The work of art making

by

Marsha Dinelli

M.S., Portland State University, 1997

B.A., University of Arizona, 1976

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Examining Committee:	**Chair: Lynn Fels** Associate Professor
	Allan Mackinnon Senior Supervisor Associate Professor
	Sean Blenkinsop Supervisor Professor
	Zuzana Vasko Supervisor Limited Term Lecturer
	Heesoon Bai Internal Examiner Professor
	Susan Gerofsky External Examiner Assistant Professor Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy The University of British Columbia
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Abstract

This research examines the relationship of art making to the universal energy and aliveness of the natural world and asserts that the West has overlooked this connection. The research depicts the art making process as a flow of resources between the physical and invisible dimensions of the universe as the artistic form takes shape, awakening the individual to an interconnected world and our reciprocal need to nurture nature's well-being as our own. Indigenous and East Asian cultures understood these connections between art making and the larger universe and the limits within which the natural world and all its inhabitants could flourish. Understanding the art making process through this lens presents an alternate perspective for how we know the world in which we live, how we understand the art making process within our world and, subsequently, how we might think about environmental education within this integrated context.

Long before the over reliance on Western science and the rational mind created the current imbalance in our relationship with the natural world, the human / more than human communities worked together to maintain the uninterrupted flow of this energetic dimension. The concept of systems thinking provides a Western understanding for the interconnectedness of the holistic perspective. As we explore the role of art making in both the Native American and traditional East Asian literature, we get a sense of where art making belongs within a holistic perspective and its ties to the health and well-being of the universe and its inhabitants. The takeaway is that the practice of art making can be a catalyst for understanding sustainable patterns of behavior that nurture the natural world.

Keywords: holistic education, nature studies, sustainability

Dedication

I dedicate this work to my children who continue to inspire me to do what I can to make the world a better place. You remain the guiding light along my journey.

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Chapter 1.

Introduction

Author and professor Ellen Dissanayake informs us that, “in every human society of which we know – prehistoric, ancient, or modern – whether hunter-gatherer, pastoral, agricultural or industrial, at least some form of art is displayed and not only displayed but highly regarded and willingly engaged in” (Dissanayake, 1992, p34). The idea of art making as universal provides the context for exploring what I believe is the “real work” of our artistic endeavors, specifically the relationship of art making to the universal energy and aliveness of the natural world. The art making process affords a way of connecting to this aliveness via the cultivation of this energy, which appears to contribute to the health and well-being of all life as the energy field is strengthened and in this age of technology, the process presents an opportunity to connect with the natural world in a beneficial way through this connection to the universal energy dimension.

Curiosity about this energy component led me to further study its relationship to the art making process and come to a further understanding of how this relationship is utilized in Indigenous and East Asian[1] practices to maintain the health and well-being of their communities. Through my own

[1] Because of the pervasiveness of the Western Industrial mindset, the traditional East Asian perspective I refer to throughout my dissertation pertains to the classical pre-industrial era and not the geographic locale of East and West.

experience as a dancer and a student of tai chi, my understanding of the art making process involves a dialogue between art makers' skills and the creative energy they draw upon as they access the creative "flow" of their practice. This dialogue provides a gateway to the universal energy and aliveness of the world that gives one the feeling of being part of a much larger entity than oneself or one's immediate surroundings. As a result of this research, I believe this connection between the art making process, in its myriad manifestations, and the universal energy that connects us to the natural world has been overlooked in the West and, along with it, its ability to contribute to the health and well-being of the planet.

Westerners are most familiar with this energy in terms of acupuncture and the Eastern traditions of tai chi and chi gong, popular meditative practices designed to promote health and well-being in the individual. But Westerners may not be familiar with the Eastern understanding of the "body is an open system connected to the external world" that allows for "an exchange of life energy of some sort between the body and the external world" (Yasuo, 1993, p103, 107). Both acupuncture and the various Eastern meditative practices are designed to "allow the flow of ki to run smoothly" through the "circulatory system of ki-energy" (Yasuo, 1993, p102-103). Acupuncture accomplishes this by inserting acupuncture needles through the skin at various points to stimulate the ki energy flow. Meditative practices work to train the mind/body to do the same. The various meditative practices are designed to help one "enter into a meditative state of mind" (Bresnan, 2003, p337), the state of "no-mind," where the "thinking

mind and its close association with the ego identity are allowed to become quiet" and the "usual human split between the self and other" (Bresnan, 2003, p337) no longer exists. In this "unitive state," consciousness becomes very clear and as one continues the practice, hopefully it becomes "the background condition of one's normal state of consciousness" (Bresnan, 2003, p338).

Understanding the art making process through this lens presents an alternative perspective for how we know the world in which we live, how we understand the art making process within our world and subsequently, how we might think about environmental education within this integrated context. To present this perspective, I begin with an introduction to the various aspects of the relationship between art making, universal energy and the natural world and the implications of this relationship. By connecting to this energetic flow, humans can have the ability to strengthen their connection to nature to keep them from being superfluous to the pattern or flow of the energetic life force within the universe.

The role of the shaman or healer in times past in many Indigenous communities was to act "as an intermediary between the human community and the larger ecological field, ensuring that there is an appropriate flow of nourishment, not just from the landscape to the human inhabitants but from the human community back to the local earth" (Abram, 1997, p7). In other words, unlike Western medicine, which concerns itself with the symptoms of an individual seeking relief, shamans were concerned with the well-being of the universe, which included the humans within it. But with the loss of this shamanistic way of life, which one elderly woman explained as an "essential link

in the pattern of nature [that] helped keep the world in proper order" (Nelson, 1983 p31), "the loss of medicine people has disrupted the balance of natural things" (Nelson, 1983 p30). The diminished network of shamans and other healers that used to occupy the liminal space between the physical and energetic dimensions has meant a lack of checks and balances on the unmitigated development of the modern world, resulting, in my mind, in our planet being slowly strangled by the restricted flow of qi, life force or other name given to this energy field. It is as if the planet has been in a coma, breathing but just barely alive. Just as the practice of tai chi or chi gong leaves one calm but refreshed and exhilarated as it opens the channels so the flow of qi is unrestricted, there is a need to do the same for the larger world. One might think of it as acupuncture for the planet. But with the demise of the shaman's expertise, do we no longer have a mechanism with which to do this? Think about how long these communities maintained the planet's viability through their relationship with the natural world. Long before the over-reliance on Western science and the rational mind created the current imbalance in our relationship, the human / more than human communities worked together to maintain the uninterrupted flow of this energetic dimension. Has the severing of our connection with the natural world diminished our ability to work with the more than human leading to a disruption in the flow of qi between living things? As fewer of us engage in the cultivation and exchange of qi (or life energy) over time, does this lack of participation in the natural world limit its health? Do these diminishing traditions that connect the health of the natural world to our own health and well-being strengthen this

current imbalance? In light of our own acceptance of the validity of Eastern medicinal practices, there is reason to believe so. Can our understanding of this concept help to restore this balance and aid in reparation of the natural world? To a certain extent, I believe so.

Ellen Dissanayake's research on the origins, purpose and value of art looks at art making through a species-centered lens, a lens that "regards art not as an entity or quality but instead as a behavioral tendency, a way of doing things" (Dissanayake,1992, p34). According to her, this behavioral tendency we've inherited has helped humans to survive. My research explores extending her species centered lens to include the rest of the natural world, whereby the behavior of art making is understood to cultivate this universal energy, providing a way for humans to connect to the living natural world through a process that contributes to its health and well-being.

In her book Art and Intimacy, Dissanayake (2000) talks about the mother-infant relationship as an important evolutionary adaptation that forms the basis for interconnectedness.

Humans "are born with an unlearned readiness to seek and respond to mutuality," (Dissanayake, p129) instilled as part of our biological nature. According to her, "the rhythms and modes of infancy (Dissanayake, 2000, p7) … and the evolved sensitivities of newborns to recognize and reciprocate them [helped humans] evolve to be the kind of creature who *needs* the signs of mutuality" (Dissanayake, 2000, p142). Far from being passive recipients,

"…babies come into the world actively ready to communicate their needs, feelings and motives…" (Dissanayake, 2000, p44) and "are innately ready for relationship" (Dissanayake, 2000, p48). She goes on to explain that what emerges from this relationship are "the capacities for 1) *belonging to* (and acceptance by) a social group 2) *finding and making meaning* 3) acquiring a sense of *competence through handling and making* and 4) *elaborating* these meanings and competencies as a way of expressing and acknowledging their vital importance" (Dissanayake, 2000, p8).

Art making carries this relationship forward, leading to her assertion that "the arts are intrinsic to human life and through them, humans continued to develop their need to belong, make meaning and develop hands-on competence" (Dissanayake, 2000, p129). Dissanayake contends that this initial relationship provides "the raw material for building relationships outside the parental association" (Dissanayake, 2000, p52) and lays the groundwork for "the feelings of transcendental oneness that can arise while making or experiencing the arts or in religious or other noetic or spiritual transfigurations" (Dissanayake, 2000, p49).

Beginning with what we know about the interconnectedness of holistically oriented cultures, Dissanayake's theory of art making leads to the notion that art making could provide, not only the basis for interconnectedness among the human community as Dissanayake contends, but also a basis for interconnectedness between humans and the natural world. Although Dissanayake's work doesn't include any discussion of the universal energy or aliveness of the natural world, it highlights the inherent value of art making which

has been shown to be connected to the human/more than human relationship in holistic oriented cultures. For the Native American art making is said to be a way of engaging in a reciprocal relationship of respect with the more than human (Thom, 2005, p6) and in traditional East Asian cultures, it is considered to be closely tied to the practice of cultivating qi, the life energy that exists throughout the universe. These cultural beliefs correlate with Dissanayake's view that long before the arts were associated with the making of symbols, humans had a predisposition toward art making as expression. Dissanayake explains that those communities that engaged in art making behavior survived better than those who lacked this tendency and I can't help but wonder if those communities survived because their art making gave them the ability to cultivate and connect with this life energy, so necessary for the vitality of our shared existence. She goes on to say that over time, this survival characteristic of making art became an "adaptation" that was further honed into a species trait to insure the continued survival of the species (Dissanayake,1992, p36), leading me to again consider whether we are compelled to make art because of our need to survive.

