sight' does not consist in 'seeing' but in being there," reminds Barthes.<sup>106</sup> The punctum fashions who one is, unifying our strengths and weaknesses to create a style to one's character and a voice to one's self.

### **Learning from a wood grain**

Reflecting upon his experiences in wilderness, Thoreau sees the world is not man's garden but "...evolving matter-in-motion upon which the impersonal chemistry of nature worked."<sup>107</sup> The true meaning of wilderness in this view is the spirit of living nature and the relationship of human consciousness to that world. A way to overcome modern alienation from nature, therefore, is through unconventional experiences in nature. Thoreau experiences, when planting his bean field, what Oelschlager refers to as a "dialectical movement: the actual experience of working in the field shapes his understanding."<sup>108</sup> He understands the affinity of self and organic materials in the world around him. He is aware that his human gestures are a metaphor for the blending of the natural and the cultural aspects of his being. In "Spring,"

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<sup>106</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>107</sup> Oelschlager, *op. cit.*, 47.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 158-9.



Thoreau articulates this idea of wilderness: the seasons are metaphors for cosmic creation and for the evolutionary process. He states: "No wonder that the earth expresses itself outwardly in leaves, it so labours with the idea inwardly."<sup>109</sup> Thoreau's philosophy of wilderness is an attempt to articulate what it means to dwell in the natural world, transcending conventional notions of time and ideas of nature as he "registers" that world: "...wilderness is neither an alien enemy to be conquered nor a resource to be exploited, but the "perennial source of life."<sup>110</sup>

Nietzsche's prophet, Zarathustra, embodies the teacher who seeks to heal the psyche through an integration of inner and outer selves. His perspective forces us to think and respond and to explore, through metaphor, the transformation of self and the reconciliation of inner and outer spaces of the soul. Zarathustra's children, his disciples, (his students), are the trees of his teachings: "My children are still green in their first spring standing close together and shaken by the winds, the trees of my garden and my best soil." But they must eventually become strong, solitary and self-aware for "...one day I will uproot them and set each one up by itself, that it may learn solitude and defiance and foresight." Each child will become a hardy, strong tree, a symbol of life.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Henry David Thoreau, cited in Max Oelschlager, *op. cit.*, 162.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>111</sup> Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, 182.

To see a tree on this side of the visible, to linger on the tree as a symbol of life and to know that you see it gives you your place in this world. When Siddhartha becomes aware of the natural world he realizes he had distrusted what he could not see, believing it to be "not reality" but an "illusive and fleeting veil before his eyes," for, until he lived in the present moment, he could not see what had always been visible, but, to him, invisible: "Through his eyes he saw light and shadows, through his mind he was aware of moon and stars."<sup>112</sup> Responding to the punctum of the photograph is to see what had always been visible but had become invisible to me: seeing a wood grain is a practice in the art of living, a spiritual exercise in which the response is often spontaneously and unconsciously in the moment. From these moments I learn what it means to see, to teach, to understand *isumataq* and to experience the lived physics of nature and wilderness.

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<sup>112</sup> Hesse, *op. cit.*, 46.



### **Photismos 3 ~ Grizzly Track, Parrot Lakes Trail**

Our bodies have formed themselves in delicate reciprocity with the manifold textures, sounds, and shapes of an animate earth – our eyes have evolved in subtle interaction with other eyes, as our ears are attuned by their very structure to the howling of wolves or the honking of geese...we are human only in contact, and conviviality, with what is not human.

David Abram<sup>113</sup>

#### **Walking on the earth**

I have had several experiences with bears in my life which I have separated by their intensity into three levels of importance: the sighting, the encounter and the more memorable incident. I had a horseback riding companion as a teenager whose father kept cattle on five hundred acres behind their farm. My first sighting, with the power of vivid recollection, was shortly after he shot a sow and her two cubs and pinned their hides to the side of his shed. During years of horseback riding in the hills above Decker Lake, however, we rarely saw a bear. Once galloping through muddy puddles on a tie road that undulated through pines and old tie cabins I met a black bear running across the road a few feet before me. Another time I galloped my horse, Shalome, west toward Peché Creek over a ridge and a yearling, coming up from the creek, black and frantic in its haste to flee, met me. We passed like cars on the highway,

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<sup>113</sup>Abram, *op. cit.*, 22.

both of us at a run, the bear small and vulnerable from my perspective on horseback. My movement in the land was unrestricted by fear of bears.

Now, I hike the hills and trails in the Lakes District and Bulkley Valley, at Francois Lake, Cheslatta, the Babine Mountains, and in the Telkwa Range. I am told there are more bears, more grizzlies, and I hear of attacks and incidents more frequently. Friends are reading bear attack stories, I carry bear spray, and friends and family have been charged. Recently, following an old wagon road trail in the hills above the east end of Francois Lake my hiking companions and I encountered three bears within minutes of each other.

### **Photismos ~ Black Bear**

In the photograph of the bear track (Figure 11), the detail that arises from the light of the photograph is the pressure of the pad of the bear's foot into the soft mud and the emotion associated for me with the physical absence of a creature who has just made such an imprint. Trachtenberg notes the power of the photograph to create the phenomenon of "transport": the surrounding objects are shut out as we concentrate our attention on the photograph of the past (for it is always the past), our mind enters the depth of the picture and we experience the "illusion of material presence."<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Alan Trachtenberg, "The Emergence of a Keyword," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha Sandweiss. (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1991), 39.



**Figure 11 ~ Grizzly Bear Track, Parrot Lakes Trail**

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Once, above the creek bed on the Nourse Creek Trail north of Francois Lake, my friends and I, marveling at the huge imprint of the tracks, studied the wake of a startled bear's descent down the hillside. With my binoculars I could see the claw marks extending in the mud like perfect clay casts. The tracks took on a life of their own, silent but visible and powerful traces of a living being, once present, but now invisible to us.

I remember in my early twenties my first incident of the heart with a bear. Hiking alone onto a ridge on a winding dirt road high above Driftwood Creek, near Smithers, I turned a bend in the road and met a black bear and her two cubs. I had surprised her, coming into her path upwind, and we were very close. She moved her shoulders. The cubs disappeared. I remained motionless. I knew I was on the path of a black bear well known for violent behaviour, tearing up our campsite and destroying tents. She stood on her hind legs and peered at me. We looked at each other. I told her I was only walking along the road and didn't mean to startle her this way. I said I was going to walk backward slowly and that she had nothing to fear. My Uncle John, a trapper, had told many bear stories over the years, and he warned me not to turn my back if I met a bear closely. In a lifetime in the bush he had never been attacked.

I was not afraid. I walked step by step backward and she walked step by step toward me. I turned the bend in the road, where she could not see me. I hurried away down the road, wondering, however, where two cubs might

go. Eventually, I had to retrace my steps to reach my camping destination and my friends, so after I had retreated a few hundred yards, I sat against a tree to wait. An hour later, returning to our meeting spot, singing an Irish song that I had learned from my father to announce my arrival, the forest was silent and the path empty. The intensity for me of our interaction, her curiosity, and the strange lack of fear I felt, has defined my relationship to bears. I often wonder how our perceptions of each other differed. I know I did not experience myself as human and the bear as animal. Mostly, I felt we were both alive and looking at each other in a friendly, albeit respectful, way. Only later did I experience the exhilarating sense of wildness in me that I had been in a realm of the unknown experience and I had survived, prompted perhaps by stories I heard later that she had chased a farmer as he rode on horseback through his hayfields. In every bear track now is the presence of that mysterious incident, made visible many years later when I ponder my desire to return to look at the photograph of the grizzly paw's imprint molded into the mud bank of the Nourse Creek Canyon. The grizzly track evokes the sensation that I was in the black bear's field of vision, in its "self world."

