

**Revealing Place Through Art:
A Métissage of Indwelling Within Thin Places**

by
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Abstract

This inquiry explores how artists are influenced by place - in particular our deep relationship with the natural world. This métissage approach weaves together poetic inquiry, life writing, and photographic inquiry – a multi-modal, multi-sensory, and heuristic pathway to seeking place. It is about evocation and provocation that comes from the indwelling of place, and the deep dialogic with place. Does place live within the artistic creation? How does place inform the geography of our embodied poetics? Does illness trespass on, or open an artist to synergies with place? Society traditionally asks artists to make meaning, to be the human vessel that translates. Place/nature asks artists not to *generate* meaning so much as to *discern* the meaning already there. This inquiry created an observational pathway that leads to a discernment of ‘thin places’, witnesses the communion as well as synergy of artist and place; and honours the way home.

Keywords: place; artists; inquiry; poetics; thin places; métissage

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the answers still blowing in the wind.

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I must acknowledge, too, the friends that have never allowed me to give up on this. Friends who have offered encouraging words, or advice, or offers to read, or commiseration, or a good firm kick in the butt, or (very) large glasses of wine. When I was feeling like I would give up – *they* never did. Thank you *especially* Bratislav (Brad) Mladenovic, Barbara Crocker and Chris McGill.

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Preface



“Heart in Pieces of Places”

Created by Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Chapter 1.

Friluftsliv (Norwegian)

- free air life; coming home to nature



Image 1-1. “Self-Portrait”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“How hard it is to escape from places. However carefully one goes they hold you – you leave little bits of yourself fluttering on the fences – like rags and shreds of your very life.”

– Katherine Mansfield, Journal Entry

“Where lies your landmark, seamar, or soul’s star?”

– Gerald Manley Hopkins, “On the Portrait of Two Beautiful Young People”

*“Scholars, I plead with you,
Where are your dictionaries of the wind, the grasses?”*

- Norman MacCaig, “By the Graveyard, Luskentyre”

It is difficult to say what it is about place that makes it so important to my work as an artist – a writer and photographer. I suppose because place is so elemental, so intuitive, my relationship with it is innate and therefore pulling an explanation out of myself is a formidable endeavour. How to give voice, how to give a vocabulary, to what place *is* to me . . . ?

Barry Lopez, I think, explains it best:

The outline of an answer is in the small flock of birds bursting and weaving through the pendant branches of the cedar just now, backlit by fog on the water. . . The physical allure of the event, how it pulls the eye – the convergence of light, animation, and color, the fleetness of the moment, the mysterious identity of the actors – can be successfully plumbed; but more of this apparition lies outside the senses, beyond the province of the intellect. It is within the ambit of wisdom . . . A community of birds, moving relentlessly through subdued light, in harmony with all else, does not need a destination to be beautiful. They do not need an explanation to have meaning. They do not have to serve a purpose. Merely by moving through, they instigate wonder. They stir possibility. A wave of anonymous energy, the fate of which bears directly on our own. (Lopez, 2007, p. x)

The language of my current place is raucous and blustering. The mountains seem vehement in how they take up immense, groaning space. The water runs with chortles and guffaws as it runs between its shadowed cliffs and vaults over them in great falls to the sea. Birdsong is insistent. And geese and seagulls and ravens are aggressive birds,

they make you notice them. Natural place here is in-your-face place. And I have grown to love it.

My place of prairie has a more implied, ambiguous language. It does not speak of itself in terms of prodigious mountains or thick forests filled with consciousness. Reticent - but, nonetheless, you hear it – in the trill of red-winged blackbirds or the chirr of grasshoppers, the occasional warning clacking of a rattlesnake tail. You smell it – in the mixed grasses and sweet grass on the wind, in the hot dust that smells like over-ironed shirts, in the astringent smell of looming rain after weeks of drought. You feel it – in the constant tug of the constant wind, singing lonely; the grit in your tangled hair; the dry burn along your shoulders.

I was born into the small gentility of Britain but I was baptized into the prairie of Alberta. And, to continue with the analogy, I was born again when coming to live in this place of the West Coast. It was like learning to love coloured pencils after years of charcoal and pastels – the 64 pencil set, because there are so many different shades of green.

I will speak, too, of the thin places – those apertures and thresholds, interstices and in-between places, where we are startled out of old ways of seeing and narcissistic ways of being.

And *that* is why place is so essential to me as an artist, and in myself. I must *take* time and *make* openness with the art I produce. I have to have empty eyes, so that what it (the artwork) is to become (whether photograph or poem) fills my eyes with what it is, when it is ready. I think we need to approach place with empty eyes, but an open heart, so that place can fill them both with who it is.

Chapter 2.

Ymholiad (Welsh)

- in search of (Queries, Methodologies and Métissage)



Image 2-1. “Sunset Clouds”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;

How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.”

- Walt Whitman, “A child said, What is the grass?”

You are about to read a thesis abundant with vignettes – images, stories, poems, observations - it is *meant* to be personal; my signature is meant to be there. The experiences, the knowing, approaches that were taken, the understanding – all braid into a polyphonic voice, harmonious and together. I wanted this thesis to be multi-focal as well as multi-disciplinary, there is another voice besides my own, and there are experiences beyond my own.

In this thesis I have combined research disciplines to build a true and potent connection between aesthetics and experience and praxis – like a woven blanket. The autobiographical/life writing takes the form of a narrative memoir. It also touches on becoming, on (re)creation, and on illness/wellness as a contributing weave in the fabric. Inquiry in the form of poetry requires a particular kind of “paying attention”. I speak to the experience(s) of place, of the visceral physicality and embodiment. The artistic result of my inquiry (the photographs and poetry of place) have come out of the conscious reaction to and reflective quality of my relationships to place. I needed, too, to integrate my praxis with the inquiry, to give equal weight to the visual and the linguistic.

The result is a complex, reflexive, tapestry-like creation, a diverse praxis – an arras of colour to the eye and word to the ear. The resultant reflection and practice blends the process of aesthetic and artistic response. I have woven art and inquiry together. Blurring. Blending. Braiding. It is a multi-modal métissage.

It is not easy using métissage (Hasebe-Ludt, Chambers, Leggo) as a connecting methodology. One not only works within and between different approaches but must also see where perspectives and paradigms intersect. One must read widely and deeply. It is like picking up a thread from the floor, and drawing another from the woven chaos of a bird’s nest, and pulling another from the beading on your grandmother’s ancient wedding

dress, then weaving the different coloured and textured threads together to create something else entirely – yet still honour the intrinsic purpose.

Thus, this thesis is an inter-personal and relational exploration of the impact of place on artistic practice. A poetic and first-person autobiographical/living inquiry (Meyer, 2010, p. 85) (punctuated with image), that illustrates, disarrays, inquires, and re-creates understandings about how place and the artist relate to each other and how the two artists (myself and another) participating in the living inquiry mediate their identities within and in-between place and their art. I am interested in the depth (of emotion, of experience, of engagement) that we, as artists and as humans have with nature/place. I focus on the actual place-based experiences (humble, respectful) of both my own reality and the actuality of another artist in place.

The combining of poetic inquiry, life writing and lived experience or narrative (Connelly, F.M. & Clandinin, D.J., 1990, pp.2-14), and photography allows for a rooted approach to the inquiry of place and its impact on artists. Art making is a sensate process. A profound, reflective path is needed to truly begin to understand why place is so meaningful. An approach seated in relationship structures the knowing of place from an intimate point of view, an embodied point of view (Snowber, 2016).

It is in this space wherein we live, wherein we breathe, wherein we burn brightly. Like poetry, experiencing place requires us to attend, to pay attention. It asks us to see where the experience is *within* us, and relate it to that which is *outside* of us. The act of attending “finds an echo within” (Merleau-Ponty, 1993, p. 140). The poet, Mary Oliver, in her book of poems, *Red Bird*, says: “Instructions for living a life. Pay attention. Be astonished. Tell about it.” (2008, p. 37). I pay attention to what poet/prophets like Mary Oliver say about subjects like place. She is an inhabitant of the in-between places, the interstices. Oliver “stands quite comfortably on the margins of things, on the line between earth and sky, the thin membrane that separates human from what we loosely call animal” (Kumin, 1993, p. 16).

Inspiration for my methodologies comes out of what Carolyn Ellis (2000) describes as an unfolding form of qualitative research that centres on a weaving and

blending of the personal and the academic. The purpose is to understand self, using first person expressed in such diverse structures as poetry, photography, personal essays and narratives. Thus, the personal history becomes a mode of pedagogical journey. I walk into place, . . . and then articulate place.

The methodologies are steeped in the experience of place. The poetic inquiry, for example, is a poetic condensation of the lived experience. Poetry intensifies and evokes the experiential praxis. Place is omnipotent, in its way. We must all be some-place. My being in the place of intimacy, of my evocative journey through poetic words, places primacy on the sensual, and the intuitive – of my living and being in the world. Awareness of place is caught up in my breath, is felt through the sharp ache in my bones. I cannot ignore, I cannot disregard.

The qualitative methods of life writing and poetic inquiry were chosen, in part, out of my life-long love of stories and words. They were also chosen out of a wish for the articulation of my scholarship to be accessible. A hope that, as Sullivan (2010, p. 58) puts it, “research, like art, [can] be accessible, evocative, embodied, empathic, provocative”. These methods are the ways in which I want to express my knowledge. And because I speak of place, the methodology needed to flow in much the same way as a river flows. What better method(s) than those that incorporate cadence, rhythm, and the intonation that comes out of the writings of our life and poetry? Additionally, the visual methods of photography and other artwork are strewn throughout the text as I weave in and out of the relationships and collective affinities of art to self, and self to place, and place to art. The photographs, paintings, and poetry provide a testimony and a methodology to deepen and heighten lived experience, and to illuminate the intense and resonant sensory, and sensuous encounters and art making processes that emerge out of experiential knowing and learning.

At times, the thought of blending my personal autobiography into the text or verse caused me concern or disquiet. After all, why would anyone want to read these words? Why would anyone want to know of the self I bring to the inquiry – of my reflection on place *through* myself? In telling you of place, I am telling you of me. There is an element

of vulnerability in revelation. There is an element of defenselessness in exposure. The peril inherent in being an ‘I’-witness. Nonetheless, I have attempted to make of this thesis a mercurial space with fluid and permeable boundaries; where a kind of métissage of inquiry, art making, and contemplation creates genuine conversations and alternative forms of knowing. I invite you to journey with me through these pages and visit and dwell with your places as well. Attend to the heartbeat. Lean your ear to the high note.

Place listens and asks *us* to listen.

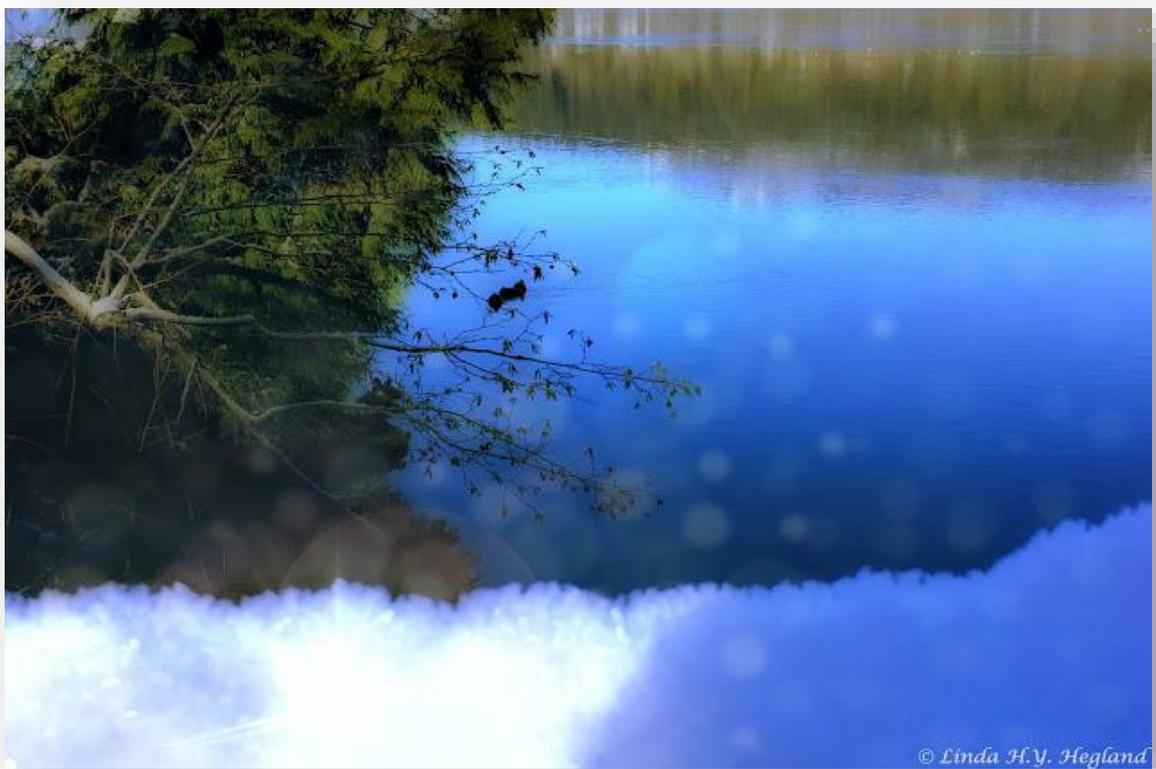


Image 2-2. “Blue Sky Reflected in Winter Waters.”

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

And so I have come to re-collect and learn to know my authentic voice – and the many voices of place. These methods will allow me to comprehend my continually transforming identity in relation to place, but also in relation to scholarship. I hope to “map an intermediate space we can’t quite define yet, a borderland between passion and

intellect, analysis and subjectivity, ethnography and autobiography, art and life”.
(Vaughan, 2006, p. 22).

I know that by choosing these means of explanation I fly in the face of objectivity, detachment, theory building, and generalization that is the ‘culture’ of much of scientific empiricism. Bochner & Ellis (2016, p. 25) have said “when you look closely at the history of human sciences, you find that the forms of inquiry that gain acceptance usually are the ones that serve the needs of the culture at that time”. Life writing and poetic inquiry, woven with experiential embodiment, makes it possible to bend and blend and break through the conventional genres of research and writing practices. Once the fissures that result are opened, transformative change is inevitable (Clifford and Marcus, 1986; Denzin, 1997). The world and its scholars are in need of transformation; and places in need of acknowledgement.

Ross Mooney (1957, p. 155) said:

Research is a personal venture which, quite aside from its social benefits, is worth doing for its direct contribution to one’s own self-realization. It can be taken as a way of meeting life with the maximum of stops open to get out of experience its most poignant significance, its most full-throated song.

And as William F. Pinar (2014, p. xv) points out:

Reality is a matter of revelation. Subjectivity, not the laboratory, is its site. The artist’s studio houses both. “Drawing from and writing through our arts practices,” Susan Walsh, Barbara Bickel, and Carl Leggo explain, “we offer insights into creative ways of being present, in the moment and also open to what is not yet known”. . . the temporal structures the spatial: the “not yet” – Greene’s still resounding phrase – temporalizes “what still lies beyond”.

In recent years, there has been seen an increasing acknowledgement and acceptance of the significance of arts-based research such as poetic and photographic inquiry, and life writing. These methods of inquiry involve the researcher coming to know him/or herself as part of the (subjective) inquiry process. For the most part, empirical forms of research have not acknowledged that observation is *always* impacted

by the researcher. Or, at least, researcher ‘infiltration’ has been discouraged; the voice and perspective of the researcher creeping into the text is considered an adulteration.

Empirical forms of research tend to disconnect person from subject; they oblige one to visit a subject in a fixed, linear, almost static approach. Inquiry done subjectively is a dynamic process, open to wonder and puzzlement, embracing new ways of knowing. Parker J. Palmer, one of the founding members of the Center for Courage & Renewal, feels that inquiry/research *should* “get a grip” on us, should be allowed to become a part of us; and ourselves be a part of the inquiry. He speaks so precisely as to how a removed approach to inquiry can be so very destructive, that I will quote him here extensively:

The mode of knowing that dominates education creates disconnections between teachers, their subjects, and their students because it is rooted in fear. This mode, called *objectivism*, portrays truth as something we can achieve only by disconnecting ourselves, physically and emotionally, from the thing we want to know. Why? Because if we get too close to it, the impure contents of our subjective lives will contaminate that thing and our knowledge of it. No matter what ‘it’ is—an episode in history, a creature from the wild, a passage in great literature, or a phenomenon of human behaviour—objectivism claims that we can know the things of the world truly and well only from afar . . . The role of the mind and the senses in this scheme is not to connect us to the world but to hold the world at bay, lest our knowledge of it be tainted. In objectivism, subjectivity is feared not only because it contaminates things but because it creates relationships between those things and us . . . When a thing ceases to be an object and becomes a vital, interactive part of our lives—whether it is a work of art, an indigenous people, or an ecosystem—it might get a grip on us, biasing us toward it, thus threatening the purity of our knowledge once again. So objectivism, driven by fear, keeps us from forging relationships with the things of the world. Its modus operandi is simple: when we distance ourselves from something, it becomes an object; when it becomes an object, it no longer has life; when it is lifeless, it cannot touch or transform us, so our knowledge of the thing remains pure. For objectivism, any way of knowing that requires subjective involvement between the knower and the known is regarded as irrational, true feeling is dismissed as sentimental, the imagination is seen as chaotic and unruly, and storytelling is labeled as personal and pointless. (Palmer, 2010, pp. 51-52)

Barone and Eisner (2012, p. 14) suggest that, unlike the usually accepted forms of research, utilizing “arts based research implies a fundamental shift away from the

conventional assumption that all research is meant to bring us closer to a final understanding of various dimensions of the social world”.

The methodologies of inquiry and knowing that I have chosen for this thesis are fiercely antithetical to objectivism. They, instead, advocate for *subjectivity*, relatedness and integrated understanding and articulation. An entering to the wholeness, which is then reflected in this work, and in this writing.

Manulani Aluli Meyer (2003) says that when doing research (inquiry) that we must develop the correct orientation to ourselves, first and foremost, and to our place. She goes on to say that behind research there is a voice, an interpretation (an hermeneutic) that, within inquiry-based methodologies is no longer silenced, as is the case most times in strictly empirical methodology. She attests that within the triangulation of meaning – that being Body, Mind, Spirit, society has tended to give credence only to mind.

. . .how to withstand the ravages of one way of thinking among the fullness and complexity of what it means to differ, to stand in juxtaposition, to be a Self that unifies on its own terms (Meyer, 2003, p. 54)

An indigenous, holistic approach – a contemplative experience, an intentionality.

Meyer extends her triangulated means of hermeneutics to place and the knowledge that can grow out of an integral intelligence and from those that lived in the place before us, stating that “the spiritual facet of epistemology is fundamental to those who know personalities of rain and the temperament of stone” (2003).

If a people develop a relationship with a place . . .they will be in full dialogue with what that place . . . has to teach . . . These are epistemological points that bring us to ancient clarity . . . place educates . . . a ‘seeing’ if you will, of what is present in the moment of experience (Meyer, 2003, p. 57).



Image 2-3. “Abandoned Barn, Alberta”.

I love old barns more than churches. Even in their dying, they sing the sunshine that pours through their rotting rafters. (LH)

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

The creation of art is an authentic and genuine process that often blends disciplines or blurs the perimeters of each to the other. Art process “becomes research when practices are articulated as inquiry” (Hernandez-Hernandez & Fendler, 2013). Or as Sullivan (2005, p. 223) states: “the imaginative and intellectual work undertaken by artists is a form of research”. Scholars such as Carl Leggo (2009, 2012, 2016), Erika Hasebe-Ludt (2008, 2009, 2012, 2013), Cynthia Chambers (2008, 2009, 2012), Vicki Kelly (2004, 2012, 2013, 2014), and Celeste Snowber (2015, 2016) – to name just a few, bring to qualitative research an appreciation that a sensitive (and sensate) research position is fundamental to the profound commitment to experience. I walk with these scholars on their intrepid odyssey, reaching for their courage to strengthen mine; and hope that I may be just as audacious and undaunted in my scholarship.

Arts-based research opens a way to interconnection, not only within the methods employed but also between reader and researcher. The research can “bring both arts and social inquiry out of the elitist institutions of academia and art museums, and relocate inquiry within the realm of local, personal, everyday places . . . “ (Finley, 2008, p. 72).

That is not to say that arts-based research methodologies do not have rigour. As they are methodologies that are both practice- and process-based, they demand a far greater creative commitment. The “method of discovery” *is* the discovery (Richardson, 1997, p. 88). It could even be ventured that there are more levels of ‘knowing’. “Arts-based research methodologies are characteristically emergent, imagined, and derivative from an artist/researcher’s practice or arts praxis inquiry models; they are capable of yielding outcomes taking researchers in directions the sciences cannot go” (Rolling, 2010, p. 107).

Poetic Inquiry: Intersections Made of Words

Poetic inquiry is both the result of a creative process, and the creating itself. In other words, it is both product and process (Faulkner, 2009; Prendergast, 2009). It is knowledge and a journeying to knowledge – a means to an expansion of presence.

Poetry concisely registers on the nerves the whole skein of human emotions. It harrows, enthrals, awes, dazzles, confides . . . The soul is the depth of our being and poetry is one means of sounding that depth . . . A poem doesn’t wile away time; it engages our fleetingness and makes it articulate. It seizes and shapes time. (Wormser & Cappella, 1999, p. xiii)

I use Poetic Inquiry because I long for intimacy. Essayist Barry Lopez (1997) perceives that being vulnerable to place is the gesture of opening one’s self to intimacy with the other by leaving rational senses behind and, instead, utilizing emotional states of being. When intimately open to place, and in being aware of the emotions that may come of that, I can embrace and embody – grace. Poetics transforms that grace into words – the corporeal intimacy of forming words in the mouth and slipping them from the tongue.

Gouzouasis (2012, p. 283) asks the question: “What is experience unless it is reflected upon and connected to the world? Too often the popular pedagogy moves along

on a linear path that offers no place to sit and pause”. I need that ‘sit and pause’ to authentically experience place and to authentically write about it. I cannot speak to or for place if my words are not accessible. “The poet makes the world visible in new and different ways, in ways ordinary social science writing does not allow. The poet is accessible, visible, and present in the text . . . “ (Denzin, 2013, p. 86)

Poetic inquiry allows for language to be used as a perceiving and constructing process. It allows for connection in (and of) many senses. Place aches to be heard, and found in human utterance. And poetry *is* topographical, written in stones and bled from their seams. Poetry enables place to be experienced and interpreted through metaphor, subtleties, and descriptive cunning. There is poetry in place. Inquiring poetically provides an original and compelling approach to understanding the intricate stratum of place. There is reciprocity between poetry and place. Poetic inquiry is ‘emplaced’ writing. Place emerges and is made up of sounds, textures, smells . . . longing. Poetic inquiry engages those elements, and through poiesis, makes poetry.

Being in and part of the world, whether we are contemplating it, interpreting it, re/visioning it, or something else entirely to inquire poetically is to attune our senses to this world. Inquiry, after all, must be to remain open to the possible, multiple contiguous relationships for the poet/inquirer to find the right distance between self and other, between the researcher and the participant, and between the poet and the poetry. Though we might wish it otherwise, our embodied and social existence in this world is not straightforward or transparent – and so I wonder how a fierce, tender, and mischievous engagement with worldliness of our lives might allow us to reshape it and make something new – we might call this learning – we might call it poetry. (Wiebe, 2015, p.163)

Poetic inquiry opens the door to what geographer Yi-Fu Tuan describes as the “narrative-descriptive approach” for the questing of place and our self in place. Or, as Lynn Butler-Kisber (2010) attests, poetic inquiry can lend the understanding to communicate discovery, pulse, and poignancy in research.

Prendergast (2009) maintains that the best poetic inquiry is that which embraces effect as well as the empirical mind and concerns itself with themes grounded in the

“affective experiential domain”. Poets look for the scraps and residue left behind by an experience.

There is a door. It opens. Then it is closed. But a slip of light stays, like a scrap of unreadable paper left on the floor, or the one red leaf the snow releases in March.

- Jane Hirshfield, “Three Times My Life Has Opened”



Image 2-4. “Last Red Leaf”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Poetry is a means to seek new scholarship and knowledge. Poetry is a means to approximate presence. I say approximate because there is a shifting required of our modern mind that beseeches an essentiality that not all are comfortable with. The poetic mind, however, steps back, takes a moment to blur its inner vision, and steps from a world of reality to one of another kind. Our toes wiggle over the threshold of a thinner

place – a place where presence is lucid and profound. We can almost touch the beautiful strangeness.

Poetic inquiry invites me into the in-between space between creative and critical scholarship. Such a space is reflexive and critical, aware of the nexus that is both self and other, both personal and public. (Wiebe, 2014, p. 3)

Or, as poet Lorna Crozier (2002, p. 8) says:

That's what I'm interested in. The nexus between what you know and what you'll never know, something coming close to you and then dancing away. The poem flickers in the middle of those two movements. Sometimes what's holy is how the light falls on the tomato sitting on your windowsill. It's that small and that fleeting. That simple and that complex.

Poetic inquiry comes out of 'living poetically'. It offers another lens in which to encounter our world. It reflects a 'crossing-over' to experience of place through natural place, definitive but also creative experiences, my own heart and attention, and perception as "a poetic, emotional, personal, spiritual commitment and experience" (Leggo, 2005, p. 439).

The poets march on, taking two principles of language very seriously: meaning is unlimited and everybody has some. So we say to the tinhorns: Kill and eat all the poets you want. We'll make more – in the underground, in our hearts, our thoughts, our stories, and the backrooms of our academies. And when the sun comes around again, look for us. (Brady, 2004, p. 636)

Part of living poetically is embodying the experience of which one writes. In reference to place, it is the literal, and messy, and erotic testament of experiential research 'drawn' or spoken of in artistic ways. We are replete with senses – touch, taste, hearing, and vision – wide open to the whisper and the ringing; the elation and the swelter, and the sorrow. Poetic inquiry releases us to speak, reflectively and self-consciously, to the constellations, the enigmas, and the paradoxes that we experience in place – and in life. Finding the words for the poems that articulate this is like affirming the inception of a soul, where it inhales at the threshold of the sigh of another, be that other a stone, a tree, a river, or a person.

We are the land. The land is us. We are the water. The water is us. We are not separate from the earth, but part of it. We are all made up of stars. The physical world is shot through with the pulse of the holy. We understand this viscerally, deep in our bones and under our skin, there is a sense that we are all part of the DNA of the universe (Snowber, 2016, p. 78)

That in-dwelling in the flesh and in the heart extends and enhances our minds, which spend far too much time disembodied.

. . . sensuous scholarship is ultimately a mixing of head and heart. It is an opening of one's being to the world – a welcoming. Such embodied hospitality is the secret of great scholars, painters, poets, and filmmakers whose images and words re-sensualize us. (Stoller, 2010, p. xviii)

To speak to the process of a kind of wayfaring through place and life, I turn to poetic inquiry because “poetry can ground theories of the world that actually involve our interactions with it, not just abstractions from it” (Brady, 2004, p. 1). It acts as a compass, within which I find my orientation, my trajectory, the discipline that ‘I am in the discipline of’ (Kelly, V., 2013, p. 154). All journeys consist of an unfolding of the poetic: the exodus, the interstice, the downfall, the capricious vagabonding, the epiphany, the return, and the transformation. One can only trust in oneself that both this journey and the poesis are rendered with candour, insight and grace.

Life Writing: Crossroads Made of Experience

In regard to both poetic inquiry and life writing, David G. Smith (1999, p. 43) advises that *all* writing is autobiographical. Erika Hasebe-Ludt, Cynthia Chambers, and Carl Leggo (2009, p. 9) suggest that braiding various personal writings together serves as an exercise of “merging and blurring genres, texts and identities, an active literary stance, political strategy and pedagogical praxis”. Authors/poets like Linda Hogan, Terry Tempest Williams, and Gary Snyder are academics that use narrative as a channel for lending articulation to their philosophical ideals and ideas. The respect and weight that is given to their work is indicative of how combining inquiry with narrative/life writing is both a multi-faceted and compelling methodology.

Using life writing as a methodology (Hasebe-Ludt, E., Chambers, C., & Leggo, C., 2009) is also a means of studying one's own life. It opens additional doors to the inquiry of place. Especially in terms of the question of how place impacts on artists and the products (and process) of that interaction, the personal relation of artist to place needs to be understood. Life writing lends itself to the "humanistic commitment of the qualitative researcher to study the world always from the perspective of the interacting individual" (Lincoln & Denzin, 1994, p. 575).

Life writing allows me to experience and tell of my study much more profoundly and genuinely. This methodology allows me to speak of connection to, and relationship with, place. It releases me to come to my 'place' of thinking - my knowledge, by embodying experiential meanings. I wish to illustrate the complexity and richness of place as it is concretely lived. I need to write from the source of my own experience. At the same time as I tell about a place, I tell about a life, *my* life.