Looking at the process of art making within this context can free us to connect to the universe in a way that is more in line with the interconnectedness of Indigenous and traditional East Asian cultures. Dissanayake speaks of art making as "intrinsic and essential" (Dissanayake, 2000, p176) in a way that resonates with deep ecologist George Sessions' talk of the need "to reawaken our understanding of Earth Wisdom" (Murray, 2000, p59) and educator, Manu Meyer's notion of "ancient streams of knowing" (Aluli Meyer, 2008, p228). They

illustrate a different way of knowing that, over time, I have come to embrace, illuminating the practice of art making as a catalyst for understanding sustainable patterns of behavior that nurture the natural world. This is not a substitute for direct engagement with the natural world but a complement to it, a way to connect on a deeper level.

When we think of the arts, we usually think in terms of the product that results from art making. Whether it's a physical art piece or the performance of a dance, musical composition, poem, or any other art making endeavor, society tends to focus on the tangible results of the process, not the process itself. And when we think of the arts in conjunction with the environment, we associate the end products with calling attention to an aspect of the environment in a beautiful way, enhancing the environment usually from a human perspective, or bringing awareness to an issue or cause. It has been my experience that the process of art making seems to be directed toward one's skill and/or one's tools for art making in conjunction with whatever the finished product will be. There appears to be a taken-for-granted-ness that the creative energy will be there or not, as one begins to work, but not a conscious intention to utilize this process to access the energetic level of the universe and strengthen the human/more than human connection. If we were to put our emphasis on the process with the intention of actively connecting to the energy field, a deeper, more holistic connection may begin to take root.

Those involved in an ongoing art making practice do so because they find immense satisfaction in this work – they tend to love what they do. Providing a

holistic perspective to further explain their work can broaden the understanding of the more than human connection as an aspect of the work and lead, over time, to a more inclusive love of what they do and a much deeper connection to the natural world and their ability to nurture it. For years, two parallel threads ran through my life's journey, one for dance and one for the outdoor environment. Although there were many times when they merged, I thought of them very separately until after I had my own children. Observing their childhood bliss while they spent their days playing out in the woods or the nearby field watching their exhilaration one minute as a caterpillar inched along, eager to know what it ate or what kind of butterfly it might become, while busy the next minute playing adventurer, building a fort and living among the forest as just another animal brought it all together. They did not compartmentalize their "play." I realized I could do the same. My daily dance practice and regular dance classes provided the foundation for the environmental work I did. My interactions and understanding of the more than human world were experienced through the lens of a dancer and this was how I saw things. Through the dance, I was connected to this energetic level and thus, the more than human world of which I felt deeply a part. It took many years to articulate this understanding and the ensuing intertwining of these two threads along my life's path. Presenting the art making process within this context, I believe, provides a more integrated view of how one might experience the world.

The eco-arts movement, one of many counter culture movements that began during the late 1960's, developed in response to the "escalation of the

industrial sector, resulting in the rapid expansion of affluence," according to author Linda Weintraub (2012, p3). Acknowledging "ecological laws as the basic operants of the planet," the movement's goal was to replace current human chauvinism with the "recognition that humans are merely a type of mammal sharing space on the planet with all other species" (Weintraub, 2012, p3). Still small compared to the civil rights and women's rights movements begun around the same time, eco-arts offers an opportunity for science and the arts to work together to highlight and, in some cases, remedy ongoing environmental problems. Although I am encouraged by the number of art makers who fall into this category and their goal that recognizes humans as equal members of the ecosystem, I am not sure if eco-artists understand the need to situate their work in the cultural realm, and not the scientific realm. It does allow art makers to immerse themselves in the natural environment of their focus, endearing themselves to the natural world and, in many cases, eventually developing the holistic perspective that allows them to intimately connect with their environment. Ideally, the science should then be embedded within this intimate relationship but if a holistic connection doesn't develop, then the work remains at the physical level, taking on the air of a "beautiful science experiment." Nevertheless, research has shown that eco-arts education creates "environmental awareness, positive environmental behavioral changes, spreads environmental literacy, increases sustainability initiatives and brings insight into environmental problem solving" (Sams, 2017, p65), making it a welcome addition to the environmental education program.

Author Young Imm Kang Song, who writes about the connections between environmental education and ecological art, has examined how “ecological art can provide new perspectives and ways of thinking about the environment, as well as fostering interdisciplinary connections and ideas…” (2009, p5). She defines ecological art as “artwork created by artists concerned with the state of our environment” (Song, 2009, p5).

Sculptor Eileen Hutton, who describes her work with small birds and honeybees as a collaborative practice is one of these eco artists. Her work provides her with the means for exploring and expanding “the traditional notion of ecology through artistic practice” (Hutton, 2017, p1). She has immersed herself in the ecology of the Burren, a unique landscape in the Western portion of Ireland, and creates nesting boxes with knitted nests inside to lure back the small birds that are leaving the area due to a change in the ecosystem. She also creates “top bar beehives,” a simple wooden frame that allows bees to build their honeycomb as they do “in the wild in wide tear drop formations” (Hutton, 2017, p14). Since these are cornerstone species in this particular ecological landscape, meaning that they support much of the biodiversity in the area, she hopes her work will help to return the ecosystem to its previous natural state. Her laudable work in helping to restore the Burren to its original ecology provides a model of “engaged and informed interaction with the natural world” (Hutton, 2017, p17).

Although my focus is on the process of art making and not the outcome, to some extent I am advocating a similar perspective to the eco-arts movement, that providing the art maker with this awareness may activate this holistic

perspective of inclusion, opening a space to explore and consider the notion of art making as ecological action. The close link between art making and the larger ecosystem in both Indigenous and traditional East Asian cultures (Cajete 1994, Thom 2005, McQuiston 1994, Yasuo 1993, Callicott 1989, etc) seems to maintain the focus on the process, utilizing that process to reinforce the human/more than human relationship. Within this perspective, the practice of art making helps the community understand and express their relationship with the natural world to gain a better understanding of how the dimensions of the universe interconnect. Preparing ourselves to connect with the universe energetically through tai chi, qi gong, yoga, or other meditative practice and spending time in the natural world helps to correlate the interdisciplinary nature of this work. And introducing a holistic perspective to provide context for the process of art making allows for environmental education to situate itself within this context.

The examples I will present here illustrate that meaningfully connecting one's art making practice to the more than human world is a process that over time may transform the individual and his/her relationship with the natural world. As this relationship continues to deepen, the sacredness of the natural world may resonate and imbue the daily life of the art maker with the awe and wonder of our universe and the alertness and joy that deep ecologist, Dolores LaChapelle refers to when she speaks of being connected to the larger mind, which encompasses all life. But it is also clear that many art makers are unaware of these connections and the opportunity to possibly impact the health of the earth

in this way. Having viewed the art making process in this way for a long time, I feel a responsibility to both the human and the more than human in my community to bring an awareness of this perspective and provide a forum to learn more about it.

Methodology

Due to the interdisciplinary nature of my research, I incorporate strands of several different methodologies to support my inquiry of art making in a relational way, including my relationship to the more than human world. The emphasis on relationships situates my research in the methodology of self-study, beginning with the transformation of my own life experiences into the experiential knowledge that finds common ground with the holistic understanding of the art making process. My experience as both dancer, nature lover and environmentalist resonate with aspects of the Indigenous and traditional East Asian cultures, presenting the basis for self-study through the reflective analysis of my “experience as scholarship” (Kour, 2017, p55) and its connection to the broader understanding of holistic thinking.

Choosing to experience the world through an artistic lens, as opposed to the scientific lens of the Industrial West allows one to engage the world aesthetically, meaning “the organization and order of existence emerges out of the spontaneous arrangement of the participants” (Ames, 1989, p.117) instead of a “pre-assigned pattern of relatedness” (Ames, 1989, p.116) that denotes the current logical order. With this artistic lens in mind, I needed a qualitative approach that could accommodate the unknown as the research unfolded. With

the focus on the art making process, an arts informed research methodology was one that would allow me to make connections between art making and the natural world.

Beginning in the 1990s, researchers began to include the arts as a way to enhance qualitative research in the social sciences, focusing on a broader, subjective definition of knowledge used to paint a fuller picture than the empirical preoccupation of quantitative research. “Arts informed research allows the selected art forms to frame and define the inquiry process and text … [while keeping with a] general responsiveness to the natural flow of events and experiences” (Cole & Knowles, 2008 p. 58). Because my research focuses on the art making process and not a specific art form, the experiences of the artists in Chapter Seven provide additional data to further support my self-study of understanding the art making process and its connection to the natural world in a new way.

While looking at various methodologies with which to pursue my research, I came across a study by Elizabeth Lange that dealt with transformative and restorative learning, two areas that are pertinent to my own analysis and research outcomes. Her study centered on a university extension course designed to help people explore various life events, such as “making a transition to a new job, work/life balance and more meaningful work” (Lange, 2004, p.121). Originally intending to focus on citizen involvement, once underway the focus of her study shifted to the critical transformative learning process itself. The methodology used for her research was a “double spiral-action research method

where the participants of her study studied their working and living while the researcher studied the practice of critical transformative learning" (Lange, 2004, p.124). What Lange found in her study was that in conjunction with the transformative learning was a dialectical relationship between transformative and restorative learning, where restorative learning provided stability to the student during the disruption and disorientation experienced during the transformative learning process. "The intent, then, of critical transformative learning is not just personal transformation but societal transformation," (Allman & Wallis, 1990 in Lange, 2004, p. 122-123).