Lopez, in his analysis of perception and self in the Arctic explores the different ways in which animals perceive the world as their *umwelten*.<sup>115</sup> What an animal sees in its *umwelt*, or "self world," a way to perceive its environment by organizing the land in which it dwells into its own meaningful

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<sup>115</sup> Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 268.

spaces. What a human observer sees around the animal, however, is merely its environment. For Lopez, a way to relate more meaningfully with the wild world is in our sensitivity to and understanding of *umwelten*, or our perception and understanding of wild animals. As a photographer I experience an *umwelten* or "self world" as well, my own version of an animal perceiving its environment in a particular way. My *umwelt* is in the punctum of wildness in the grizzly track. The bear's trace or imprint is like a photograph, a source of my self world in which the material presence of the bear appears. An inner sense of wildness reassures me, that although I am human, the world of this bear exists within my self as well.

### **Photo/synthesis ~ the grizzly track**

In my desire to preserve the inner wildness within me, I realize I am human only in relationship to what is not human. In the bear's track is wildness and a confirmation of the outer world, a cosmos, a universe of nature within me and a sense of myself in a spectrum of time. Barthes explains the punctum is both the punctum of the detail (a gesture, a detail or a fragment) and the punctum of time: it is both the past and an anticipation of the future. Thus, the equivalence of the past and the future *is* the punctum; whether the subject is dead or alive, he says, "in every photograph is this catastrophe."<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 96.

The insight into the catastrophe of our relationship to nature is an expanded punctum. It is neither merely memory, nor nostalgia; this catastrophe mediates, through the photograph, a confrontation between self and mortality of all living beings. What might it mean to future generations to see a photograph of the bear and know that it no longer exists (*this has been*) and that viewing the photograph now means you are, ironically, seeing its presence, yet its impending extinction; that its death in the future is contained within the photograph as well? Last year, on the Babine River, where I fly fish in the summer, a young grizzly came to swim and fish in the river near our fishing hole. There is a poignancy and emotion of fear evoked by this photograph (Figure 12). The response is multi-faceted. I am a human fishing in her river, and I feel we are connected as fishers, human and animal, knowing myself the thrill of the water surging on my legs and the tension in the line when a salmon strikes. I wonder, what does she feel? I can relate to what could be a joy and freedom as I watch her swim, almost dancing, bobbing in the river current and as she sits on the water's edge scooping fish heads into her mouth.



**Figure 12 ~ Grizzly, Babine River**

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I am, however, also a usurper of what should be her wild space to feed, and I feel the impending doom that emanates from the bear's wildness diminished in juxtaposition with the people who come to fish this river during the salmon run in August. The punctum for me is in the precarious position of the many grizzlies who live along this river and who are threatened by disappearing wild habitat due to logging, tourism and inroads into their territory. Something in myself feels lost, threatened and diminished as well when the wildness of this grizzly is lessened by contact with many fly fishers who come from all over the world to fish this corridor on the Babine. In the photograph the bear has become humanized, tamed and spiritless.

The punctum of the photograph acts as a perceptual membrane between an inner and outer space, between the land and the human body; it is an attunement of one's self to what seems to be a paradoxical world in which the opaque is transparent, and landscape is both invitation and danger. Like photosynthesis in nature, it gives energy through light: an attentiveness to the bear reveals an insight into the relationship between myself as human and the other non-human world of nature.

### **Learning from wild animals**

This opportunity for awareness of wild animals in the natural world may be the way to help children cultivate their sense of mystery. A story-telling curriculum, where children have the opportunity to re-enact land experiences can

give them an opportunity to learn on the land and to be in touch with the earth, its wisdom and themselves. Artistic experiences in nature develop the imagination as well, providing opportunities for a creative construction of life through literature and art. Truly seeing a world of wildness can encourage children's kinship with animals and the unknown. The earth is both home, a dwelling place for the spirit, and the place which provides the opportunity to establish a confident relationship with "the other." It is, as Trimble states, a "spiritual bedrock" and a source of strength for children.<sup>117</sup>

Lopez suggests that for children, biologists' studies of animals can "draw them back into an older, more intimate and less rational association with the local landscape,"<sup>118</sup> leading to questions regarding the methodology and flaws of Western science as a form of inquiry; but it can also reveal its strengths as well: the rigour and thorough fieldwork in research done by geographers, anthropologists, and environmental philosophers. Just as important, Lopez stresses, is personal experience. Despite their differing perspectives, Thoreau, Taylor and Oelschlager also encourage the articulation and expression of personal experience through a "subtler language" as an essential aspect of our re-connection to nature and wilderness.

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<sup>117</sup> Stephen Trimble, *The Geography of Childhood*, eds. Gary Nabhan and Stephen Trimble. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 170.

<sup>118</sup> Barry Lopez, *Crossing Open Ground*, (New York: Random House, 1989), 199.

A sense of wildness evokes emotions which are an "ancient animal notion encoded within us," within our muscles, that is primordial and genetic.<sup>119</sup> To truly see the natural world, says Nabhan, is to remember a million years of ancestral relationships to nature. He reminds us that one quarter of American children will grow up in slums. Soon, most American children, it seems, will not experience the land in personal, meaningful or creative ways. Television and books have replaced outdoor experiences and the ability to truly see the land is becoming a rare, perhaps even extinct, experience. Children are less able to read the landscape compared to their ancestors. As Nabhan reflects on herons and the encoded memory of birds, he realizes his response to the heron is his "own magnetic encounter with an encoded legacy-a continuity with former generations of my own kind," in his consciousness.<sup>120</sup>

Hiking alone in Crete in the snow, the author John Fowles experiences a moment of wildness that makes him realize that his own freedom as a human being depends on the freedom of wild animals. Fowles, taking shelter from the icy wind, suddenly sees that a massive bird of prey, the rare lammergeier, has flown over him to investigate his presence in the rocks. Fowles describes the experience in terms of a mutual gaze, a "silent dialogue," while the bird, he assumes, decides whether or not he is alive. The sense of dialogue he experiences, an encounter with wildness, is the bird communicating to him:

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<sup>119</sup> Gary Nabhan, *op. cit.*, 7.

<sup>119</sup> Nabhan, *op. cit.*, 36.

"Cage me, cage yourself." Reflecting later on the endangered lammergeier and the English woodlands of his own childhood, he realizes how "as in every other heavily farmed area in the world, the silence and motionlessness of a dead planet begin to steal up on us."<sup>121</sup>

Our mindfulness and our ability to walk in a sacred manner may help prevent a dead planet. A respectful attentiveness is needed not only to the stones and the trees but to the animals who share our natural home, and our closest link with the "other" world of animate beings. Nabhan urges the need for such deeper experiences for our children: an intimate involvement with plants and animals in nature, an opportunity for direct exposure to wilderness and an education which includes teaching by elders of all cultures. Lopez reminds us, as well, that the protection of our ecosystems, the study of natural history, the sharing of the oral traditions of native culture, and immersion in thoughtful ways to nature, represented both as text and image, are necessary actions to ensure our young people know what is being lost. This is an awareness of loss far deeper than the diminishing of genetic diversity, or homeland, or wilderness recreation, he reminds us; it is the loss of the "focus of our ideals...our sense of dignity, of compassion, even our sense of what we call God."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> John Fowles, *Wormholes*. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 267-8.

<sup>122</sup> Barry Lopez, *Crossing Open Ground*. (New York: Random House Inc., 1989), 204.