Drawing from literary, poetic, artistic, Indigenous, feminist spiritual, and other related epistemological and wisdom traditions, we advocate auto/biographical, life writing inquiry as a way to reach into the *heart of wisdom* (Hasebe-Ludt & Jordan, 2010, p. 1).

In life writing, we provide the reader with an invitation to recognize and connect. There is, through this text, a place for readers themselves to remember or to perceive a reciprocity. I'm inviting you to the process; to discovering the characteristics of place with me. This text serves as a meeting place. "To write is to carve a new path through the imagination . . . To read is to travel through that terrain with the author" (Solnit, 2001, p. 72). Your reading is a praxis. The shape of my knowing is a praxis. Therein lies the reciprocity.

This reciprocity, the interchange, may not just be between myself as writer and you as reader, but also in the reader remembering affinity within his or her own sense of place. "Places possess a marked capacity for triggering acts of self-reflection", says Basso (1996, p. 55), inspiring thoughts about who one presently is, or memories of who one used to be, . . . the experience of sensing places . . . is thus both roundly reciprocal

and incorrigibly dynamic”. Life writing, then, is a means of ‘gifting’ . . . a means of invoking common ground and synchronicity.

How are geography, autobiography, and memory connected? How do we take up and live with Rainer Maria Rilke’s challenge – to be mindful of the places we inhabit, to be present in them, and to act in response to their souls and to the life they signify? . . . How do we see the value . . . of writing autobiographically, as a literature of ourselves, in such a place? (Hasebe-Ludt & Chambers, 2009, p. 2)

Tim Ingold (2011, p. 178) suggests that even the *physical* act of our life writing forms an embodied métissage:

Understood as a weaving of threads rather than a hammering of keys, as melodic rather than percussive, writing is readily comparable to stitching or embroidery, and the idea of the text as something woven is revealed to be not a loose metaphor but an accurate description of what goes on.

Life writing is a complex and many-layered terrain for and about Being-in-the-World.



Image 2-5. “Sun-lit Moss in Forest”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Photographic Inquiry: Paths Made of Light

Photographic inquiry as a way of knowing incorporates a disciplined, arts-based way of seeing (Costello & Iversen, 2012, pp. 679-693). This methodology can blend and integrate all of landscape, light, significant detail, place, poetics, and narrative. Though it may appear to be an objective means of research, it is actually far from that. A photographer looks for symbolic and striking details – choosing what to frame, how to frame, what to place in sharpest focus in order to highlight significance. Details impart essential truths, as relevant to photography as it is to poetry. The meanings in the choice of details are complex, layered, enigmatic – never straightforward or linear. For example, a river flows, creates, destroys, and acts as both a path and a boundary. We can drown in its depths or simply drift on its surface, dependent on how much we entrust to its temperament. So, too, does a photograph have multiple meanings, dependent on the

photographer's use of metaphor or other tropes. The particular quality of place, and how it is photographed, is contingent on how the photographer interprets its character; or feels him/ or herself in that place, or how he/she chooses to tell the story.

Alongside the concept of poetic inquiry, and life writing as reflection, my art as photograph has become a form of photographic inquiry. It is another strand of the 'context' that defines and embodies myself as artist and scholar. *Context* comes from the Latin word 'contexere' – to weave. Context weaves patterns – the patterns that emerge from my life writing, from the poetic and narrative word, and from the images (the photography). Thus, the context shapes me.

A tree, growing, is context – a weaving together – of leaf, branch, trunk, and root; decaying and transpiring, a tree shapes larger weavings of soil and atmosphere. A river, flowing, is context for water, sand, fish, and fishermen; flooding and ebbing, it shapes bar, banks, and valley . . . Context is a place where processes happen, a setting of dynamic relationships . . . (Spirn, 1998, p. 133)

The camera acts as an extension of my hand or finger, like pen on paper. Light becoming ink, forming images on paper. "The relationship between image as photograph and text as life-writing becomes a métissage of living practice . . . a fluid mixing of spaces, places, histories and memories that compose my story . . . Rooted in interconnectedness and relationality, métissage attends to liminal spaces" (Sinner, 2015, p. 64). Photography is like the writing of words into images. Just as a paintbrush follows the contours of landscape, then dips into icy blues where the snow hollows, so the camera follows the trail of light and finds those self-same icy blues. Or such as when, through a macro lens, the individual beads of pollen loom large as the sun in the sky, insignificant words can become compelling and immense as in a haiku. For Eudora Welty, known widely for her short stories and acclaimed for her photographs, the camera was "a hand-held auxiliary of wanting-to-know." (Welty, 1995, p. 84)

It has been said that knowledge composed through images or text is presumed to be separate and distinctively different. "Words and image are like two hunters 'pursuing its quarry by two paths'" (Mitchell, 1995, p. 70 quoting Foucault, 1982). The suggestion is that these two means of knowing can certainly complement each other but that they

provide different kinds of insight. I think otherwise. My understanding is that it is not possible to completely separate these two means of knowing. For myself, writing and photography are inherently connected, one inspires the other. My hope is that my words and my photographs speak within the same voice. My desire is that the images open to the poetry and that the stories open to the images. I believe that photography generates a new kind of revelation – of consideration, especially when the writer is also the photographer. What the poet sees in a photograph, and puts into words, creates a transformation – “extending what is often an immediate response into something more lasting and reflective”. (Greenberg, J., 2001, p. 4). So the medium of photography, for me, is correlative for what it is to bring knowledge, memories, or mindfulness to an articulate image – and, ultimately, for what it is to write with light– “there is no picture and no poem unless you yourself enter it and fill it out” (Bronowski, J., 2016, p. 16).

Having said that, I must pause for a moment to comment on the convention of captioning photographs. The photos in this thesis are captioned – it is the expectation and convention of an academic thesis. In an artistic sense, I feel that my writing and my images inform each other (one path rather than two). But photographs are documentary much more than pictorial, specific rather than generic. I do feel, however, that the captioning of a photograph creates an ambiguous borderland where, if I project my own understanding of what the photo is to convey, I intrude on what the viewer chooses to see and understand. In light of that, I have created my captions, with a few exceptions, to be merely factual.

I think photography, like writing, is a rephrasing – a communication, from ourselves to ourselves. As a photographer, there is imbued an instinctual manner of seeing, of witnessing, that leads to deeper insights, a deeper ‘vision’, if you will. When photographing, I am often caught by a detail without knowing yet what the whole is, then come to comprehend the whole through compelling details and perceptions. I let them speak. Photographs can profess an essence, a self, as does writing.

Place and photography alike are made of the “primary raw materials of light and time” (Berger, 2011, p. 85) – they are the most basic and simple of elements, an energy.

Place has many forms of energy – light, land, weather, movement, sound. When creating images of place, that energy generates a dialogue, a quality to acknowledge and to grasp within the photograph. In experiencing place and engendering image of place, the act of going beyond our *selves* is the act of art.

Sometimes a photograph offers the photographer a gift he didn't expect, a marvellous detail – what the eye longing for meaning sees unconsciously, and includes. How wonderful it is that the decision to take a photograph is mysterious – giving us, like love, more than we bargained for. (Rosenthal, n.d.; n.p.)

To photograph place as I do demands that I am aware and open to seizing the narratives and poetry of pattern; the startling, bewildering, and eccentric. The interwoven and vital, the serendipitous and fleeting, so too the immutable and awe-some. “Photography is a medium of thought; it is a means of discovery and expression, a way to decipher patterns, to work out ideas, to find and tell stories.” (Spirn, 2014, p. 3)

Over the last couple of decades, there has been increasing interest in using visual images in research. It has been recognized that visual image has “power to evoke emotional embodied responses and mediate different understandings depending on its form”. (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 124). Spirn (2014) tells us that photography has always been a means of discovery, for both the scientific and artistic fields. As Richardson (2000, p. 937) attests: “Science is one lens; creative arts another. We see more deeply using two lenses. I want to look through both lenses, to see a ‘social science art form’”. The crucial thing is that there is always an underlying meaning. Awareness and knowledge are enfolded in place and it is offered to be participated in and perceived. The photography is an initial act towards finding a way post.

There was a time when I saw a photograph as an outcome, a conclusion – as a product rather than as a process or an inception – “at first I looked, but did not see. My camera recorded a spectacle, but my mind missed the wonder” (Spirn, 2014, p. 9). But as I came to study place, I wanted to know what makes a place distinct, to understand what the soul of a place is, and to incorporate this essence in photographs. The camera is a

means, a tool like a paintbrush, to give voice to and illuminate the spirit moving in and through place.

What I learned for myself came right at the time and directly out of the taking of the pictures . . . a double thunderclap reverberates at the author's ears: the break of the living world upon what is already stirring inside the mind, and the answering impulse that in a moment of high consciousness fuses impact and image and fires them off together. (Welty, 1995, p. 38)

In paying closer attention to process, to the quality that is being offered up, images come to be embodied. Dorothea Lange, the photographer, advised: “. . . open yourself as wide as you can, . . . like a piece of unexposed, sensitized material, - like film itself” (Spirn, 2008, p. 17). As a result, the fine points of cognizance and remembrance in place become the landmarks – eternal rhythms and continual transformation; stones and sky and rivers. The cosmos in the corkscrew blemish of a dying apple's skin, the promise in a sunflower's seeds or the anticipation in a roses' infant bud. The poignancy of faded blooms, the strength in barren, cragged stone. It is not, then, just the photograph of a stone, or a hill. It is the colour story there, of the shadow story, or the way the light sweeps over the crest of the hill, or the texture of the lichen. In it, the specifics become grand.



Image 2-6. “Driftwood in Winter Sun”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Therefore . . .

These unique means of approaching inquiry result in incomparable revelations. They facilitate opening up to different aspects of knowing, deeper approaches to experience – to what it is to be human, and who we are in place.

These fields and their intersection with qualitative research, have opened up inquiry that valued the phenomenological [experiential], the autobiographical, and the artistic. Arts-based research has burgeoned to live in a multiplicity of ways including poetic inquiry, artography, performative inquiry, arts-informed learning, and many more. (Snowber, 2016, p. xv)

So, too, is it important that research be approached holistically – not just mentally and physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. Kevin Brophy attests that this stance is especially compelling in the instance of artistic quests such as poetry, whose sounds

and rhythms may resist language in its usual linear flow, returning us to a porous boundary between registers (Brophy, 2006, pp. 139-56). In Indigenous scholarship, for example, it is important to know how the self is situated, how the inquirer is related to the inquiry. It is within the concept of trust. We are implicitly woven into the creation – “an awareness in process” (Eakin, 1999), if you will. In this reclaiming of the wholeness of self, we experience a homecoming.

Native scholar Greg Cajete has written that in indigenous ways of knowing, we understand a thing only when we understand it with all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit . . . it is a whole human being who finds the beautiful path. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 47)

Kimmerer alludes to the fact that by opening oneself to more than one way of communing, and inquiring, that we may in ourselves become – and creates – a “new species of knowledge, a new way of being in the world” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 47).

The methodologies of poetic inquiry, life writing, and photographic inquiry are *my* way of being in the world. They have come to be recognized as effective strategies for accessing silenced voices, eliciting emotional responses, provoking conversations, and for encouraging a heightened social sensibility (Leavy, 2009). They bring a different (and extremely important) dialogue to the fields of arts-based research and curriculum studies.

Chapter 3.

Querencia (Spanish)

– a place from which one’s strength is drawn, where one feels at home; the place where you are your most authentic self

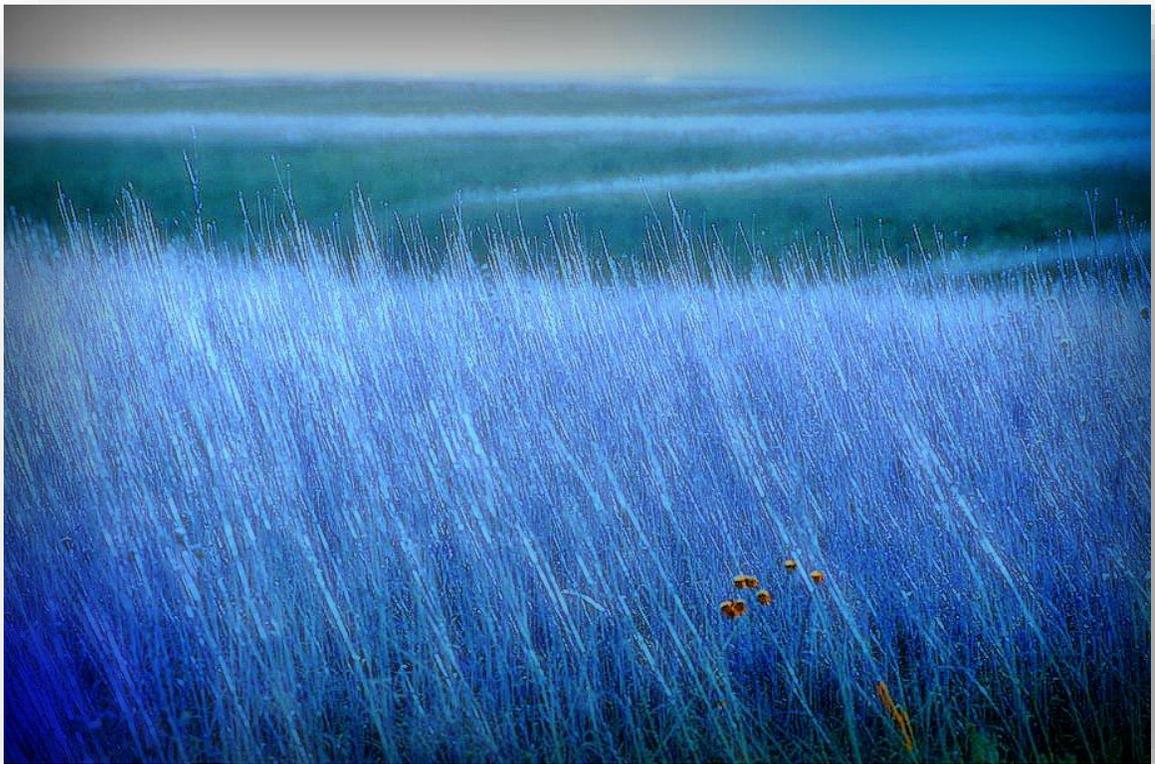


Image 3-1. “Prairie ‘Blue’ Grass”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“There are experiences of landscape that will always resist articulation . . . Nature will not name itself. Granite doesn’t self-identify as igneous. Light has no grammar. Language is always late for its subject.”

~ Robert Macfarlane, “Landmarks”

When I first began my studies in the M.A. program in Art Education at Simon Fraser University I did not realize that I was beginning a journey of change, nor did I realize the magnitude of that change. In the course of completing this degree, my health has suffered several setbacks and I did not realize that how I embodied those physical changes would also shape the journey. Or, conversely, how (re)opening myself to place, nature, and art would affect the process of embodiment. The effects of being a sort of vagabond, an irreverent tramp, as I explore things, people, ideas that have opened to me, are profound. I have found poetry, artefacts, talismans, a visual means of ‘seeing’ the world differently, a strength I was unaware I had. I found ‘place’ – places that lay deep in my heart though I no longer physically live there; places that exist in worlds much smaller than mine – and much larger. Illness, and the subsequent search for wellness, also came to bear on my journey to place.

Who/where are we as artists? Where does place assimilate and coalesce in ourselves and our art making? These questions are formidable and innumerable. This inquiry assists in understanding the meshing and reciprocity in these questions and lives in the art produced in the process. The inspired question of the research is the following: how do artists understand their artistic identity (and practice) in relation to place? What dry dust do their toes curl in; what wind flings the tears from their eyes? This is my inquiry, the question that “rubs” (Kelly); the supplication that makes me tremble.

I was dumbfounded, when I finally paid attention, that a place – a place of nature - still influences me, and most definitely influences my art. I wondered if other artists are affected like that. I began to ponder, to mull, to listen and pay heed, to write things down, to witness. I listened to the ‘rub’, to the question that would make me tremble.

I should define what I mean by ‘place’. I tend to use the words place, environment, and nature interchangeably. I may refer to the sun-drenched vastness of the

prairie and its early influences on me, or the birdsong-glutted trail that I often walk beside a muddling, puddling creek, or the domestic but rather wild confines of my own garden. All have an impact on my particular art (my focus of writing and photography), my body, my creativity. The rustle of the breeze through new leaves may lead me to try and capture movement in a photo. It could just as well hold me frozen in place, eyes closed, listening to the words of poetry whispered between leaf and air. Or it may make my heart lurch with a memory of wild wind through tall prairie grasses, buffeting my ears and blowing my hair almost from my scalp. In this thesis, I journey through to finding meaning of the impact of place on artists and their work. I explore my own work of photography and writing and also the art (painting) of another artist (Kaija Savinainen Mountain) and how place is deep within her brush strokes.

The challenge of this inquiry was in finding the common ground in articulating our experiences with place. How do we talk about this process? How does our art spring from the places of our lives? How does place quicken in our eyes so we see light in the shadowy forms of forests; or in our ears so that we hear music not only in birdsong but also in the shushing whisper of a breeze through leaves? How does place quicken in our veins so that the desultory meander of a wide, muddy river or the gabbling of a stone-filled creek pulls at the blood that feeds our hearts? How do I understand how Kaija relates to place? What *is* her place? How do she and I go deep into this inquiry?

I travelled across the country to Kaija's place. I had not seen her for almost 30 years. We have the kind of friendship that simply picks up the thread where we last dropped it and continues to weave the tapestry of what we are with each other. I walked her gardens with her, I drove on the dusty roads on which she runs, I drank cider with her while she tells me of the willow tree she grew from seed – towering above us. I walk with her and her horses across the pastures under which other beloved horses of hers have been buried. I look at her rooms full of paintings, I take innumerable photographs. I sit in the dark, candle-lit, cedar-scented sauna with her while the rain pelts outside and she tells me of how the world sometimes hurts and this place of gardens and nature is her solace and her compass. And at the edges, unexpected, came the intrusion of illness – both hers and mine. It came to have a voice in the inquiry as well.

Born in Finland, raised in Sweden, and an immigrant (like myself) to Canada, Kaija is keenly aware of place and its impact on both her life and her art. She says of her work:

My work has an immediacy of vision that is reflected in its spontaneous, seemingly disordered or haphazard nature. Underlying the surface imagery, however, are formal elements and a sense of balance that is surprising. The order results from my vision of what I want to express. I like to think my work has an energy, and an exuberant quality, amplified by the fact I work in mixed media – watercolours, oil paintings, and pastels -entirely left-handedly. A decision to use the untrained hand, to attempt to tap into instinctive, subconscious, non-rational energies that supposedly emanate from the “right brain” has added another interesting dimension to my work.

One needs to look beyond the surface and understand that elements of nature, and the animal world, for instance, horses, deer, and other animal beings can be symbolic parallels to human lives. I use the imagery of horses & deer in ways such as Expressionist painters like Franz Marc did – imagery that I believe is accessible to most people – to illuminate and enrich our existence, to help viewers to focus on the underlying potential and dignity of our lives. The works are suggestive – they speak to viewers, who can then ‘fill in the blanks’ with their own echoes and personal sense of the world around them.

Conversations with artist Kaija Savinainen-Mountain and visits to her studios/place offered the opportunity to inquire and seek, reflectively and reflexively, through conversation, art making and writing. The process of contemplation, consciousness, and ideas transmute with the visuals and experience with place and become other art forms – poetry, narrative, image. I will weave my narrative throughout this inquiry, blend my poetics with their voices, blur the edges of where *we* begin and *place* ends. The resulting marks and created consequences can come only from the perspectives of reverence, respect, reciprocity.

We are looking for a tongue that speaks with reverence for life, searching for an ecology of mind. Without it, we have no home, have no place of our own within the creation. (Hogan, 1996, p. 60)



Image 3-2. “Artist Kaija Savinainen Mountain at her Window”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“Where are you from?” We ask this question of each other constantly. If it didn’t really matter on some level, why would we ask it? People naturally and frequently refer back to a certain place – their place of origin, or where they grew up, or some other place of significant influence. And that place is held up as an exemplar for all other places one experiences. A place that we embody.

The catalyst that converts any physical location – any environment if you will – into a place, is the process of experiencing deeply. A place is a piece of the whole environment that has been claimed by feelings. Viewed simply as a life-support system, the earth is an environment. Viewed as a

resource that sustains our humanity, the earth is a collection of places.
(Alan Gussow, 1972, p. 1)

The inquiry of place is also about relationships, and a pedagogy of connections. Learning about place is not about intellectually apprehending it, it is about experiencing it (Chambers, 2009). It is about following a path with heart. I have lived in several different cities and three countries in my lifetime. I have come to understand the importance of place. I understand the importance of remembering and having place/land/nature remember *me*. Individual and collective memory is located in particular places, leading to experience and identity. When I lived in England the preoccupation with place is because it is small and ancient, when living in the USA the preoccupation with place was that of ownership and power. Living in Canada, with its enormous landmass, the topographical diversity, the force of nature, we are preoccupied with place and landscape in and of itself. These three very different places and cultures and communities form my memory, form my person.

In belonging to a landscape, one feels a rightness, an at-homeness, a knitting of self and world. This condition of clarity and focus, this being fully present, is akin to what the Buddhists call mindfulness, what Christian contemplatives refer to as recollection, what Quakers call centering down. I am suspicious of any philosophy that would separate this-worldly from other-worldly commitments. There is only one world, and we participate in it here and now, in our flesh and our place. (Sanders, 1993, p. 121)

Throughout this thesis, I attempt to find the in-betweens of place/art/poetry. In keeping with my personal philosophy of braiding, blending, and blurring my lived experience and my art, I am seeking the interstices at the point where they all meet – the thin places.

in·ter·stice (ĩn-tŭr'stĭs)

n. pl. **in·ter·stic·es** (-stĭ-sēz', -sĭz)

A space, especially a small or narrow one, between things or parts: "*There is a gleam of luminous gold, where the sinking western sun has found a first direct interstice in the clouds*" (Fowles, J., 2013).

I am seeking, in my experience of place, embodiment, and poetry, that “gleam of luminous gold”.

Heaven and earth are only three feet apart, but in thin places that distance is even shorter, so says a Celtic saying. In Celtic mythology, as in many cultural systems, the in-between places, the interstices, were those of places of transition, neither one thing nor the other. Doorways, shorelines, the forest’s edge, dusk and dawn. These are the places of power, the extraordinary, where we are wild in place. “I grew up with landscape as a recourse, with the possibility of exiting the horizontal realm of social relations for a vertical alignment with earth and sky, matter and spirit. (Solnit, 2006, p. 49)

I was born into this mythology, the way of seeing and being in the world. The Celtic/Gaelic/Anglo traditions, as do Indigenous traditions, understand the powerful effect of imagination as a means of interacting with and engaging the threshold between ourselves and other (seen or unseen). These traditions embrace vision-seeking customs. We are aware of our ‘dwelling’ in place and of the place that has been inspirited within us. It is a means of walking along a “path of reclaiming a relationship and dialogue with an earth that is aware of us”. (MacEowen, 2000, p. 114).

The earth is our origin and destination. The ancient rhythms of the earth have insinuated themselves into the rhythms of the human heart. The earth is not outside us; it is with: the clay from where the tree of the body grows . . . There is something in our clay nature that needs to continually experience this ancient, outer ease of the world. It helps us to remember who we are and why we are here. (O’Donohue, 2004, p. 36)

Sometimes, just sometimes, creatures such as birds will know when we occupy that interstitial place with them.

Fragments of Place #1

I collect bird feathers. Today I place another black and gold/orange feather with the others. The feathers live in a pile of colour on a table in my studio. The feathers are like messages left in secret places where I am meant to happen upon them.

In the summer season great flocks of tiny bush tits descend habitually on a bush in the yard, a bush that I have never been able to put a name to. They are late this year and I worry for them. It has been cold. The bush tits are *so* very tiny, like little fairy birds. They twitter constantly as they swarm like bees over the bush. The twittering sounds like baby breaths breathed through tiny chimes. I've come across, once or twice, their strange hanging nests made of moss and spider webs. What else but a fairy-blessed creature would make nests out of spider webs?

Here too, in my place, I am graced with the sweetest of birds – the mourning dove. Its gentle call of cooooOOOOO-woo-woo-woo greets me in the hushed quiet of the morning and calls softly into the night – just until the moon rises. It is like a solemn hymn. I found several of their nests fallen to the ground one stormy summer. They are the frailest and most delicate nests I have seen – shallow soft bowls made of pine needles and grass stems. Even more delicate than that of the bush tit. A group of mourning doves is called a dule – which means pitying. Perhaps I love them best because pity, though sorrowful, is also merciful. We all need mercy in our lives.

Once, many years ago, I called far out to Ontario, to the home of the artist, Kaija Mountain. Her husband, Jim, answered the phone and I asked to speak to her. He took the phone with him to the kitchen window to call her, as she was outside.

“Oh!”, he said, “She can't come now. She is standing out there covered in birds. They are perched all over her arms and on her head, fluttering at the ends of her fingers.”

I may find feathers left for me, or the creative brilliance in the occasional gust-tattered nest; but Kaija has stepped into that in-between place, that thin place, that shelters trust.



Image 3-3. “Dove on Child’s Arm”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Sometimes those interstices, those synchronous and transition places are magical – in a complex way. Dylan Trigg, in his book *The Memory of Place* (2012), writes that the memory of places we experience first-hand is fundamental to a sense of self. Trigg also argues that “the eerie disquiet of the uncanny is at the core of the remembering body, and thus of ourselves”. This especially spoke to me as what is an artist’s relation to place if not uncanny at some deep level.

The definition of ‘uncanny’ is ‘strange or mysterious, in an unsettling way’. In place(s), there is magic and mystery in the mundane. As an artist, all landscapes/places are uncanny, when you look deep enough, when you let them get under your skin, when you challenge the illusion of objective reality, when you let them dabble in the blood of

your veins . . . when you open your imagination. The ‘unsettling’ is essential, you cannot be complacent about place, or you won’t see it. And sometimes you come upon strange juxtapositions which are, well, uncanny.

Place as Wonder

I walked, one time, away from a well-trodden and groomed trail and into a forest. Suburban sound became unspoken, silenced. Gradually the purl and quaver of birdsong painted a soundscape, and included the pipe and call of squirrels, the graceful tap of deer hooves. I pushed moss-covered branches and eye-poking twigs aside and moved ever deeper from tame to wild. Each time I looked back the winding paved road, the gravelled car park, the safety of directional signs, the threshold . . . increasingly disappeared. A dark brown, boggy and mucky stream drowned my feet. I tramped around a bend of thick willow and spruce to find, neatly placed, a chair.

Discovering this place was like opening my back door and finding the Milky Way spinning below me. It was unsettling, uncanny. I sat on the chair, feeling like I was a guest taking rude advantage and sitting on a chair that belonged only to one other. A bird hopped onto one of the rungs, I heard something long and furry slink through the drape of foliage. I expected rabbits to sit at my feet like children waiting for a story. An experience does not have to be *this* odd to stir the magic and mystery of place. Nonetheless . . .

Experiences of place are not fixed; they are multi-dimensional and enter the mind, body and heart through waters imbibed, dirt under nails, smells pressed into memories and images inextricably linked to imagination. It thus fell to the tradition of experiential to call into question the distinction between space and time at the level of our direct, preconceptual experience . . . to attend, as closely as possible, to the way phenomena present themselves in our immediate, lived experience” (Abram, 1997, p. 204)

The relationship with place calls for attention at several levels. Actually listening, actually smelling, actually hearing, tasting, and actually feeling. It calls for being aware of those hurts in a place that have been caused by inattention. We need to be, as Wade

Davis (2008, p. 2) said, a “people who still feel their past in the wind, touch it in stones polished by rain, taste it in the bitter leaves of plants”.