Lange found that restorative learning helped the participants

> … return to their inner compass, which was submerged under the deluge of adult expectations, cultural scripts and workplace practices …" Restoration of their ethics and "return to the inner self gave them a platform of stability that guided them through the upheavals of negotiating transformation in their work or home lives … Restoring the participants' foundational ethics to a conscious place in their daily lives … grounded them so they could withstand the disorienting aspects of transformation and remain open to threatening new knowledge. By restoring forgotten relationships and submerged ethics, participants transformed their worldview, habits of mind and social relations. These relationships and ethics were then reintegrated in a way that augmented the transformative process (Lange, 2004, pp.130-135).

This is the dialectical nature of transformative and restorative learning and I recognize this interplay as critical to my research.

The self-study methodology of my dissertation lays the groundwork for what I hope will be further research utilizing participant action research methodology to provide a framework for how to understand the process of connecting to the natural world in this way. My research embraces the need to nurture a different way of knowing our world and incorporating new practices into existing ones. Utilizing art making as the restorative anchor in this process, one can then reach out and become more adept at inviting the intention and awareness of being connected to the natural world in this relational way. This leads to the transformative learning of a more holistic view of the world, allowing our thinking and behavior to become more attuned to the planet, which is then further reflected in the choices we make in our day to day living.

Implications for Education

Reading through the Oregon Environmental Literacy Plan (the basis for environmental education in the state) and observing some of the local middle school environmental education classes, I believe we remain disconnected. It seems environmental education must strike a better balance between the intellectual reasoning as knowledge and the knowledge acquired through practical experience, in addition to a better balance between science-based and art-based environmental education. For many schools in the Portland area, environmental education has become somewhat mainstream, in that most high

schools offer it as an elective within their science department and elementary and middle schools usually provide a unit during the school year that encompasses environmental science and sustainability. In addition, after-school clubs and activities supplement the environmental curriculum with more specialized areas of interest, although as funding begins to shift, there may be less and less of this. Despite these efforts, policies that exacerbate our environmental problems continue to proliferate.

One of the problems I had with pursuing my doctoral studies in the United States was tackling the question of what department would be applicable for me in pursuing my studies. There were no art-based programs in environmental studies at the college level when I began this process and many schools didn't even have an environmental studies department, only a department of environmental science. Also, trying to navigate a degree jointly between environmental studies and the arts proved impossible because the arts also have their various separate departments. This compartmentalization fits within our Western context but is very limiting from a holistic perspective. Throughout my search, my inquiries were met with varying levels of enthusiasm. If someone in environmental studies at one school was excited, the accompanying arts programs couldn't see a way to make it work. Likewise, at another school where all the different arts departments were eager to support my research, their environmental science department wouldn't touch it. Which is how I ended up talking to various education departments and they were the most bureaucratic of all.

Very few education departments in the States offer any programs in arts education anymore. If one has a bachelor's degree in any type of art, they can get a teaching credential but a doctoral degree is much more compartmentalized. Also, most schools don't offer a degree in environmental education. It tends to be a subset of a science or social studies program. In fact, I spoke to only one professor / administrator in an education department (outside of SFU) who even took the time to hear what I had to say. My point in all of this is that I hope my research will at least provide an opening for people to consider a different perspective.

The current trend of nature preschools holds promise as a place to foster this relationship between art making and the environment and provide a foundation for science with a holistic perspective. Several school districts in which these preschools reside have begun to accommodate them by incorporating their curriculum to some extent into their lower grade classrooms and this could provide a framework in which to situate a more balanced curriculum. As children get older, hopefully, schools will make a concerted effort to provide a more balanced approach in both their art making and environmental education classes, or better yet, combine the two. I also think that art making from this perspective should also be available at the college level so students will have the opportunity to engage with these ideas as art making will probably always be a part of their life, regardless of where adulthood takes them. More importantly, they will be the adults that inhabit and engage with the world of the future. As for the adults today, those involved in art making should have an

opportunity to be introduced to this perspective, perhaps through community education, and environmental organizations should make space for those members that espouse this perspective. Recognition of the many parts of an integrated universe is important but a recognition that all of these pieces work together as part of the whole is also needed. In my mind, the arts should be a part of the environmental education discussion and curriculum, and the mission of environmental education should reflect a holistic perspective that the art making process affords.

Although I have taken the long way around, I wanted to introduce the many threads of this discussion at the beginning in an effort to keep the overview from getting too compartmentalized. As I mentioned earlier, my research explores the relationship between the art making process and the energy dimension that connects us to the natural world. The shaman's role provides the basis to explore the traditional Indigenous and East Asian cultural connection to the energetic dimension and Ellen Dissanayake's theory of art making looks at the universality of the process and its basis for interconnectedness. We will continue to look at the arts and the energetic dimension throughout this piece but to introduce this broader notion, I begin with my own story.

As a young child, I spent a lot of time in nature (a good start). I also loved to sing and dance, as many children do. I was not labeled as a dancer or an environmentalist, I was just a kid. But how I grew to inhabit these "labels" is the unfolding of my journey and a validation of my belief that over time one can be transformed through a meaningful connection between art making and the more

than human world. The growing relationship between my art making, nature and the holistic perspective that has come about through my knowledge and experience with the energetic field that permeates our universe has drawn me closer to the natural world, as my need to be in it and strive for a meaningful, sustainable life has grown stronger. As I have continued to explore and experience this way of knowing, I have come to believe that the practice of art making situated within the inclusiveness of the holistic perspective may lead to a stronger foundation for understanding the natural world and offers a gateway to a more integrated experience within it.

It seems I have always felt very connected to the natural world, beginning with the imaginative play of make believe when trees were my dancing partners and squirrels and birds my audience. Spins and jumps were as natural for me as running and my walking was always peppered with a leap or two, a kick or a twist. I, who routinely considered the trees on my street my neighbors, who regularly ran to the empty field behind my house to talk to the wind and dance with the blowing grass, and who spent a considerable amount of time mesmerized by worms and bugs of all sorts, to the extent that I was once so engrossed in being a bird that I lunched on a worm, knew intimately that the more than human were as much a part of my world as I. I willingly performed for the sky, trees and birds, meandering creeks and wayward streams. I collected leaves or buckeyes and acorns, loved finding caterpillars and ladybugs and snails, could watch the birds and butterflies forever and enjoyed coming upon a squirrel or raccoon going about their business.

Since I often hummed or sang to myself when I danced around, my mom was relieved to have a happy child who didn't require a lot of attention. Our house backed a large open space with trees around the edges. It was big enough to keep me busy for hours and on the other side of this huge field was the elementary school, so if I got tired of having adventures in the trees or running loose in the fields, I could always check out the playground. My behavior was attributed to a healthy imagination and I continued to maintain a strong connection with the natural world as I got older, albeit in a more discrete fashion. I continued to entertain the trees, flowers, squirrels and dragonflies with my singing and dancing and often felt closer to them than many humans.

When I was nine we moved and I remember kissing the trees and our house goodbye, mad at my parents for making us move. But the new neighborhood had its own treasures – mainly the wooded parks and pathways that I now could access. Since my school was farther away, I could explore new routes going to and from and because we went home for lunch, I had twice as many chances to play. Oftentimes, my friends would drift off home for lunch, leaving me so engrossed in a bug or climbing a tree that I never made it home and by the time I realized I was hungry it would be too late, as kids were already heading back to school.

Playing outside and dancing around was my modus operandi from the beginning and like most young children who liked to dance, my mom enrolled me in dance class where I did quite well. I was able to learn the steps quickly and keeping time to the music was quite natural. Teachers paid attention to me and I

was encouraged to continue, not that I needed motivation. Dancing was not something that was confined to dance class for me. It was a method of transport, embedded in my kitchen chores routine, my leaf raking choreography and general well being. I didn't even have a chair at the dinner table when I was young, preferring to arabesque up to the table for a mouthful of food and then glide away to savor the flavors, nourishing both body and mind in the process. But I was also capable of stillness, and could just as easily watch a caterpillar making its way along a garden wall, be enthralled by how quickly a woodpecker could tap, tap, tap his beak into the tree, or read a book.

When I got a bit older I began to understand as a dancer, the meaning of muscle memory and was very aware that it wasn't enough to know a dance or a certain technique only in my head, I needed to know it in the rest of my body, as well. For me, mind and body were very much connected, whether working together as I moved in a dance or on a wooded trail where my feet knew just where to step to bypass a perpetually muddy area or locate a hidden perch where I could quietly watch the birds and other creatures in the nearby state park.

I continued with my formal dance training and ongoing participation in the dance as an adult. I loved the work of dance, which I regarded as the ongoing physical training and practice that gave me the ability to disappear into the movement so completely that the dance and I were one, but I hated the fuss and theatrics affiliated with performance, despite understanding its need. I wrestled with my ongoing love for the dance but, eventually, understood that through

dance and the way my dancer's body/mind understood movement, rhythm, feeling and connection, this was the way I presented myself in the world and this was how the world made sense to me.

At UCLA one summer, I took a class called "The Nickolaus Technique", which focused on breathing and alignment. It was a series of exercises done in order and was a great warmup before dance class. Eventually, it became part of my morning practice and after doing the series of exercises faithfully for about a year, I started to feel my breath moving through my body, as if someone was blowing air through my veins. The wind in my body flowed in rhythm to my breathing and when I was done with the exercises I felt bursting with life and my body tingled. By now, I was used to these bodily sensations and just accepted that this was me.