### III RECURRENCE



**Figure 13 ~ Water Pattern, Decker Lake**

© Roni M. Haggarty

## Photo/synthesis ~ Water

The world was beautiful...without any seeking...the moon and stars were beautiful, the brook, the shore, the forest and rock, the goat and golden beetle, the flower and the butterfly were beautiful...All this had been and he had never seen it; he was never present. Now he was present and belonged to it. Through his eyes he saw light and shadows; through his mind he was aware of moon and stars.

Herman Hesse <sup>123</sup>

Receptivity to a detail in nature causes something invisible to appear, something that delights or has a poignancy that is painful but that makes me recognize something wild in the world that I perhaps felt, even somehow knew, but couldn't yet "see." This could be in the agate, the stones under lake water, the juniper, the patterns left on wood by insects, an animal's track, or the season's changes reflected in the lake. The photograph both records and relates to a moment that is both past and present in a way; something I perhaps recognize intuitively and which must be seen more closely and meditated upon, because it reflects an aspect of the relationship between a human being and nature. It is a time of synthesis and a way to articulate through art, the experience and the recurrence of the seasons and the patterns in nature.

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<sup>123</sup> Hesse, *op. cit.*, 46.

How does one convey the inner landscape or express the subtleties of the perception of wilderness within oneself: the rock's formation, the juniper's permanence, the bear's gaze? The best source we have may be metaphor. In "Narrative and Landscape," Lopez urges a balancing of one's inner landscape to the outer, sacred order of nature through story, a way of knowing and being in the land that is necessary for humanity's mental health.<sup>124</sup> This balance is a metaphor for the act of storytelling itself, a way to achieve harmony between experience and the inner self through contact with the land. For Lopez, it is through the metaphor of a country of the mind, a landscape evident to the senses that the self retains in human memory and that arises in the oral tradition of a people. For Rapoport, in his studies of the meaning of place, it is stories in the tribe, the "unobservable realities" which find their expression in observable phenomena: the land makes the myth real and it makes the people real. Mythic landscape and the stories still alive through language keep the land alive in the people.<sup>125</sup>

### **Photismos ~ Decker Lake**

There is a story alive in me and in the transition between ice and water where I live. Ice knows a hardness that contains a universe of melting and

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<sup>124</sup> Lopez, op. cit., 67.

<sup>124</sup> Amos Rapoport, cited in Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams*. (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1986), 296.

softening, softness in its smallest form in a cell, a hardness that yields when it must, where the rhythm and cycles of life demand it. I feel I am human in relationship to the land, and that I must articulate that meaning in conversations with photographs and in remembering and moving within the water, the hills and the valleys of this land. A journey into the land, walking in an attentive, sacred manner, with photography and writing as my spiritual exercises, is a journey into the recurrence of a water droplet to ice and ice to a water droplet; a way to see and be part of the tensions of time and space and to understand the inter-relatedness of human beings and the animate and non-living world of nature. The ice endures, it is a recurrence, a melting into water that helps us accept change and how we survive those changes. I think of Fowles' understanding of his love for nature: "The deepest thing we can learn about nature is not how it works but that it is the poetry of survival. The greatest reality is that the watcher has survived and the watched survives."<sup>126</sup> No matter what our situation, a stone or a tree or a bear track can connect us to the universe and reassure us that we live in it together. In some photographs I recognize in a recurrence, in a pattern or recycling of life, not only that we are both survivors but a desire to internalize the spring thaw, the lake storms and the breaking ice floes jostling and grinding loudly in the lake.

Decker Lake, and its patterns of life, is photismos, illuminating my understanding, clarifying my life's meaning not only in this land but also as a

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<sup>126</sup> Fowles, *op. cit.*, 268.



teacher. Memories evoked by a photograph act as a photismos for the aspects of my human self most like the ice and water of the outer land. The photograph "Spring Break-Up: Ice Floes" (Figure 14), is an enactment of the land through my father's interest in ice patterns and the effect this ice had on me physically as a child. As an adult, going to university in the city, my father would break into telephone conversation, like a sudden wind coming up or a startling moment when the ice cracked and jostled loudly onto the shoreline below the steps, to describe in metaphor the sounds and movement of the ice, the way it crawled up the shoreline toward the bank or the way it drove the dock like matchsticks across the beach. He told me the land's stories, and, since his death, these stories and his photographs help keep the land alive in me.

In beginning to tell my own stories I can invite young people to do the same, so we can keep the land alive in us through photography and language, and by being attentive to certain moments. In the following excerpts from my journals I show ways to focus, through photography and writing, on one's experiences in nature: a) a moment in memory, b) a moment of light or recognizing one's photismos, c) a moment as a metaphor, and d) a moment as a recurrence.<sup>127</sup>

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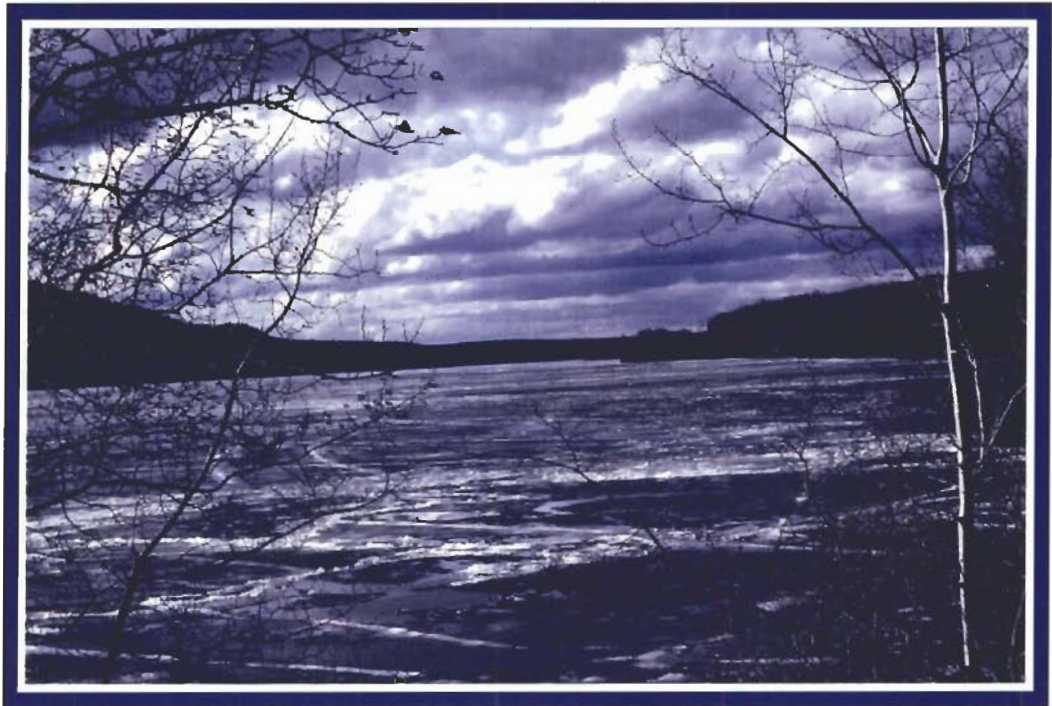
<sup>127</sup> Roni Haggarty, Journals, "Spring Breakup," "After the Storm" "Ice Map," © Roni M. Haggarty

## The photograph and a moment in memory ~ Figure 14

### Remembering "Spring Break-Up," Decker Lake, 1963

*I remember spring break-up, blue skies in March with a wind off the lake, the verandah a landscape of dry, gray wood grain islands within expanses of wet, dark pine planks and patches of melting snow. Where there is enough space, I can skip. The skipping rope pats the dry wood, makes circles of air stand still and I jump a little like an atom in time. In the yard, random snow mounds cover the dark ground and yellow, faded grasses pressed from the previous summer appear in the empty land spaces. The earth is brown in patches like melting chocolate, pasty and muddy. The aspens stand bare on the northern rise behind the outhouse, their leafless, white trunks gray and stiff. The old, dry stalks of Queen Anne's Lace are broken, bent like circumflexes.*