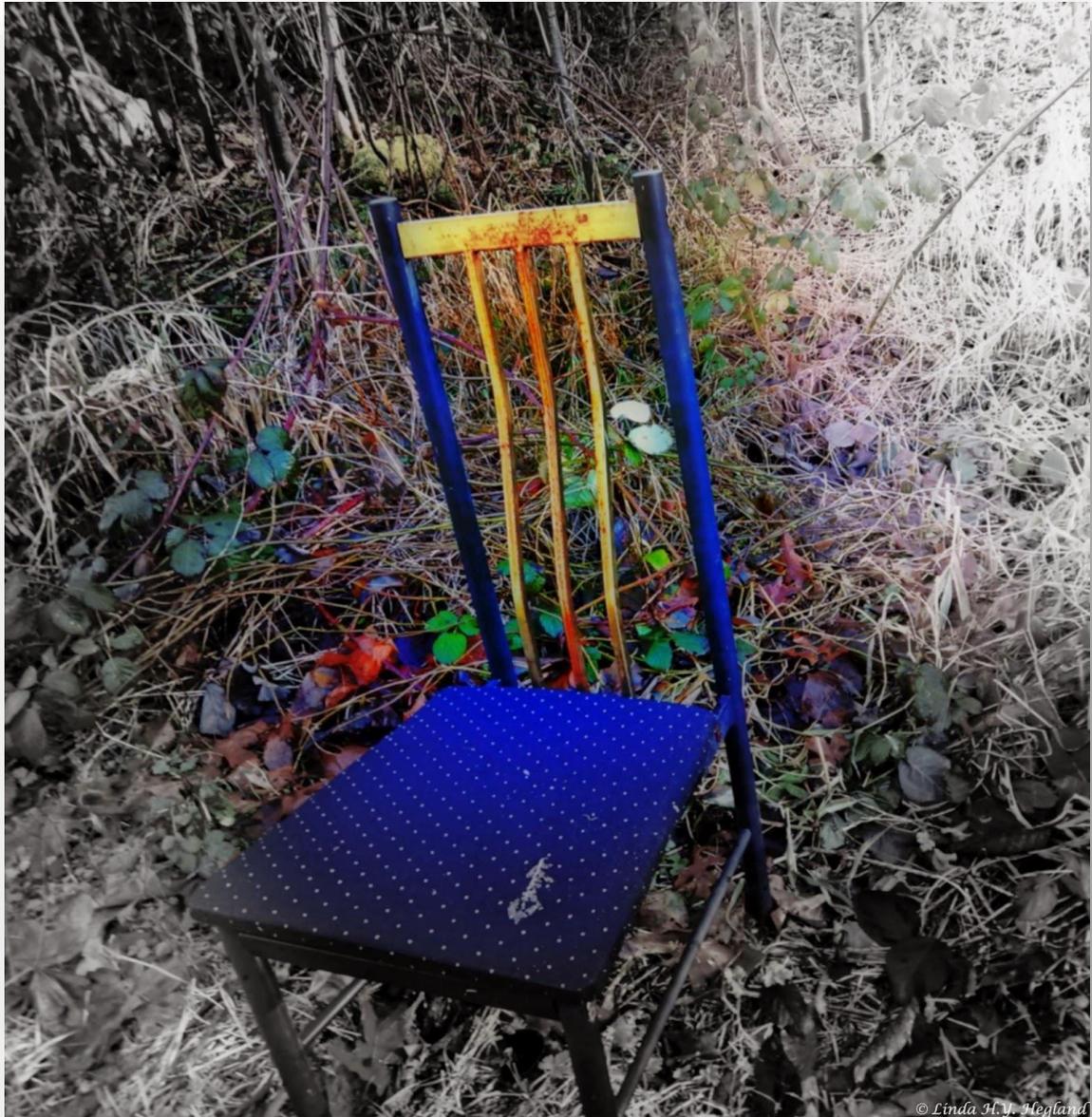


Image 3-4. “Mother Nature’s Chair”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Place as Courage

Interwoven through the study of place, through the art that arises from relationship with nature, through the experiential and the poetic inquiry, is the poking intrusion of illness – both that of myself and of the artist, Kaija Savinainen-Mountain. It will colour the images, it will choose our words, it will overtake us and, at times, *we* will overtake *illness*. It is like being caught up in a tempest, in a mistral. I long for the wind to die down and to feel my feet gently, firmly touching the ground again. There is in that, the disruptive nature of illness, described by Susan Sontag (2001, p. 3) as “the night-side of life, a more onerous citizenship”. Sontag goes on to say that “sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place”. So, malady, too, is part of our artistic truth. Wellness is a place to be sought. Due to ill health both Kaija and myself have lost our borders, at times we have gone ‘off-track’. So our art-making, our bond with place, is a movement to track ourselves back to land/place.

Place/nature is our blueprint, our rendered sketch, on how to adapt to illness and strive for wellness; how to die to what was and be born into what will be, over and over again, form after ephemeral form. It is a kind of ‘medicine walk’ (Kelly, 2017; Wagamese, 2014). And Kaija and I are healers to ourselves. Finding the balance, alleviating the dis-ease. Following a red thread, on a red road, walking, always walking. I’ve heard it said that all illness is homesickness. Whether that refers to personal illness or worldly illness, or both, , it doesn’t really matter. We crave and need ‘home’ – place.

Home is the place from which I come and to which I return. Home is where I always am. All circumstances call me to new steps in the dance. All sickness points me there. All sickness is homesickness. All healing is homecoming . . . The way home – Shhh - Inquire . . . Shhh - Listen. (Connelly, 1993, p. 25)

The illness road that Kaija and I walk manifests in many ways. It surprised me that it even surfaced as part of the inquiry process. Perhaps because I was seeking deeper in myself, this thesis took on unexpected, though more complex, meaning. Both Kaija and myself experienced health challenges that shook us to the core, which made us question our presumed and smug assurance of our continued presence in the world.

Illness, by nature, is chaotic. I do not “dwell” on my illness, though it has an impact, and effect – *every day*. I do not dwell “on” it because illness is not an object so much as it is a part of the being that one dwells *in*, not an entity apart from the body. Illness is a haunted place – and a storm-shaken one. Vulnerable.

Pain in nature, not our human angst. Different painting. Illness as an example. Emotional pain threshold you must experience daily. In nature, moon on the water such an overwhelming experience it is painful. Pain and the image in front of you merge and melds into one emotional experience. I have experienced such pain, buried two sisters and my dad. Have cancer myself. Needed to run out into nature, the whole landscape was sad, so sad like it was experiencing my loss. Merging of me and my experiences with nature and its emotion. Place can sorrow with you. Landscape giving me permission to be sad. I saw the dying of my sister in the lake, in the trees, and especially in the blue of the sky. Place will always comfort you at your times of deep despair.

The common ground relationship with nature, relationship in our personal lives. It is here, this place, living in nature, in my gardens. All of my relationship that is in nature, is in my gardens, translates to how I am in my personal relationships.

This place is my compass. (Kaija Savinainen Mountain)

Place then becomes an anchor, the relationship changes. We (Kaija and myself) needed to define for ourselves what constitutes an authentic connection with place, with our art as it relates to place. We needed to encapsulate, to clasp to our hearts, that the illness in and of itself, does not describe us, does not determine us. In my thinking, it is just one strand of the web that is *me*, one papery layer of the onion that is *me*, one root of a tree, one drop of a rainstorm, one note of birdsong – that is me. Our aesthetic/artistic experience of place is both wide and deep.

For all that aesthetics can be marginalized by those who think of it as an optional extra we know that our encounters with art and nature go not merely wide but also deep, and moreover, go as deep as anything in our lives can go. (Lyas, C., 1997, p. 2)

Illness can be both ugly and beautiful at the same time, the art that results from the influence of place is not necessarily beautiful. It can be also be frightening, powerful, disturbing – authentic.

Place most certainly can be a place of aesthetic value, as can the art that comes of place. Illness, though most often ugly, can burn gorgeously bright with fever, can scorch our cells exquisitely, smolder stunningly for eternities.

So, too, was this means of inquiry salient to my seeking to parse the complexities of illness as it related to place.



Image 3-5. “Dying Rose Petals”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Chapter 4.

Tenalach (Irish)

– the relationship one has with land/air/water, a deep connection that allows one to literally hear the earth sing



Image 4-1. “Solitary Wheat Stalk Against Stormy Sky”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“Bees do have a smell, you know, and if they don’t they should, for their feet are dusted with spices from a million flowers.”

~ Ray Bradbury, “Dandelion Wine”

Approaching my subject both photographically and poetically allows the inquiry to be holistic. Poetic inquiry is not just the creating of poetry. It is a means of listening, connecting to, and being present (with place; with another’s sense of place). And for that reason, too, poetic inquiry may manifest itself in image (photograph or painting), not just words. Poetic inquiry creates a voice, an inner voice that we reflect and respond to internally, before sharing our knowing with the world. It widens research by incorporating the reflective, expressive, and sensual aspects of knowledge. Poetry is implicit in speech but also in place. My inquiry is based upon (re)searching for the essence of experience in place.

A poetics of research is not seeking a destination, an end-point. Instead, a poetics of research is a sojourn, a searching, a way of knowing. (Leggo, 2000)

Poetic methods are qualitative and call for self-conscious participation. Instead of being inverted like a telescope for a distancing effect, poetics turns it back around for magnified encounters with life as lived, up close and personal (Brady, I, 2009, p. xi)

As an artist, I strive to deepen my own lens creatively through an artistic perspective of poetic inquiry complemented with photographic inquiry – which is a means for creating space(or a place) for evocative knowing.

Storm

Storming morning
and the rain beats the windows and the
wind beats the birds,
turning somersaults in the air,
their wings battling backwards against the blow.

The leaves betray their mother tree
and tear themselves away.
They run away with the foolish, blustering wind
to the circus, to a marriage that only lasts to the end of the street,
too far to return, too brief, themselves betrayed.

Knocked up and knocked down to turn to black silhouettes
on the sidewalks, ghosts of caprice, ghosts of the storm.



Image 4-2. "Storm Trees".

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Covenant

If I were a leaf,
trembling, and about to fall.
And you were the ground
beneath.
I would waft,
pleasingly
tempting
the wind catching and lofting me,
shuddering me,
allowing me to dance,
to tease - you.

If you were the ground
beneath,
you would wait patiently,
soil pliant and waiting.
When finally
we touched
you would hold me lightly upon yourself,
hold me as my foliage dress
disintegrated;
til my leaf-bones lay
exposed and fragile.
Hold me until even those shattered bits
became as nothing,
and I breathed no more as a whispering, clattering
sun worshipper –

But a part of you, ground,
brown and fetid, moist and rotted,
bearer of life and seed.



Image 4-3. “Dance of Leaves, Water, Wind - Abstract”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Fragments of Place #2

My mother suffered from Prairie madness. Prairie madness, or prairie fever, as it was sometimes called is an affliction that affected western European settlers in the Great Plains and on the Canadian prairies. It was said to be the result of the extreme levels of isolation on the prairie. Other contributions were the harsh weather and environment. Blizzards, very few trees, cold winters, and flat land that stretched out for miles and miles. The loud, forceful, alien wind that blew seemingly constantly and, people said, drove people mad. And in the winter the snow-eating Chinook wind that turned four-foot drifts of snow to puddles within the course of a few hours. The warm Chinook wind and the typically pyrotechnic thunderstorms contributed to the feeling that the prairie was a land with sharp, moody seasons. Though this was the early 1960’s, all of this was as present to my mother as it had been for those settlers so long ago.

We were immigrants to this place, this place so very different from what we knew. The cozy, embracing environs of the Cotswolds of England. My father was recruited from England to swell the ranks of the Calgary police force in the late 1950's. The Prairie area did not have enough population to meet the needs of the police force recruitment. Though "needed", we were still immigrants, plonked down amongst religious groups such as the Hutterites and Doukhobors (unpopular groups fleeing European persecution in such places as Imperial Russia) in an alien landscape in an unfamiliar isolation not experienced in the village-like closeness of Bath, England.

Before this my world was contained and I did not understand size, the impossibility of moving so far and achieving so little. I was young and the careful mapping I had done included paths to school, roads leading to my grandparents, the small tract of land at the bottom of my street, the edge of the fence across which I reached to feed carrots to the horses. Contained. Moving north uprooted me, left me groundless in the face of so much land. I was floating on an ancient sea, travelling to my new home, a place unknown to those who knew me. (2004, de Leeuw, p. 8)

The wind certainly drove my mother mad; or at the very least sunk her into a depression that never really lifted, ever. But for me, this prairie – this foreign, peregrine place became the place of my soul. I was a child prone to a 'lone wolf' personality in an isolated place. This place impacts me, in all my papery layers, in all my transparent skins. And, thus, also impacts what is a scrap of me – the consequences of my imagination and my creativity.

Gregory Cajete speaks of the indigenous peoples' relation to the landscape and nature, that this deep sentiment is true of others as well. He says:

This is the ultimate identification of being Indigenous to a place and forms the basis for a fully internalized bonding with that place. This perception is found in one variation or another among the traditions of Indigenous people throughout the world, including the archaic folk traditions of Europe (Cajete, 1994, p. 83)

My Celtic background helps me to understand this concept. My Celtic ancestors had a relationship with nature. I spent my initial formative years playing on Salisbury Plain (before rope fences and the plague of tourism) running about in the shadows of the great stones of Stonehenge. My ancestors lived according to the seasons, and celebrated

solstices. They knew plant medicine, and had spirit beings that dwelled in trees, and stones, and wind. Bogs, and mounds, and knotted roots and branches that when they trembled with the breeze spoke the tongue of gods. They had a strong kinship and connection to the land, and communication between animals and people was an accepted norm. But my bond with this place of birth did not have the same impact as the place of prairie, the prairie place from whence my art practice grew.

Place as Sculptor

I remember my first sight of the prairie. We had arrived in the night, in a deep, very dark velvet night and I was asleep. I woke very early the next morning, eager to see the new world. I ran to the door off the kitchen and threw it wide. It opened on to the most vast and frightening thing I had ever seen. There was space and emptiness and wind and a horizon far, far off – further even than when I had been to the seaside and saw the ocean disappear into a far fog. The sky was so immense that I felt that it would swallow me. I felt smaller than a ladybug, as insignificant as a mote of dust. But I also remember taking a huge breath, holding it very still near my heart, and feeling full of this place. So full my heart didn't have room to beat, and the wind in my lungs pushed out through my veins and circulated through and around my body. So full.

But my mother didn't feel that. I felt her come up behind me. I heard her sharp intake of breath. I heard the sob strangled in her throat. I turned to her and saw the tears on her face, the stark loneliness in her eyes.

“It is a wild place,” she moaned, “uncivilized, bleak. Where has he brought us to? Where?”

This was a place of liminality for both my mother and myself – another of those thin places. In anthropology, the term liminality (Latin meaning threshold) refers to the ambiguity or disorientation that occurs in the middle stage of rituals, where one is not one thing or another; is in an element that is neither one place or another. A transition. I stepped over that threshold, my mother did not. So, in large part, this thesis is an attempt to explain place as a process of ensoulment. Though ensoulment is generally considered

in religious terms as the “getting” of a soul, whether at conception or at birth, I am referring to how our lived experience – the impact of landscape, of place, of perspective, of the realization and the sculpting of our art practice – forms our “deep” soul, the soul that we grow. That small struggling, reaching plant that strives to be a sunburst.



Image 4-4. “Prairie Coulees, Alberta”.

... striving to become ‘congruent’. I came as a stranger to this magnificent but in some ways terrible place to live, with its more tragic than triumphant history, and gradually, though never easily, I found both a way to feel at home in my own skin, and in this place. (Butala, 1997, preface).

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

I feel a form of amnesia whenever I am asked about my childhood, about traditions, about celebrations and rites of passage. There simply were none. Thus, my personal ecology, my spiritual ecology was honed in my new landscape, this place.

I observed animals and birds – their lives and their deaths; I ate handfuls of sweet, blue Saskatoon berries and inhaled the sharp scent of sage. I came to recognize different

kinds of clouds scudding across the wide, wide sky. I came to build rituals around the first spring rain that would suddenly turn a brown, twig-dead grassland into a colour-spattered canvas as fragile flowers would magically appear and open in response to the rain – and then die back to the ground by evening.

I came to view the land as sacred, saw that within it was ceremony and honouring. As a child, I did not know the language of spiritual ecology, but the dusty grasses and indolent river, the ever-singing wind, murmured to me in a way that I now know was mystical, spiritual. One of the basic laws of ecology is that everything is related to everything else. Ecology means home. Myself (my home) conjoins with everything else. Sacredness is in daily phenomena, and it is deep and transcendent. I plumb those depths to find the eye through which I create my photography, to find the tongue which speaks my poetry.

Deep experience. Finding the spirit in the ecology. Finding the art in the experience. It still makes me deeply sad when I see the skins of coyotes that ranchers hang on their cruel fences in a effort to scare the coyotes away, to limit their wild wanders. There is a story about Aldo Leopold, the philosopher and environmentalist:

One morning, Leopold was out with some friends on a walk in the mountains. Being hunters, they carried their rifles with them, in case they got a chance to kill some wolves . . . Soon they saw what appeared to be some deer fording the torrent, but they soon realised that it was a pack of wolves. They took up their rifles and began to shoot excitedly into the pack, but with little accuracy. Eventually an old wolf was down by the side of the river, and Leopold rushed down to gloat at her death. What met him was a fierce green fire dying in the wolf's eyes. He writes in a chapter entitled Thinking Like a Mountain that: "there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain. I thought that because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean hunter's paradise. But after seeing the green fire die, I sensed that neither the wolf nor the mountain agreed with such a view." . . . (he realized) the ecosystem as an entirety, as a living presence, with its deer, its wolves and other animals, its clouds, soils and streams. For the first time in his life he felt completely at one with this wide, ecological reality. He felt that it had a power to communicate its magnificence. He felt that it had its own life, its own history, and its own trajectory into the future. He experienced the ecosystem as a great being, dignified and valuable in itself. It must have

been a moment of tremendous liberation and expansion of consciousness, of joy and energy – a truly spiritual experience. (Harding, 2016)

My mother's sadness and friendlessness, my father's long and frequent absences from home, our physical location on the very edge of the city – at the virtual door of the prairie; my solitary nature; all made me turn to the prairie and it became my companion and teacher.

Landscape is a fundamental human defense against loneliness. If you're intimate with a place, a place whose history you're familiar, and you establish an ethical conversation with it, the implication that follows is this: the place knows you're there. It feels you. You will not be forgotten, cut off, abandoned. (Lopez, 1997, p. 23)

The prairies formed me – took a shy, sullen, wan-faced little English city-girl and taught her fortitude and loyalty; taught her to bend and accept adversity so that it wouldn't break her – like a willow in a heavy wind. It taught her endurance and it taught her constancy.

The move to the voluminous spaciousness of Canada from the brevity of England was the first of a moon phase/tidal change that turned my life in a different direction. My environmental and spiritual ecologies were turned a full 180 degrees. My sense(s), both physical and those involved in the small budding of my artistic self had to become larger and more capacious. My world became expansive, different. My new landscape forced me to go beyond the very limited view I had of 'art' (colouring books, colour between the lines, 'appropriate' colours) and to view the world from a different perspective than that of a sea-locked island. The prairie is of formal shapes and patterns, seen from the sky like a patchwork quilt. The artist's compositional elements like value, color, and line predominate – harmonic, transcendent. The prairie's sublimity: the vastness of space, intensity of light, magnificence of skies.

I paid attention -

“. . . a rock is not a customary mode of perception, yet there is more beauty in a rock than any of us is likely to discover in a lifetime.” (Eisner, 2004, p. 85)

Now, from an adult perspective, I can look back at this time in the context of Maxine Green's words:

From particular situated locations, we open ourselves to fields of perception. . . . We reach out into the world – touching, listening, watching what presents itself to us from our pre-reflective landscapes, primordial landscapes. . . . we have already begun to organize our lived experiences perceptually and imaginatively. (Greene, 1995, p. 73)

When . . . On the Prairie (Part I)

When as a child,
I sit at the foot of the prairie,
grasshoppers tangle themselves
in my wind-tattered hair,
I fill my mouth
with small pebbles and stones.
My tongue moves them
round my mouth,
I feel the smoothness
with the hardness –
the silk
with the endurance,
the facility
with the clumsiness.

A long meditation
as I sit with the prairie
sucking on ancient stone
and bird-egg pebbles.



Image 4-5. “At the Foot of the Prairie, Alberta”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 4-6. “Bird-Egg Pebbles”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

I was a solitary child, alone but not lonely. Some of my loveliest memories are of times when I was completely by myself, sitting under a bush, or under a tree, or on the front steps of my childhood home. My mother recalls that I was a sombre child, but not particularly unhappy. Because I usually had a book in my hand, she felt my fault was that of being a bookworm rather than that of lack of friends.

Our neighbourhood had several families with children of all ages; all of us were immigrants from one part of the world or another. We wandered the neighbourhood en masse, with a motley crew of dogs in tow. We played mostly in the coulees, creeks, and gullies of our prairie back yard. But at some point, I would break off from the group and find a solitary tree to read under or lay out on a large, flat rock that had been warmed by the sun. Sometimes, when the group moved on to another activity, I would stay behind and continue to amuse myself with drawing pictures in the dust with sticks or mixing prairie soil with spit to make ‘paint’, which I would then daub on flat stones.

I believe that place sculpted me as a person and as an artist. As my art developed it became that of flow – flow of line when a visual artist, flow of words as a writer. I remembered the prairie. I felt, as Hogan described, that I was

. . . such a keen listener that even the trees leaned toward her, as if they were speaking their innermost secrets into her listening ears. . . . a hearing full land open enough that the world told her its stories. The green leaves turned towards her, whispering tales of soft breezes and the murmurs of leaf against leaf.”(Hogan, 1995, p. 47)

I have to be like a hawk, willing to plunge, willing to read the place that influences me.

Here is how a hawk hunts: soaring over rippling wheat fields or clacking prairie grasses, patiently watching. All she sees are surfaces, reflections on the grainy ripples, the glistening grey-green leaves of the cottonwoods. Then something changes—the angle of the light or the movement of wind—and the hawk catches a glimpse of a shadow under the surface of the grasses. She tucks her wings and dives. So it is with us, as artists, when we dive into our inner shadows seeking the creativity within; using the patient, grateful, informed observation of a particular location, then pursuing a truth briefly revealed in that place.



Image 4-7. “Late Afternoon Coulees, September, Alberta”.

- . . . the one true landscape, the place where sun, moon and stars could shine free, lending their light to the pale grasses, painting them gleaming apricot, gold, mauve, or rose. I had never seen such beauty. (Butala, 1997, preface).

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

I live in a different place presently than I did as a child. And my art reflects the influences of this current place. But places are pervasive, omnipotent. Places are like tattoos. So, too, the places where we spent our childhood remain within us, embedded in our bodies and appearing in our dreams. As artists, through our visual images, our poetry, our story, we bring into the present the place(s) that formed us, enhancing our experience of our personal history and the power of place to shape our psyche.

our personal and natural rhythms

cycles spirals repetition periodicity pattern

movement shape

rhythms manifested in environment, in place

diurnal lunar seasonal

the rhythms of our body in place,

the rhythms of place in our bodies

always coming home

Place as Seeing

Peter shook his long, tangled, greasy, hair out of his eyes and leaned forward to peer closely at my pencil and charcoal drawing. The model was taking a break after a lengthy pose, wrapped in blankets and sipping tea. Peter rubbed the bridge of his nose, ran his finger thoughtfully down the curve of one of my drawn lines.

“Here”, he said, “here, you have actually **felt** the curve of the hip, it has depth and you have lived it. You have walked it like walking the crest of a hill. You have rendered it as a form, a shape - rather than a hip.”

This was considerable praise from my mentor, Peter Bodnar, a visual arts professor at the University of Illinois. Though of Czechoslovakian birth, Peter dressed in the garb of the native Navajo. His hair was held back by a grubby bandana around his forehead. He wore proudly a large and very old turquoise necklace gifted to him, he said, when he was made an “honorary” member of a Navajo tribe early in his artistic career. He never took it off. He was an exotic combination of gypsy, bohemian, and man of the land. In his mid-sixties, he exuded an infallible wisdom. He never taught method (much to the frustration of classmates that wanted to know the mechanics of how to draw);

instead he taught spontaneity. Maxine Greene states that involving ourselves in the arts will enable us to recapture a lost spontaneity. She says “breaking through the frames of presuppositions and conventions, we are enabled to recapture the processes of our becoming” (Greene, 1995, p. 130)

Peter Bodnar and Maxine Greene would have gotten along very well together – musing tirades about art over home-made wine, discussing the role of art in the lives of “travellers”. Peter did not allow you to make pretence at being an artist. He did not instruct, he made one discover, though he did so in a frustratingly obtuse manner, challenging me with “whys” and “why nots”. And if I complained of not getting my head around something he would advise me to go somewhere where there were trees and listen to the silence. Not the lack of sound, he would emphasize, but instead the fullness of silence. He kept urging me to “See! See!”

Peter was very much a bridge for me. An art reviewer, Peter Frank, once said of Peter Bodnar:

So many of Bodnar’s students came under his thrall and to this day remain gratefully in it. His mentees are enchanted at once by Bodnar’s art, insight into art and life, generosity, and gently eccentric persona. Many students come to believe that everything they learn about art and art-making, they were enabled to learn by Bodnar. Bodnar was the gateway to many students’ self-recognition as artists.” (Frank, 2009, p.1)

And so it was with me and I regret to this day that, due to unforeseen circumstances, I fell out of his realm of influence much too soon. But I had told him that, all my life, I had written and told stories, I had loved animals (and preferred their company), and I did art. As we bid farewell to each other, he asked if he could keep one of my drawings. He asked if I would tell him a story. He said that if I listened to the natural world around me, to the places, really listened and really saw, that then I would always have form to “walk along” and stories to tell, and companions that, though dumb, knew the world better than us.

Like Cajete, Peter Bodnar urged one to “remember to remember”. Peter taught freedom. He taught me I could love my animals, love my stories, love a place. He said he loved how I could show how a hip was so many more things than just a hip, with one gestural line. He said I just had to be okay with stepping off that cliff – that cliff that crouches just at the edges of our peripheral vision, just outside our comfort zone.

He didn't believe I would fall. He believed I would soar.

Chapter 5.

Dadirri (Aboriginal Australian)

*- to become aware of the sacredness that surrounds you,
hear creation breathe and follow her rhythm*



Image 5-1. “Wisps of Visitors on Barbed Wire, Alberta”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“Earth’s crammed with heaven . . . But only he who sees, takes off his shoes.”

~ Elizabeth Barrett Browning, “Aurora Leigh”

When thinking of place and its impact on myself as an artist, I also have to view place as time that falls back on itself; or like an accordion – folding and unfolding, pleating and un-pleating, dependent on which note I play and when. My past place impinges on my present place.

My parents, when I was growing up, wanted me to approach my art in a third-person, impersonal way. After all, wasn’t it just a hobby? They gave no credence nor value to what I was creating in my solitary mind. I did very well in school, my grades were always exemplary. That allowed me the frivolity of my poems and drawings. Had my schoolwork been less than stellar, as it was in the case of my brothers, I would not have been permitted that. Instead, it would have been nightly tirades at the kitchen table, lasting until bedtime, with a clip around the ears if I didn’t *get* the math, or the reading, or the whatever, as was the nightly routine for my brothers. It was a cruel process visited on them more for the potential embarrassment of having stupid children than for any actual value placed on education.

But my parents never attended any of my school art shows, never attended any of my poetry readings at assembly, never attended the folk concerts in which I sang with such conviction. They were always invited; other parents came. That was another sort of cruel. My brothers suffered for the attention paid to their failings. I suffered for the inattention paid to my creativity. I didn’t cause trouble or embarrassment, so I was barely paid heed of at all. It was not a deliberate cruelty; just a carelessness.

So I went to the prairie, to my place of solace. And there I could take the mask of the ‘good’ child off. Place wants to be loved, remembered, honoured, embraced. Acknowledged on its own terms.

So, too, do little girls.

On my own in the country of my people, and I feel the lure and tug of the land as insistently as a lover's grasp. This is where poems are born, where stories are nurtured within me, and it is here, among the cliff and stone and bush and waters, where I am most fully the creation that I am, I stand solid here. I am the moose and the bear and pickerel. I am tamarack, pine and lichen. I am the rich brown of the earth and the eternal bowl of the sky. Home. Where I am articulated and defined in the context of geography. (Wagamese, R. 2016, p. 50)

As an individual, and as an artist, I just cannot justify that third person impersonal approach to place (and art), that my parents had thought was only appropriate. The relationship is just too erotic. As Wagamese said, above, place tugs insistently at us, like a "lover's grasp". In keeping an open heart, I allow place to flow through me like water. As naturalist Terry Tempest Williams (2015) writes in *An Unspoken Hunger* :

It is time to take off our masks, to step out from behind our personas—whatever they might be: educators, activists, biologists, geologists, writers, farmers, ranchers, and bureaucrats—and admit we are lovers, engaged in an erotics of place. Loving the land. Honouring its mysteries. Acknowledging, embracing the spirit of place—there is nothing more legitimate and there is nothing more true. That is why we are here. It is why we do what we do. There is nothing intellectual about it. We love the land. It is a primal affair. (Williams, 2015, p. 84)

An erotic relationship with place embraces much of the same language as an intimate relationship with another human being – love, exposure, yielding, vulnerability, acquiescence, trust, melding - truth. How do we *touch* a place?

The lightening we witness crack and charge a night sky in the desert is the same electricity we feel in ourselves whenever we dare to touch flesh, rock, body, Earth. We must take our love outdoors where reciprocity replaces voyeurism, respect replaces indulgence. We can choose to photograph a tree or we can sit it its arms, where we are participating in wild nature, even our own. (Williams, 2008, p. 111)

Stone, Beloved

Ancient stone, found, on dust-choked prairie.
whale-shaped obsidian;
allegories flowing in its veins and channels.

It whispers soundless stories.
Says – listen.

Once waters of a vast river
danced upon my surface.

I held the spawn of fish.