In college, I began to study the role of culture and its impact on the environment. Rachel Carson (1962), Gregory Bateson (1973) and Chet Bowers (1997) were my introduction but I was also drawn to the readings of Native American culture, (Nelson 1983, Cruikshank 1990, Cajete 1994, Kane 1994) as I related to their holistic views of the sacredness of the land and its inhabitants, despite being an outside observer.

I began to see my own everyday behavior from a different point of view. My childhood behavior became a positive (rather than a purely comical) aspect of my self-understanding and I became less enamored with much of the modern world that often seemed designed to exploit and destroy the natural world. I had

always felt a strong connection to my physical place in the world but became more interested in its history and the perspective of the other inhabitants that shared the space. I deliberately began to consider the natural world as an active partner, going back to my childhood understanding of the trees, animals, plants, bugs and birds as my neighbors.

Growing up in a time of activism made a huge impression on me. People were protesting the Vietnam war and challenging the government's decisions in many different areas and I was unable to see dance in an activist light, unable to find my way through my art. Many people were just getting involved politically for the first time by voting and protesting and volunteering for political campaigns and get-out-the-vote organizations. But dance class was void of politics. It didn't exist while preparing for a performance. In trying to figure out where dance fit in my life, I began to see it as a daily meditation and preparation for being in the world as the environment and environmental issues became a predominant aspect of my identity. For me, this was the beginning of connecting dance to the rest of my life.

After college, I went to work for several environmental non-profit organizations until I began to question the effectiveness of my work in changing the way people lived and cared for the environment. I needed to find a different approach and entered graduate school, where a professor called my attention to the fact that despite the efforts of environmental educators to introduce students to the natural world and those organizations working toward change, these efforts were being undermined by the anthropocentric relationship we humans

had with the natural world. He explained that this anthropocentric relationship was fostered by a culture that revered science and the rational mind above everything else, leaving no room for events and activities that didn't fit into the intellectual realm of scientific thought. This made sense to me and I remember thinking it was something I had probably known for a long time but was unable to articulate. It occurred to me that I could relate to his comments through my experience as a dancer, that although I understood certain scientific facts about the physical world in a disassociated, one-dimensional way, my real connection to the natural world was the experiential interaction that immersed me in the aliveness of it – the wind blowing through the leaves, the gurgling water of a river, the smells and sounds that encompass the language of the earth. It was this immersion or connection from within, similar to my experience as a dancer, a more layered, multi-dimensional experience, that provided the basis for my strong relationship with the natural world that helped me to understand his explanations.

Now that I had made this connection between dance and the natural world, there was so much more to know. But no one I knew seemed interested in this connection, least of all, the environmental community where I had positioned myself. Sustainability, at the time, was a relatively new term used to describe the environment but it had become attached to businesses, cities and technology in an effort to promote a healthier way of life. Despite good intentions, the change was ineffective, I believe, because, once again, it didn't deal with the root of the problem, namely the relationship we currently had with

our environment and the lifestyle itself. Changing the way we lived and reforming our cultural framework to accommodate the natural world was considered out of the mainstream and my suggestions to look at this aspect was met with resistance. More work on my part was needed but a new question was emerging. Could the art making process provide the catalyst for a holistic perspective that could transform our relationship with the natural world and begin to nurture the recovery of the land to enable the ecosystem to heal?

To find an answer, I began by looking at the cultural context for art making in both the Native American literature that had first introduced me to a different way of seeing the world and the traditional East Asian literature since I had begun practicing chi gong around this time.

Chapter 2.

Native American Worldview

Reading about Native American culture from various Indigenous and Western authors, the Indigenous worldview seems to provide an ecologically interconnected perspective for understanding how humans can sustainably share the earth with the more than human. Although particular practices vary throughout the Native American communities, a common perspective recognizes the interconnectedness of the living world, advocating a responsibility and a reciprocity that restrains their way of life within the physical limitations of their home so all life can continue to thrive. These restraints appear to be bound up in a strong moral code that intimately links humans and nature in an intrinsically holistic entity and may be instrumental in helping them to operate within a world where they recognize they are but one of many voices imbued with a collective responsibility for their actions and the effect these actions have on the system as a whole. (Nelson 1983, Cajete 1994, Cruikshank 2008).

According to the literature, the ecosystems that make up the larger system of the natural world have formed sustainable patterns over time that the Indigenous respectfully come to understand within their place. As an example of this, in a study of the Coast Salish people's connection to their land, doctoral student, Brian Thom found that the physical landscape within which the culture resides becomes the center for a meaningful "experience of relationships with others and with the land itself" (Thom, 2005, p1). The Coast Salish "view the land

through their experiences of dwelling in it" (Thom, 2005, p4) and as a result of these experiences, there is a "deep interplay between person and place, society and nature, language and culture…." (Thom, 2005 p2). Through his research Thom concluded that, "certain kinds of distinctive places within the Coast Salish world are central if not essential to Coast Salish understandings of the nature of being" (Thom, 2005 p195).

The local patterns that support life within many of the Indigenous communities can instill a note of caution regarding the effect human actions can have on the system. Relationships appear to provide the framework for taking responsibility for the consequences of one's actions within this interconnected system and informs a moral code based on a genuine willingness to share the earth with all life equally. It seems that in this worldview, an intrinsic value to all life and a love manifested in reverence for the natural world, permeates the culture.

To explain the complexity of this system, Sean Kane describes the Indigenous universe as a circuit where "the behavior of any part of the circuit is partially determined by the results of its previous messages" (p*). Sean Kane illustrates this circuit with his explanation of the wolf-deer cycle, "an action by one part of the circuit, say, the organism, creates a difference in another part, say, the environment…The difference travels around the circuit as feedback" (Kane,1994, p165). Kane asks the question,

> "Who runs the show? Is it the deer, who being too few in number act as a message to the wolves to cut back on their breeding? Or is it the wolves,

> who having cut back on their breeding cause there to be more deer? It is not as if wolves and deer alter their populations unilaterally. It seems as if the overall circuit governs their actions. It is as if the overall pattern thinks" (Kane,1994, p165).

The rich tradition of Indigenous storytelling that informs the Indigenous way of life guides this thinking within the overall pattern and the actions that take place within this ecological circuit. Their storytelling speaks to the relationships within the ecosystem, the patterns between the beings. According to Kane, Indigenous myth comes from the life of nature itself, a result of the co-evolution of people with their habitat. Rooted in the landscape they are passed on from generation to generation providing the ancient knowledge of how the ancestors, not just human ancestors but all life, successfully participated in the ecology of the earth (Kane, 1994).

Margo Greenwood, in her article, *Being Indigenous*, talks further about this relational perspective,

> Being in relationship with the storyteller is a process itself. Yet the very act of engaging with the content or product of the story is also a relationship... as a listener, I enter into relationship (through hearing, feeling, imagining and reflecting) with the storyteller and story. Knowing in a relational way moves beyond the physical senses and draws upon multiple ways of being and coming to know about one's being" (Greenwood, 2013, p100).

In short, "*relationship* is at the core of Indigenous knowledge(s)" (Greenwood, 2013, p.99) and the human/more than human relationship, rooted

in the local ecological relationships that comprise the larger system, is very prominent. Such an intricate and close connection to nature is cultivated by looking inward through “introspection and self-actualization… to connect with a life force that is manifested in all existence” (Greenwood, 2013, p100). This context, in turn, acts to reinforce the intrinsic value of all life, the interconnectedness between humans and nature, cultural communities within their natural communities and the respect, reciprocity and responsibility needed to forge a healthy relationship capable of sustaining life on the planet. Relationships are also at the core of the art making process, specifically the relationship the art maker can have with their process of art making, the tools with which they engage, the experiences they bring to the process and their “audience” or rather the community (both human and more than) they are responsible to and reciprocate with.

As part of an Indigenous view, there appears to be a spiritual focus that accepts a way of knowing that involves more than what can be objectively observed, a recognition that the relational experiences within a connected system of living entities are infused with an energy or vital force that exists not only within each entity but throughout the system as a whole.

Gregory Cajete, among others, has stated that most Indigenous tribes believe “a universal energy infuses everything in the cosmos and expresses itself through a multitude of manifestations” (Cajete,1994, p44).

> Human beings interpenetrate, not only with one another, but also with the life around them – the breath and lifeways of trees, grass, earth, water,

> rocks, animals, and natural phenomena. Honoring and understanding this interpenetration of living things provides profound lessons of how one can live in proper relationship in a community of human beings, animals, and plants, which share the same breath of life (Cajete,1994, p88).

Corroborating his description are David Suzuki's statement that the Native Mind "see[s] the entire natural world as somehow alive and animated by a single, unifying life force, whatever its local Native name" (Suzuki, 1992, pp17-18) and Richard Nelson's thorough research of the Koyukon where he explains their belief that "the earth itself is the source of a preeminent spiritual power...." (Nelson,1983, p26).

This awareness of a universal energy infused throughout the living community connects the mind/body and human/nature dimensions and influences the behavior of the Indigenous toward the larger world. An awareness of this universal energy acknowledges the complementarity of the inner and outer dimensions of the human/more than human relationship. It is present "not merely in the individual but in nature as well...a dimension that transects the physical realm at every point and that, whether we are aware of it or not, is present in any object and event" (Kane, 1994, p134). This energy is a connective web between humans and the more than human, forming the basis for the nurturing relationships, responsibilities and reciprocity that has been part of the Indigenous landscape since ancient times. It is represented in different forms, depending on the culture, but the idea that this energy exists as an active part of the cosmos appears to be widespread throughout the Indigenous world. Humans share this

energy with the other living entities that share our space, and this interplay forms the basis of the reciprocity that perpetuates the ecosystem.