*I remember the faint whine of the wind through the aspen branches, rustling the dried leaves and stalks, bringing the cold moisture from the surface of the ice to the corners of my eyes, where small tears form, gathered from the frozen air.*



**Figure 14 ~ Spring Break Up, Decker Lake**

© Roni M. Haggarty

In the movement of ice to water, I recognize through my photismos, my own wildness, my connection to creation. In the tears of my eyes, in the lake water and in the frozen air, the ice melting, I am the photograph, it is my self portrait, my autobiography. If as Berger says, a photograph of landscape can reveal the panel of being in the people within that place then a photograph measures, reflects or mirrors on a certain level the relationship between my self and the world, my panel of being, representing my lived experiences with this lake. The photograph becomes part of the memory of the land. Its wild other self imposed itself upon my consciousness as a child, and I accept its power to become more than an arrested moment; it has the capacity to exist in a living context, the ability to invite the narrative. It has the power to link the land and the human memory within that space, maybe even the power to encourage people to preserve that world, to respect and honour its beauty, its power, its wildness. Berger predicts: "It is just possible that photography is the prophecy of a human memory, yet to be socially and politically achieved."<sup>128</sup>

Lopez emphasizes the inter-relatedness of culture and land where land is both a way of knowing and a security for people: "The land is like a kind of knowledge travelling in time through them. Land...provides a sense of place, scale, history and a conviction that what they most dread--annihilation, eclipse--will not occur."<sup>129</sup> The human imagination is activated: my mind becomes the

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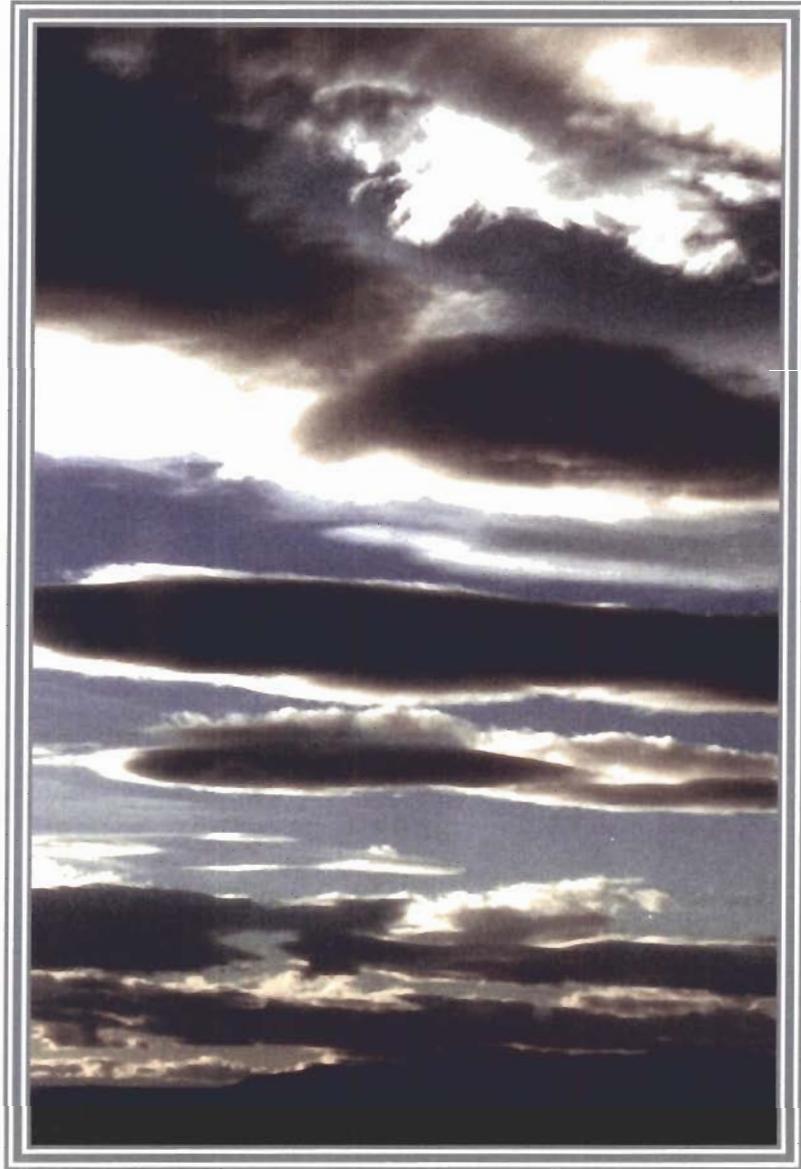
<sup>128</sup> Berger, *op. cit.*, 72.

<sup>129</sup> Lopez, *op. cit.*, 264-5.

mind of the land, the lake a kind of knowledge travelling through me. The land is home.

The lake exists both as a moment in memory and an entity beyond human interference, living in part outside of human projections and constructs. Language, as metaphor, is a photismos, a response to that world indifferent to my desire to impose my meaning on it. It imposes its meaning on me. My response is the only human way I have to converse with or enter into a dialogue with the land, to show my understanding of a spiritual experience I have when I see or feel in nature a separate living reality. A photograph of the land records a photismos of my experience.

The lake where I lived my childhood is a living organism with its own experience of itself, supremely indifferent to me, a living organism that I cannot use, although I try with my imagination to project onto it my desires and human self. As I grow older I realize it has projected its wild influence on my self and my life. I can only partly understand my experience of it as other than myself. Biologically we are united, through the elements of air and water, and I will become the earth and water when I die. There is, however, despite that connection of similar physical elements an inner/outer tension that separates us.



**Figure 15 ~ Storm Clouds, Decker Lake**

© Roni M. Haggarty

## **The photograph and a moment of light**

The lake reflects itself back to me in a moment when I am drawn to some spontaneous mutual glance which I record as a portrait of the land's self, a sort of visual dialogue when an aspect of the lake, for instance, interprets itself to me through my photograph. Sometimes I recognize it when it happens, before it is saved as a photograph, sometimes I see it and feel it later in a photograph as I wonder why I was drawn to the lake to want to have this visual moment. Sometimes I wonder if I speak to it visually for a moment what will it give back to me? When something draws me to the photograph, the punctum in it will yield my photismos or insight.

**Photismos ~ "After the Storm," Decker Lake, 2004**

*At supper time the richest light angles across the lawn in front of the kitchen window. The sap, a golden syrup, gleams in long black seams in the aspen bark, a warm, amber patina. The light enters the house boldly, falls in shadows on the floor near the window, pulls me forward. I walk across the room to meet it.*

*Today, an overcast gray day, the landscape seemed indifferent, the hills a narrow, green line between lake light and sky light. Tonight, the western sky clears in a narrow line over the lake and delicate blue horizon emerges. A storm is about to break.*

*Within an hour, black clouds loom between the aspen leaves to the east, the clouds over the hills edge steadily west, and within minutes the darkness is over us, heavy and full (Figure 15). At the edges of the cloud the trapped light presses upon the storm. Thunder begins to rumble, a low, distant growl, then a tumbling, crashing fall of air through time and space.*

*Water comes rattling on the verandah, spattering the wood steps, forming in dripping pools along the rails, sliding smoothly along the wood planks between the cracks and spaces. Clinging, lingering, stretching, the drops fall gently to the wet, dark earth beneath my feet. They run into the hidden, soft darkness beneath porches and steps, invading the land beneath eaves and trees and wheelbarrows, gathering the dry earth into balls, crawling at first, then racing with momentum into random rivulets and patterns of flooding. Thunder tumbles roundly, in leaps and scrambles.*