Once I flew high over prairies
in the talons of a hawk.

Mistaken for bone.

Once I scraped flesh from hides of buffalo,
and hewed the flesh from trees.

When first you picked me up from
the prairie floor,
blew the dust from me with lips pursed,
as though to kiss . . . ;

When first you ran your thumb
along my burnished length,
as a lover would another . . . ;

When first I felt warm again,
held in human hands.
No mere stone . . . ;

When first I sensed your contemplation on
my shape, my form;
the solace you draw from
the stroking of my skin . . . ;

I breathe.

I breathe.



Image 5-2. “Mesquite Seed Pods”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Fragments of Place #3

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth. 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 upon it, to dwell upon it. (Momaday, N.S. 1969, p. 83)

Place as Deep Sense(s)

Dust rises behind the pickup as I drive it across the prairie field, along the grooves that run deep and permanent across it – originally made by pioneer wagon wheels hundreds of years earlier. Scars. Prairie dogs watch the truck from their mounds, whistling piercing notes of warning before upending themselves into their holes, disappearing from sight with the flick of a black-tipped tail. The truck is an old 1965 dust-grayed white GMC with a wide sofa-like seat, manual drive, and windows you have

to roll down manually. The passenger-side window drops with a glassy thud once you get it a third of the way down; the driver's side sticks on every crank of the handle such that once you get it down, you tend to leave it down.

I am helping friends bring in their hay. I drive slowly along and those that are much more experienced with the "haul-and-heft" method of throwing bales into the back of the truck walk alongside. Each load I drive back to the barn, where others lift the bales out and into the hayloft. I am driving back to the hayfield after my last load. I wear an old denim shirt with sleeves rolled up to the elbows, worn jeans, my hair tied up in a messy, grimy ponytail. Every once in a while I spit the dust in my mouth out the window. You can't be a lady on the prairie. The prairie is embodied in me – in the way I dress, the way I move, the way I don't think twice about spitting out the truck window while I wrestle with its gears and stubbornness.

My two boys love riding in this truck. The vast, slippery vinyl bench-seat invites shoving and horse-play; there is not a seat belt to be found. Don't think there ever were seatbelts in the first place. The window has a wide ledge and they hang their bellies over it, making themselves dizzy staring at the ground moving along below. When they pull themselves back into the truck their faces are as dust-grubby as the truck itself. But now they have fallen asleep in the dozy late afternoon sun, piled into the corner of the truck seat like puppies after a vigorous run. Their hair sticks out at sweat-dried angles and there is a burnished redness to their cheeks, an extra freckle or two on their noses. Their lips are parched.

I stop the truck for a bit of a rest at the top of a small knoll where there is an ancient medicine wheel. Though the prairie is dry and juiceless, the grasses around the stones are green. I remember that most prairie grass species have exceedingly long root systems. The roots are thin but some can go as deep as fifteen feet to find moisture and richer soil. I start to recite the names of grasses, like a chant, like a poem. The grasses speak of other prairie creatures, of climate and soil:

beak grass, big bluestem, bottlebrush grass, buffalo grass, indian grass, little
bluestem, porcupine grass, prairie brome, prairie dropseed, prairie satin
grass, panic grass, rattlesnake grass, riverbank wild rye, sand
dropseed, side oats gama, sweet grass (*oh ambrosial,*
worshipped Sweetgrass!), switch grass, wood reed
grass

As I sit, eyes closed, dust caked in my nostrils and sweat trickling down my back,
I listen to the prairie symphony – the whirr of grasshoppers, the high whining keen of the
shortgrass, birdsong low and high, gopher whistles, hawk shrieks . . .

lesser yellowlegs, blue-winged teal, killdeer, gadwall, avocet, red-winged
blackbird, great-horned owl, chestnut-collared longspur, whooping crane,
saltmarsh sharp-tailed sparrow, meadow lark (*just seven notes!*)
short-billed dowitcher, magpie, Swainson's hawk, three-
toed woodpecker, peregrine falcon, marbled godwit,
brown pelican, burrowing owl

The conductor is the thrum, thrum of the prairie wind, the Chinook wind,
the Foehn wind,
rain shadow wind.

Wind textures, insect medleys, birdsong choir.

When . . . On the Prairie (Part II)

When, as a young woman,
trying desperately to look candid
with wind,
always wind on my face,
a hand sheltering my eyes
from the sun.

I scuff with my toe
bird bones in the dust
revealed on a day
when the gossamer wind
stirs the silted ground.

Bird bones thin as glass,
hollow as reeds,
as light in the bluing sky
as a mote of dust,
or a drop of rain.

Now a mere memory
on a hot, friable day
when grasshoppers jump
with a rattle
and hawks keen
in the eye-scorching sky,

Bones and dust stirred together
by the touch of the gossamer wind.

What follows is a gallery of images of the prairie, taken when I returned to that place to bury my father's ashes, tucking him in alongside my mother's ashes. I set these photos here, a reflection of the story and poem that comes before. The narrative is born of memory. The poem is born of the recalled meter present in the measure of the wind and the pace of big sky clouds. Taking these photos, I hoped the prairie and I would know each other again. But this is, instead, a gallery of fugitive moments – I felt like I was stealing them; a thief with no right to that place's essence anymore, I have been gone too long – or perhaps there is now too much gone from the prairie. Or, in my self, a sea change – or a *see*-change.



Image 5-3. “Tumbleweeds & Barbed Wire, Alberta”.

The legendary tumbleweed is really a nurse crop that protects the growth of prairie grasses under its shade, and then sacrifices itself and blows away. (Antoine Predock, architect).

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

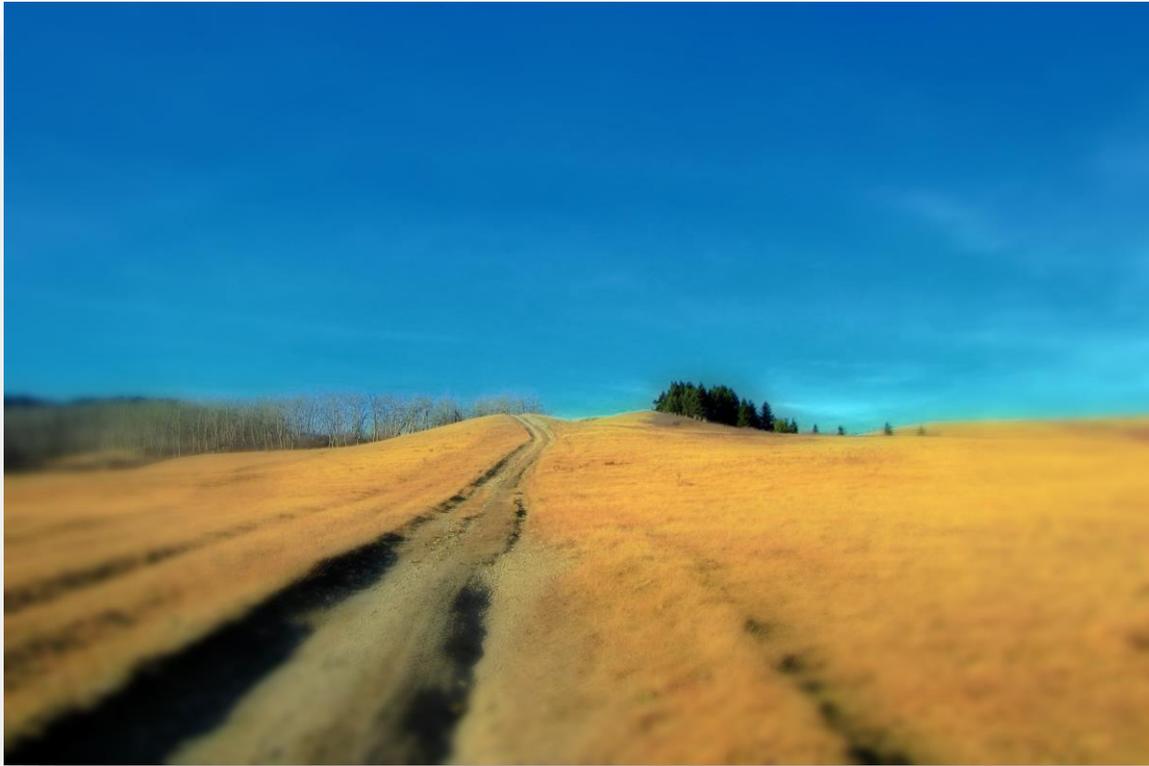


Image 5-4. “Old Wagon Road, Alberta”.

From Highway 22 just north of its crossing the Oldman River turn east on Township Road 101. At the end of the road, turn north on Sharples Creek Road. Continue north and then east to the T-intersection with Range Road 14. Turn north of Range Road 14 and continue through its numerous name changes to the sharp switchback intersection of Township Road 111 with Range Road 12. Turn north on Township Road 11 to its end in a T-intersection with Highway 520. Head east on Highway 520 to its intersection with Range Road 115. Turn south on Range Road 115, then sharply east on Range Road 300. The road changes designation to Township Road 111 and meet Range Road 10 near an old barn.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 5-5. “Old Man River, Alberta”.

In the beginning all the world was water. One day the Old Man, also called Napi, was curious to find out what might be beneath the water. He sent animals to dive below the surface. First duck, then otter, the badger dived in vain. The Old Man sent muskrat diving to the depths. After a long time muskrat rose to the surface holding between his paws a little ball of mud. Old Man took this ball of mud and blew upon it. The mud began to swell growing larger and larger until it became the whole earth. The Old Man then made the people. (Ancient Blackfoot tale).

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 5-6. “Winter Prairie Brush”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 5-7. “Winter Prairie Fence”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

When On the Prairie . . . (Part III)

When, as an old woman,
I walk the fence line
in the purple mauve, pink evening
with an old dog that promises loyalty
but chases hopefully after gophers
and gnarls at magpies
at further and further
distances from my side.

I find that there are
such things as tumbleweeds
and that they do
pledge their love
just as old Marty said
in his old cowboy song.

They blow to my legs and my hips
and whisper
don't leave, don't leave.

And I see the wisps of things
that came, also, to this fence
leaving bits of themselves
behind.

The hair of red cattle, the wool of black sheep,
the bones of a mouse picked clean
by a muttering owl.

And later, when the lupid moon hangs heavy
and luminous in the umbrae sky,
and the frogs have stilled their trill
to a breathlessness;
when the prairie night wind
gust-whispers round my ears
and the coyotes begin their banshee songs;

The drive-weary calves move restless,
mourn
for their mothers,
scud their tongues round their lips,
dreaming of mother milk
and warm flanks.
I sing to still them,
to calm them
with a mother-bellow-like run of notes.
Taking the call of the

yodel-perfect coyotes
and turning it
to lullaby.

The sounds I make curl
round me and calf alike,
and our
loneliness
tucks itself behind the moon.

One day, calculating years and places in my head, I realized that I have lived longer in *this* place, this place of rain, and green, and mountains, than I lived on the prairie. When I first came to this place, this place that is not prairie, I couldn't see the horizon for the mountains. I couldn't see the sky for the trees. The wetness here felt too big, it seeps. My experience of forests was that of the cottonwoods and wild grapevine that delineated the river bottom of a brown prairie river. The low foliage consisting of tangles of bare skeletons, bone yards of winter-killed trees, piled along the river. There would have been a brief green-ness in the summer, rampant with grasshopper chirr. Then the trees would be bare again, winter piled at their feet with blackened leaves and mounting snow, peppered with the bedroom slipper tracks of jackrabbits. Taciturn owls in the rasping branches.

Now I experience forests as tumultuous green upon green, ferns thriving in the shade. The forests are never quiet. Mountains loom over my shoulders, shrug up into the sky, not like the supple slump of the coulees. Water is a constant and, on the shores of the Pacific Ocean, the waves' canter and plucking motion creates potholes in the churning sand wherein I can find salt-brined creatures that are neither marine nor terrestrial but something in between.

My life has led me to water. I am becoming native to *this* place. Now my art speaks to light and shadows. I have left the dry, bony landscape of the prairie behind. I have exchanged brittle shortgrass for blankets of moss. My feet are placed on different land. Rivers, like the Oldman, where I could see straight to the bottom of their rocky beds and wade in to its deepest point half-way up my thighs, have been replaced by lakes and

an ocean that hides all manner of secrets and monsters in her murky depths. Here the shores are strewn with driftwood logs, with seashells, and wet vegetation. The trees grow taller here, and here there are forests and they are darker, and more dark the further you venture in. Here the light is different. Here the light plays with the shapes and forms of trees and rocks and shores. Light is contour, light is pattern. Not the thin, unadulterated light like on the prairies. I had grown to hate the wind, that constant shushing low roar sound. The strength of it. It could cut your face with the grit it threw at it. But now I look to the water, to the constant lap/lap of it, the sound of clittering pebbles as the water pulls them back. I need the constant back-drop of sounds like that. Because it's the wind I miss the most, now that it's gone.

Place as it Sits in the Heart

That landscape, though, that previous landscape, is imbedded in my stride. It guides how I approach people, taking them at face value. It guides how I approach life and emotions. So what happens, now, that I have dramatically changed my environment?

People are most likely a product of where they were born and raised. How you think and feel's always linked to the lay of the land, the temperature. The prevailing winds, even. Where were you born? (2006, Murakami, p. 5)

The artist, Kaija Savinainen Mountain also speaks about how place stays with you, even when you find yourself in a different place.

I need to so say something about immigration. I am an immigrant but we grow to love nature and land where we are, but keeping in mind where we come from.

She goes on to say:

Nature is my strength, I need it around me. When I moved from Alberta to here (central Ontario) I went for a walk in the spring and I saw flowers that I had grown up with in Sweden. There are similarities here that are like Sweden. The prairie had been new to me. I loved it. But here, I found a piece of myself again – strong memories.

Kaija speaks about her sense of connection and kinship with nature:

I paint a landscape, a piece of nature I have seen and what appears on the canvas is not my version of it but how nature wishes to be spoken about, painted. I will go back to that place and see what it had been trying to tell me, I see what I missed but what had still subconsciously tattooed itself on my senses.

I have been a very long time away from the landscape of prairie. I have no desire to live in it again. I have grown to love green, and trees, and water. I find myself, “praising the solace and privacy of fine, silver drizzle, the comforting cloaks of salt, mold, moss, and fog, the secretive shelter of cedar and clouds”. (Peterson, B. 2001, pp. 26-27). These elements of *this place, my place, now*. And I had thought that, having moved on and out, that I had had ‘done’ with that prairie landscape. But as I found myself again in artistic writing practice, a practice that has been submerged beneath the hurly-burly of everyday life until one day I stopped and looked around and said to myself – where have I gone? As I found myself, I found in the words that now flew from my fingertips onto paper, an insistent voice. That voice is deep with the rumble of the now-returning buffalo herds; that voice is a high treble fluting with the call of the red-winged blackbird; it is a creaking of pelican wings above a loitering river; the whisper of wind in wheat fields. I grew up with those voices. Those voices of *that place, that place of prairie*.

As I stretched my artistic journey and looked to a *visual* way of being in the world, I re-found the photography I had also abandoned years ago in the vortex of that same turbulent world. And here I have found an eye, a way of seeing, that speaks again to that influence – the influence of place. In the prairies, where everything is vast, and wide, and sweeping, and unlimited, one finds solace in the almost unnoticeable detail. The grasshopper next to invisible on her swaying blade of grass; the tiny fragile violet obscured in a wedge of sage – here today, gone tomorrow; the diminutive frogs that appear after rainstorms – fleeing in ripples of what looks like dirt ahead of your booted feet. I *have* taken pictures of sweeping landscapes – rolling hills and stretches of lake. But, mostly, I peer closer with my camera lens. I take pictures of the insides of buttercups, the texture of a stone, the reflections of light pooling in the rainwater atop a wooden barrel. This practice, too, comes of living on the prairie – looking for other small things that abide in a world of expanse, companions that help to make one feel a little less alone.



Image 5-8. “Rain Drop on Grape Vines”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Chapter 6.

Gokotta (Swedish)

- to wake up in the early morning with the purpose of going outside to hear the first birds of spring sing



Image 6-1. “Dandelion Seed Tightrope Walker on Spider Web Strand”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“The land is like poetry: it is inexplicably coherent, is transcendent in its meaning, and it has the power to elevate a consideration of human life.”

~ Barry Lopez, “Arctic Dreams”

So, I am looking, as an artist, for those aspects of place that ‘speak’ to me. Those words will be different for each individual, each artist. We bring our varied experiences of place to bear on our artistic output, on our idea of how we are in the world. “Spaces become places when they are invested with meaning from our experiences.” (Ellis, 2005, p. 58).

Consider what is implied by the idea of a special sense of place. For many people it means that the place “speaks” to them, that it has a significance for them, and usually this means that the place plays a role in either reflecting something of their own sense of themselves or else that it actually shapes or is a part of that sense of self. Thus, when we say that we feel we belong to a place, we really mean that the place is part of who and what we are. (Malpas, J., 2008, p. 19)

Further, my own art-making, photography (besides what it speaks of place in and of itself in image) serves as metaphor. In photography light is everything. A photograph is the consequence of light playing with dark, of bringing certain aspects to the forefront, to focus. Each strand of light will illumine something else. To bring to light is also the emerging of insights and understandings. I must wait to ‘receive’ when taking a photograph. My methodology is to go beyond mere documentation and representation of place. I prefer ‘receiving’ images that are unusual, uncommon, and that which causes me to ‘stop’. Sometimes the ache of a place will appear as a ghost, something nebulous barely caught at the corners of my eyes, not really fully seen.



Image 6-2. “Ghost Walks the River”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

If metaphor is personification, then an image is not just what I, the photographer, wishes to say, but also what the place photographed wishes to say. I am conscious of braiding together all the elements – the colour, the texture, the light – as I seek the poetry in the image. Metaphor does not just exist in the verbal world of poetry, but in the language of photography. I also braid place, autobiography, and metaphor. For example, if I look to the wide sweep of a coulee to photograph, I see form - place. I am reminded of stories associated with that place (the time I followed the tracks of antelope along the curves of a coulee, then stumbled upon the desiccated ruin of an antelope carcass, the sweet apostrophe of a foetus in her torn womb) - autobiography. I look to the coulees and I am brought to think of deep time, and the secrets hidden in helixes, and spirals, and undulating coulees – metaphor.

My process of photographing illuminates and transforms my experience of place.

You follow the murmur of your blood through the unknown territory your eyes invent. . . You have closed your eyes, and you enter and leave from yourself to yourself on a bridge of pulse-beats: the heart is an eye (Paz, O. 1987, p. 87)

My methodologies of photography, poetic inquiry, my walk on the red road – all synthesize and coalesce like a braid of sweetgrass, smoldering on the coals. My praxis has become ceremony and acknowledges the sacred in the doing or making.

To truly observe, one must sometimes set both words and the creation of image aside. To inhabit place is to do so much more deeply than either image or words can allow. It is like when sitting motionless on a stump in the forest, a butterfly lands on your knee. If you try and grab your camera, no matter if inch by inch, it will fly away. If you say something, or even gasp, the mere current of your breath will lift its wings and it will leave. One can only go under, submerge to where you just experience the butterfly. You note the tear in her wing, the way she bathes her face with wire-thin legs; the way her tongue rolls and unrolls like a party favour. When she eventually flies away, you hope that she remembers that you were kind. To experience place where ourselves stop at our fingertips, 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 “ (Butala, 1997, p. 64)

I had an early experience of someone who truly, innately knew the power of place, though at the time I was far too young to understand the potency of that observation. When I was a child, about grade three, my social studies teacher took us, one day, on a field trip. She piled us into her and one volunteer parent’s cars, some of us sitting on the laps of others. We drove out of the city, and then onto the highway, and then turned into a dusty, yellow-grassed, rutted road that took us out into the prairie.

She told us to sit where we liked, gave us paper and crayons. Some students sat down by the slow-moving river, taking advantage of the shade of the few cottonwoods there, others in the shade of a large boulder; some settled down in the sun-parched prairie grass, flicking ants off their dusty legs.

“This is a place of great history,” she said, referring to the lesson that week about the creation of the RCMP police force and the Indian battles that had taken place on the Bow River. “Draw what you know of this place.”

The next day she asked us to stand in front of the class, displaying our pictures, and tell about what we knew of that place. Some had drawn bloody Indian battles, graphic and crimson, arrows sticking out of bodies and hurtling through the air. Others had drawn rigid RCMP officers, dressed in red serge, large Rin-Tin-Tin dogs at their sides. The pictures were lurid and exaggerated, images shaped from favourite TV westerns or John Wayne movies.

A Blackfoot First Nations boy held up his picture. It was a drawing of different sorts of birds.

“I don’t think you understood what I asked of you,” the teacher said, not ungently.

The boy pointed at his drawing.

“This is a hawk”, he said. “The hawk hunts where the prairie is flat and open.”

“This is an owl, the big kind. They live where there are trees.”

“This is a red-winged blackbird. They like to sit where the grass is high, and sing.”

“This is a pelican. They swim on water. If there is no water, you will not see pelicans.

Ken Taylor (2008), in his Unesco paper “Landscape and Memory” says:

One of our deepest needs is for a sense of identity and belonging and a common denominator in this is human attachment to landscape and how we find identity in landscape and place. Landscape therefore is not simply what we see, but a way of seeing: we see it with our eye but interpret it with our mind and ascribe values to landscape for intangible – spiritual – reasons.



Image 6-3. “Winter Crows Over Fallow Fields”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

This inquiry, this communion with others and myself, this opening one’s heart is a prospect that is infused with excitement but fraught with trepidation. Will I be able to ‘see’ with another’s eyes, and with their heart; listen to the words between?

But this morning, the first dry morning in a while, I notice that the forsythia is in bloom – yellow stars and curls on bare grey branches. In the still-sleeping garden beds, waiting for the fork that turns their chilled soils up to the steaming sun, I notice the first Varied Thrushes of the year. Like big 747 planes trundling around landing strips, they hop and waddle in search of the first spring earthworms, their buzzing whistles low and furtive. The crows are starting to raid the eaves troughs in hopes of material for their nests. They look in at me sitting at my desk, hanging upside down and peering intently. Their clawed feet scuttle and rattle on the metal – sounding like our old hound dog on the clay-tiled floors, in need of a nail trimming. The mornings, that have been dark and still

all winter, are now cacophonous with birdsong – singing up the early sun. The birds are here in numbers now, and in the near midnight time I sometimes hear the giggles and yips of coyotes. I don't realize that I've missed them all until they are here again and I wonder how I went a whole winter without hearing them.

This is my way of understanding (or seeking to understand) the indefinable, immeasurable qualities of the natural place I inhabit in my life. But I forget sometimes . . . so I fear that means that my heart is not always open enough as an artist – not even for myself, so how can it open for the perceptions of other artists?

In the rush of my everyday busy-ness, I fear I overlook the poetics of natural place and its effect on my mind, emotions, body, and spirit. *I disregard.*



Image 6-4. “Geese on the River”.

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.

We are always in ‘place’. We are immersed in places, always in one place or another, and intimately caught up in the natural places around us. But our hearts sometimes fall silent beneath the roar of our hustling, bustling minds. *We* disregard.

Scratchings on paper in the middle of the night, scribbles on envelopes left deep in pockets. Middlings and muddlings, sketch of a bird in the holly tree, two lines of poem about the wind. They are all mere twitchings of nature, of my searching for place. I yearn to be feral, I wish to haunt rivers, to run with antelope along the creases of the coulees. I long to sleep un-bedded beneath the star-pocked sky and wake hung with dew.

I feel, at times, that I am taking steps (sometimes firm and strong, sometimes tentative, sometimes down a slippery slope) down a sparsely-trodden, fascinating, and frustrating path. Who am I to analyze another’s perception of place? I am not meant to analyze, though, am I? Instead to discover and experience an artist’s conscious and unconscious attachments to place. To discover how and why an artist in a given place conceives him/herself to be as a consequence of that place

I could remember the poet Rainer Maria Rilke who said that it’s the questions that move us, not the answers. Or *I could* remember what Terry Tempest Williams said about place, about staying home, and learning the names of things, of those things in place we live amongthe plants, animals, rocks, rivers, and wind. She says:

If we are not home, if we are not rooted deeply in place, making that commitment to dig in and stay put . . . if we don’t know the names of things, if we don’t know pronghorn antelope, if we don’t know blacktail jackrabbit, if we don’t know sage, pinyon, juniper, then I think we are living a life without specificity, and then our lives become abstractions. Then we enter a place of true desolation. (Williams, 2006, p. 4)

Both experiences of place in the natural world and commitment to art are not learning in the sense of the acceptance of information or passive absorption of facts. They are, instead, organic, primal, feral. We absorb the experiences of place and making art deep in the cells and fibres and bones of our bodies. Our experience of place is visceral, our art is personal. We will the land not to forget us. We actualize *knowing*.

There is an interstice between realization and knowing. As artists, we attempt to actualize that realization; we see the patterns in the images, or the place, or the words. We seek the universal patterns in all. We move from poiesis, - that of leading into being, to praxis – the act of producing our art; and in that process comes the knowing, and the embodiment.

Place needs a witness. When we come to be aware of our knowing, we bear witness to the stories, the form, and the spirit with our art-making. Geologists call the crack in a cave through which water seeps to create stalagmites and stalactites in the open spaces beneath the earth, a ‘lifeline’. Leonard Cohen, the poet, says “there is a crack in everything, that’s how the light gets in”. The interplay of darkness and light; the poiesis of bringing into being, the praxis of creation – our lifeline.

We cannot view place indifferently, distantly, nor without empathy. We cannot just *look*, we cannot use only our eyes. We must actually behold– spiritually. We must also hearken, not just hear. As we have intent, sense, and heart – so does nature, so does place. Cajete says that natural phenomena are living entities. We cannot perceive place/nature as living entity unless, as Peter London espouses, we open ourselves to it, listen deeply, enquire with heart. When we make our art with dialogue - with relationship - to the natural world, we come into a “knowing”. A knowing that is profound and visceral and creative. A knowing that changes us. “The many ways Nature employs of creating the world, are not just techniques, they are ways of being in the world” (London, 2003, p. 65)

Knowing has depth. Abrams speaks to the depth of the experience that we can have with place. Not mere superficial looking but rather deep and open-hearted *seeing* - immersed, open, and surrendered to what surrounding entities might emanate.

The human mind is not some otherworldly essence that comes to house itself inside our physiology. Rather it is instilled and provoked by the sensorial field itself, induced by the tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth. The invisible shapes of smells, rhythms of cricket song, and the movement of shadows all, in a sense, provide the subtle body of our thoughts. Our own reflections, we might say, are a part of the play of light and its reflections . . . Each place its own

mind, its own psyche! Oak, Madrone, Douglas fir, red-tailed hawk, serpentine in the sandstone, a certain scale to the topography, drenching rains in the winters, fog off-shore in the summers, salmon surging up the streams – all these together make up a particular state of mind, a place-specific intelligence shared by all the humans that dwell therein, but also by the coyotes yapping in those valleys, by the bobcats and the ferns and the spiders, by all beings who live and make their way in that zone. Each place its own psyche. Each sky its own blue. (Abrams, 1997, p. 262)

Gregory Cajete emphasizes that “(Indigenous) education, at its innermost core, is education about the life and nature of the spirit that moves us.”(1994, p. 42) He says that it is essential we be aware of the various forms of living energy around us — and attentive to what we might be moved by. It also means that we *allow* ourselves, our spirits, to be stirred by both powerful and subtler things in the process of relating to place, and to the artist that we are. He says “art is an expression of life . . . Art is a way of seeing, of being, and of becoming” (Cajete, 1994, p. 153).

There are mystifying complexities of meaning and subtleties of form in place. Place consists of a precise voice in a precise moment and, when we reflect – upon our reflection and in the physical tones that come from that, the art emerges. All is connected. Richard Louv (2005, p. 40) observes that “the land shapes us more than we shape the land.”

Natural place begs for poetry. As the spirals, and the lines, and the circles that proliferate in nature flow to rhythms and beats from the central heart of place, so, too, does place wish to be sought by the process of poetic inquiry. Tim Lilburn speaks to the nature and process of poetry and its unapologetic yearning for soul:

Poetry’s fundamental appetite is ecstatic; its curiosity yearns beyond this barrier of intelligibility to know the within-ness of things...The knowledge poetry seeks is the most intimate... Poetry leans into the world and back to this state when the mind bespoke the souls of things... (Lilburn, 2008)

Lilburn suggests that the essence of poetry is not to explain or describe place necessarily but instead to come close to the spirit, to be satisfied and ecstatic with relating to place. Peter London also writes about our experiences with place and nature as sacred conversations. He suggests that the place itself dialogs with us and our creative/artistic

response is our means of inquiry and knowing. (London, 2003, p. 65). We embody and we transform.