By connecting with this energetic level, art making may act as a conduit to the more than human world. It is “a tool to express the nonverbal, the innermost reflections of the dream, the understanding of relationship to the natural world…” (Cajete,1994, p95) “a kind of magic. And in this magic of creation, the artist becomes immersed within his media and the mind of creation” (Cajete,1994, p148). For many Native Americans, “there is no distinction between art and life. The two are inseparable” (Schmidt,1994, p27). In fact, many Native American languages do not have a word for art. For them, “a life lived in balance is a work of art, and… an artfully crafted object reflects the true path of life being walked by its maker” (Schmidt, 1994, p27). Native Americans contend that the “spirit of the earth shows itself through the hands of its people” (Schmidt, 1994, p26) and looking at many of the Native American blankets, baskets, masks and tools reflects this reverence for Nature and the co-mingled energy of the art maker and their materials. With this intention in mind, “the artist must work with: clarity of purpose; an understanding and true appreciation of his materials and his tools; an inner harmony and vitality of spirit, mind, and body; and a focused meditative attention that exercises his full intelligence in a prayerful act of bringing an entity, a form that lives, into being” (Cajete,1994, p148-149). This is quite a different intention than the individual mandate of Western based art making.

For the Coast Salish, art as a way of communicating with the more than human world through this shared energy field means caring for their ancestral

places to maintain a harmonious balance and allow access to the spirits in these ancestral places. "...Story and myth telling, vision questing, spirit dancing and singing, hunting and fishing and plant gathering… are all ways of engaging in the reciprocal relationships of respect with non-human beings, who dwell alongside humans in the land…" (Thom, 2005, p6). Connecting art making to the other aspects of their community through this shared energy field appears to be part of their responsibility to care for the universe. Humans express their gratitude for the more than human through this reciprocal relationship by sharing their stories, song, prayer, dance and other artistic activities, thus creating a close bond with the more than human world across time within a shared space.

To summarize for our purposes here, in general, Native Americans observe an ecologically interconnected system infused with a universal energy or life force. They recognize the need for balance and harmony in the system for the well-being of all who are part of the system. Relationship is at the core of the balance and harmony in the system and included in these relationships is the process of art making. As an expression of the balance and harmony sought within the ecosystem and a means to connect with this energetic level of the universe, art making appears to be an active element of the Native American holistic perspective.

Chapter 3.

The East

Similarly, my reading on traditional Eastern cultures also presents an interconnected view of the world. Again, a variety of practices throughout these communities seems to confirm the belief that the earth consists of a single system in which everything flows together as “the unfolding of a single process” (Wei-Ming, 1989, p70) and this understanding is expressed in a wide array of unique customs and practices that define the groups within this purview.

Except for Hinduism, which “refers to the entire culture and traditional way of life of the people of India,” (Bresnan, 2003, p1) Buddhism, Confucianism/Taoism and Shinto mythology are considered to be the traditions that form the foundation for the philosophies within the traditional Eastern worldview and these philosophies have been adapted and formulated to fit the cultural needs of the various Eastern populations.

Shinto mythology, which evolved from Indigenous beliefs in Siberia, provides the foundation for the “pantheistic/animistic worldview,” (Shaner, 1989, p164) wherein all things were believed to participate equally in a “seamless web of divine presence” (Shaner, 1989, p165). Together with Buddhism and Confucianism, they form the basis for the Japanese cultural traditions. Shinto mythology has been defined as a “way of the gods” (Bresnan, 2003, p177) and is considered to be both a Native Japanese religion and a “nature religion” (Bresnan, 2003, p178). Acknowledging the animism within the universe, Shinto

tradition considers nature and natural events, like thunderstorms and earthquakes, to be divine and, thus, in possession of “kami”, or “the spirit of the thing.” Shinto combines its divine spirit with Japan’s “love for the beauty of nature” (Bresnan, 2003, p178).

Buddhism, derived from the Hindu tradition in India, has been adapted and culturally refined as it spread to other Asian cultures, most notably China, Korea and Japan. In Japan, Buddhist philosophy easily partners with the Shinto tradition because the human/nature connection is presented through complementary lenses. The Shinto tradition acknowledges the existence of the life spirit that connects the human/more than human world and Buddhism connects the world through the unity of being and immanent mind, whereby the essential reality of one’s own nature is, in essence, the fundamental reality of all nature (Bresnan, 2003). Common to the religious aspects of both these traditions is the “notion that the meeting ground of religious experience and the experience of nature are identical” (Shaner, 1989, p168).

In China, Confucianism and Taoism or Daoism started out as Indigenous philosophies built on the belief that “everything is an expression of the working of the whole” (Bresnan, 2003, p130). Confucius believed in the reestablishment of “harmony between human society and the natural order, which is continually threatened by unchecked selfish interests” (Bresnan, 2003, p124).

He proposed extending a type of court etiquette or *li*, “an elaborate system of customs and manners that specified the ways in which noblemen would relate to one another in formal situations…” (Bresnan, 2003, p134) to the entire social

order so it became a refined set of manners designed to regulate the personal interactions arising out of the various social relationships among those in human society. This protocol, designed to act as a restraining and refining force, was supposed to create a sense of balance and harmony among the human population.

In response to the constraints of this *li* protocol, Taoism came into being. It was “founded on a deep love of nature, a love of the harmony and organic wholeness of nature (Bresnan, 2003, p156) and came to be regarded as the impersonal and infinite force, cosmic in scope, that stood behind the being and the unfolding of the natural order” (Bresnan, 2003, p152). To the Taoists, the Confucian system not only failed “to restore man to his natural state, but it actually made things worse! The simple, natural life that the Taoists cherished was seen to be smothered in the complex…Confucian system” (Bresnan, 2003, p156). According to the Tao or the “way,” “the currents of human life are one with the currents of the sea, the flight of birds and the growth of grass and trees. To be in accord with Tao is to be one with it, like the wind and the waving of the wheat field” (Bresnan, 2003, p 156). Taoism treats everyone in the universe the same. “Humankind is very much a part of the universe… [so] nothing is to be gained by mentally setting ourselves apart” (Bresnan, 2003, p165). In contrast, the “overly organized and ritualized social practices” (MacKinnon,1996, p661) of Confucianism did set humans apart.

Although both philosophical systems focus on how humans conduct themselves, they approach their mission from different perspectives.

Confucianism is clearly focused on the human perspective while Taoism regards the human population as just one segment within the larger natural world. “In the cosmic sense [the Way] belongs to the Taoist order while in the ethical sense it belongs to the Confucian order,” (Lidin, 2006, p54) resulting in a “dialogical relationship” (Mackinnon, 1996, p661) that unites them both in a discourse blending the organization of Confucianism with the unstructured simplicity of the Tao’s natural way. Taoism focused on “restoring humanity’s proper harmony within the natural order” (Bresnan, 2003, p156) by “appreciating and learning from the events of everyday life” (Mackinnon, 1996, p661). Both agreed that “human society is one of the things that nature does, and that a healthy human society is one that lives in perfect harmony with the natural order of which it is a part” (Bresnan, 2003, p156) but the Taoists considered the overly complex Confucian behavioral training to be “arbitrary rules imposed from the outside,” (Mackinnon,1996, p661) infiltrating the simplicity of the natural way and the universal harmony it was meant to restore.

This brief introduction to the various philosophies that provide the basis for the traditional Eastern worldview leads us to the primary concept in Taoism that is the principle of *wu-wei,* which refers to “the way nature acts – perfectly, spontaneously, not forcing or trying to control anything” (Bresnan, 2003, p157). Literally it means, “nonaction in the sense, of not forcing, but in the more everyday sense, it suggests flowing freely, going with the current” (Bresnan, 2003, p157). A Daoist is “like the grass or drifting clouds only in the sense that the energy of Dao *plays through* him naturally, without forcing or trying to control

him. Nature is so beautifully regulated, that once in accord with it, one doesn't have to *do* anything…. just go with it" (Bresnan, 2003, p165). Thus, a person of the Tao exercises their agency "by blending in and becoming an integral caring part of the environment" (McKenzie, 2009, p199). The Taoist tradition is based upon the following ideas which form the basis of a holistic perspective:

- the principle of holistic unity where "the importance of the parts is seen in their relationship to the whole"; (Bresnan, 2003, p29)
- the "principle of internal life movements [in which] all things in the world have an intrinsic life force which moves them in a way in which motion is not imposed from other things or a God but is derived from the inexhaustible source of energy of life, which is the Way…. as all things are interrelated to form a network of interchange of processes, the transmission of moving force is conceived of as an exhibition of life activity, in the absence of which the individual things will cease to be defined…, and
- the principle of organic balance [in which] all things and processes in the world are related in processes which proceed toward a balance and a harmony…" (Callicott & Ames, 1989, p11).

These principles depict a framework for the core of the Eastern tradition, the universal energy that connects the life processes in the universe known as ki, qi or chi. This life energy exists throughout the universe, allowing an ongoing exchange to take place between the human and the more than human entities as "the continuous presence of *ch'i* in all modalities of being makes everything flow

together as the unfolding of a single process" (Wei-Ming, 1989, p70). A universe built on this notion of interconnectedness, invariably engenders a belief in the intrinsic value of all life and considers the health and well-being of all as it strives for the balance and harmony essential for its prosperity. In the Buddhist tradition, "a human being is part of nature.... He comes into being depending upon various conditions, contributes his share to the drama, and makes his exit. He is part of nature, that is, in a constant process of becoming (*bhava*), evolution (*parinama*), and dissolution" (Kalupahana, 1989, p252).