*The rain writes to me on the earth, assuring me I am not alone and that the people I live with in the world are not the only world. I long for the lightning and the thunder and wait, as I have learned to wait in life, for the silence and the heartbeat to count out the distance between the flashes of light and the thunder.*

*A hummingbird darts frantically, drones and hovers over the white bloom of my mother's hair - vanishes. Heavy storm clouds huddle into the sunset corner of the lake. Waves lap the shore, the loons call again, the grebe's creaky cry returns and shadow and light patterns shift and dance across the lake's surface.*

*The storm is gone. Lily pads loom above the black water in the bay. The sky is in fragments, the sun's glare softened by cloud gauze. In the west a tender, bruised sky presses a peach limb against the cool blue hills (Figure 16).*

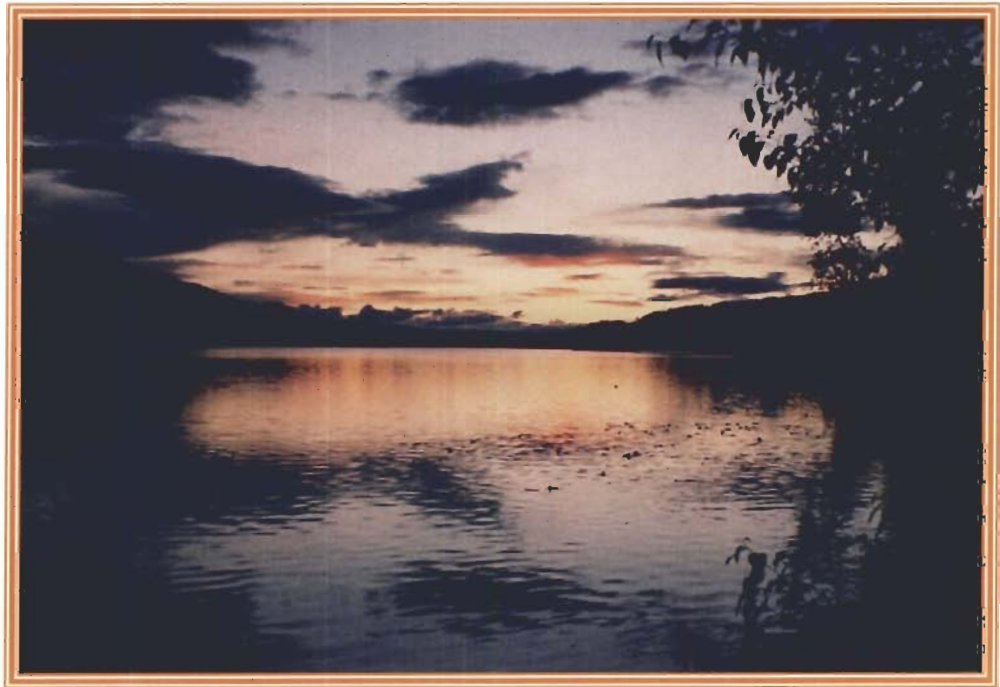


I experience this interconnectedness of my self with the inner/outer cosmos in the lake, and explore the relationship between the “inscapes” and the outer landscapes in nature when I photograph in the moment. This inner space within the human soul contains not only what Parkes calls an “inscape” of land, sea, waves, rocks, sun and wind but the cosmos as well (the moon, stars, galaxies, a Milky Way). It is, Zarathustra discovers, “by going into the world of the human soul one finds oneself far out along the galaxy – yet heading back in, to the chaotic heart of existence.”<sup>130</sup>

To become who one is, is to practice an art of living in which one is at home in the world. To become who one is, is to see into the eye of the storm. In photismos, in the spiritual exercises of attentiveness to wildness within us, is the synthesis of self and nature and the metaphors of one’s life.

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<sup>130</sup> Parkes, *op. cit.*, 129.



**Figure 16 ~ After the Storm, Decker Lake**

© Roni M. Haggarty

## **The photograph and a moment as metaphor**

Through the open, empty windows, the past and present merge with a tension of lost time, frozen time, the suppressed or hidden memories pressing against my mind like clouds over the lake, as they loom and lift and return (Figure 17). The windows direct my gaze into the land to the outer landscape, like an ironic frame opening from an inner space into a broader sense of self, yet simultaneously enclosing me in a protected place. This expression in photographs has become autobiographical for me, as I express a *genius loci* of my life's landscape.

Now the window frame situates metaphorically not only my childhood but moments enlarged through reflection to an expansive moment: the land and I are one made visible. The frame has never enclosed for me – it is imaginatively the expansion possible beyond the human dwelling (beyond myself) made visible to me: my body, my self, the dwelling, the window, and my vision onto the cosmos. In water and light is a community of self and land, a unity of subject and other.

The lake, through its transitions from water to ice, gives me a spirit of place which reminds me of the many facets, fragments or prisms of the selves we seek to unify before we undergo again the cycle of life and become the skulls and bark and water droplets and hardened stones of the earth. Nature teaches me to feel and know the perfection and unity of life.



**Figure 17 ~ Window and Water, Francois Lake**

© Roni M. Haggarty

## The photograph as a moment of recurrence

### PHOTISMOS ~ DECKER LAKE

#### ICE MAP

I smell the sticky bodies of tree buds bursting from branches  
Perspiring beads refract colours saved from summer days  
I am waiting to melt ice to blue moments

I touch the cottonwood branch, its woolly seed pods crusted black  
Frozen life spattering in the flames, smoke from inner dampness rising  
I am breathing spring run-off in cool air

I hear the axes splitting bone marrow into slivers and chips  
Splintered wood shrieks and tree trunks topple  
I am the stilled blood in their frozen veins

I see the trees, sentries on the fringes of the lumber yard  
An ice spattered shoreline offers me its tree bones  
I am from another life, peeling bark blends into my skin

I know a spring sky etched by geese writing homeward  
Outstretched bodies like branches float in a blue sky  
I am the cloud's filigree over ice floes and black water

The land offers a seductive glance through its mountains, its water, its ice floes, its northern light, its cloud patterns. So simple, so obvious at times, but powerful, elusive, eternal, arrogantly indifferent, and so incomprehensible. The lake teaches me. Water recurs, in all things, a metaphor for the creative

process, for living a life in nature, becoming isumataq. The lake is my symbolic touchstone, like the stone, the juniper, the grizzly track and the ice. My relationship to this lake integrates all the places that speak to me, my sources of self: a sacred place for the spirit of faith, (our baptism as children by the lake), dying places for our flesh and bone (the drownings in the lake that haunted my childhood), frozen places for the spirit at rest, (my father's grave, covered with snow), places for our bodies to be soothed, (our neighbour, Ted, in his eighties, swimming among the lily pads), and places of beauty and wildness (in the boat with my parents as the storm approaches, trailing my hand through lily pads and hovering blue dragonflies).

The lake, deceiving in its gentleness and its beauty, can contain both fear and danger, and yet seeing the lake in a new way after all these years as a powerful living organism, separate and beyond me in so many ways, reinforces something in me, unites me with its life force, a force or wildness that I believe humanity needs to know and experience. In its photismos I realize I have been transformed and that I can see as I have never seen before.

The punctum of the lake's photograph both refers to and defies death, for the seasons give us our metaphors for the human concept of past and present, and also the *photo/synthesis* and renewal that is light and energy in a living being. There is an awareness of transience, and to see the photograph (Figure 14), both reminds me of my father's death and evokes a discomfort at my own impending death, what Barthes' calls the "catastrophe" in every

photograph. The living lake, however, reflects its wildness to me and helps me defy each dying moment.