Our identities are formed of place. We are intricately bound to place, even if the formative place is not where we presently are. Those places are impressible, sensitive, inspiring. We have some wisdom as a result of our relationship with place. The elements and the particularities of a place matter. “Knowledge of a place — where you are and where you come from — is intertwined with knowledge of who you are. Landscape, in other words, shapes mindscape.”(Orr, D., 2013, p. 185)

*And forget not that the earth delights to feel your bare feet and the winds
long to play with your hair*

- Kahlil Gibran, “The Prophet”

Fragments of Place #4



Image 6-5. “Dying Vines on Wooden Fence”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Place as Healer

In both the work of myself and Kaija Savinainen Mountain, place has prominence. We both have always been influenced by the natural world around us. But also, it has been our experiences with illness that has opened doors in our hearts that we weren't aware had been closed. I believe it has deepened the relationship with place and the knowledge gleaned from the relationship has transformed each our forms of art.

Illness, whether it is chronic pain and creeping blindness on my part or cancer for Kaija, results in some form of ‘shape-shifting’ for each of us. On one level or another, our bodies have betrayed us. As artists we *embody* so very much of what our place(s) provide to us in inspiration or solace. Our work reflects our understanding of our

communion with place. However, with every setback or reoccurrence of an illness we must re-shape ourselves, we must undergo yet another metamorphosis – shape-shift. The sensory and bodily changes we experience permit, or even empower, our awareness to enter deeper layers of being. We are continually led to a threshold, a dawning, where we make choices. We must become transformative. We must turn to art where what is deep and genuine can find form and voice. Un-fracture the fractured. When a person’s life is interrupted by illness, it allows a new strand to be braided into the context and content, the newly realized spiritual expanse of place. Place puts us back together again.

Kaija Savinainen-Mountain experiences place, and is open to the emanations. Seen through the harrowing pall of her illness, she writes of her experience of loss, anguish, deep hurt – and ultimately hope (and wellness). She writes:

. . . I was going through chemo I created a series of crane paintings. About 50 or so works over the course of the year I was ill and recovering. I had to run daily to breathe and to feel. It was from this I began to think about life and why. One day while out for a run (it was July, hot and sticky) I stopped at the river, allowing for my dogs to swim. . . . That afternoon was particularly buggy and I too needed to catch my breath. The embankment was steep so the descent was a bit crazy holding onto four big dogs. The dogs went into the water and began drinking.

I put my hands in the water when I heard above me somewhere the sound of cranes calling . . . I looked up, saw nothing and looked back down and at that moment my hands in the water were mixed with a reflection of three cranes flying overhead. It struck me that fragments of time intermingle and touch each of us, all of us human, animals included simultaneously. For a number of years I had observed the cranes but never been brave enough to paint them. It was this idea of minute fragments meeting, mixing and were they physical entities, not sure but I know I felt it all around for weeks and weeks.

I do believe we choose not to see or feel them, these fragments.

The work/paintings would start in a very literally sense of something observed and as I push the images or work further the work would take on a life of its own directing me into a soul and spiritual searching. I refer to these experiences as I recorded them on canvas as “fragments of time” . . . I would literally feel experiences rushing around me, touching me and moving me in various directions remembering, recalling . . . I was . . . experiencing a heightened sense of the inner self. I could hear myself paint

and the work would speak to me through my brush. It was exhausting at times yet incredibly exhilarating . . . I strongly believe we all have fragments of time surrounding us, holding us close; how we chose to accept or acknowledge is up to the individual. I sold a few of these paintings but not many. I have one I call Angel Wings that makes me want to cry, to weep deep gut wrenching sobs . . . the anguish within the work is there but not many see it. And there again is what we allow a work to tell us, the dialogue we hear or listen to is so real and very different for each person. When that connection occurs between you and a work it is pure magic to me . . . you and the work become intertwined. Possibly this makes little sense but when I paint it has to come from a lived experience flavoured with fragments of time . . . I think I named the whole series “Sing me home . . . “

And place speaks to us in subtler forms as well – the way the light of the sun moves over moving water, the mournful cry of the dove, the way a breeze lifts our hair and then leaves. But . . . Kaija’s emotions and experience are so powerful and moving I have included, here, all three of the paintings that constitute the series:



Image 6-6. “Angel Wings” (from series Sing Me Home).

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.



Image 6-7. “Calling” (from series Sing Me Home).

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.



Image 6-8. “Ancestors” (from series Sing Me Home).

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.

Kaija struggles with the words to describe this gut-deep experience but it is obvious her hurting heart is wide open – and the cranes dove deep into her soul. Embodiment in nature translates to being embodied in the art produced.

It is through the power of observation, the gifts of eye and ear, of tongue.

Sometimes, illness forces us to view our relationship with place more intimately. Tim Lilburn, a poet who observes and relates to the natural world with an intensity and reverence of seeing that helps us to understand our lives speaks of his fall into illness and how it produced his book of poetry, *Orphic Politics*:

I wrote the poems in *Orphic Politics* between 2003 and 2007. This was a difficult time for me. I got quite ill, was hospitalized, and had a number of surgeries. I also developed an auto-immune condition that made walking difficult. I had never been sick like this before, never lived in the country of the ill, and my health problems went on for a couple of years. The poems respond to all of this. After a while, being sick felt like an orphic immurement. I began to think of other diseases in me that might be in need of healing, noological [knowing & knowledge] disorders—a loneliness for things, for example, the residue of colonialism. How to transform these? I subjected myself to the theurgic [practice of ritual] art of poetry. (Lilburn, T. 2008)

My body has begun to let me know – in whispered but emphatic mutterings – that the blows of a fractious world have come to live in muscle and bone. My immune system, too weary of a world that it is constantly warring with, is weakened and sad. I live in constant pain.

My daily rhythms of writing and reading, even getting out of bed or simply walking to the end of the block, have been derailed by a chronic illness that has stopped, unceremoniously and without apology, the music to which mind and matter moves throughout the day. I have been made palpably aware of how body and brain conspire in what we call being. The pain and extreme physical weakness have somehow short-circuited those paths of synapses upon which creative thinking travels. I feel like the card to the library of my own mind has been revoked and all thoughts and ideas are hidden behind locked wooden Special Collection doors to which I no longer have access. Or like Alice down her Wonderland hole where all is fog and fragments and conversations

double back on themselves, weaving confusion and chaos. A mental haze persists. I am blind in one eye. How, then, the idea of my art continuing in photographs? How, then, the knitting of words together in flowing lines of poetry?

It is, sometimes, like my soul is caged.

The illness is chronic but is not constant. With medication and rest and luck I have days that are so much the opposite of what has become normal that it feels, well, miraculous. And on those days, the sparkle and radiance that brighten the fog result in reams of poems and hundreds of photographs. It is when I am physically in a natural place that I am most often catapulted to a higher temperament of receptivity. Not that it takes me ‘out of myself’ when I am open to place and its influence. Just the opposite, actually. We tend to treat illness as an abstraction. In place, in natural place, when I can feel the sun on my face as it freckles through the leaves of the tree I am sitting under; though I am there because I am physically unable to scramble over the rock face to the stream, the concreteness of my body-mind is ‘painfully’ evident. I need to be open to what knowledge place offers that is not cognitive.

Over time the feel of a place is registered in one's muscles and bones.

- Yi-Fu Tuan, “Space and Place”



Image 6-9. “Caged Soul”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Today, early morning, I go again for an IV drip of vitamins and secrets. The morning is silent and I have many invitations to greet crows along the way. A part of me feels that seeing so many crows on a daily basis could be conceived of as portentous, even ill-boding, given my errand. A murder of crows, scavengers of carcasses. But the truth of it is that I live in an area of old-growth forest that the crows find suitable for hiding their large, messy nests. And the neighbourhood still boasts above-ground power lines – suitable for warming avian feet in the winter. Research at the University of Washington in Seattle has proven that crows can identify humans. I have been known to toss them apple cores, pieces of toast, the occasional peanut. So they know me. They are probably not so much predicting my death as waiting for a handout. Good morning, Crow. Good morning, Black Knave.

Upon arriving at the clinic, I am greeted by Buddha!. He is a new nurse, David. Tall. Bald. He is beaming with a smile that crinkles his eyes and that makes his round face glow. He beckons me to follow him to the chair and when I sit, he takes my face in his large hands, smiles, and says ‘*karuna*’. He strokes my arm until it is warm and the veins become inviting. He tells me he is from Tibet and he just celebrated his son’s seventh birthday. This is the first time, he says, that he has been with his son for his birthday. For the last seven years he has only been able to come and see him once a year, and never on his birthday. But now David is finally here to stay, he says, and he hugs his son every day. He ignores the tear on his cheek. I catch it with my fingertip.

He says if he hurts me I can pull his non-existent hair. I don’t even feel the needle go in, though blood trickles down my hand. The healing fluid again drips, drips into my body. The healing begins. I am healing, finding strength. I think I will start a garden again. I think when I am done here I will go out to the quarry and pick up rocks for this garden. I think, today, I can roll them, or even lift them to the car. I think today I can be strong and, though I will be tired, my body will have accomplished miracles. The first thing I do, though, is look up the word ‘*karuna*’. It is Tibetan for compassion.

I *am* growing a garden again. Through the on-again, off-again spring I have been slipping plants into the soil. The names of the plants themselves are a poem –

bowman’s root (also known as Fawn’s Breath, a name to catch *my* breath),

star grass, hive vine, stork bill, butter and eggs (toadflax),

brodiaea (cluster lilies), seepspring, Indian paintbrush,

olive, fig, bird’s eye,

goat’s beard, tidy tips (platyglossa),

owl’s clover, desert lantern.

I like to say the names together in a chant, the words spilling off my tongue like melodies. I slip them into warm soil – the melodies, the names, the plants. I use my hands to pull the soil around their fragile limbs. My tending of *this* garden is different. Where before the tending of a garden was perfunctory and wrought with a certain kind of violence – the tearing out of clinging weeds, the drowning of soft slugs – this time, well, the relationship is altered, changed. I am becoming em-bodied in this garden, this garden I am tending.

I remember the enchanted gardens of my childhood. Gardens where the colours were brighter – my eyes were open; where I could delight in chasing butterflies by day and fireflies by night – my body was fluid. Gardens where the very air was clear as mountain water, and the morning moist and fragrant. Where the rhubarb was sweeter because it was stolen from the McCafferty's garden under a nickel-silver moon. My breath-held tension as I moved aside the loose board and bellied up to the rhubarb patch while Mr. McCafferty smoked on his back porch with his fat, deaf Basset Hound at his feet. The smoke of his cigarette drifted up and curled round the single yellow light bulb, befuddling the moths that were already intent on a death of wing-sizzled immolation. Trying to smother the crack-crackle noise of the breaking stem with the hem of my dress, I would tear one piece for me and another for my brother who was waiting in the alleyway with sugar in a twist of foil in his pocket.

As I dig with my fingers around the plants to loosen the soil, I unearth things. My desk becomes a repository for these venerated things, my curios and bibelots. There are some odd flowers I pressed in an old book – their coloured juices staining the yellowed words, the skeleton of a shrew, the strange sculptures of old seed pods, the pieces of a blue robin's egg – and another that never hatched, a button or two, some small stones, some feathers, a wisp of wheat. Even the shell of a Butter Clam, and one of a Varnish Clam that I can only surmise were dropped there by a seagull back from his foray at the sea coast. Inventories from a child's hiding place in the hollow of a tree, and from my pocket after a rippling of fingers through garden soil, and from religious holy places, are all remarkably similar. We are all so fond of bones, it seems. Nevertheless, these found

items are our artifacts, our talismans. Each thing on my desk says something of the history of my garden – each spoke to me. It’s why they are there.

I feel a commitment, now, to my pain-wracked body. I feel that commitment in how I am embodied in this garden, this sliver of nature. There is a new love. I still pull the weeds, but gently. I still remove the slugs, but I feel shame. I toss them gently into the woods over the fence and hope fervently that they don’t possess an internal compass that will bring them back to feast on the daylilies or the strawberry blossoms – like swallows, or monarch butterflies, or salmon. Is it possible to re-home slugs, like you would a difficult stray? Sometimes the commitment is unbearable, as is sometimes the pain. But it is assuaged as the soul of this garden runs like sap in my veins, blended with the blood. Like a tree of red, pushing its branches and roots through my heart, out of my toes into the soil. In the words of the great tantric sage Saraha “here in this body are sacred rivers: here are the sun and the moon as well as all the pilgrimage places . . . “. I feel that it would not be untoward to lift my face to a full moon and bay, under the wide-open stare of the midnighter owl.

My body has made me conscious. My body is embodied in this garden, manifested in its struggle, proclaimed in its unfolding, revealed in its transformation. This body, an awkward, unpolished, humble thing; this body incorporates touchstones, it utters poetry, it bears baggage, it longs for the green succour of nature. Like this garden, my body is an evolving piece of art. It does not have to be beautiful to move you. It is never quite finished. Like the soft-bodied slugs that hide under the squash leaves I, too, am unprotected, soft, tender, risking experience. But like those warrior weeds, I have grown tenacity. My body and its scars, its pain, is an account of experience – a chronicle, an archive, a remembrance, and a testimony. The garden witnesses me. Acknowledges me. As the breeze dances through the nodding heads of scarlet poppies, I may dance in my garden with naked, dirty feet.

Grounded(ness)

I find the fine, white scar
on my hand;
the result of a frightening question.

It sits in the webbed roots of
bones and veins and the wear of time.

When did my hands turn to oak?
When did my skin turn to paper?

I place my hand on the soil,
also cracked and lined and webbed.
Commonality, coincidence,

a universal sigh.



Image 6-10. “Grounded(ness)”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

There are probably all kinds of rational reasons for why place/land can heal us. Of late I have heard theories posited such as chlorophyll, oxygen, endorphins. I think the reasons are more intrinsic, more native and genuine, than that. It may be that our bones and blood have elements in common with stones and sea. Or that standing in the piney embrace of an ancient tree takes us to a source. Being in the presence of innumerable sub-terrestrial, amphibious, and sky-trekking creatures who exist in a distinctly parallel sphere – connects us. “Place will teach me to ‘imagine beauty and conjure intimacy . . . [to] find solace where literal analysis finds only tree and rocks and grass” (Lopez 1999, p. 351).

A medicine walk is a kind of pilgrimage; a kind of reawakening to the land and to the self. It is, to me, a walk into place to find change and transformation. The increasing disconnect that we, as humans, have with nature creates an inflammation of the soul. Finding place again, and within place - one’s self, becomes the antidote. Sometimes illness, and the resulting pilgrimage into place to seek healing – the medicine walk, results in questions that we don’t even know we are asking. Where am I going? What do I need to learn? What do I need to reclaim? What gets left behind?

And sometimes the answers are so very, very simple. Once a dragonfly settled next to me on a warm stone for an hour, and the shimmering portal between us thinned, and I touched an elemental place. Solace, restoration, compassion. Our place, our landscapes, as Stephen Trimble avows (1996, p. 20), “nourish and teach and heal”.

And, sometimes, it is just the sheer, unutterable reverence of it that heals:

The owls appeared now, drifting from tree to tree as silently as flakes of soot, hooting in astonishment as the moon rose higher and higher, turning to pink, then gold, and finally riding in a nest of stars, like a silver bubble. (Durrell, 2006, p. 176).

Chapter 7.

Waldeinsamkeit (German)

– the feeling of being alone in the woods



Image 7-1. “Driftwood & Paw Prints”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That’s the problem.”

~A.A. Milne, “Winnie-the-Pooh”

I need to speak here of Kaija’s and my relationships/communion with animals in the place(s) we inhabit – both those animals with which we live and those that deign to grace us with brief intimacies in the wild. They act as our emissaries, our mediators with place. They provide a deeper and broader palette from which we can paint and colour our affinity with place. They are the pathfinders for our way-finding.

From Kaija Mountain – a personal email:

Thank you Linda for understanding and listening. I so look forward to reconnecting and walking together. Perhaps the painting I’m sending will begin the dialogue. When I run (and nothing fast anymore) with my group of dogs I feel as if though I pass through remembrances or fragments of times as I call them. Some places along my routes call me and reappear during my runs. I will take you to that place along our concession roads...the trees whispered, stood tall and I watched a deer skip across the road. She was quick and graceful. She glanced at us, and we locked eyes for a brief moment. I’m sure we appeared as a pack of wolves to her and a huge threat. I could hear her in the cedar stand when I saw two more...they all stared at us and then one of them raised its head snorting distain in our direction. I blew back a pitiful sound I’m sure but ears turned in our direction and time stood still. Digger the big old Alaskan started to pull again and then the deer quickly melted into the maple/cedar woods. I had my camera along to record some of the magical colors but the deer in the painting were not in the pictures. The deer in the work came from my memories of the moment. As I stated earlier I’m not a slave to camera images but they serve as starting points with a few basic details, structures, colors...there I go again rambling. Today is make a list of things I need to do within the next week or so; school things for next term, return to my art....I have two large canvases primed with a base color drying and waiting for me.... It takes me about two weeks to shed school reports from my thinking self and for the creative person to re-emerge. I can never rush the process...Later and thanks again for understanding,

Kaija



Image 7-2. “Cedar Spring”.

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.

Of those animals that have lived with us, both Kaija and I have been touched, moved, and altered by horses, dogs, and cats. Kaija says of horses and the significance they have had on her painting:

Why horses? Their contrasts can say so much. Despite their strength and vitality, they have a vulnerable, graceful quality. They are wild and chaotic, yet can exude peace, calm and gentleness. Plain and heavy or exotic and delicate - they are as varied as humans. And through the subtlety of the gentleness, they give grace to life, providing us with aesthetic pleasure just by being. (Kaija Savinainen Mountain artist statement)

In my own experience, I have found that horses never lie, that their ultimate gift is trust. And, perhaps smaller in the grand scheme of things, but important nonetheless whether philosophically or naturally, they, literally, can tell you which way the wind is blowing.



Image 7-3. “Photo of artist Kaija Savinainen Mountain with painting and sculpture (made of natural materials including horse hair) inspired by her horses”.

Personal photo belonging to the author. Circa early 1980’s. Photographer unknown.



Image 7-4. “Communion”.

Photo of Author taken by son, Kelsey Hegland, and belonging to the author.

Kaija is a dedicated long-distance runner and her paintings are strongly impacted by the places and creatures she observes during her long runs with her dogs. My own experience is that of, camera in hand, muddling along with an aging dog. Our pace is slow, convoluted, measured, . . . astonished.

A dog knows the passage of time – more keenly, and *differently* than do we. They can tell from the strength of a scent whether the animal came by here hours ago, or days ago. They know the weave, and the tuning, and the turning of seasons; when to expect geese nesting in the grasses and when the turtles will rise to the surface after a winter sheathed in frigid mud.

Conversely, walking into place with a dog *stops* all time. The scents pull her like the fingered aromas from a bakery shop. She finds berries dropped by birds and perceives whether they were dropped by a crow or a chickadee. She knows where the skunk slept last night; she can follow the skip and leap of a hunting coyote. She alerts me to the swaying tails of salmon under the sheen of the water in spawning season – mesmerizing, spellbinding. She knows the branch on the ground is newly fallen.

Being in place with dog means that walking is determined by circumstance, not the route or the pace. Circumstances create irregularity, doubling back, stopping so suddenly one gasps. Counselling by the dog, I notice that there is a new pile of leaves, and that the air has moistened with a lifting fog. It means that sometimes I have to get down to ground level to see the infant geese hidden at the riverside; that sometimes I have to look up to see the heron bizarrely in the tree; that sometimes I should turn and see what made that small, barely-there sound. When her ears go up, I should look to what is rustling in the bush. As she sniffs intently at a circular, swirled indentation in the long grasses, I realize the sleeping places of deer in the night. If we feel that we are the ‘other’ in place/nature, it can close us. Dog, in her exuberant ‘rolling’ in the world, in her generous sharing of her understanding of place, shows us how to open.

And the cats? Well, the cat just sits in her existential self and in so doing, teaches us haecceity (the ‘this-ness’ of beings or things, the property of being unique). Merely that.

Sharing place with animals is sharing in the original language of nature/place. Those relationships emphasize our need to remember, remember the language in place. All of the other species are fluent, it is concealed within them, and their days and nights are aligned with it. Whether four-legged, finned or winged, this sacred language shapes their songs, utters their stories, patterns their movements, migrations, and seasons. We *can* remember. As Alan Watts, the philosopher, once said. “You did not come into this world. You came out of it, like a wave out of the ocean. You are not a stranger here.”

Paying attention to other beings—recognizing their incredible gifts of photosynthesis, nitrogen fixation, migration, metamorphosis, and communication across miles—is humbling and leads inescapably to the understanding that we are surrounded by intelligences other than our own: beings who evolved here long before we did, and who have adapted innovative, remarkable ways of being that we might emulate, through intellectual biomimicry, for sustainability. We are surrounded by teachers and mentors who come dressed in foliage, fur, and feathers. There is comfort in their presence and guidance in their lessons. (Kimmerer, R.W., 2014, p. 22)

Words act as compass; place-speech serves literally to en-charm the land – to sing it back into being, and to sing one’s being back into it. (Macfarlane, R. 2015, p. 22)



Image 7-5. “Artist Kaija Mountain with Muses”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Fragments of Place #5

Edward Casey (1996), the philosopher, approaches place with two very different philosophical slants. He outlines a meaning-making of place referencing primeval cosmology. And, secondly, he traces place through the origins and development of Western philosophy and literature, to the resurgence of place in postmodern cultural theory. Evoking Aristotle’s cryptic remark: “The power of place will be remarkable” (quoted in Casey, 1996, p. ix), Casey uncovers the long history of interest in place in philosophical inquiry. He writes:

To be at all—to exist in any way—is to be somewhere, and to be somewhere is to be in some kind of place. Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How

could it be otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact?
(Casey, 1996, p. ix)

Keith Basso (1996), an anthropologist, writes of the braiding, blending, and blurring of place (or the marriage of geography, mind, and culture) in his book *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscapes and Language Among the Western Apache*. For the Western Apache, he says,

[P]lace roots individuals in the social and cultural soils from which they have sprung together, holding them there in the grip of a shared identity, a localized version of selfhood. . . . [S]elfhood and placehood are completely intertwined” (Basso, p. 146)

I remember when I went to school there was such a subject as Natural History. For me, a child new to this country and new to the prairie, this subject was an essential part of my being able to find my ‘place’, my anchor. We carried journals, shared flower presses, and bird identification books out into ‘nature’, out into place. We dug holes and, looking at the striated soil, learned geology. We learned that moss mostly grows on the north side of trees; that a singular tree out in the middle of flatness can act as a sundial - and learned to tell time. When watching a rabbit hop about that tree, and then dive down into its burrow, we even learned how to tie shoelaces. Finding cottonwood trees taught us that water was close and the undulating coulees taught us that the wind is a sculptor. Thus we learned geography.

Flowers and grasses crushed between the layers of the flower press revealed structures we couldn’t see when in their three-dimensional realness; their colour stained the pages. The seed pods, crushed open, revealed their floral future. We found that crushing insects in those same flower presses did not reveal anything of them at all. Instead, an oily smear devoid of beauty. That taught us something too.



Image 7-6. “Pressed Leaves: Created by Author’s Grandchildren”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Place as Experience

Kaija spoke of how the images of place she captures with her camera do not, necessarily, become represented in their realism within her paintings. She uses the images as ‘starting points’, she creates from the ‘memory of the moment’. I find the same creative avenue in my photographic work. My photos are not necessarily focused on the actuality of the object/scene/landscape in front of the lens, but instead on the emotion or sense invoked from it. Barthes (1981) argues:

The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body (or *landscape*), which was there, proceeded radiations which ultimately

touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photography of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. 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 (*anything*) who has been photographed (Barthes, R. 1981, pp. 80-81)

Further, Durrell (the travel writer) posits “. . . the goal of the writer or novelist (*or painter, or photographer, etc.*) is to isolate the germ . . . expressed in its landscape” (p. 158). This may be achieved by entering into silent communion with the landscape, an act that he termed quiet identification. “. . . the essential essence of landscape . . . you will hear the whispered message, for all landscapes ask the same question in the same whisper: I am watching you – are you watching yourself in me?” (Durrell, L. 2012, p. 158)

In other words, the art created is not necessarily representative, per se. It is, instead, about the experience that has been felt in that rapport with place. Kaija and I, coffee mugs in hand, strolled throughout her gardens. Here, she ran her hands through the tender petals of a large grouping of daisies – more appropriately deemed a flock as they looked like pleased white sheep, almost turning their heads to her as she went on. There, she enthused about the bombastic red blushes of a drifted planting of voluptuous blooms. They glowed with pride, smug. We encountered a lavish palette of colour at every step. At that turn in the path, she showed me where a toad hides during the day under a broken piece of pottery, coming out at night she told me, to add his bass tone to the fluting treble of the frogs. An army of frogs, amended by the compact knot of a single toad. Up high was a messy nest; across our path was the still dew-damp gesture in the grass of a garter snake. Her entire garden buzzed, and trilled, and quavered, and beckoned, and danced a soft-shoe shuffling with the breeze. We spoke of relationship with place, we spoke of the dialogs and the languages we learn when we listen to place, we spoke of what it is to inhabit that shimmering, transparent place that is not there, but not here.

Here I provide a gallery of images of artist Kaija Mountain’s gardens, followed by examples of her painterly responses to place of garden and my photographic responses:

The artist's gardens:



Image 7-7. “Artist in her Gardens”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 7-8. “The Artist’s Garden”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

And some of her artistic responses:



Image 7-9. “Daisies & Friends”.

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.



Image 7-10. “Cone Flowers”.

Painter: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.

My responses/experience of Kaija's place of garden:

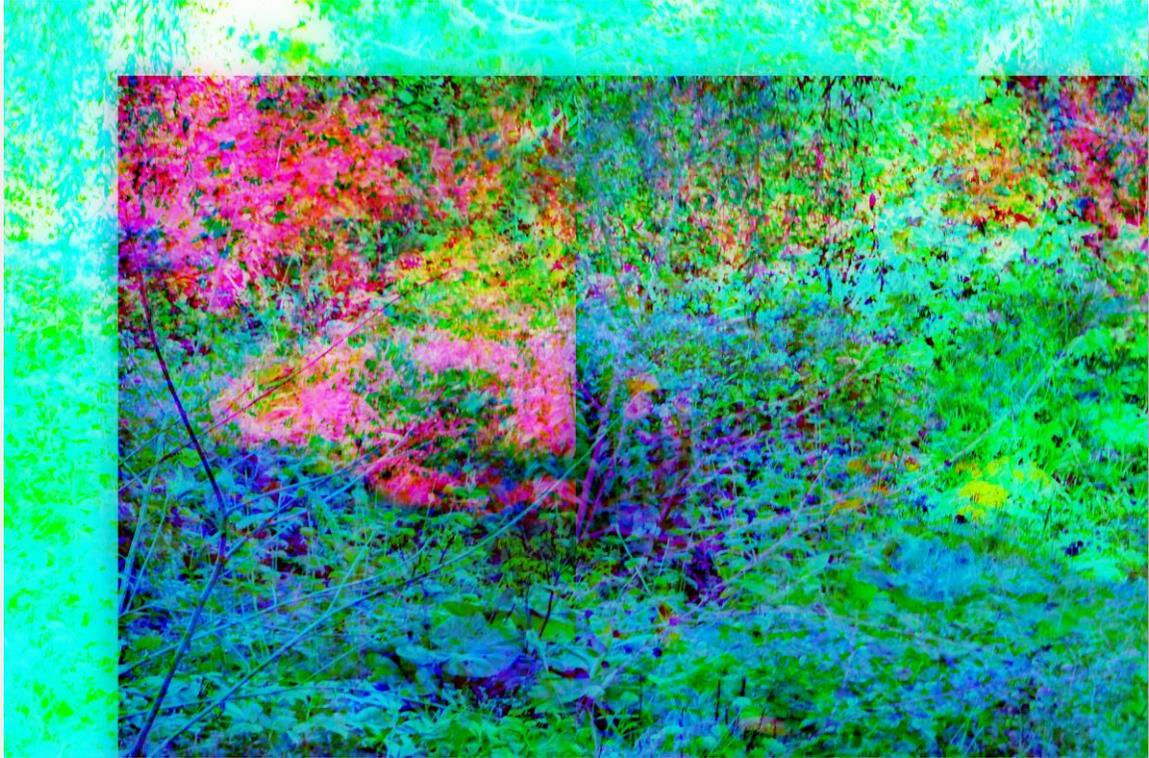


Image 7-11. “Garden Palette”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 7-12. “Daisy Under Log”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.



Image 7-13. “Bee Balm”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

William Least Heat-Moon suggests that we must dream our way into landscapes, particularly prairies:

I'd come to the prairie out of some dim urge to encounter the alien – it's easier to comprehend where someplace else is than where you are – and I had begun to encounter it as I moved among the quoins, ledgers, picked brains, winds, creek meanders, gravestones, stone-age circles. I was coming to see that facts carry a traveler only so far: at last he must penetrate the land by a different means, for to know a place in any real and lasting way is sooner or later to dream it. That's how we come to belong in the deepest sense. (Heat-Moon, 2014, p. 105)

You can bid farewell to a place, think that you will never return. You can become enwrapped in the newness and novelty of your new place, your new way of being. But you are always and eternally called back – like a kite that runs along wind trails and cloud tunnels, thinking itself freely bobbing and dancing with bird beings in the air – yet held by a string that inevitably pulls it home. If only in dreams, you still return. “The landscapes we know and return to become places of solace,” writes Terry Tempest Williams (1991, p. 244), “We are drawn to them because of the stories they tell, because of the memories they hold, or simply because of the sheer beauty that calls us back again and again.”