Qi, "a core concept of Chinese thought shared by Confucians, Taoists, Buddhists and other scholars throughout history" (Lidin, 2006, p19) is considered to be "the building block of the universe, both substance of all things and the divine flow of energy… Thus, it is a psychophysical term, wider than the Western notions of energy and matter, combining both" (Lidin, 2006, p20). It is composed of the ongoing interaction "between yin (the passive cosmic force) and yang (the active cosmic force) (Wu, 2005, p147). It is "the vital force that condenses and dissolves in perpetual change, alternating between the yin and the yang in endless relationship, interplay and harmony, a ceaseless flow of energy passing between them in the cosmos" (Lidin, 2006, p20). The concept of Yin and Yang teaches that all things and events are products of the transformation of these two elements or forces" (Jin-wen, 1994, p35). Through their corresponding interaction, they "generate an unbreakable organic continuum…. that is complementary and interdependent" (Wu, 2005, p148). Confucian scholar Dong Zhong-shu, from Han dynasty (206BC – 220AD), goes further, noting that "not

only are things related generally, but they are interrelated in exact detail. And, not only are things constantly changing and transforming, but they activate each other" (Jin-wen, 1994, p36). In terms of art making, this back and forth activation comes about through the ongoing dialogue that takes place during the art making process between the artist's skill and the creative energy as they work together to bring the process to form.

Seeing the universe as an organic whole, movement and tranquility alternate and become the root of each other – Yin and Yang. As yang is generated through movement, its activity reaches its limit and then becomes tranquil and through its tranquility, yin is generated. When tranquility reaches its limit, activity begins again. Everything flows into the other as the concept of yin and yang illustrates the interdependency of the system. By actively cultivating qi, one builds a stronger connection within this flow in an effort to restore balance and harmony to the system. This concept of qi is germane because art making, in the East, is a melding of artistic craft and qi cultivation. It is very closely connected to the individual as a source for cultivating qi and working toward the "union of human and heaven" (Wu, 2005, p.v). "…Technical knowledge of one's art is insufficient. Artists have to transcend technique so that art becomes spiritual resonance, transforming their artistic endeavors into the means of gaining accesses to the ultimate beauty and reality *(Dao)"* (Wu, 2005, p183). The perfecting of a skill goes together with the training of one's mind/spirit in "a gradual interweaving of external techniques with internal processes" (Wu, 2005, p185).

"Becoming aware of ourselves as vessels and channels of Chi… we become more aware of and attuned to our interconnectedness with all that exists" (Ching & Ching, 2007, p3). Through training and practice in one's area of art making, one can become fluent and masterful in the tools of one's particular craft. By adding meditative breathing or a formal practice of tai chi or chi gong to one's art making, access to the self-cultivation of this qi energy flow is enhanced, strengthening our connection to the larger universe to "join the inner and outer worlds" (Ching & Ching, 2007, p2). As this connection strengthens over time, this process of accessing this energy level becomes the "spiritualness" that describes this art making practice, almost as if the process transports you to a place outside the physical realm. Dancer Wen-chi Wu comments that "a master artist communicates with audiences through *unconscious* physical, spiritual and divine subtle energies rather than merely through conscious meanings" (Wu, 2005, p223).

The traditional Eastern perspective accords great importance to the individual's role in cultivating qi, whereby the individual is seen as a "mediator between the microcosm [human] and macrocosm [nature]" (Wu, 2005, p217). This is different than the Native American view which seems to depict the larger environment as being endowed with sacred energy or vital force that humans draw from by immersing themselves in it and then embracing the responsibility to give back – a much more reciprocal arrangement. So, even though the focus on reciprocity appears to be a much more central tenet for Native American cultures than for those in the East, the understanding of an interconnected world remains

viable in both these communities. It is this interconnectedness, in addition to the instilled notion of body/mind oneness, infused with the universal energy accessible through art making that appears to be a common characteristic of both Native American and traditional East Asian cultures.

Over the course of my research, the element of energy has been identified in many different ways. There is the universal life force or vital force in many Indigenous cultures, qi, chi or ki depending on the specific Asian community or the prana of India. It has been referred to as the connective layer of energy, the bioenergetic level, the “flow” that Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes about and the bioenergy field that Marco Pogacnik (who I will discuss later on) and others refer to when working with the ley lines of the earth. There are also those who speak of the spiritual, mystical or numinous energy within the universe and the creative energy that many art makers already acknowledge. Also included in this group is the term subtle energy and animism, which is defined as the spiritual force of life. Even the science of quantum mechanics acknowledges the existence of humans as “waves of energy indistinguishable from the rest of the flow, our consciousness somewhere within it” (Slattery, 2009, p71) at the subatomic level. I believe these are all valid distinctions but for my purposes, they are all part of the energetic field that exists in our universe.

Recognizing that there is an array of holistic perspectives that instill this understanding of the interconnectedness of the universe and advocate human respect and responsibility toward the more than human, I am not advocating for any specific perspective or, for that matter, any specific energy form, only

suggesting that there are many paths that can be taken to develop a holistic mindset. With this in mind, this chapter serves as introduction to the basic philosophies of the Eastern tradition with a specific focus on the nature of qi energy. As in the previous chapter that focused on the Native American perspective, I am looking at how these cultures define this universal energy and how their art making is connected to it. Now it’s time to look west.

Chapter 4.

The Industrialized West

As a constituent of the industrialized West, it has been my experience that the mainstream worldview has focused on the earth in its physical form, utilizing the word ecosystem to denote the connective processes of the physical living world. Exceptions to this limited physically defined view include the emerging inclusivity of environmental literature, the deep relationships that develop among scientists and the subjects they study and the ever-growing number of people in the West who are adopting a more holistic worldview and lifestyle. But for the most part, Westerners seem to hold a scientifically defined view of a fragmented physical world that emanates from an anthropocentric belief, compared to the colorful mythic stories of other cultures that bring the invisible dimensions of the universe alive and provide an introduction to the broader context of the more comprehensive worldview of our Indigenous and Eastern neighbors. This restricted Western view of the physical and tangible aspects of our universe continues to separate humans from the rest of the natural world, making it difficult to recognize our responsibilities toward maintaining the existing sustainable patterns within our local ecosystems that are needed for its health and well-being. Although both the Indigenous and East Asian perspectives are becoming Westernized, their original cultural viewpoint acknowledged a relationship with the natural world in which the natural world has intrinsic value. But our Western scientific view continues to view the world as resource based. In my opinion,

although we are beginning to acknowledge our interference in the planet's processes as a cause of climate change, without an understanding of our role within the larger world, we lack the restraint of a holistic worldview that imposes limits and fosters a sense of balance and well-being.

Author Anthony Weston asks us to "consider how thoroughly humanized are most of the spaces in which we live and work… our spaces are also usually and insistently filled with wholly human sounds." According to him, "it is this sense of disconnection that makes it possible for us to ruthlessly exploit Earth, while reassuring us that we ourselves are not threatened by the degradation of larger living systems." The fact that "we are so willing to foul our own nest" leads Weston to surmise that humans "refuse to [or are unable to] acknowledge that it is our "nest"" (Weston, 2004, p33). Weighing in further on our disconnectedness, authors Bai and Scutt explain,

> "who we are, how we relate to and act in the world, depends crucially on who we think we are in relation to the world. And vice versa. If we think that humanity (mind) is separate and independent from nature (matter), and moreover, that the former is superior to the latter, then it follows (psycho)logically that humans can manipulate, control, exploit and even destroy nature" (Bai, Scutt, 2009. p95).

Unlike the intrinsic human / more than human relationship found in the traditions of the holistic cultures of our Eastern and Indigenous counterparts, these authors illustrate the absence of meaningful relationships between the West and the natural world. In fact, not only do we see ourselves as separate

from the rest of the natural world, we are also disconnected from the historical connections that tie other cultures to their landscapes, both physical and otherwise, although as westernization spreads so does Western disconnection. We are a society in flux, regularly on the move and embedded in impermanence.

But a number of contemporary Western authors - including Orr, Bowers, Abram, Bai, Berry and Sessions - are writing from a more holistic vantage point and the burgeoning view taking shape in Western environmental literature continues to provide a more inclusive look at the natural world, planting the seed of this broader, more holistic perspective of our universe.

For example, the need to understand the importance of culture and language in how we perceive the world is written about at length by Chet Bowers, whose work centers on the “tacit and contextual levels” where cultural patterns, including language, are learned (Bowers,1997, p25). Calling attention to the diminishing non-commodified portion of Western culture, he explains the need to rebuild and revive this aspect of community through the commons and its relationship between the human and more than human world. According to Bowers, taken-for-granted cultural patterns that are disconnected from the natural world are the source of the ongoing perpetration of environmental destruction in the west. Building on Bateson's view of an ecology, which states that “the unit of survival is a flexible organism-in-its-environment,” (Bateson,1973, p 451) not the individual on its own, Bowers' work focuses on using a “root metaphor that takes account of what we now understand about the interdependence of living systems (Bowers,1994, p163). The root metaphor of

life as an ecology foregrounds the nesting of humans in culture, and culture nesting in natural systems" (Bowers,1994, p164). Bower's root metaphor of life as an ecology stipulates, "humans exist in a part/whole relationship where the fate of humans and natural systems are inextricably bound together in the sense that humans cannot survive the destruction of the life-sustaining ecosystems" (Bowers,1994, p165).

Bowers also acknowledges the problem of print-based language in recognizing his nested view of ecological systems and reducing the more than human world to an abstract, disconnected landscape that emphasizes our separateness from the rest of nature and the absence of any notion of aliveness. Much of his work supports the view that Western educators and scientists fail to understand and disregard "how humans impact natural systems" (Bowers, 1997, p75) and I believe he offers one of the best explanations for how our Western culture of science and technology is breaking down the holistic systems that previously governed the living world. His scathing critique of western culture's destructive practices, from the loss of local knowledge to the increasingly important and non-neutral role of the scientist who ignores the relationship between culture and natural systems without an accompanying understanding of the cultural implications of their work on the larger community, signifies the importance of Bowers' work. As the practice of eco-art continues to grow, there may be more opportunities for the holistic collaboration of science and art to restore this understanding.