The intersection between a place in nature and its photograph, a visual and textual conversation among aspects of the inner landscape and exterior landscape, can elicit memory and enhance my ability to appreciate formative experiences with the earth, specifically wilderness, which in my years in the city have been overlooked or have remained forgotten, invisible or silent. A photograph, metonymical for my autobiography of this lived place, elicits the articulation of my sense of place and my way of knowing nature as community and home.

A window in a building being reclaimed by the land, rather like nature's wildness reclaiming my spirit, enlarges my understanding of self rather than confining it. Like Decker Lake itself, it refers to a recurrence: it partly confines the land with the coming of the ice but it escapes and releases with the spring to water. I can dwell in the transition between human and land, and accept the window as the metaphor for the tension I feel between inner and outer and human community and land as community: the lake is home.

## CONCLUSION ~ WALKING ON THE EARTH

### A personal currere

My personal currere is a metaphor for, and embodiment of, a process in education, an alternative approach and exemplar of what I have come to believe is essential for authentic educative experiences in the classroom.

*Photo/synthesis* as currere is a methodology and a learning inquiry that reflects the interdisciplinary and integrated curriculum I advocate. It is a qualitative study influenced by auto-ethnography, writing as inquiry, and the phenomenology of a lived experience, but also by ways of knowing in the arts (aesthetics, poetry) and social sciences (geography, ecology). For me, walking is my source of self, a spiritual exercise, and a way of plumbing the depths of a pedagogy of personal currere as embodied learning.

I have learned from remembering the frozen world of winter ice at Decker Lake and from the wild summer lake storms; I have learned to recognize hidden resemblances of wildness in the agate, the juniper and the grizzly track; and I have learned to accept, even embrace, moments of fear and death and beauty. Partly because I feel a part of the recurrence of seasons in the north, from experiencing my own aging and transience, and partly because in the *genius loci* of my place, I have learned how nature and friendship are reflections of the land and that this is the heart of true community and a true pedagogy of



nature. Barthes' metonymic power of expansion<sup>131</sup> in the photograph is a way of learning to see the stones under water, the wood grain and the grizzly track.

Language and art are pivotal to this awareness of meaningful moments on the land, and together with young people we must have opportunities to bring to creation through art and literature what we have come to understand from these experiences. We need a balanced education to help unite body, mind and soul which includes an awareness of "something ineffable" expressed in the aesthetics, creativity, oral culture, stories and embodied learning found in nature.

Referring to his intimate, "blood" relation with nature, Nietzsche, quoting Empedocles, declares: "It is with earth we perceive earth, with water, water, with aether, aether, with fire, fire..."<sup>132</sup> Weather, for instance, an aspect of the natural world, is a "membrane between the self and the world...permeable" and after years of solitude in nature, "wandering like a heavy cloud between past and future," Nietzsche's prophet in *Thus Spake Zarathustra* discovers his "wild wisdom" comes with the force of a storm. His soul is impatient to teach - to cast "hail showers into the depths."<sup>133</sup> What forces in a particular landscape compel us to be artists or photographers, and to write, to teach, and to want to "cast hail showers into the depths"?

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<sup>131</sup> Barthes, *op. cit.*, 27.

<sup>132</sup> Nietzsche, cited in Parkes, *op. cit.*, 127.

<sup>133</sup> Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, 109.

How does one both explore one's self in an authentic relationship with the natural world and encourage others to find their own art of living? When our young people tell us they feel alienated from the world of earth, sky, trees and lakes, how can we as teachers respond? What dispositions can we say are necessary for a life of philosophy, for the cultivation of self? Educational experiences must affect the fundamental character of our humanity. A synthesis of both experiences in nature and artistic expression are needed along with an opportunity for young people to grapple with creating their own philosophy of nature.

An increasing emphasis in North American culture on the beneficial and utilitarian features of technology in education can separate us from a personal relationship with the earth. The view that nature is a useful, objective entity, an "other" separate from our psyche, soul or inner self, or a commodity to be controlled or mastered may be alienating our young people and inhibiting their opportunity to live life in harmony and balance with the natural world. Can a world focused on technological progress offer us creative opportunities to use technology to connect to nature in positive, life-affirming ways? How might photography, both a technology and a creative, artistic process, help us in our pedagogical practice to discover, celebrate and honour our sense of place?

Concerned we have become a culture that voraciously consumes the earth, many writers, focussed on ecological issues, urge us to consider ways that might effectively address the imbalance between humans and nature.

Photography is a way to help us become more engaged with nature and to explore our attitudes to the natural world. As well, we can connect artistic practice and inquiry with traditional wisdom from Eastern cultures and indigenous peoples. Lopez suggests we must eventually consider a philosophy of nature which will help us rediscover the mutual relationship we have with our natural world.<sup>134</sup> As a teacher, articulating my philosophy as a personal curriculum, I invite others to participate in this pedagogical journey, to initiate themselves into a way of seeing and a way to express through metaphor an understanding of a philosophy of what it is to be in their own place. My northern place is a *photo/synthesis* of embodied learning, an attentiveness to details in nature and photography as reflective practice.

My curriculum, a metonymic curriculum which differs in significant ways from current curricula, encourages the experience of *punctum* through both physical experiences and the act of photography. My curriculum, although an individual experience, has broader pedagogical, ecological and moral implications that go beyond self to the broader world. Can this really be learned? How do we act upon it? To experience a change in consciousness we must walk out into the land but we can also bring the land into the classroom, and nature into the school. We can, for instance, create opportunities for nature and even wilderness, to become more visible in the playground.

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<sup>134</sup> Barry Lopez, *Crossing Open Ground*, (New York, Random House, 1989), 198-99.

How can my pedagogical experiences in the land be part of a more universal currere? By providing opportunities for students to experience, identify and articulate their symbolic touchstones, their own moments of photismos, to encourage their attentiveness and to expand their awareness of the spiritual and philosophical exercises that provide authentic lifelong relationships with nature. Teachers have to be catalysts re-orienting the way we view nature and creating alternative possibilities for knowing and being in the world. A community currere can take the experience beyond self to a shared community of humans and the land.

A currere of universal nature is a pedagogy highly relevant for any educational situation, whether it be in rural areas, in wilderness or in an urban setting: it is an opportunity to learn anywhere nature can be found but it can also be experienced in urban settings and in classrooms isolated from nature. If, in urban classrooms, one can't experience a rich relationship physically in nature, other experiences are possible to engage the body and make a link between the senses, the emotions and the world of nature. Some young people in rural areas live within nature and cannot see or articulate what has become for many an invisible environment, at best, a scenic backdrop to human interactions. At least the possibilities for them are rich. Of most concern is the increasing number of young people in urban environments who have little opportunity to experience the world of nature. What matters most here is the development of a respectful attentiveness, a listening to the land as a spiritual exercise, writing as a spiritual

exercise, and ways of seeing to recover an ability to see, perceive and feel nature in the most ordinary moments. These are ways to discover a subtler language or Taylor's "language of personal resonance" and to become part of a community of knowing and being in your own place.

### **From a personal currere to ways of seeing**

Children are less able to read the landscape compared to their ancestors. Television and books have replaced experiences in nature and the ability to see the land in meaningful ways is threatened. Nabhan offers a solution: an intimate involvement with the plants and animals in nature, an opportunity for direct exposure to wilderness and an education which includes teaching by elders of all cultures who are intimate with place.<sup>135</sup> Our language, our land, and our consciousness are inextricably interconnected. Through the body we perceive this knowledge and the images that provoke the punctum explore the tension of life and death and a wildness that is both frightening and beautiful: the creation of an agate, the endurance of an ancient juniper, the steady gaze of a black bear, the gentle summer lake water in the bay at Decker Lake which becomes the relentless and untouchable expanse of ice in the winter. A sense of the unity of one's inner self with a universal nature, a community of humans and nature and a recognition of a reciprocal wilderness is within us.