Beauty heals, solace heals, the land mends and resuscitates. Illness can sometimes make us lose our place in the world. Placeless. Lost. But listen. And speak.

And the land – place – will bear you back to where you belong.

There have been a few times when it felt like the fabric of the universe – the soul of a place – reached to include me in its folds. To give me a sign (for lack of a better term) that it was aware that at that particular time in that particular place – we were connected, place and I. Three times, to be exact, I have felt myself as part of a whole. An integral part of place. A quantum. A mere fragment. But in the experience, felt the cosmos turn inside me.

(1) Dark

The artist, Georgia O’Keeffe, . . . remember her exultation?

“ . . . and the SKY – Anita you have never seen SKY - it is wonderful . . .” (Giboire, C.1990, p. 184 - in a letter to Anita Pollitzer, September 11, 1916)

On a bridge in the country back-roads of Illinois. Far from lights of man, or road or house. The night was as dark as ebony – a raven’s wing; as soft as a hummingbird’s lick of honeyed fingers – formless.

But then, look up. From horizon to horizon, in a great arc, a cupola. Millions upon millions of stars. Spinning and sparking. It seemed each star cluster spun within its own axis.

And below, the air breathed and respired with the trilling song of what could only have been millions upon millions of frogs – each serenading, in turn, their own star – wooing, entreating.

Beseeching.

Chant.

Descant.

Wait.

And my head grew dizzy, as I gaped up at the dark heavens pocked infinitely with holes and tears where the light shone through from the other side, from a place of rapture. And my blood surged through my veins and spun in my heart like the whirling ellipses above me.

Myself. A sliver. A mere scrap of humanity, drifting in the universe.



Image 7-14. “Moon Over Sunset”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

(2) Panting of Wolves

On a jut of land, bulging from the forest. Our tent and low glow of a fire an attempt at hanging onto civility, illumination. Around our camp the darkness was deep, and beside our camp the river ran heavy and turbulent, our ears so acclimated to the sound of it running to the ocean that it was mere ambience.

Laying on our backs, we waited for the meteor shower. We guessed at what were planets, what were stars, what were satellites spinning endlessly until they died.

Sputnik.

Asteroid.

Moon.

The meteorites began streaking across the night-fallen sky. One, then two, then twenty. Then un-countable. They spoke. The fizzle of a flame. The swish of ladies' skirts. The sibilance of snakes. The whisper of vast rocks dying in the sky.

And out of the woods came the shadows of wolves. The pant-gutter sound of pursuit. The innuendo of their foot-falls. The murmuring secret of them.

They stood, just for a moment, and looked our way. The feral yellow of wolves' eyes in the moon-soaked night. And just for that moment – with tumbling river, and sizzling skies, and silent, taciturn forest about us . . . we were wild.

A mere scrap of humanity, running with the wolves.



Image 7-15. “Night Camp”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

(3) *Ghost Horses*

A cold, wintry day back on the prairie after a time of being away. This time of “coming back” a period of definitive *un-grounded-ness*. My small family (two sons, husband, myself) temporarily apart and at loose ends. A close friend sensed this. Unsettled(ment). Lack of mooring.

He took my boys and myself out to visit an old farmer he knew. A few miles north of Fort McLeod, near the Standoff reservation. Stitching back and forth across the land from one backcountry road to another. Finally dipping down into the coulees and into a dilapidated farmyard. The man and his wife invited us into warmth. Floors that creaked, shelves that groaned. We were served tea and stale cake.

The farmer took us to see his horses. Seven. White, large, very old horses. Our friend, Jim, says this man was “the last of the horse farmers in that whole area and those old horses grew old with him . . . “. They panicked at the sight of us strangers. Flared nostrils. Rolling eyes. Enclosed in a pen that sloped up a muddy, stone-studded hill. They milled up and down. Galloped in circles, snorting and whinnying. Their hooves creating sparks as they struck the stones. Like the god, Thor, with his hammer and anvil.

“They are ghost horses”, one of my sons sighed.

Jim then took us to a place on top of the coulees. We could see the snow coming, out near the horizon. Jim said the farmer had told him that “when his dad first started cultivating that land they unfortunately ploughed through many tepee rings and who knows what else.” There, barely visible through the frozen, brittle, prairie grass were the stones of a medicine wheel.

We stood there, and Jim told the boys of medicine wheels, and tepee rings, and buffalo. The wind picked up, whipping our scarves up into the air and bringing tears to our eyes. The snow had raced from the horizon – small flakes piled at our feet. I shivered, but not with the cold. I imagined this ruined spirit, “underworlds real and imagined . . . darkness, cities, ghosts, the subconscious, mining, burial, the sentience of ice and granite, and agency of matter . . . “ (Robert Macfarlane in conversation w/ Tobias Carroll;

retrieved from: <http://www.mensjournal.com/articles/the-book-that-changed-my-life-robert-macfarlane-w431268>)

We edged back down the slope to where the farmhouse sat in the hollow like a drowsing toad. The boys held my hands. There were ghosts swirling in the snowflakes and in the hooves of the horses. One son grew up and away and is perpetually melancholy. The other son grew up and died. We must have carried the ghosts away with us that day. They taste of despair.

In my drawing class at the university the next day, on old ruined paper and with the ambiguous, nebulous quality of charcoal, I drew the ghosts of horses.

Myself, and two small boys, mere scraps of humanity, hiding from ghosts.



Image 7-16. “Ghost Horses”.

Artist: Linda H.Y. Hegland. Charcoal & Conte.

Seven Horses

Myth has it that you can wish on a ninth horse,
and have your dreams and wishes come true.
But on that wintry day
of cloud-scabbed sky and greying snow
there were only seven horses.

White, and thin, and a bony old beyond old,
they swarmed up and down
their inclined enclosure.
Their hooves slipped on the rime-slicked rocks
and sparks flew up into
the obsidian frigid air.
(The hoofs of Jehovah's horses are counted as flints – Isa. 5:28)

My boys called them Ghost Horses.
And sure enough as they mobbed in stranger panic
about the corral, their forms
morphed and transmuted,
each with the other.

It started to snow and with the accompaniment
of nickers and neighs, and
the shuffle-hush of fresh snow falling
on frozen ground,
we climbed to the shrug of a rise and saw in the ground
the stones of a medicine wheel.

I will speak of portent or omen,
or wishes and dreams,
of spirit or medicine wheels
lost in the prairie grasses.
And I will speak of ancient horses that flew sparks
from their hooves and blew their equine breath
with pink-rimmed snorts into the winter cold;
and had only the power of seven.

Chapter 8.

Saudade (Portuguese)

– the feeling of intense longing for a place you love but is now lost, a haunting desire for what is gone



Image 8-1. “Silent Bulrushes”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“The earth has music for those who will listen.”

- Reginald Holmes, “The Magic of Sound”

We cannot choose the past or the places that create us any more than we can choose our biological grandparents, our genetic heritage. We cannot choose what to love, who to be, all we can do is open ourselves to the world, sit, watch and learn. Breathe. (Price, 2007, p. 157)

I will share experiences and ideas just as they had come to me – in the order of first encounters, departures, returns; sunrises, sunsets, seasons; gaps, twists, epiphanies. Themes and motifs – those of place-attachment, place-identity, hopes, dreams, demands, wide-open horizons – will rise, pass, and return as naturally and openly as the prairie itself . . . I want . . . to bear witness to the facts. I want . . . to lay out my heart, forgoing art’s great schemes. There’s no cleverness to be found here, only rawness. (Bass, 1997, p. 188)

Fragments of Place #6

I write of place. I write of relationships – the one with place, of an artist with place. I dare to be so bold. Like Rick Bass (above) I have only my awareness and my perception to tell, at times the experience of others – only the rawness. It is my realization seen and felt through the pall of illness, through the expanse of place. My experience may seem a piddling understanding, perhaps insufficient and trifling. But . . . in it there is honesty, daring, deep reflection. I offer you those things outstretched in my place-weathered hands.

Place as Loss (and Found Again)

At times, in trying to explain this nebulous, slippery thing called ‘place’, I have gotten lost. I’ve had to find a stone that grows warm in the clasp of my hand, or driven far to see a vast sky. But isn’t that the point, getting lost? To find (yourself) again? I knew ‘place’ was important, of course, otherwise why spend all these years researching it.

While walking Kaija’s gardens with her, it was obvious that she has a special and very profound relationship with place and the ‘others’ that live there. She told me the

story of one day being in her garden and feeling, sensing, that she was needed. She parted the bushes and found a new-born fawn mired in the mud. She lifted it and found, on parting yet more bushes, the mother waiting. She sensed that where there was one fawn, there may be two. And that is what she found. She gave this fawn, too, to the waiting mother. That deer (whom she named Grace) now makes a habit of bringing her new-borns each year to show Kaija. And habitually turns up in Kaija's paintings (and eats her day lilies). In the painting hanging on my dining room wall, a painting of the uninhibited colours of autumn trees, there are three deer. But you don't see them unless you go looking for them. You have to really 'see'. And you have to know that deer live in the heart of the artist.

Come! the deer beckon. At least to the top of the hill. The [deer] teach us new things about the landscape. They lead us into corners and crevices there we would never other go, and teach us to notice, with senses inflamed, things we might never otherwise pay attention to – the direction of a stirring of breeze, the phase of the moon, a bent blade of grass, a faint odor, a funny feeling of being observed – and because of deer, we notice these things with an intensity that is both feral and comfortable. – Rick Bass (2009, 77-78)



Image 8-2. “Painting of Visit to Northern Canada”.

Artist: Kaija Savinainen Mountain. Retrieved from: <https://www.facebook.com/studiowillowcreek>.

I strive to have a relationship with that place that Kaija has. It is not my place. I can experience this place vicariously but never actually – not in the same way. My perception of her place, my perception of her experience of that place is different. And therein lies the mystery, the mystery that is sought. And the places that are lost.

I listen to the coyotes howling in the nights and to the crows cawing in the mornings and to the wind washing in the leaves of the cottonwoods in the evenings, and I know that I have not really heard anything of it except the mystery in it. But the mystery has captivated me, and under the spell of it,

I have meandered, like the drifts of snow, across the wide prairies.
(Gruchow, 1985, p. 7)

For example, Kaija loves winter – lives it and paints it. In my place now, I don't really experience it. But, because place that has influenced us stays always with us – I remember, winter.

Sometimes I think that we need that place of starkness and loss in our lives. The pure ache of it. In my prairie life it was the white expanse of the snow-covered prairie with a solitary remote tree, denuded of leaves, in the distance. The wind spoke differently in this scape. It didn't carry birdsong or the constant buzz of the grasshopper. It carried, instead, the shushing sound of wind polishing snow to an icy glaze. My steps crunched, like snapping peanut brittle. Snow piled high and heavy on mere twigs, fracturing them from the limb like a leg in a trap. An owl, more silver than the snow, turned his head and peered, piercing - blinked.

When colour has been snow (white)-washed, when sound has been muted, when the light is callous and stabbing, one must look for a distinct kind of beauty, a singular kind. That spare-ness, that simplicity, lays everything exposed. My sight expands. There is nothing to see but the blunt, sheer truth of a thing, of a place, of a self.

I can count the trees - there are so few. I can count the footsteps of a passing coyote or the deep divots of a deer. I can count my breaths, because I can see them in the arctic steam in front of my face. I can count my heartbeats as they pulse in my ears. Life becomes minimal.

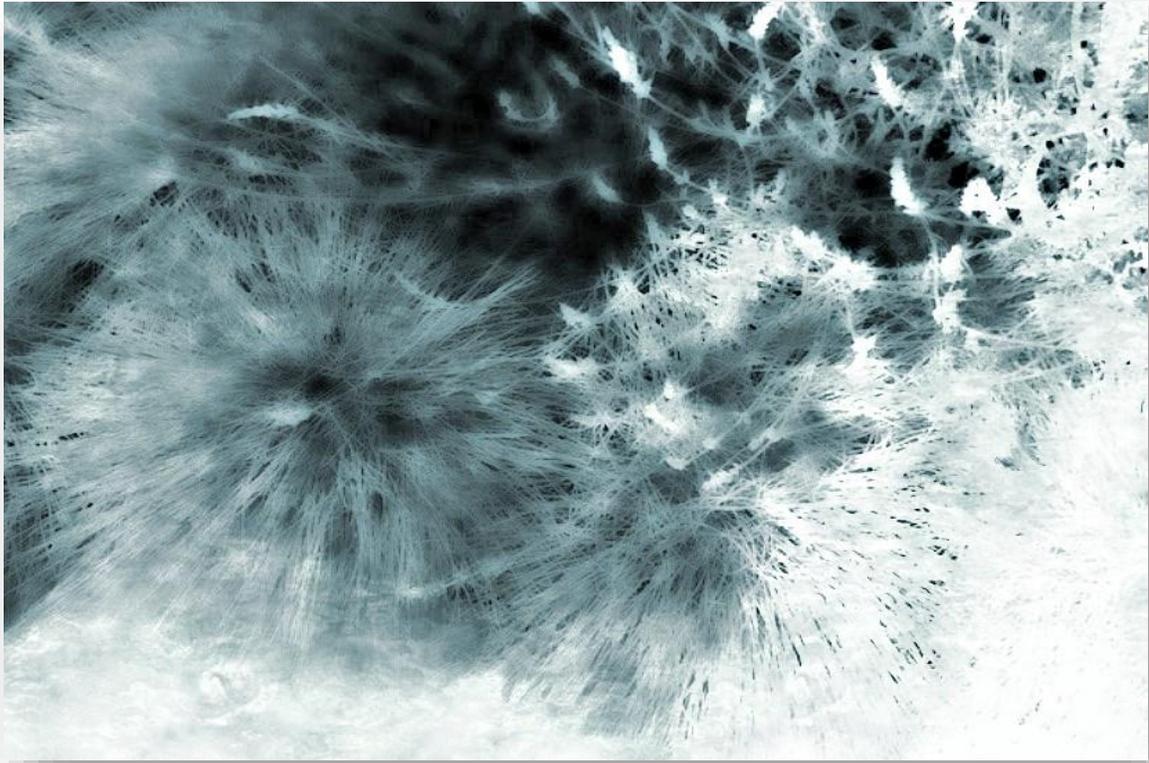


Image 8-3. “Winter Prairie Tumbleweeds”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Coming Home

The birds
swept low.
Embers died in a long-tired fire.
Both wind and water hardened
as the winter night approached.
And the horse came back alone.

Winters in the prairies are silent. How can I tell you of a place that is now, in winter, so monotone, so bereft of context? There is mystery, still, to be told. The blizzards bring snow that falls like a giant counterpane over everything, muffling sound and willing gophers to sleep deeper. When you wake of a morning, before even looking out the window, you know snow has fallen. There is a profound hush. The world inhales and forgets to exhale. It holds its breath. Everything watches – the jackrabbit, the antelope, the coyote shuffling slippered feet across the tops of crystalline drifts. This, too, is a place to learn yet another mystery.

In this stillness, I am the trees alive with singing. I am the sky everywhere at once. I am the snow and the wind bearing stories across geographies and generations. I am the light everywhere descending. I am my heart evoking drum song. I am my spirit rising. In the smell of sacred medicines burning, I am my prayers and my mediation, and I am time captured fully in this now. I am a traveller on a sacred journey through this one shining day. (Wagamese, 2016, p. 30)

Some sounds, ironically, are amplified in winter. The quiescent shroud actually accentuates the sound that is there. The hoot of a snowy owl from a kilometer away. In the other seasons, the sound would have been lost in the symphony. The crunch of your booted soles as you wade through the drifts. A rumble will sometimes crawl up your legs, making them quake. Then from far, far away, through the luminous air, you hear a train whistle.

There is still beauty in the white, and brown, and black of winter – the muted version of the place that feeds you, an artist, beauty.

. . the browns and blacks and whites [are] so rich [you can] feel them. The beauty here is a beauty you feel in your flesh. You feel it physically, and that is why it is sometimes terrifying to approach. Other beauty takes only the heart, or the mind. (Lopez, 1999, p. 361)



Image 8-4. “Lone Tree in Winter”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Artists know how ‘place’ can physically shape our bodies; we notice how we lean into the painting when we paint the undulating lines of a river, how we feel the curve in the shape of our hip, how the river humps over stones like the back of our calf humps over the underlying muscle. How we sight with one eye when we photograph light, a natural inclination, the way the sun focuses the light on the eye of an upturned sunflower. How the head on our neck turns into the sound of the wind, like the leaves turn belly up in hopes of being tickled, when we write of it.

We become tempered to the very shape of the land itself, and by its rhythms and processes, as surely as if we were buried by that snow . . . our bellies spooned against each curve and hummock of soil, each swell of stone, and the snow pressing down, kneading and pressing and sculpting us physically (Bass 2009, p. 61)

Place can enter and lift illness out. In the same way frozen fingers actually burn, communion with place can take illness and conflagrate it.

Incinerate. Cauterize. Sear.

Vulnerable.

See, I remember . . . that place.

Then that place exhales, finally, after a time.

Breathes

Edward Casey roots his philosophies in the sensate experience of the process of being in place. He speaks not only of the ideation of place in and of itself but also of a concrete bodily 'locatedness'. He sees place as relational, textured, defining. Place opens in the intertwining of nature and the lived body.

Just as imagination takes us forward into the realm of the purely possible – into what might be – so memory brings us back into the domain of the actual and the already elapsed: to what has been. Place ushers us into what already is: namely, the environing subsoil of our embodiment, the bedrock of our being-in-the-world. If imagination projects us out beyond ourselves while memory takes us back behind ourselves, place subtends and enfolds us, lying perpetually under and around us. In imagining and remembering, we go into the ethereal and the thick respectively. By being in place, we find ourselves in what is subsistent and enveloping. (Casey, 2009, pp xvi-xvii)

And now must I feel and experience my new place and adjust. I must locate my body differently – must accommodate to more vertical, less horizontal. My sight must learn to shorten. I must learn to love echoes. The horizon can only be seen over water. I taste salt on my lips instead of dust. But the eagles remain the same. The world they inhabit - high in a sky of draughts and zephyrs, downdrafts and ascensions- is the same over prairie and sea coast.

Stars Like Dandelion Seeds, Scatter and Fall

I once saw a star tumble from the sky;
it sighed/sizzled as it kissed
the earth's thin nimbus,
then consumed itself
within its own passion.

I once saw a small bird
tumble from the sky;
the breathy hand of a passing breeze
caught it
and perched it on a branch.

I once saw a butterfly emerge from its cocoon -
over hours and hours -
its trembling body fragile and tender,
its wings shatter-able like stained glass.
It dried and grew in substance and tenacity -
wings of glass, heart of oak.
It flew away, now shivering with yearning -
buffeted by ocean breath.

I once saw, on a sheer rock face – granite and scree -
that faced the ocean surge,
a crippled and warped tree.
It grew from a thumb of soil,
drank from the rain in the wind,
adored the sun in its own broken way.
It grew because it did not know how not to,
its seed an augury of purpose.

I once saw a bee dance,
and I have heard prairie grass sing.
And here, on this ocean shore
I see the source of
beginnings. And endings.



Image 8-5. “Waterfall”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

I have felt as a stranger to this type of place, even now, after almost thirty years. This place has felt foreign, though it intrigues me. But place is nothing if not insistent. Tugging at your clothes, clasping at your hands, finally spiralling its fingers into your heart, opening it. The dry dust that, in the prairie, infiltrated through the weave of my shoes is replaced by moisture that oozes through the weave. The light falls through leaves, falls through rain, drifts down mountainsides. The light is various shades of green – muted and soft. The poetry slips out through the worm-holed ribs of driftwood, through the small gapings of barnacles on the rocks. Words bubble up out of the slim smiles of clams in the sand. Eagles soar on unseen breezes and then call with a sound that takes my breath away and forgets to give it back.

My place of the prairie led me to rivers that flowed determinedly to the sea, slowly, meandering and wandering – in no great hurry. They flowed with a constant murmur, the tones subtly nuanced over boulders and falls. This ‘new’ place leads me to swifter rivers, their flow more anxious - the sea so close that they are impatient. Here, the waters – the tides, breathe as do I. In and out. In and out. Seeking the salty nature within myself.

In my prairie place, the mountains were a mirage, a purple-blue smudge along the horizon that, on clear days, were higher and closer. Like a spine. In the West. Here the mountains hulk over the bays and the sounds. You can read the coming of seasons down their sides, the demarcations of the terrain. You can mourn the clear cuts. You can watch eagles and falcons scudding down the slopes in search of prey. The mountains are in the North.

In this place, my art has changed. The nature of encounter is different here than when I responded to the prairie environment. Here I have come to deeper layers of knowing and being. There is not, here, the sparseness – the thinness – of the prairie. Here place is full, and complex. It is multiple and tangled. My words and my photos – well, they speak of different things. But one should not forget the place that formed you, the place from whence you ‘sprung’ – implying that you will launch to greater heights or

drift to other seasons. That place of prairie taught me, and this place of oceans and mountains is teaching me – that I mustn't forget.

Over the years, one comes to measure a place, too, not just for the beauty it may give, the balminess of its breezes, the insouciance and relaxation it encourages, the sublime pleasures it offers, but for what it teaches. The way in which it alters our perception of the human. It is not so much that you want to return . . . but that you want to not forget. (Lopez, 2011, p. 33)

The theologian and mystic, Thomas Merton, endeavoured to live in the silences of places. Again, the in-between places of a different kind of knowing. His mysticism studies included those of the Catholic and Shaker churches, but also Zen and American Indian spirituality. He spoke and wrote voluminously of his spiritual journeys. But he also had an exquisite sense of the simple things of place – such as rain. I live now in a place of rain. So, I know, for example, rain – differently.

The rain I am in is not like the rain of cities. It fills the woods with an immense and confused sound. It covers the flat roof of the cabin and its porch with inconsistent and controlled rhythms. And I listen, because it reminds me again and again that the whole world runs by rhythms I have not yet learned to recognize, rhythms that are not those of the engineer.

The rain surrounded the whole cabin with its enormous virginal myth, a whole world of meaning, of secrecy, of silence, of rumor. Think of it: all that speech pouring down, selling nothing, judging nobody, drenching the thick mulch of dead leaves, soaking the trees, filling the gullies and crannies of the wood with water, washing out the places where men have stripped the hillside! What a thing it is to sit absolutely alone, in the forest, at night, cherished by this wonderful, unintelligible, perfectly innocent speech, the most comforting speech in the world, the talk that rain makes by itself all over the ridges, and the talk of the watercourses everywhere in the hollows!

Nobody started it, nobody is going to stop it. It will talk as long as it wants, this rain. As long as it talks I am going to listen. (Merton, 1981, p. 9)

Chapter 9.

Sillage (French)

– the scent that lingers in air, the trail left in water, the impression made in space after something has been and gone

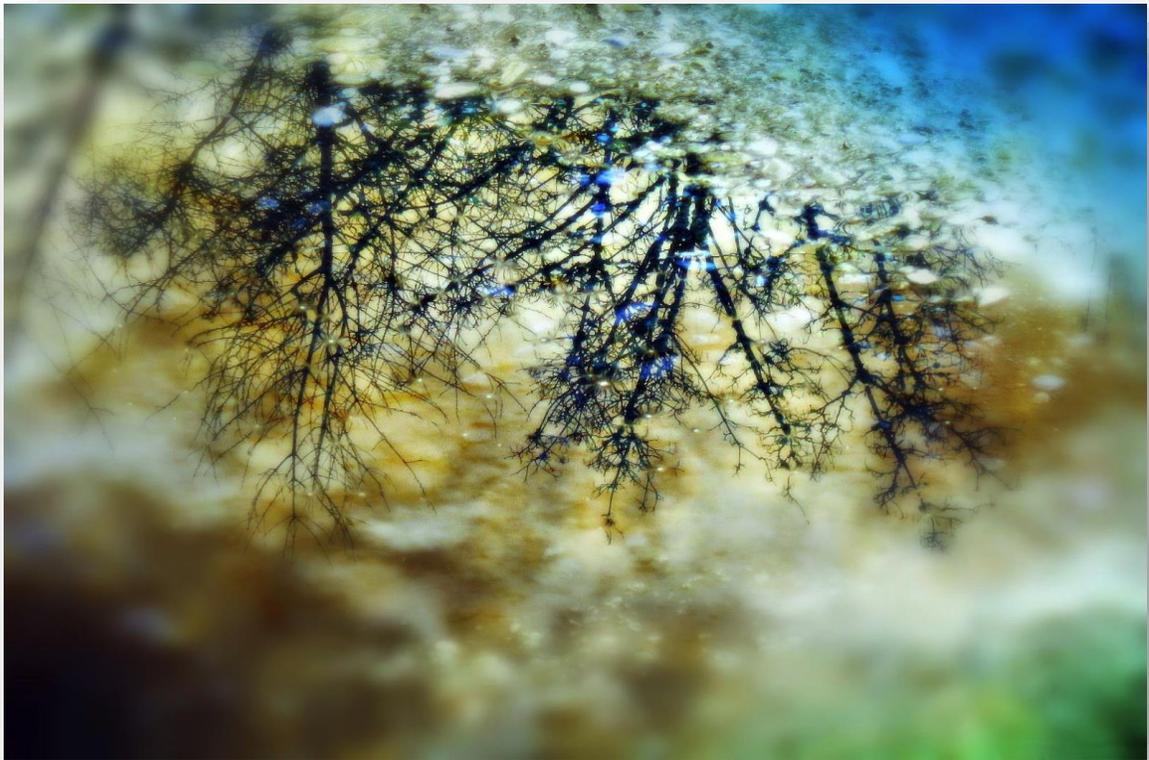


Image 9-1. “Tree Reflection in Puddle”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“ . . . Landscapes leave their marks in us. . . Certain landscapes stay with us even when we left them, changing not just our weathers but our climates.”

- Robert Macfarlane, “Landmarks”

Place has altered *my* perception of being human. I know now that as a human it is essential to be vulnerable, to be open. I know now that there are things that I must stay awake at night for – both terrors and reverence. To be human is to be paltry, in a way. Whales can hold their breath longer than I can; monarch butterflies can migrate thousands of miles on a sip of milkweed. But, now I know that I have the ability to wonder, to be astonished, to be in awe.

The Hebrew word for human is closely related to the term *adamah*, which means “ground” or “earth”. I *have* altered my perception of what it is to be human in place. I am humble. As David Abram says: “an abiding humility in the face of the Earth’s exuberant multiplicity, wildness, and weirdness is, I believe, a necessary quality of our kind and the best possible medicine for what ails us” (Abram, D., 2012)

As humans, could we not be forged in some way by the parched stone that brands the soles of our feet? Could our essence be shaped by the characteristics of the topography in which we live? Imbued in our very marrow? Perhaps it is not only the earth that holds profound ages and entwined complexities, but also ourselves.

Fragments of Place #7



LandMarks & Placemarks - guideposts, lodestars, signs

There have been landmarks along the path of this journey – experiences of place that have led me to new understandings and new literacies. I have, in the process of my inquiry, explored different dimensionalities. What is the origin of my own purpose? I suppose it is an alternate avenue of knowing: the sacred, and the secular. In the exploration lives the thought, the reflections, the kitchen table conversations. The

landmarks have kept me to my bearings; they orient myself true to my inner compass. Art is alchemy – I become more myself when I discover how I perceive the world.

I had never been ‘out’ on the water when living on the prairies. I had waded in rivers, swam in horse ponds, and even skinny-dipped under an overpass in the only deep part of the river, surrounded by floating pelicans and indignant Canada geese. My place, this place of now, is waterlogged – bedewed and drenched and swamped. Where I live I am surrounded by three rivers. I can walk with the dog along fresh-water stream beds or walk after an ebbing tide in salt-thickened waters. A couple of years ago, I found the sacrament that is kayaking.

It is good to be conveyed quietly, gracefully, to natural rhythms. I was finding the invocation that is this place of water.

This is a landmark.



This is a place mark.

Affinity/Water/Kayak

Dragging kayak through crushed shells and driftwood
I carry the weight of the city in my body,
the din of fretted air in my mind.
As I leave shore, a toad jumps brown in green water.

I am a prairie gopher, not a river otter,
I scold myself;
nor like the sleek buoyant seal that blinks at me
over the rim of a wave.

I place paddle in water, shift in my seat,
hope that the eagle that flaps in a pine tree above,
screech and shriek,
is not omen, or opportunistic.

I stroke again, stroke, cut through the fleece of clouds
reflected in the water;
the evening lowering the sun to shards of light on the surface,
like diamonds on my fingers or ice in my Scotch.