When I first met Chet Bowers, he was putting together a master's program called Culture, Ecology and Education at Portland State University in the early 1990s. He was continuing to teach in the Education Department at the University of Oregon but he was up in Portland once or twice a week working on what appeared to be a labor of love. I was a mom with two young kids, soon to be part of a program the university was offering that provided financial incentives for young moms to further their education. Although Chet's program wasn't slated to begin until the following year and students weren't being directed to the program yet, the counselor I was assigned to thought I should meet him. She walked me down to his office and introduced me, where he graciously proceeded to spend almost an hour of his time talking with me. The conversation was enlightening, not the typical academic jargon that schools promote. As I left his office, I felt that this man could teach me a lot and I was quite fortunate to have been introduced to him.

Once the program began, everyone was initially overwhelmed by Chet's classes. His body of work and the concepts he conveyed were new for most of us. Due to the large interest in the environment in Oregon at the time, the students in the program were a diverse group, appreciating Oregon's natural beauty and hoping to do what they could to preserve it. Many students found the information in his class difficult to absorb, becoming frustrated at how alien the thinking was from what they were used to. But Chet was wonderfully patient, advising them to just live with it for a bit, let it work its way in from the outside.

Looking back, that piece of advice probably sounded just as alien as the class material and I wonder if it fell on deaf ears at the time.

I couldn't get enough, inhaling everything he had to say. It made so much sense to me, allowing me to view everything around me with fresh eyes. The University still had a Dance Department at the time and I was taking a Cuban dance class and the lively Cuban rhythms comingled with the dialog from Chet's class would run through my mind as background chatter throughout the day. He often railed about digital technology, which led to many heated discussions in class, but for many it was the first time anyone had heard the digital experience portrayed in a less than flattering light, providing a powerful antidote to mainstream ecstasy. He found the slow pace of positive cultural change and his colleagues' embrace of this change irritating and could also be short-tempered when it came to University rules and procedures, but he was passionate about his subject material and serious about the environmental consequences of our cultural shortcomings. The program was rich and thought provoking, invigorating us students with the need to understand his message in order to be part of this change.

In addition to Chet's own work, the syllabus for the courses contained wonderful reading material. The list of authors included David Orr, Gregory Cajete, Helena Norberg-Hodge, Wolfgang Sachs, Paul Theobald, Julie Cruikshank and David Suzuki to name a few, and several of the authors visited to guest lecture for a couple classes. He created an exhilarating learning environment and I was amazed to be introduced to the world in this new way. I

came away from this life changing experience with a desire to work toward restoring these cultural values as an essential remedy for restoring the natural world and I feel lucky to have known his bright mind and been inspired by his important environmental work.

Another Western author and educator working in this same realm of "life as an ecology" and the need to revive community relationships through the commons, is Rebecca Martusewicz. She explains that "intelligence… is not born of the human capacity to think or make sense of the world alone. Rather, it is the result of a collaborative endeavor among humans and the more than human world." In this sense, as human communities are nested within a larger ecological system, we participate in and are affected by a complex exchange of information and sense-making that contributes to the well-being of that system" (Martusewicz, 2009, p254). She refers to this shared give-and-take as "collaborative intelligence." Pointing out that intelligence tends to be understood as an exclusive human quality, she proposes the need to recognize that "intelligence is much bigger than our own minds or words" (Martusewicz, 2009) to help us see our interdependence with the natural world.

Also in this growing and diverse field is David Abram, whose books, *Spell of the Sensuous* and *Becoming Animal*, provide an in-depth understanding of our connections to the natural world at the deepest levels of our being, depicting the aliveness of it, similar to Indigenous cultures who, "experience their own consciousness as simply one form of awareness among many others" (Abram,1996, p9). *Spell of the Sensuous* details the modern world that people

currently reside in as a listless, shallow, dead place reflected through the technological mindset and dualism that anchors the Western perspective. He contrasts that depiction of the natural world with a gloriously thick description of a place where humans are “an *experiencing* form” (Abram, 1996, p10) in a world of similar experiencing forms, a world pulsing with aliveness and one in which all forms have languages that communicate, not just humans.

His description portrays the human in relation to the living world, in a dialogue between the unconscious and the conscious, the past and the present, and what Sean Kane characterizes as a dimension where “the unconscious is continuously awake and aware, and not merely in the individual but in nature as well” (Kane, 1994, p134). Both these authors provide a Western context for a connected world that allows us to step back and contemplate a broader, more interconnected view.

The philosophical concept of phenomenology appears to be the closest the west comes to understanding the union of body and mind and the body/mind relationship to the larger environment. Abram explains that Edmund Husserl inaugurated the philosophical discipline of phenomenology as a way to pay attention to the subjective side of direct experience and he describes phenomenology as a way to look “toward the world as it is experienced in its felt immediacy” (Abram, 1996, p35). Abram notes that the real world is “an intertwined matrix of sensations and perceptions, a collective field of experience lived through from many different angles” (Abram, 1996, p39). Connecting body and mind into one experiencing unit, “an active and open form,” (Abram, 1996,

p49) is beautifully animated by Abram's colorful language depicting this interactive form in its vital state. This form,

> "draws its sustenance and its very substance from the soils, plants, and elements that surround it; it continually contributes itself, in turn, to the air, to the composting earth, to the nourishment of insects and oak trees and squirrels, ceaselessly spreading out of itself as well as breathing the world into itself, so that it is very difficult to discern, at any moment, precisely where this living body begins and where it ends" (Abram, 1996, p46-47).

Although Abram alludes to the life force or qi energy in his writing, as the above-mentioned description depicting the ongoing dialog between the experiencing form and the ecosystem illustrates, the west doesn't really acknowledge qi or a life force except when referring to the Native American or East Asian cultures. We allow for energy in the system because of our understanding of systems but it is not the spiritual, subtle kind acknowledged as qi in the eastern worldview or the vital force of the Indigenous. The spiritual energy of Western religious traditions, however, is considered very separate from the physical ecosystem referred to in Western science and not often discussed in an interconnected way, although the writings of the priest, Matthew Fox, whose work regarding creation spirituality, "the interdependence of all things" (White, 1994, p185) comes to mind as one example that disputes that. Fox refers to himself as a spiritual theologian and describes the tradition of creation spirituality as the "reawakening of mysticism and the protecting of mother earth" (www.matthewfox.org 2018). Again, my limited experience suggests this is not

mainstream in the West.

Surprisingly, though, it may be scientists themselves who are beginning to connect their work to the holistic perspective that will provide the necessary foothold for contemporary culture to embrace an understanding of the universe as a living system. The physicist, Fritjof Capra has developed a body of work around the notion of “systems thinking” which he describes as a holistic or ecological perspective that emphasizes, “the view of living organisms as integrated wholes” (Capra, 1996, p.17). Similar to Bower’s understanding of life as an ecology, Capra explains that, “the behavior of a living organism as an integrated whole cannot be understood from the study of its parts alone” (Capra, 1996, p.25). The crux of systems thinking is that the “properties of the parts can only be understood within the context of the larger whole” (Capra, 1996, p.37). He refers to systems thinking as “contextual thinking,” which, like the holistic perspective, shifts the focus from objects to relationships.

> Each of these [organisms] forms a whole with respect to its parts while at the same time being a part of a larger whole. Thus, cells combine to form tissues, tissues to form organs and organs to form organisms. These in turn exist within social systems and ecosystems. Throughout the living world we find living systems nesting within other living systems (Capra, 1996, p.28).

Both Capra’s description of living systems and Bower’s description of humans nesting in culture and culture nesting in natural systems provide a systems thinking basis for understanding our world.

> “Because systems thinking is contextual, it concentrates not on basic building blocks, but on basic principles of organization” (Capra, 1996, p. 30), specifically a system’s pattern of organization and structure. The pattern of organization is the “configuration of relationships that gives a system its essential characteristics. The structure of a system is the physical embodiment of its pattern of organization, a description of the system’s actual physical components” (Capra, 1996, p.158). Capra explains, “in the case of a living organism, the pattern of organization is always embodied in the organism’s structure and the link between pattern and structure lies in the process of continual embodiment” (Capra, 1996, p. 160). This continuous “making of itself” is known as autopoiesis, and is the “pattern of organization of living systems” (p.160). An autopoietic system “undergoes continual structural changes while preserving its web like pattern of organization” (Capra, 1996, p. 267).

By understanding living systems in this way, Capra is able to provide a “conceptual framework for the link between ecological communities (ecosystems) and human communities. Both are living systems that exhibit the same basic principles of organization. And based on these principles, he is able to outline the basic ecological principles needed to build sustainable human communities” (Capra, 1996, p. 297). Like Bowers, Capra understands the interdependence and non-linear nature of these systems and also the limits of science as a mode of inquiry. Capra explains his systems thinking through the biological sciences, implying that the living world is a “network of relationships” but this “systems

thinking as network thinking" (Capra, 1996, p.38) is applicable to all branches of the scientific community.

An example of systems thinking at the energetic level of the universe is Mico Slattery's (2009) dissertation that confirms the interconnected universe acknowledged in both the Native American and traditional Eastern cultural worldviews and compares it to a similar concept through the science of Quantum Mechanics (QM), the study of particles at the subatomic level. Slattery explains physicist David Bohm's work on interconnectedness that came about through his work with "plasma (gas with a high density of electrons and positive ions), which left Bohm with the impression that the sea of electrons was alive" (Slattery, 2009, p. 80). Expanding on the notion of living organisms as an integrated whole, Bohm's theory is that, "mind and matter are not different substances but different aspects of one whole and unbroken movement… [and this] total order (the structure of reality on all levels) is enfolded in some implicit sense, in each region of space and time" (Slattery, 2009, p. 83). Bohm's work led him to recognize the limits of what science could explain and the need to look beyond the physical realm to understand the interconnectedness of the universe.