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<sup>135</sup> Nabhan, *op. cit.*, 97.

Young people must be encouraged, inspired and invited to experience other aspects of their human self in wilderness.

### **WAYS OF SEEING**

To live a life of philosophy is to realize a way of life closely connected to nature. By walking into the land, by learning to see, I participate in a part of the living universe, in the cycle of life, in an eternal recurrence. To photograph and to write about a photograph are ways to articulate this way of life as a spiritual exercise in seeing and in becoming what Nietzsche calls the poet of one's life. Space speaks to me through gestures of the land, beckons me to a more intense connection of my self with the world, through my eyes, through my words and through my body. One way to learn to see is through the creation of a metaphor. A photograph is a part of self in which the punctum of the soul emerges. Metaphors articulate this understanding. For me, the metonymical force of the photograph (punctum) brings to light the metaphor of *photo/synthesis*, an experience of transformation and a way to articulate a currere of the land.

Walking into the land, in an attentive way, becomes a lived physics when articulated in art and writing. Within the metaphor is the light at the heart of *photo/synthesis*. *Photo/synthesis* is both a personal transformation through light (photography and insight) and a way to situate an integrated curriculum of such disciplines as Art, Environmental Studies, English, Geography, Earth Science and Creative Writing. Through metaphors the body and nature can reflect each

other; through an embodiment of language we can feel a connection with nature and through metaphor we can integrate a broken curriculum.

### **LITERATURE AND AN ORAL CULTURE**

Lopez in "The Passing Wisdom of Birds," reminds us that the protection of our ecosystems, the study of natural history, the sharing of the oral traditions of native culture, and immersion in thoughtful ways to represent nature, possibly in text and image, are necessary actions to ensure our young people know what is being lost in the natural world.<sup>136</sup> Combining experiences in nature like hiking in the mountains, exploring marshlands or studying ocean shorelines with readings by nature writers who share experiences in similar places can help enrich these experiences and connect young people to traditions of other humans who have similar needs and responses.

In addition, participation in others' experiences through literature is a viable alternative to visiting the wilderness if, however, we engage students in the text, in the word, in poetry and in philosophy to invite participation in this way of knowing nature. Learning experiences, therefore, which involve active physical participation have the transforming power to teach us about our relationship to nature. Writing poetry, stories and oral histories using photographs containing personal experience and student photographs of nature

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<sup>136</sup>Lopez, *op. cit.*, 193-208.

can help young people express their poetic response to nature, to the forces of life.

According to Gary Lemco, poetry as a higher philosophical exercise, uses metaphors to embody concepts that link humans to the natural world: poets are dancers of spirit.<sup>137</sup> Language as a creative act is how the child as artist also expresses the forces of life. Through imagination, and the realm of the metaphor, through word, sound and gesture our students participate more fully in life. We can encourage the creation of metaphors from students' individual experiences of photismos: their own philosophy of nature coming to light.

Cheney identifies a need for an education that allows opportunities for conversations between humans and the natural world, that explores ways to articulate and define the context (language and stories) for those conversations, and that encourages the awareness of narrative as an expression of the understanding of self.<sup>138</sup> In this view we are words, and we live within stories which interpret our relationship to wilderness. A phenomenology of landscape encourages an intimate relationship with nature and can be partially achieved through the enactment and embodiment of photography and writing. To see the land through photographs is to provide opportunities for later reflection, to

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<sup>137</sup> Gary Lemco, *Nietzsche as Educator*. (San Francisco: Mellen Research University Press, 1992), xiii.

<sup>138</sup> Jim Cheney, "Sacred Land," in *Colloquium on Environment, Ethics, and Education*, ed. Bob Jickling. (Whitehorse, Yukon, Canada: Yukon College, 1995), 61.



encourage a sensitivity to the punctum. To be able to situate learning in an intense response to a photograph, an experience that acknowledges remembering the earth, is a way to be attentive (a way to practice philosophy) or be receptive to the resemblances between elements of nature, and its recurring patterns. One way, therefore, for young people to respond to nature is through their own photographs or photographs taken of nature familiar to them and associated with their own lived place (local gardens, parks, inner courtyards at their school, nature encountered walking to school, or their own "sacred walking" in their neighbourhood).

This is a way to record the life of community of nature, an imaginative response through photography of young people's experiences in a particular place. A discourse of photographs and oral history could be a multi-level conversation over time and space, journey through photographs, stories, poetry and art which could traverse generations in a community and weave through not only the residents' lives but also the places within which they dwell. This may help young people today, as well as future generations, better understand and appreciate the relationship between themselves, their ancestors, and the land. Experiences in nature can be heard and recorded by the children of the community who will in turn become a part of the future history and culture in this particular place. In this way the children can act as agents of memory.

## THE USE OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Young people long to have a relationship with nature, to have both a sense of belonging and a sense of place with the earth. Many have a perception and sensitivity to the land never expressed in a school setting, an awareness they perceive as belonging primarily to the past, known only through myth or their studies of indigenous peoples. Following a recent audio-visual presentation using music and my photographs of Ireland, grade 12 English and Geography students were invited to respond in writing to the connections which emerged for them.<sup>139</sup> In these writings, students reflect on "...the beauty of the world around us and the sorrow that we use each other regarding the need for land," and on "how the people show their love of God through the landscape." One teenager is struck by "...the connection that exists between the land and the people of the land that inspires them to write literature and music, also the connection between the people of far off and us here, whether it be through family heritage or the responsibility of humanity to care for our earth."

My students from Asia and South Africa respond to Irish landscape images with recollections of the homeland they now miss. One boy longs for a world without pollution for, he realizes, "We don't see many lush green images around of the world these days." Others consider "...how much we are missing in our lives," and "...how we take for granted our environment, our home earth."

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<sup>139</sup> "Language of the Land": English/Geography 12 Presentation (R. Haggarty, D. Swain, Elgin Park Secondary, Surrey, British Columbia Canada, 1998)

Finally, there is concern regarding “how much harm we are inflicting,” and “whether or not it will ever stop.” These responses indicate that our young people feel alienated from what once was an immediate and necessary response to the world of sky, earth, trees, and rivers.

One way to bring students closer to their feeling for nature is to introduce photographs which encourage them to describe places in nature which are meaningful to them, and to which they can respond in imaginative ways. A couple of students looked me up later to tell me that seeing the photographs of the Irish countryside prompted their own journey to Ireland soon after graduation. To enhance this experience future presentations could include opportunities to respond to photographs in which students experience their own powerful response or punctum to a photograph. Barthes, in *Camera Lucida* did not include the photograph which contained the punctum of his mother’s gesture, deciding it could never provoke the same emotion in anyone else; for each of us the punctum is a unique and particular experience, a journey of personal discovery and transformation.

#### **CHILDREN AS PHOTOGRAPHERS, ARTISTS, WRITERS**

A photograph of an icicle shown me by my teacher when I was a child had a powerful impact on my consciousness.<sup>140</sup> How much more powerful would have been the opportunity to photograph, reflect on and create through

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<sup>140</sup> See: *Prologue: The Icicle*, p.1.

writing and art my living experience when I was in school? To photograph is partly to remember later what you are perhaps drawn to in nature, but to consider some aspect of nature closely is an act of philosophy, a moral act, a spiritual exercise in which we open our eyes to the resemblances and unity between ourselves and nature. To reflect on the photograph later is to live in a tension, in a space between self in the photograph and the aesthetic experience of synthesis that connects us to a sensibility of place. Our sense of our mortality (even fear of death at times), our desire to experience beauty, our discomfort at what could be ugly or cruel, are all subtly intertwined at times. Perhaps it is even a moral responsibility to actively see, to become aware, to be responsible in some way to the natural world of which we are a part and in which we live.