Water drips off the paddle
like falling stars.
My body remembers salt and rhythms – lightens.
I hear the evening settling of tired birds,
the quiet, almost silent, surge of the
kayak through water – silk.

My mind empties,
bare and clear.

Heartbeat in my ears; weight of water current through my arms.
Moon rises.
Swallows stitch back and forth
across my prow.

Bats dip and swoop, fish swim beneath me;
the bay sighs, I hold my breath.

The pull and tug of muscle against ocean;
the undulating sea grass that splits
before the arrowed push of the kayak
as do the curling, white-crested waves.

We breathe, the ocean and I – ripple.
Wholeness. Affinity.



Image 9-2. “Sunset Kayak”.

Photographer: Linda H. Y. Hegland.

Whether painting or photographing, place is not something to be copied but, rather, is a primary source for the genesis of the work. One does not impose or presume, but rather ‘brings to light’ that essence of place. Place has impacted my work of photography in that having grown up in grand, expansive, and unfathomable landscape, I have learned sanctity – and the modesty of the low yellow flowers of the Buffalo Bean, or the simplicity of the sandy nest of a burrowing owl. Paul Gruchow (2009, p. *x*), who grew up on the plains of Minnesota, attests:

The prairie is one of those plainly visible things that you can’t photograph. No camera lens can take in a big enough piece of it. The prairie landscape embraces the whole of the sky . . . Any undistorted image is too flat to represent the impression of immersion that is central to being on the prairie.

Or, to quote Larry McMurty in his book *Crazy Horse: a Life* (2005):

To those not attuned to their subtleties the plains are merely monotonous emptiness. But to those who love them, the plains are endlessly fascinating, a place where the constant interplay of land and sky is always dramatic . . .

So Gruchow says that you cannot photograph the prairie. Conversely, Emmet Gowin, a photographer, has been presumed to have said that the gift of the landscape photograph is that the heart finds a place to stand. Not only that, I think, but to photograph landscape or place you are also gifted with ears to hear the soft drumming of the hearts of stones; or to feel the skim of a hare's whiskers across your shoulder blades.

You don't believe me.

If you put your finger in the shallow water at the ocean's edge, right where the water licks at the furrowed sand – or even a river or stream – you can feel the pulse. Leave your finger there and at some point the pulse in your fingertip comes to throb in rhythm with the water. Cadence and exhalation. Flow and flutter.

On the prairie you are forced to live in the eye. Land, sky, and ever-changing light. When living in a prairie place I learned that in vastness there are slight fluctuations – in light, in movement. There are immense possibilities inherent in emptiness. Emptiness is teeming with small things. I have come to turn that same eye to the profusion of the West Coast. Here, place is complex and complicated – many-textured. You must peer close to find the miracle in the minuteness. To become attuned to the subtle rhythms and rhymes.

The timbre and tones of the written text or poem, and the resonance that shimmers in a photograph, have their roots in the sensual experience of place – visual, aural, olfactory, somatic.

This is a landmark.



This is a place mark.

This thesis is, in part, a memoir. The place (prairie) that I, as narrator, speak of is the prairie of that time, decades ago, that I experienced as a solitary child and a being growing into her character and spirit. Though my life has moved forward and my reflection of place has expanded, I have endeavoured to stay close to that earlier self when telling my stories of that place. To do otherwise would be to violate my role as witness; that is, to bear witness to the beginnings of my writer and artist consciousness and knowing of place.

When I revisit a place that had significant meaningfulness in a past phase of my life, as when I returned to the prairie to bury my father's ashes, I take a moment to consider my present self with the one that inhabited that place years ago. Sometimes I lament the arc that took me from that place. But, if I were to be honest, this lamentation is steeped in nostalgia and poignancy. The first prairie place I knew then no longer exists. That wild prairie of my youth is all but gone – ploughed under massive fields of grain or grazed to dust by large herds of domestic cattle. Barbed wire creates mosaics of tamed squares of land. The place that sat on the very edge of the prairie, my first home in this country, with a backyard span that reached to a never attainable horizon? That place has disappeared under hundreds of houses, big box stores, and a prison. That place now exists only in my imagination and memories. There, though I will never forget the land, it appears to have forgotten me.

On that trip to bring my father home (to my *second* prairie place), I asked my brother to drive me out to the prairie – where he himself often travels, alone, with a thermos of coffee laced with whiskey, and old rock-and-roll on the radio. He seeks ancient, slumping barns and abandoned rusting Harvesters to take pictures of. We drove and drove. That prairie place in which my sons first began their unfolding to the experience of place, is ebbing and diminishing out from the edges of the town. We did finally find it, but it is disappearing.

We pulled into a field, drove to the edge of a coulee, turned the engine off. As we sat in my brother's truck, the sound of the ticking engine and the occasional grasshopper clacking against the grill making a sort of contrapuntal music, I gazed. Falling in love

with that place was not something I imagined I'd ever do, but I wanted to take the time to at least accept it, and the impact the years I spent there had on my life.

I am confronted with reality. The place where I played uninhibited, mindful only of spiked cacti and spiralled, slumbering rattlesnakes – that place of my genesis is gone. However, does that not then make emphatic the impact that place has on an artist – the influence of the place experienced even when it no longer exists? That place is how I know myself, how I know how to *be* in a place.

This is a landmark.



This is a place mark.

That trip back to Alberta, seeing the prairie all but lost, had me realize that, as a culture, we tend to be placeless, landless. There is no harmony with place.

The problem, then, is how to bring about a striving for harmony with land among a people many of whom have forgotten there is any such thing as land, among whom education and culture have become almost synonymous with landlessness (Leopold, 1986, p. 210).

Placelessness is the perpetual absence of recognition, respect, relationship and reciprocity with the land. If we don't have that, then like my once-wild prairie, all will disappear. We don't protect what we don't love.

Landlessness is a loss of a culture's sense of place. A sense of place is rooted in the concept that people used to, can, and do form emotional, spiritual, and meaningful bonds with natural areas, making the welfare of the land personally significant (William & Stewart, 1998, p. 20)

Even here, in my 'now' place, I see out my front room window the clear cuts on the sides of the mountains. Not so very long ago, the green on the mountainsides was thick and impenetrable. The mountains seemed inviolable – holy. But now there are houses crowded into the clear cuts, rights of way cleared for power lines. Development is creeping up the sides of the mountains like floodwater up the side of a levee. Creeping up

to where the bears are, the elk and the deer. Taking from them the only homes they have. As humans move in, life is wrung out. We forget we are related to that place.

This is a landmark.



This is a place mark.

For us as artists, and for those generations that will be seeking place after us, what is needed is not only an aesthetic of engagement, but also of enchantment and intimacy. Enchantment is a sense of openness to the unusual, the captivating, and the disturbing, and to seeing the generosity and nobleness in the most common of things. Enchantment with place, hopefully, will foster a culture that will listen to and respect place.

(Enchantment is) the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted . . . is to participate in a momentarily mobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spell-bound . . . Thoughts, but also limbs . . . are brought to rest, even as the senses continue to operate, indeed, in high gear. You notice new colors, discern details previously ignored, hear extraordinary sounds, as familiar landscapes of sense sharpen and intensify. (Bennett, 2001, p. 5).

A more intimate relationship with nature lays in the development of genuine perception (a consciousness, a knowledge). In Norway there is a form of education called ‘friluftsliv’ that requires building relationships and experience with all layers of place. Friluftsliv literally means “free air life”. Philosophically, it embodies the idea that returning to nature’s place is, well, returning home. And it is not just about going out in nature but also to be present in nature, present in place. It is to listen to the stories place tells, to develop a finely tuned pedagogy-of-place, to see place as a teacher:

. . . students discovered from locals that an old pathway crossing a mountain range had several different names for different sections, each depicting a storied aspect of local history. A large boulder might be the home of a troll-spirit, for example, that should be spoken to in order to request safe passage. There seemed to me to be both an aboriginal sense of the land and a commitment on the part of the students . . . (Henderson, B. & Vikander, N. 2007, p. 241)

This is a landmark.



This is a place mark.

At our finest and most fortunate, we make paintings or photographs of what is in front of us, to honour what is greater and more compelling than we are. We never attain this wholly, though in return we are given something whole – a sense of belonging and inclusion. It (place/nature) “thus redefines us, and is part of the biography by which we want to be known” (Adams, R., 2005, p. 15).

I want my photographs to be witness, a kind of testimony. I want them to capture the poetic but also the palpable silences. I strive to capture the untranslatable mystery, endeavour to do it suggestively rather than forcefully – each image a world in and of itself but also part of a larger narrative about place.

That query and attention paid to minute shifts and variations (in light, and texture, and pattern) that result in both specificities and diffuse abstraction – is a relationship. The explanation lies in communion – in intimacy. Especially so for the artwork that comes out of the influence of place/nature. Much of painting and photography, and even poetry, can reduce the viewer or reader to passive bystander. An observer but not a participant. Intimacy, however, extends itself to the observer, revealing the personal, emotional and unique qualities of the subject that initially drew the artist.

The intimacy that I found in my place of prairie and that I am now finding in my place of West Coast waters; and the intimacy that Kaija Savinainen Mountain finds in her gardens and along her running trails in the woods; becomes personal and more than personal in our art. We meet place at the golden interstice, with openness, in earnest, and with no preconceptions. And there we find an infinite and diverse array of lines, patterns, exquisite contrasts of colour and tone, uniqueness and singularity. We invite the viewer into that golden glow where the light hides in the small crevice of a rock, or that mossy fragility in the fissure of bark on a dying tree.

It is the intimacy that invites one into the humanity, the mercy, of place.

This is a landmark.



This is a place mark.

Place As and Of Ancestors

Recently, I spent a semester in Simon Fraser University's President's Dream Colloquium on Returning to the Teachings: Justice, Identity and Belonging. I attended, and played a role in building community based on epistemologies steeped in First Nations tradition and ceremony. In sharing food and rituals, we explored stories, dialogue, and identities . . .

No . . . I am holding this experience at arm's length. And I should be sincere with you about the significance that this reflection on place within this context had to me. I could and should be more authentic about what I tell you – honest with you and with myself. So, let me tell you this differently . . .

Many years ago, my sons and I lived a few weeks on an Alberta First Nations reserve, as part of a university course. The First Nations people on the reserve were very welcoming, very kind to us. But it was not a completely positive experience. The reservation was a derelict place – battered, ramshackle houses; rusted and dilapidated vehicles on blocks or piled up against the fences, tumbleweeds instead of tires; snakes hiding in the ruptured upholstery. Skinny, scabby horses wandered on land that was too scant to feed them; children chasing dogs with sticks or sniffing glue behind the school. It was a place, and a people, broken open, broken-spirited. What kind of place . . .?!?

Well, it was a place that was not being remembered and honoured. When people are taken from place, and confined to reservations like those tamed squares of prairie, where the lands that are sacred are on private property, or government regulated or devalued to tourist attractions, or otherwise inaccessible, the appropriate rituals cannot be

fulfilled, the honouring of place is impeded, it's not remembered. Place becomes lonely. People are lost. How does one still remember that Chief Mountain (Ninistakis) is the Blackfoot home of thunder; or that the Crowsnest Mountain is where Raven lives? You need to *be* in place. And when you are not, you are adrift and, in the case of that sad reservation, a community and spirit is lost.

Most of the sacred sites where I come from are not on the reservations, not where the people who need to remember them are. When places of sacredness become tourist sites, the stories, and myths, and art become just and simply that – myths. Place must be experienced, not just told about. While stories keep aspects of knowledge current and alive, . . .

. . . actually going to the sites, being there and experiencing each place with all of one's senses, brings about a deeper, embodied understanding. Being at a place, hearing the stories, participants experienced the intellectual and spiritual traditions of the *Siksikáitapiiksi* [Blackfoot Confederacy] as part of "the phenomenology of landscape" (Tilley, 1994). People took in the knowledge of each place like the food they ate; they embodied what they learned. For *Siksikáitapiiksi*, to know is to embody what one knows (Heavy Head, 2005, p. 16)

But . . .

My boys learned to flint knap there. From a kind of stone called Etherington chert and from petrified wood pieces, they were taught to make arrowheads. The arrowheads they formed were nothing like the arrowheads my husband used to find as a boy along the Old Man River, the site of historic Indian battles. These pieces of flaked stone they offered up in their cut and gouged hands were awkwardly-shaped wee things. But I know the stone is called Etherington chert because they were taught to understand the material they were working with – how it is harder than some kinds of stone but softer than others. They shared that with me. They hadn't known beforehand that stone has character and differing degrees of reciprocity with those that try and form it. They were taught to respect that.

And they made me earrings – of beads and porcupine quills – which I still have over thirty years later. Back then, when porcupines become road kill on the Alberta

highways, only First Nations people were allowed to ‘harvest’ them – both for their quills and for the pot. I enthused over the jewellery and didn’t tell them that the stew we were given on the reserve that night was porcupine. And afterwards, we sat out on the back porch that sloped precariously away from the house in which we were staying, sipping tea fragrant with sage with the family that hosted us. We watched the early evening sun, its low rays making it look for all the world like it was tethered to the ground, pull itself hand-over-hand down below the horizon. There were some gentle times there.

Really, though, the whole ‘intensive’ experience of living on the reserve was wrong-headed and patronizing. Though I felt that the situation was that of losing place, the reasons for that loss were not really clear to me. I was ignorant. And not just because I was an immigrant to this country and did not have a complete knowledge of the shameful history that put those people on those reserves in the first place, or of the residential schools.

The history of residential schools is likely the least known dimension of Canadian history. It is not taught in our schools. It is not commemorated anywhere in our country or in our national capital. The 150 year history of residential schools has not been made a part of our national memory. It has been ignored or, worse, dismissed.

What is known however to most Canadians is the present legacy: that Indigenous peoples in Canada do not have the same standard of life that is enjoyed by mainstream Canada. They easily fall into the trap of blaming Indigenous people for the conditions in which they live and for failing to address their problems adequately. That blaming leads inevitably to disrespect. That disrespect however also comes from the many generations of public policy founded on the view that white Euro-Canadians were superior, a view supported by law and taught in schools to Indigenous and non-Indigenous student alike (Sinclair, 2010).

When back at the university that semester, I remember a time when a great sound vibrated throughout the entire building. In the social foyer was a huge powwow drum and eight men were around it, drumming and singing. I remember, too, we non-indigenous folk hanging around the edges, lapping up bits of the rhythm and the heart-thudding beat. We had no idea how to be a part of that . . .

We, of Western cultures, feel a disconnection – separation, detachment, from where we are, I think. We tend not to have that indigenous connection with place, thus the landlessness/placelessness that makes us feel disappeared in our own world. We yearn to recover our lost relationship and reciprocity, to belong once more to the land, to be related.

So, recently, through the semester of Returning to the Teachings we had the gift of Elders. Elders are keepers of tradition, guardians of culture, the wise people, the teachers. In Aboriginal societies, we were told, elders are known to safeguard knowledge that constitutes the unique history of the people. Right from the beginning, we were included in Sharing Circles; collectively drawn into community – no more lapping at the edge of experience. We were gently shown each time that we met that the circle is the essence of the natural pattern of creation, of relating. The water cycle, sunrise and sunset, the seasons . . . birth and death. The movement of wind around the earth; transformation. The medicine wheel – infinite and continuous.

A ‘circular’ approach toward life is inherent in Indian cultures since time immemorial. The native world is one of cycles, and observing the cycles provides an order to life and community. Medicine makers, prophets, and wise elders studied the moving world of circularity. (Fixico, 2003, p. 42)

The Elders were so generous with their time and their knowledge. I experienced this generosity (on *so* many levels) profoundly. They talked about community a lot. And I began to see the distinction between what I had experienced over 30 years ago and now. These Elders taught that Indigenous peoples have a strong understanding and sense of kinship. It comes from intimate relationships to place, to the ancestors, and to their communities. I could understand now that the pain and heartache I had felt on that reserve must have been, at least in small part, due to losing the relationship to the sharp-scented sage, to the shy antelope loping in long-grass, to the bare stone and pushing rivers, to the unseen beings whispering in winds or humming in deep valleys. There is a blurring between self and the world, a fluidity of edges and identities. Everything external is also internal. We non-Indigenous people seldom understand relationship to place at that depth or at that level. There are ghosts of ourselves that need reminding and made whole.

In these Sharing Circles, the Elders told us stories of how they had been torn away from their beliefs, their families, and their ceremonies due to the Residential school system. Hard-to-hear stories, soul-shattering stories. I remember one story especially and later how, over tea and hot soup, the story was related to land, to place. This Squamish Elder described how the teachers at the residential school scrubbed brutally at his skin, to scour the Indian out, to purge the 'red'. He later told me that seeing forest clear cuts evoked a similar sadness. The cruel and violent process of clear cutting, he said, is like scrubbing the trees from the skin of the mountain, purging the wildness.

Part of the reason for that perverse relationship with the land, he felt, was that people were seeing the trees only as profit and not as part of a living entity that should be acknowledged and honoured. However 'broken' it is, "land still has the power to inspire, to surprise, to create and demand a rebirth of the self. That, after all, is the original meaning of the word 'nature' – *to be born*." (Price, 2007, p. 24). What I sensed from some of the conversations with the Elders, is that a foundation of indigeneity is to actually be *from* a place, to be *of* a place, to *belong* to (and to be remembered by) place. Place can teach us how to be whole. Perhaps we can receive the knowledge of how to be indigenous to a place.

Another Squamish Elder spoke of 'two-eyed seeing' and also of a 'Third Way', where indigenous and Western ways of knowing meet – a kind of ecological *métissage*. Basically, an added lens (or braid) to the typically objective, scientific, non-relational viewpoint, or an alternative way of educational inquiry through an Indigenous lens:

People are related to their physical and natural surroundings through their genealogies, their oral traditions, and their personal and collective experiences with certain locations. Interrelatedness is also reflected in many indigenous peoples' systems of knowledge. These systems are commonly explained in terms of relations and are arranged in a circular format that consists mainly (if not solely) of sets of relationships whose purpose is to explain phenomena. In many of these systems of knowledge, concepts do not stand alone; rather, they are constituted of "the elements of other ideas to which they were related" (Kuokkanen, 2007, p. 32).

Physically, the difference between seeing with one eye or with two eyes is that of depth. One can see the world with one eye but it is not possible to see all dimensions. So

the image that reaches your brain is not a complete image – not a true image. I speak from actual experience – I trip over shadows, stumble over sunbeams. Seeing with both eyes enables us to see with an intelligence, with an enhanced depth which also brings into play, those things in our peripheral, our outermost, vision. If this analogy is applied to the concept of ‘two-eyed seeing’, then I am proposing that the enhanced insight and sagacity of approaching place with the additional Indigenous viewpoint will help us to find our tracks, our way, in the world.

I think non-Indigenous people are lonely for place – we have a hollowness, a desolation inside of ourselves. I think we have forgotten ritual and remembering, have forgotten how to sing to the land. When the song is unsung, and thus unheard, place becomes saddened, and we are removed from the power that surrounds us. We have abandoned what ceremony is for . . .

The ceremonies that persist—birthdays, weddings, funerals— focus only on ourselves, marking rites of personal transition. [...] We know how to carry out this rite for each other and we do it well. But imagine standing by the river, flooded with those same feelings as the Salmon march into the auditorium of their estuary. Rise in their honor, thank them for all the ways they have enriched our lives, sing to honor their hard work and accomplishments against all odds, tell them they are our hope for the future, encourage them to go off into the world to grow, and pray that they will come home. Then the feasting begins. Can we extend our bonds of celebration and support from our own species to the others who need us?

Many indigenous traditions still recognize the place of ceremony and often focus their celebrations on other species and events in the cycle of the seasons. In a colonist society the ceremonies that endure are not about land; they’re about family and culture, values that are transportable from the old country. Ceremonies for the land no doubt existed there, but it seems they did not survive emigration in any substantial way. I think there is wisdom in regenerating them here, as a means to form bonds with this land. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 249)

In this course, each guest speaker was celebrated and venerated. Each time, it was explained to us why certain ceremonial things were done. I saw almost all of the speakers moved to tears simply by being honoured and traditionally wrapped in a blanket. They were told that the blanket was meant to protect them, to support them in having the courage to speak their words. In some instances, they were ‘swept’ with cedar boughs or

with an eagle feather – to sweep their cares from them and lighten their hearts. They were each given a carved talking stick to imbue them with power.

Ceremony is both a context for transferring knowledge and a way to remember the responsibility we have to our relationships with life. Native ceremony is associated with maintaining and restoring balance, renewal, cultivating relationship, and creative participation with nature. (Cajete, 2000, p. 54)

The most powerful ceremony for me was that of ‘witnessing’. The principle of witnessing is strong among First Nations peoples. It comes, in some part, out of the oral traditions of Aboriginal people, but also as a means of holding history and building relationships. Witnesses are called to be the keepers of history and significance at an event. For each speaker, four people were called to be witnesses. It was explained that by virtue of witnessing the work of the speaker, it was validated. That the work could not take place without honoured and respected guests to witness it. Witnesses are asked to listen with care and, most importantly, share it with others when they return home. My understanding of witnessing was that it asked of one to move from their head to their heart. Many witnesses were very emotional, overwhelmed with witnessing from the heart. When it came my time to witness, I experienced directly how the ceremony of witnessing was integral to genuine understanding, and how powerful it was to move from head to heart.

In my experience, participating in a ceremony can allow us to name those aspects of ourselves that we sometimes do not, ourselves, understand – the inexplicable. There is an intimate power in calling a name or a force in the act of ceremony, or in the sacrament of witnessing, I feel.

That reserve I stayed on so many years ago - they experienced so much disrespect of their sacred places. I remember one particular place because I rode my horse in that area and I recall how I subconsciously noted the waning, the diminishment of the place over time:

. . . the medicine wheel and cairn near Majorville, the oldest of the 70 known medicine wheels on the northern prairies. . . close to 5,000 years old; older than the pyramids and the Parthenon. And Majorville is largest

of the medicine wheels, after Big Horn in Wyoming. But few people today know the Blackfoot name for this place; and even fewer know or remember any stories about it. But there is one story; an old man in Siksika, the nearest reserve to the site, says that at one time the cairn on top of the hill was so large you could see it from the reserve. Over the years those who have hiked to the top of this unnamed hill, in the middle of the prairie, those who have stood on a point where they felt they could almost reach the clouds traveling overhead, those ignorant of the past and of the significance of these places, seeking a memento of what they had discovered--carted away stones from the site, shrinking the cairn, and disturbing the linear rays of rocks, emanating from the central cairn, perhaps in alignment with celestial events such as the summer solstice and key geographical features such as Chief Mountain, *ninaistako*, in the Rockies, a central feature of the sacred Blackfoot landscape.

The memory and the life of this place are both precious and precarious. The Majorville rock cairn sits atop a simple hill in the middle of the prairie surrounded by a fence and a government plaque. It is an embattled, precarious site surrounded by a major drilling program, 35 square miles of seismic activity with 128 shallow gas wells drilled [in one year alone]. (Chambers, 2006)

Related to the significance of place is the ‘power’ of place. Sacred sites and places empowered significantly influence one’s understanding and process of perception... People have special places where they feel more secure and safe, and such places should not be discouraged. This aspect of life is one that indigenous people have understood for a long time...(Fixico, 2003, p. 71).

Places are like family or old long-lasting friendships. We are beholden and grateful to them, bound by history, memory and devotion. Like those relations and those abiding friends, places need to be fed and cared for; they want to tell us stories, want to offer us gifts – a song, a painting, a wisdom.

My experience of these unselfish Elders is that they tell a different story than what I think I know – a story that guides and challenges us to live responsibly in place. This story is a gift I can receive. And it is a gift I can pass on. I have considered - what would living this way mean to relationship (with community, family)? What would it mean for our relationship with the land, for place? Perhaps, this Indigenous wisdom would be a means of reclaiming a sense of belonging in place, or even in the universe – so we are not placeless.

There is that need to return home. I am really no different than the salmon that seeks her genesis upstream or the sea turtle that returns to the beach from which she ran to the sea. I just want to come home. The salmon and the sea turtle – what they have in common is a sense of reclamation and recovery. What they teach is a ‘*right* relationship to place’. It has nothing to do with whether one can empirically or scientifically touch it, or measure it, or observe it, or repeat it, or document it. What of embodiment? What of compassion? What of instinctive, intuitive, regenerative wisdom? What of a wise, enlightened, *right* way of being in place?

Place is story. Place is identity. Memory is embedded in the land and in the metamorphosis of landmarks over time. Place teaches us how to be whole, so the Elders told me. While in the company of Elders, I came to comprehend these things: respect, reciprocity, responsibility, relationships.



Image 9-3. “Shades of Blue: Prairie Sky”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Chapter 10.

Inuksuk (First Nations, Inuit)

– on the right path



Image 10-1. “Portal”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“ . . . I write because it belongs to the force of the moon: high tide, low tide. I write because it is the way I take long walks. I write as a bow to wilderness. I write because I believe it can create a path in darkness.”

- Terry Tempest Williams, “Why I Write”

My encounters with place continue. I keep the other place, that place of my forming, close to my heart. It has, after all, insinuated itself into the fibre of my bones and the pulse of my blood. But this place, too, touches me. I have become aware of myself as “human in place” and aware, also, of how that reveals itself in my art. I am embedded. I attend. And so, I am so much more than human in place. I have relationships with other species, with waters, and with winds, and with that small, niggling comprehension that there is wisdom greater than my own.

Here is calm so deep, grasses cease waving . . . everything in wild nature fits into us, as if truly part and parent of us. The place shines not on us but in us. The rivers flow not past, but through us, thrilling, tingling, vibrating every fiber and cell of the substance of our bodies, making them glide and sing.

The trees wave and the flowers bloom in our bodies as well as our souls. And every bird song, wind song, and tremendous storm song of the rocks in the heart of the mountains is our song, our very own, and sings our love . . .

Crystals of snow, plash of small raindrops, hum of small insects, booming beetles, the jolly rattle of grasshoppers, chirping crickets, the screaming of hawks, jays, and Clark crows, the ‘coo-r-r-r’ of cranes, the honking of geese, partridges drumming, trumpeting swans, frogs croaking, the whirring rattle of snakes, the awful enthusiasm of booming falls, the roar of cataracts, the crash and roll of thunder, earthquake shocks, the whisper of rills soothing to slumber, the piping of marmots, the bark of squirrels, the laugh of the wolf, the snorting of deer, the explosive roaring of bears, the squeak of mice, the cry of the loon – loneliness, wildest of sounds
(Muir, 1979, pp. 92-93)

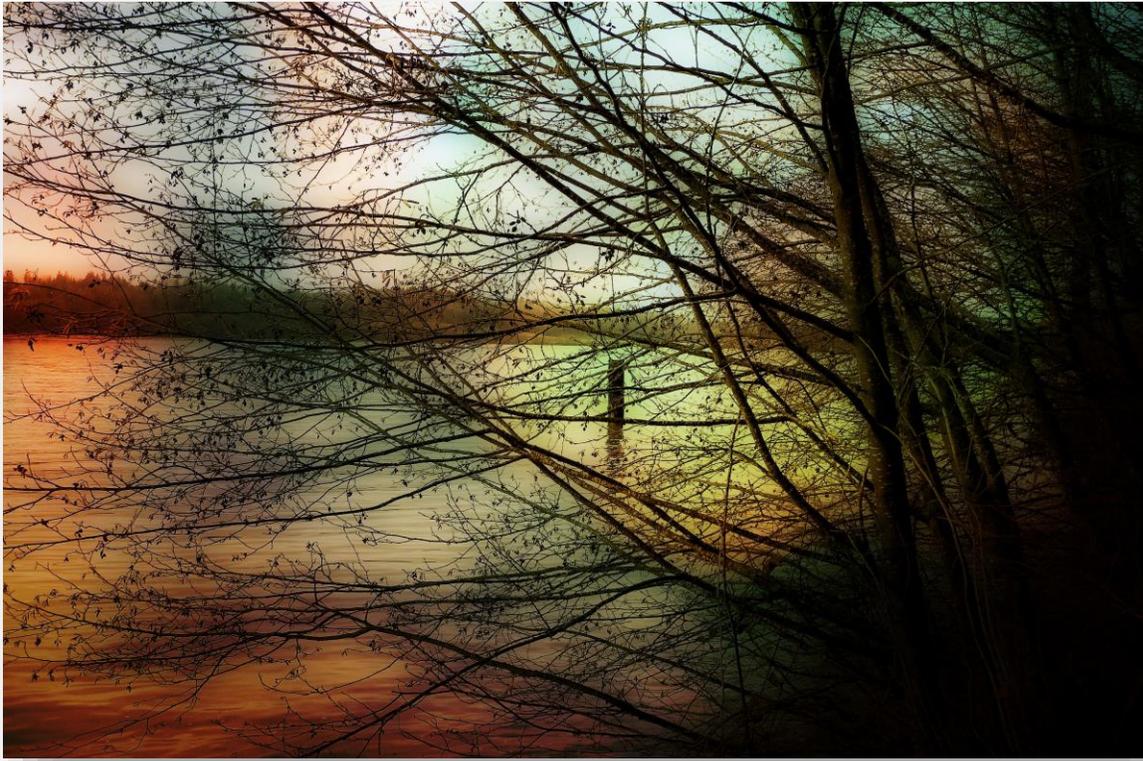


Image 10-2. “Light & Shadow on Flooded River”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Fragments of Place #8

I am on a plane on a visit back to the prairies. As I look out of the window, down to the prairie landscape below, I ponder on what I miss and joke with myself as to whether the wind can still mess with my head. I peer down onto the counterpane of squares and shapes that delineate crops and pastures, coulees and slow, meandering river.