Students can be encouraged to do likewise with their natural world and reflect as a spiritual exercise to discover their responses, their "significant horizons," their place and their world. Photographs can also be the starting point to integrate through text and image curricular strands now separated in such disconnected subject areas as Art, Literature, Geography, Creative Writing, and Physics. Photography is a way to encourage students' clarification of their own philosophical understandings in which one's feelings, one's sense of an ethical response to the land, and an awareness of place lead to a respectful understanding of a necessary and reciprocal inter-relatedness, and the responsibility one has to preserve what one values in that place.

## **A community currere ~ walking on the earth**

A currere of community is a way to go beyond what can be, at times, limited human values and perspectives which see the world primarily in human terms, without acknowledging the influence of the natural world on our spirits, to land as community and a recognition of the earth and the world around us as a living organism. Arne Naess, in *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, encourages a spiritual response to our relationship with nature: we live in a community, including nature and humans, of interdependent beings. This realization can enable younger generations to appreciate the land, to record the stories of their birth and to experience more meaningful relationships with nature and wilderness through an interdisciplinary currere of art, history, literature and ecology. We can help students connect with deep ecological thought, says Naess, in the most ordinary places:

And even inside the schoolyard you find nature's greatness...we can do it in cities. You can do it along railways, highways. Everywhere there is something that is essentially nature. You don't see any human purpose in it. It's there on its own – and its ugly or beautiful – but it's there and its complexity is unlimited.<sup>141</sup>

A universal curriculum of nature is one in which we share our personal currere of nature, art and language, our shared wildness, whether that

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<sup>141</sup> Arne Naess, "Deep Ecology and Education," *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*, 5, Spring, (2000): 54.

be in wilderness, in gardens, in a schoolyard, or in the storm clouds or weather patterns over an inner-city school.

The splintered and fragmented secondary school curricula reinforces Taylor's modern malaise and Oelschlager's fragmented modern identity; it encourages dualities rather than the inter-connectedness and unity of the universe, a pattern by which interdisciplinary curriculum can be designed which encourages a synthesis of students' learning and which de-emphasizes the current focus on analysis and deconstruction of ideas. Living philosophy as a way of life, and giving attentiveness, through writing and art in a particular place, to the experiences of one's life, are necessary before truly meaningful reflective practice, or a second sight, pedagogically, can take place.

A photograph, a powerful, reflective visual response to nature, can both encourage a teacher's reflective practice, a second sight or photismos, and prompt conversations to encourage young people to communicate beyond what might be the limitations of a verbal text or the physical confinements of the secondary classroom. A photograph of nature can evoke a spiritual exercise, a reflective discourse between inner and outer landscapes. Our knowledge of place and way of being in the world can be articulated through the unique tension of a photograph and the memory or story that emerges through the emotional experience of its punctum. One educates oneself through the self-discipline of spiritual exercises, through attentiveness, focus, meditation and reflection, (whether walking in nature, reading, researching or writing), to a

self-realization and transformation of awareness. Young people can experience self-realization through spiritual exercises or learning experiences: specifically, the study of philosophy, ecology and literature can focus on an awareness of cosmology and a physical intimacy with the natural world by listening to the language of the land. Ultimately through walking in the land, through an embodied learning, and through a creative synthesis of metaphor, nature is within our human reach.

We need to help each other bring our inner landscape to light, to define ourselves as human in relation to the world of nature, and to create for ourselves a pedagogy of nature that takes a personal currere and links it to a community of responsibility and communication for and about the land. Teachers of nature (*isumatuq*), help to bring to light (*photismos*) the inner landscapes of others, and help to bring to light the need to feel a connection, even a communion, with all of nature, both animate and non-animate.

Part of my communion, part of the sacred act of walking to me, has been to listen not only to the voices of my friends as we journey in nature, as we walk the valleys, shorelines, mountains and meadows, but to their gestures and silences. They have taught me that in a *photismos* of nature, in a spiritual exercise, and in a sacred walking in the land, a teacher, human or non-human is always present, like a "silent illumination." In the landscape of my classroom, I think increasingly of Tu Wei Ming's metaphor: "Each human being is a silent

illumination."<sup>142</sup> For me, a photismos, a pedagogy of self, earth and cosmos in not only possible in the schoolyard, but in the classroom. I am a different teacher at the end of this journey. Through friendship, and by sharing the beauty and wildness of my childhood place, I am brought full circle to the wisdom of the ancient philosophers: nature is again my community; nature is my home.

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<sup>142</sup> Tu, Wei-Ming, *Embodying the Universe: A Note on Confucian Self-Realization*, in *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 183.



## **EPILOGUE ~ PHOTISMOS, WINDOW ONTO THE LAND**

This thought matured in him slowly...harmony, knowledge of the eternal perfection of the world, and unity. Everything that was not suffered to the end and finally concluded, recurred, and the same sorrows were undergone.

Herman Hesse <sup>143</sup>

### **Decker Lake, 2004 ~ inner and outer landscapes**

I continue to return to what is still my inner landscape, my northern home, as I more frequently do now, to see the abandoned buildings from my childhood like fragments of existence withdrawn from time. They represent the transitions between humans and our landscape: the active forces of earth and wind and weather overtake these aging and disintegrating human structures. The windows and doorways of abandoned houses inhabit a space reclaimed and absorbed by nature: they express a poetic gesture like movements suspended by stillness or silence. In spontaneous moments, the gesture enlarges, filling my vision, like a photograph, an intense, physical moment unifying space and time for me in a visual moment. My photographs are for me dwellings, membranes of the art of living and the representation of my self. I celebrate these moments

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<sup>143</sup> Hesse, *op. cit.*, 131.

and the spirit of place within the land where I dwell, prisms of self in nature and the membranes across which I may move at certain mindful moments (Figure 18).

I can live in the gestures within the inner and outer space of the frozen lake, a juniper tree, a grizzly track or beneath the suffocating northern storms where the clouds descend to press upon the earth. In the tensions which connect and separate my human world and nature are the expressive gestures of the wilderness upon my spirit: the dynamic energy of land, water and sky, the formation of fire through lightning, the land reclaiming human structures, and the juxtaposition of security and danger in wilderness. The detail of the window onto the land, within a broader space, is metonymical for this larger vision and awareness. Within a flower center is the broader wilderness: within the red Indian Paintbrush is a fire in the forest, and the Foxtail holds the wind. Each is like a membrane of perception, an opaque parasol filtering light between myself and some aspect of nature.

Similarly, a photograph is a part of self in which the punctum of the soul emerges. Like a window it opens onto a broader vision yet simultaneously encloses revealing how we perceive the connections between the earth and humans. In a picture of a dwelling, a tree, or a water droplet are voices or faces of the land and the inner/outer tensions of the dynamics of wildness within us.



**Figure 18 ~ Two Landscapes, Tyhee Lake**

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My photographs, as self-portraits, act to embody a spirit of place and my experience in the land of my childhood. The photograph situates the language of my memory, my perception of the passage of time. My human eye responds to the gestures of sky, land and water. This, for me, is both autobiographical and the embodiment of a spirit of place (*genius loci*). The inner and outer tensions of living in this place are invitations into an initiation of the self into a sacred land. The photograph, a membrane between my self and nature, is a reminder to be receptive to the outer world, to learn to listen and to see, and to attend respectfully to the illumination of all beings. To remember, to recognize the resemblance of wildness within each other, to give thanks for what in wilderness is recurring and indestructible, these are my spiritual exercises, these are the qualities of my home in nature, these are my moments of grace.

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