I miss the coulees – the fatigue, the languor of the vast plate of prairie alleviated by the snug contours, the lineament, the idiosyncrasy of the folded, pleated coulees.

I miss the sky. The sky that, especially on clear, star-gorged nights, feels like, from horizon to horizon, a star-painted dish upturned over my world and there is nothing

but stars from my left hand to my right hand – arching over my head and pooling at my feet.

I miss the clouds. Sweeping across blue skies, pure and cerulean, the wisps of clouds known as mares-tails. Clouds like a veil, a nebulosity, ol' buttermilk sky. Skudding across the sky in the endless, mindless wind that make me feel like curtains are constantly billowing in my head, doors slamming and clattering in my mind.

I miss the dawdling, ambagious river that counters the precipitate wind. It is a lazy river, in no great hurry to be anywhere. From where I am in the sky, it looks like an old, brown-patched Bull snake undulating lackadaisically across the prairie floor. The river will be dammed soon. It will be different.

Now I am on a plane flying back over the green landscape and vary-coloured waters of my West Coast place. But I glimpse these only in patches, as there is a fog. It almost seems as though the plane's engine noise is muffled – the same sort of silence when you wake to a morning of fog. The strange, deadened, smothered silence of fog.

When I walk out in fog, my world diminishes to what I can see within the bounded obscurity of the verges of the fog bank. Within the fog, what are usually the normal scuttles and flutters of the beginning mornings become heart-skipping thumps and thuds. Horror movies and such use the instrument of fog to good advantage. Sound is blunted but underscored; innocent, ordinary forms loom out of the murk abruptly and unpredictably. A simple tree, ignored in the usual transparency of bright sunlight, appears portentous, impending, startling me as though it has not been in the same place each and every day.

Cold sweat and disquietude aside, I do love the fog. I love how the world becomes temporarily black and white, like an artsy Parisian photo – all lines and shadows and contours. I love how fog softens the world, taking the jangle of our lives and dissolving it.

I used to tell my children that fog was a cloud that had fallen down. So, if that is true, then when walking through a fog, you may stumble upon angels.

We make our descent and the skies clear. I think, if I were to leave this place, I would miss the fog.



Image 10-3. “Fog & Morning Sun Over Blueberry Fields”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Place as Teacher

Brian Wattchow, an Australian scholar, speaks so eloquently of how, as artists, we have a particular voice to reflect how place teaches:

As artists we have an intrinsic vision or voice. Through this scholarship I have sought that song, delved for that sagacity. What is it that is my own? What am I to do, to be, that bursts forth from my intrinsic, indigenous essence? Place always teaches, it never not teaches, so long as we pay

attention, keep watch, remember. We must apprentice ourselves to an experience of place, if place is to become our teacher (Wattchow, B.,2007, p. 263)

Place has taught me how to watch for storms. To know a place so well as to see a storm coming from the minutia and details offered by the day. Or the building crescendo of pinches of pain which roil and rasp until they form the eye of my own corporeal storm. I have been taught how to encounter storm, how to ‘weather’ it: turn my haunches to the wind, bed down low in the grasses, prink the rain from my feathers, the slow indwelling wisdom of ‘wait’.

Place has taught me how to journey with integrity, with constancy. An artist’s affinity with place is quite like a river’s journey: it contains vast whirls of ebullient movement, meandering streams, driving rapids and swarming falls; door-lips through to precarious narrows, stretches of impassive stagnation, luminous pools of moonlit stillness, and irrevocably, a place of conciliation with the sea, blending with the source, salt of birth.

Through this unfolding inquiry and scholarship, I have sought wholeness, a fullness, an integrality. A braidedness. This resultant scholarship is implicitly, essentially, a medicine walk – I have been tracking myself back to myself. In a session I attended, Manulani Aluli Meyer once said that one should “make your scholarship matter to the mother (land)” (October 13, 2016). To do that I must stoop low, touch the land (place) and allow it to amaze me.

Touch is a reciprocal action, a gesture of exchange with the world. To make an impression is also to receive one, and the soles of our feet, shaped by the surfaces they press upon, are landscapes themselves with their own worn channels and roving lines. (Macfarlane, R. 2012, p. 161)

Place has taught me to “try to love the questions themselves” (Rilke, 1903, p. 35); to delve into my life, to inquire, to know what is my own. To participate and engage with the collective intelligence and collaboration that is place, and then is art. It is to know the sweet reason of synchronicity, simultaneousness, contemporaneousness – co-existence.

At the beginning of this thesis, I spoke of the multi-focal, multi-disciplinary approach that métissage enabled. How I could weave together image and story and memory. I found that the images could speak out of the memories, and that the poetry could speak out of the images. I found that I could weave another artist's experiences into my own, and into that of place. The relationships are interconnected and reciprocal. Métissage allowed me not only the process of braiding together stories of place, but also stories of becoming – relationships.

The definition of 'topographic memory' (Chambers, 2006, 2008, 2012) is that of the ability to recall the contours, design, shape, or structure of a previously experienced environment. I think there are also emotional and personal topographies. My memories of place are like pegs and, when a thread is looped from one to the other, they become a woven map of the ley lines of my experience. But included along those ley lines are the artefacts and vestiges of place, the things that create the swirls and whorls. Copper nails, blue feathers, bleached bones, rounded speckled stones, un-birthing bird eggs. This creates the multidimensional tapestry of my lived experience.

In following these ley lines I have learned ceremony. The ceremony is the act of honouring relationships. Shawn Wilson (2008, p. 80) in his book *Research is Ceremony* says, "rather than viewing ourselves as being in relationship with people or things [place], we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of" (emphasis mine).

I am brought to mind of the Blackfoot concept of *aoksisowaato'p*, which refers to the "ethical importance of visiting a place as an act of relational renewal that is life-giving and life-sustaining, both to the place and to ourselves." (Blood, et al, 2012, p. 48)

So in the act of ceremony and relationship, place becomes sacred. Through its attributes of merging and blurring concepts, perceptions, and identities while taking care to maintain individual fibres and voices, métissage consequently bears the intelligence to transform.

And what do I leave for you? An invitation. A supplication. Why not journey yourself with your own eyes and with your own ears and your own seeking soul to find

each imaginative métissage strand and weave a tapestry of your specific geographic place? Wilson, in relation to qualitative research, states, “it is up to the listener to piece together a lesson from the story and to apply the pieces where they fit . . . “ (Wilson, 2009, p. 28).

And so the weaving continues . . .

Place has taught me, if nothing else, one very profound, mysterious, enlightened, knowing thing. I am an entanglement – of creativity, of story, of poetic flow, of image, of sentience, of consciousness, of awareness, of inter-being, and of interstices, of touching and being touched by the connectivity with everything – living and non-living alike. I am the place I dwell in. I am my own métissage.

It is essential to experience all the times and moods of one good place. No one will ever be able to say how essential, how truly part of a genuine life this is . . . (Merton, T. 2009, p. 177)

Place as Gift

When I was eleven, perhaps twelve, years old I was given, either for a birthday or Christmas present, a Brownie box camera. It was actually my mother’s but I had coveted it for a very long time. It was made of Bakelite, was quite heavy, and was carried in a frayed and crackled leather case. This was probably my first foray into photography. I toted that hefty camera everywhere and the strap around my neck left a scuffed abrasion that eventually developed into a callus.

The camera had a partially used film in it when it was given to me, and it didn’t take me long to finish the half dozen shots left on it. We had no money to get more film so from that day onward I took pictures with an empty camera. I would choose a subject carefully and then reverently take the Brownie out of its case. You had to hold the Brownie at waist level, peering down into the viewfinder to get the subject centred. When ready, it made such a lovely cl-chunk sound when you pushed the button. I was voracious, starved for images. I ‘took’ pictures of the sides of old barns, my cat, the dandelions before they turned to floss, the laundry capering on the line, dead ants, my

mother's lily-of-the valley, windows, peeling paint. Despite there being no film on which to view again the captured image when developed, the motion of 'photographing' allowed me to find, as I have alluded to before, those interstices. Those in-between places, those moments and places suspended in time – like insects in amber.

I have no idea what happened to those half a dozen shots. I have no idea what ever happened to the camera. But it was an opening, a beginning to my life with image – a threshold I had stepped over.

Place as Aperture

My brother and I found a door in the prairie. Just that - just a door – standing upright in the weeds and breathing wind. At some point, obviously, it had been part of a house, though there was not even so much as a foundation left. A farmhouse, of course, buttressed by the windbreak of carrageenan bushes and lilac trees that were reverting to wild. But now it was merely a door, swaying creakily on its rusting hinges. The paint had long since peeled from its surface – the wood was worn ashen and glossy like a sand-blasted stone. The doorknob hung on an eroded bolt, barely attached. It was made of glass and porcelain. We found a key at the base of the door, hidden in the dust and ants. It fell to pieces in our hands, the metal of it having turned to corroded wafers.

We wandered, my brother and I, to all kinds of worlds through that door. We would step over the threshold and were always polite about closing the door behind us. Sometimes we imagined we were in Narnia, like the books. Sometimes it was Alice's wonderland. My brother preferred stepping over the threshold to a land of cowboys. I preferred the Magic Garden. We were so fortunate to have found a door, rather than a window. I can only imagine how we would have pined, like children with their noses pressed up against Christmas windows, if we had only been allowed to *see* the otherness. The door permitted us to step across the threshold and *be* the otherness. That interstice – that crack, that golden light.

Place as Threshold

Why do I relate these two stories? They are threshold stories – the acts of openings or beginnings. One is the dawning of an attraction to the art of photography. Though no product resulted due to the lack of film, nonetheless the process of becoming is there. The second is the opening to otherness in place, and to the discovery that place could be many things. Both of these experiences were pathways to and across those thresholds. They are all about connection and transition. In both the instance of an empty camera and that of stepping through into other existences and sensibilities, there is a sense of redesigning reality, a shift in the vantage-point. A desire, if you will, to see the natural world outside of human dialogue and experience. I think these two vignettes tell of awakening and inspiring reciprocity with the non-human, hoping to provide an egress wherein we can leave creative constraints at the doorway, and release the senses in a new way. I think we have an ancient yearning to re-unite mental abstractions with physical perception, and situate them both in place.

As a result of this inquiry, I am hoping to lay down tracks for others to follow, towards finding their own concepts of place. In conversation with Michael Ling, an SFU Education professor (March 29, 2017), he described this process as that of laying down tracks with snow shoes. He said that snow shoes leave the size of tracks such that, regardless of whether you are wearing hiking boots or ballet shoes, you would be able to step into those tracks and find your way. That analogy had a profound effect on me.

The verb ‘to learn’ relates back etymologically to the Germanic word *liznojan*, which means “to follow or to find a track”, or learning whilst following a track. Cajete acknowledges tracking as a key indigenous pedagogy: “the hunter [tracker] of a good heart is a metaphoric ideal that reveals the nature of journeying toward completion” (Cajete, 1994, p.58). The following of tracks, looking for those thresholds in both likely and unlikely places, deciding to step over – or not, finding our stride, wandering and losing ourselves – finding ourselves again . . . Well, that is the rhythm of learning in all kinds of disciplines, in all ways of life, in all kinds of places. Regardless of what it is we are looking for, we are seeking paths, and thresholds, and determining who to follow.

I have taken my direction from those who have forged ahead of me, leaving clear and deep snow shoe tracks on the trail; from those who have negotiated a particular kind of passage, my elders. The Leggos, and the Chambers, and the Snowbers, and the Kellys, and the Sinners of the world who led with the methodologies. And the Lopezes, the Cajetes, the Hogans, the Williamses, the Dillardards, and the Abrams of the world who led with their dialogues with place.

By this I mean that those daring and audacious inquirers who will follow *my* journey of inquiry can feel safe in the knowledge that in following my foot prints, they are following tracks that have been deepened by venerated others before me, whom I genuinely respect.

These people witness. The preservation of the natural world, of place(s), of the poetry and image of place, of our innate stories, of our very selves (psychically and physically), ultimately hinges on their witness. They heighten our awareness by showing us how to consider and execute scholarship differently – with wide open eyes and with a unique regard.

At its heart, art is an exploration; a discovery of self. It is an ever-evolving agency by which we consider place – and our ‘place’ in it. When we empower place to impact on the process and the product of our art-making, we open to the gift of the astonishing interplay of natural and spiritual forces.

We shall not cease from exploration
And in the end of our exploring
We will arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time

(2009, Eliot, T.S. p. 29)

Whether place motivates us, as artists, to create sacred music out of the wind, or the flow of rivers danced on its shores; or the complexion of the sky out of an azure-filled paintbrush, or words that roll down mountainsides in iambic pentameter – it is all about the evolution of our understanding, and our compassion. As if we are returning again and again for the first time.

Chapter 11.

Machnamh (Irish)

- reflection, thoughts, deliberation



Image 11-1. “Braided: Leaves and Dog Hair”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

“There are places I’ll remember all my life, though some have changed. Some forever, not for better, some have gone and some remain. All these places have their moments, with lover and friends I still can recall. Some are dead and some are living in my life, I’ve loved them all.”

– The Beatles, “In My Life”

In this inquiry I have explored my own intimate journey from, to, within and between place. I have sought to learn if place has meaning and significance to myself as a human being and as an artist. I have integrated the experience of another artist in an attempt to ascertain if this relationship with place goes beyond myself. In seeking to delve into that question and write this thesis, it has written *me*, instead, and has asked of me questions itself. Unexpected questions, around illness for example – I never expected to write about illness!

And I believe that I have left you with more questions than answers. But that may be as it should be. I don’t want to tell you what your response should be. Place is complicated, messy, complex, raunchy, fecund. It is not made up of tidy packages and linear data – conclusive and prescriptive. No. Place is generative and imaginative, ambiguous. When we relate to place, we artists and inquirers find that we can communicate on so many levels. In allowing place to thrust into our hearts, we are open to a perspective that “disregards notions of verification, reliability, and facticity for plural truths rooted in the personal” (Pelias, 1999, p. xi). So I don’t have any definitive answers for you.

The methodologies I chose for this inquiry – those of poetic inquiry, photographic inquiry, and life writing (within the overarching theme of *métissage*) came to be the only way I could authentically tell this inquiry. To speak of place, and especially of place as it relates to an artist’s aesthetic, insists on a sensual approach. Place consists of seeing, listening, smelling, touching. As I visited these aspects of place – both in memory and tangibly, I gleaned that I could not seek just with my mind, but must also seek with my heart. I had to let my vulnerability sit on the page.

The poems, the images, the life stories that emerged – all are the weft fibres of interstitial golds and moonlight-shattered silvers that move in and out of that compelling, stalwart, powerful warp that is place. Over the six years of this thesis’ actualization I was continually astonished. When I stepped out of my own way, I found I was led to images I was not initially seeking; poetic words were whispered in my ears; and memories and life experiences that I had not known were in the depths of my heart and being came to light and (in)sight. I just followed the path. In so doing, it was the words of the poetic inquiry and the life stories that guided where images should be placed in relation to them. The result defied pattern and was, instead, organic.

Throughout this thesis, as I seek comprehension of my self with life writing, I recollect fragments of place. Those fragments often surprised me. They evoke sentiment, grief, warmth, - but also emotions only understood in hindsight. Never, *never* regret – just a more complete understanding of *who* I am and *why* I am, both as artist and human being. The fragments of place substantiate the impression of place on me as an artist. Perhaps that is also a kind of wisdom.

Additionally, I delve into the immeasurable ways that place can be ‘as’ – place as sculpture, place as deep sense, place as experience . . . And each of these expressions of place affirm the transformative role of place.

Every inquiry needs guideposts. At times, in place (as it is sometimes with art), the signs are nebulous and ambiguous. Remember how I said that my art mentor never told me how to *do* art, but encouraged me to find my own way? Like that. Once in a while we must dig in the sand, dig within ourselves, to find the buried sign to our destination.

This is how my inquiry, my weaving and braiding, comes to be – extant, ascendant, knowing – woven by the place(s) in which I dwell. It is a process of weaving myself into the land.

I think that I *have* established that place *does* have an effect on artists. The reality is that artists that are open to place love because we care, and care because we love.

Remember how easy it was to love a place when we were children – the bough of the tree that you sat in when your feelings were hurt because it held you ‘just so’? Or the shaded hole that you dug for yourself under the forsythia bush, that you loved to lay in on hot, sultry days because it always smelled of rain? We love place when we are intimate with place; and intimacy relies on “feeling with” and “breathing with each other” (Macy, 1991). Place embodied - *that* inspires belief.

I think another question that may have surfaced is how can we truly know a place? I have described how an artist such as Kaija Mountain comes to know her place by listening to the river, listening to the birds like the whippoorwill below her bedroom window. But I think I have also emphasized that we likewise have to listen to the voices of a people whose lives reflect a Western history with place that is imbalanced and wrong – Indigenous peoples.

I have related, in this thesis, a memory about a people bereft of place. But proceeding from that troubled memory is the story of my more recent experiences with Aboriginal Elders. I spoke of ceremony and witnessing; reciprocity and humility. Place needs our songs; our attentiveness and respect.

And I spoke of illness and its intrusion into lives and art. The disconnection that illness can wrought, and the healing that comes of relationship with place. Sorrow, joy, grief, and resignation. Place holds us in her hands.

This is an inquiry that does not have an end. Instead of calling this a ‘conclusion’ I should be more inclined to call it a ‘commencement’ – a dawning. I am leaving the door, like that door standing alone and neglected in the middle of the prairie, open for you to cross over the threshold to your own understanding and knowing of place.

The circles are there, in that place – water, breath, rhythm – and they continue cycling. They have no end either. The stone picked up on the wind-scudded prairie; the breathless quiet of a winter morning; the stars that glitter cold on a hot summer night; the way paint finds narrative on a canvas; the way that light ‘leak’ insists on reflecting in the pond in your photo; the way a poem slopes off the tongue - all these things of place

become intimately known to us. In place, and of place, we circle and spiral and return again – ever and forever finding ourselves at a new beginning.

I gift this final poem to my grandchildren, hoping that they will come to know place.



Image 11-2. “Crows at Dusk”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

Seeking – Skin to Skin

You and I, child,
we see these
different landscapes.
You see the ants, all in a row,
carrying another, dead from the cold.

I see the crow, skittering
from tree to tree,
following, attending, waiting,
watching, abiding.

But your feet are firm on earth.
You don't look up to the sky.
You point out the erosion at
the edges of the alley,
how our path has narrowed
from the year before.

Still . . .
Erosion, growth, or death –
it is all change.

I still see the crow; he sniggers blackly.

Down there, child, where you watch,
the frost
has turned dying leaves
into glittering treasures.

How must these jewels appear
to a crow
on the wing?

These frosted gems and weighted stones,
and the prosaic tumble of seasons . . .
One sighted feather!
Now *that* delights you.

Come near, I'll kiss your cold-reddened cheek,
and blow another to our cawing paramour.



Image 11-3. “Spirit of Water”.

Photographer: Linda H.Y. Hegland.

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Appendix A.

Interview Questions

1) Can you give me an introduction of who you are as an artist?

KSM: There are many parts to me. I view myself as artist mother athlete teacher gardener caretaker - all make up who I am and all feeds into my art. I can't compartmentalize myself, that is not who I am. I think I am a voice for nature. I love nature. I am in nature. It makes me so sad when I see people who do not experience nature, how disconnected they are because I think it is very important to know where we are from – I am born not literally but emotionally of this place, I am here, this is what I am. And it translates into my art.

I need all of nature to be an artist. I am an artist for myself, for the land. I don't paint for commercial purposes, I reflect the landscape around me, give voice to what I see and feel. I think I am channelling female (I see her as female) nature.

Caring for nature can effect how you mother, how you teach.

Emotional rollercoaster is what nature puts me on as well. You have to care and it has to matter to you. When I paint it has to mean something to me, it has to be something I have felt. I have to have truth as an artist. I don't paint elephants. I don't know elephants. I have to have felt, deeply.

LH: I read, once, about an artist who has amnesia. A virus obliterated her hippocampus and, as a result, she can no longer recall what happened 5 minutes earlier. If she draws a line in her sketch book or smears a daub of paint in an

arc on her canvas, within 5 minutes she has forgotten what she meant to do with that line. It is ironic, I think, that in an age of constant distractions, we often express a desire to “be present”. But this artist is actually marooned in the present. I also know a person who has synaesthesia. He hears birdsong as the colour red; he colours blue and hears wind. It took me a long time to identify myself as “artist” – perhaps I was in denial. But what I have always identified with is the role of “translator”, of being the go-between. I feel my photography and, to a certain extent, my poetry is my fulfilling this same role as an artist. And to do that, to be that, I must be both “marooned in the present” and be able to see what I hear and hear what I see. Nature has a natural morality. There is a morality in being an artist, too.

- 2) As an artist, are you drawn to a particular place in nature? Is there somewhere you keep returning to, literally or in your painting/writing?

KSM: Nature is my strength, I need it around me. When I moved from Alberta to here I went for a walk in the spring and I saw flowers that I had grown up with in Sweden. There are similarities here that are like Sweden. The prairie had been new to me. I loved it but - here I found a piece of myself again – strong memories.

Trees, winter, the landscape, the animals, the horses - all allow me to connect. Out of the mist one evening while driving by a man-made structure, an overpass, totally manmade but it is a little piece nonetheless of the landscape. I feel I have to paint that idea one day.

I don't talk about my ideas to people when they (ideas) are in my head. Not until it comes out of my mind and onto the canvas. I will show you a painting of a barn! Barns have a soul! I have driven by this barn for twenty years and yet did not paint it until I saw it in a certain light - when it took me and shook me by the shoulders.

I need to do something about immigration, too. I am an immigrant but we grow to love nature and land where we are but keeping in mind where we came from.

Part of my visual-ness is all about observation. I observe all the time. I have to smell it, touch it – tactile. You can draw from a picture or photo but where is the layer of ‘you’ in it, where is your sensory response to it? Experiential is so very important. Need to ground ourselves constantly or life becomes chaotic and we tread on nature rather than see it.

When I look at the Canadian landscape it tells me that I must experience it before I can translate it , before I can speak for it.

Art is not about copying it is about living the experience

LH: Art is the product of imagination, but imagination is often the product of a place, the lived experience of that place. The earliest artwork I can remember doing was of the hills and prairie around Calgary in Southern Alberta. But I live in a different place now. And I love it and appreciate all that it has to offer. I have learned to understand, and to be open to and listen to this place. But often, in my heart, I return to the place of my growth – the prairies. Now, I can be at the shore of the ocean, or walk in the laps of mountains. They have inspired me, too. But seashores shout at you, so too do mountains. But the prairie only whispers. Even the constant, constant wind speaks to you only once it is inside your head. You must listen closely and not miss the message.

3) Do you see a place differently after painting/writing it?

KSM: I do see a place differently after I have painted it. It sometimes surprises me. I see it in a different fashion.

I paint a landscape, a piece of nature I have seen and what appears on the canvas is not my version of it but how nature wishes to be spoken about, painted.

I will go back to that place and see what it had been trying to tell me, I see what I missed but what had still been subconsciously tattooed on my senses.

LH: When I have taken a photo of a place, I may think I know what it is that I have taken a photo of. But there is always something there to amaze me. Once I took a photo of an interesting seed head on a flower. Once I had the photo up on my computer I saw that there were dozens of tiny spiders, what I had thought were seeds. And radiating out from the flower head were miniscule shining filaments of spider web. The next time I went to that particular place I took time to look much more closely. It was now a different place than when I had first experienced it.

4) How has your sense of place developed? How would you define your sense of place?

KSM: Connection. Kinship. I see the story in places. My painting is a kind of “visual fiction”.

I always strive to know the roots of the place even if I fictionalize it in my painting.

LH: Yes, connection, kinship. The stories that have made place, and through experiencing place, have made us.

5) There are people whom have said that the phrase ‘sense of place’ is nearly drained of all meaning. What would you choose to replace it?

KSM: Hmm. Sense of place, what term would you use instead? I do not use that term ever. Connection and links instead. Time. Sense. Emotions. The phrase has become too commercialized. Living with a historian I hear sense of place all the time. No, I must experience it – a form of communication.

LH: Myself, I think I would prefer to call it the “intelligence of place”. A sense, instead, of our essential interconnectedness of we, as humans, with that which is “other than human”

6) What do you think happens when we lose a sense of intimacy with the natural world around us?

KSM: We stop caring, period, when we stop caring about nature. You have to care about the smallest of creatures, the smallest of plants. Have respect. So discouraging hearing about what we are doing to the oceans. We have to care, to really care. It starts with observing the smallest of things.

7) Can you please explain how your connection to the natural world is also your connection to yourself?

KSM: We all have different dialogs, for each of us and our individual experiences. I feel the landscape so deeply, all wrapped up in me.

The pause in nature is just as important as the voices in nature. Like negative space in a painting. Look for the pause.

Like organized, formal gardens – no, that’s not me.

LH: I think we are in the process of forgetting that we are nature. We think we are separate but we’re not. I guess if we feel a disconnect, of the loss of a sense of intimacy, it is because we have lost ourselves.

8) One of your great gifts as an artist/writer is your ability to translate your experience of nature into a painting/words. Yet nature seems to inspire in us not words/images but silence – after all, that is one of the most profound reasons for living close to nature, to get beyond words. Do you find that sometimes the words/images get in the way?

KSM: Nature sometimes asks of us a silence, beyond image and words. Do images get in the way? Yes, they can overwhelm. We need to delve to the essence, not every detail, nature does not speak from every single leaf on the tree, just the essence of tree. My horse paintings are of the essence of a horse, not necessarily the individual horse.

LH: Listening to the unsaid, as well as the said. Looking for the meaning in the absence of sound as well as the layers of sound. Looking around the shouts to the barely whispered. Negative space just as important.

9) Camus said that beauty can drive us to despair. Rilke also said something about that; he spoke of beauty as the “beginning of terror”. What is it that is so terrifying about beauty – especially the kind we find in nature?

KSM: Despairing and terror of beauty. You cannot improve upon nature but I can take a piece of an idea and then it is not a scary or overwhelming. Then I have not made the wrong analysis of the subject. Sometimes things are not meant to be painted. Intimidating but not scary. I fear I will kill a painting with details.

10) There is a certain pain we can experience in nature – a different pain that we confront in the natural world from that anguish that we experience as a human day in and day out. Can you elaborate on that?

KSM: Pain in nature, not the same as our human angst. A different painting. Illness as an example. It creates an emotional pain threshold you must experience daily. In nature, just the moon on the water is such an overwhelming experience it is painful.

Pain and the image in front of you merge and meld into one emotional experience. I have experienced such pain, buried two sisters and my dad. Have cancer myself. Needed to run out into nature, the whole landscape was sad, so very sad like it was experiencing my loss. Merging of me and my experiences with nature and its emotion. Place can sorrow with you. Landscape gives me permission to be sad. I saw the dying of my sister in the lake, in the trees, and especially in the blue of the sky. Place will always comfort you at your times of deep despair.

11) Do you think we will ever learn to coexist with nature in a way that benefits both?

KSM: We will never co-exist with nature in a way that does not hurt nature. We do not know how to limit our taking.

A bulldozer has no eyes to see, for example, turtle habitat as it grabs and scars the land.

That's what art does. It makes me think. Makes me aware of the horrors even if I don't paint the horrors. I must focus, instead, on what allows me comfort.

12) How do we address our relationship with nature in our personal lives, in our art? Where is the common ground?

KSM: The common ground relationship with nature are the relationships in our personal lives. It is here, this place, living in nature, in my gardens. All of my relationship that is in nature, is in my garden, translates to how I am in my personal relationships.

This place is my compass

Appendix B.

Previously published poems

I hold all copyright to the publications listed below:

A version of *Grounded(ness)* (including the photo *Grounded(ness)*) was previously published as *Rooted in Surrender* in *Bricolage Magazine of Independent Arts & Culture*, Issue 3, 2013.

A version of each of *When on the Prairie I, II, and III* were previously published in *Sky Island Journal*, Issue 1, Summer 2017.

A version of a few paragraphs of this thesis appeared together as *Old Trucks & Prairie Songs*, previously published in *Sky Island Journal*, Issue 1, Summer 2017.

A version of *Stars Like Dandelion Seeds, Scatter and Fall* was previously published in *The American Aesthetic* (a Quarterly Journal of English Language Poetry), Spring 2015, Volume 3, San Francisco, Berkeley.