Slattery's dissertation appeals to the subatomic level where everything exists as waves of energy, including mind and matter, and compares it to the training of the Buddhist functional mind and the training of young Native Americans in an effort to shed light on the inability of science to overcome the separation of mind and matter. Both types of training required mindfulness. "Buddhists required the vehicle of mindful attention to relieve the mind of its

afflictions. Native teachers required mindfulness in other ways, designed to make the student an astute observer of the natural world" (Slattery, 2009, p.120). Both of these cultural perspectives bring body and mind together as one, a problem for Western culture's current belief systems. Slattery believes that the Western world has trouble resolving the separation of mind and body because they "have been looking for its resolution solely at the macro level of reality" and that "Western based societies have conditioned us to believe that the external [or physical] world is more real than the internal world; therefore, we privilege the one over the other" (Slattery, 2009, p. 143).

If science can begin to integrate an interdependent, non-linear understanding of the world through systems thinking as both Capra and Slattery depict, then we have the outline of a western holistic perspective. Capra's explanation of living systems based on the pattern of autopoiesis is in line with Slattery's take on our interconnectedness, and that seems similar to Yuasa Yasuo's explanation of an ongoing reciprocal exchange of ki between the microcosm and macrocosm, "an exchange of life-energy of some sort between the body and the external world, that is, there is an absorption and release of ki between them" (Yasuo, 1993, p.107). And a similar Native American perspective notes "the proper human relationship with nature as a continuous dialogue (that is, a two-way, horizontal communication between Homo sapiens and other elements of the cosmos) rather than as a monologue…" (Suzuki, 1992, p.18). Each describes an interdependent relationship between humans and the rest of

the universe and between the energetic level and physical level that allows for an ongoing exchange.

Being able to look at the holistic perspective scientifically provides a measure of proof that the energetic field exists in scientific terms which seems important to Western minds that regard science as the only truth in the physical world. But although understanding the universe in this way provides the prelude to the interconnectedness that holistic cultures are based on, it “does not give us the necessary *experiential insight* to move us beyond a dualistic mode of perception” (Bai & Scott, 2009, p.98). The art making process, however, can provide this “experiential insight” and already employs the non-dualistic dialog that is needed.

At this point, there appears to be little evidence that art making in the West is connected in any way to the energetic level of the universe, holistic understanding or body/mind unity. But systems thinking provides the basis for Western science to consider the holistic perspective of interconnectedness and as it becomes more pervasive in the Western world, the notion of art making as a gateway to this interconnectedness may garner more acceptance.

Chapter 5.

Art Making and Universal Life Energy

So, what happens when the holistic perspective that understands the universe as an interconnected system infused with animated energy encounters art making?

To look at art making within the context of Indigenous and Eastern cultures is to glimpse its connection to the life energy of their particular worldview. The myths and folktales of many of these cultures presents a universe where the human / more than human relationship is often familial or friend-like, fluidly slipping from the physical to invisible dimensions when applicable. One example is the Iroquois folktale of “How Stories Came to be” (Bruchac, 2008). It is the story of how a young Indian boy learns about what a story is from a great rock and then takes the rock’s stories back to his people to teach them about stories. Over the years, his relationship with the rock continues until finally the rock conveys the last story, telling the man that the stories now belong to the people to share. Another example is the Japanese tale of the “Crane Girl” (Manley, 2017). In this story, a boy frees a crane from a trap. In return, the crane returns to the boy as a girl and helps out his family until she is found out. The boy ends up following her to her home where they live together for the rest of their lives as cranes. These relationships between human/more than human and inner and outer consciousness, I believe, are illustrative of the same relationship between humans and the ecosystem that Bateson describes as the “larger mind,” and

what F. David Peat describes as the “wider reality” (Peat, 2002, p287) of the Native American experience. Deep ecologist Dolores LaChapelle, speaks of Bateson’s notion of the larger mind as she notes that “in certain traditional cultures, daily life was lived with a feeling of connection to this larger mind” and characterized this connection as a “bit like magic…an experience of total alertness and joy” (White, 1994, p166). Author Sean Kane also referred to this connection as a dimension where “the unconscious is continuously awake and aware, and not merely in the individual but in nature as well” (Kane,1994, p134). According to them, this alert and joyful state of being was the norm, not the exception. When more rational consciousness was required, a human would have to leave this “flow” until such time when ritual was needed “to bring the people back into the flow, back into the daily life of their place” (White, 1994, p167). Because everyday life was so connected to the natural world and its invisible dimension, traditional cultures remained “in the flow” (White, 1994, p167) for most of their daily living. Peat characterizes this reality in Indigenous cultures as “the domain of animating spirits, energies and powers” (Peat, 2002, p278). Bound up in this worldview, which included art making, was an acceptance of these beliefs from the beginning of a child’s life.

The secular and anthropocentric beliefs of the West, however, introduce us to the existence of a web of energy that undergirds all life systems through QM, a subject we are more likely to be introduced to in high school science. By then, a child has been a member of their designated community long enough to have formed their cultural beliefs and QM becomes just another disconnected

piece of information relegated to the back of one's mind for "when we need it," which for many of us (present and future scientists excluded) is not very often. As in the case of Indigenous cultures, the ecological interconnectedness of our world should be introduced early in a child's life to counter the compartmentalization so prevalent in Western culture. What the art making process offers is an opportunity for imagination, intuition and creativity to energize the various dimensions of an interconnected world early in life. Viewing or seeing the world through an artistic lens from an early age can help to instill this perspective until it becomes second nature as these art makers mature.

In the beginning of my doctoral program, one of our assignments was to take up a new practice of some sort and I chose to play the cello. It was unlike anything I had done before. With my background in dance, the unexpected weakness of my fingers surprised me and as I watched my fingers struggle, it occurred to me that they were probably the one part of my anatomy that I never stretched or strengthened. Unlike my toes, which needed to be strong to carry my weight, my fingers happily flowed through the air, following the supple movements of my arms to provide a graceful accompaniment to my steps or provide a link to my partner. As I forced them to stretch ungracefully around the cello's neck so I could exert pressure in the right places on the strings to elicit the proper note, my fingers once again provided a link to my partner, this time an instrument with a mellifluous sound. And when I actually got the sound right I was compelled to continue, drawn magically in to what I can best describe as the sound of the earth as it creaked and stretched, sighed and grunted. The earth's

voice as it emanated from this wooden vessel prodded me to practice, to become comfortable in this movement of arms and fingers so the voice I heard became more melodious and the cello offered a slightly contented sigh, relieved to be getting past our awkward introduction.

To have to learn something totally new at my age is quite an opportunity. I can't remember the last time I learned something that wasn't a variation of something I already knew. How to hold the cello, how to hold the bow, how to stroke the bow and press the strings with my other hand to form the notes, all this was new to me even though the act of learning was not. The anticipation of my first lesson gave way to my eagerness to try. When the teacher asked me if I wanted a picture of how my hand should look holding the bow, I declined explaining that I needed to get comfortable with how it felt when I did it correctly so it would be imprinted in my muscle memory.

During practice, I focused on the mechanics of playing. The cello and I were very much two separate entities at that point, getting to know one another and slowly learning about each other in order to forge our partnership. I was reminded of the hours of dance practice that littered my past, repeating steps until I got them just right while always working on turning my toes outward, instead of keeping them pointed straight ahead. Stretching the fingers on my left hand to force them wide enough to reach the correct places on the strings and the accompanying soreness of teaching your body the discipline of something new reminded me of my constant efforts at turning my toes outward..

But the whole idea of learning something new was refreshing, bringing a

new awareness to the process of beginning and learning to navigate in unfamiliar terrain. In a way, I was relaxed because I didn't feel in control. The unexpected was present because I didn't know what the expected should be but I was willing to be open because I wanted to learn.

I was drawn to the cello because of its deep sound, a sound that conjured up the dark moist soil common to a wet fall afternoon in the Northwest. The dry fallen leaves in their dazzling colors crackling under my hiking boots as they worked their way into the soft mix of ingredients that nourish this landscape are, for me, actively present in the cello's song and I can picture myself sitting down on a stump or a rock, serenading the trees with the robust but serene tones that I would one day be able to exude from this instrument. It's as if I could almost smell the rich aroma of the soil wafting out across the bow as I worked at playing the notes in the right way.

Knowing how to read music had been helpful since I wasn't sure I remembered how from so long ago. But I was much more attuned to the right or wrong sound of the instrument, which had always been my way. A wrong sounding note let me know that my fingers weren't wide enough apart on the neck of the cello or I was dropping the bow, which made the stroke wobbly and in the wrong register. So much to keep track of and yet when I got two notes in a row right, all that was forgotten – I could feel and hear my way.

Although I was certainly not confident enough to improvise and react to how a song played on the cello might unfold, I could clearly remember the feeling

of working in one's medium and the improvisational quality that comes from taking your "lead from the work" (Eisner, 2002, p78). I always loved when everything came together while dancing – I felt like I was soaring above the ground, my body stretched celestially into the clouds. The physicality of practicing the cello, as a conduit for the serial movement my body responded to, revived an aspect of my learning process that permitted me to inhale the knowledge in my own way, once again forging a relationship between the dimensions of an interconnected world.

I mention this learning experience to call attention to the ongoing dialogue one experiences during arts-based learning and that when these patterns are developed as children, they are easily activated for whatever knowledge we may be trying to acquire. Because I already felt connected to the natural world through my art making, this new learning experience located me in that world I already knew.

In the autobiography of his childhood in France, the artist, Jules Breton described it this way. "The recollection of these hours of childhood comes to one like the memory of some delightful dream…how we felt ourselves comrades of the flowers and the beloved animals" (Breton,1890, p29). From this passage which shows the interconnectedness of his world as a child, he goes on to note,

> "there is nothing more delightful than the sense of physical well-being and mental exhilaration which the artist feels in outdoor study…Is not each page of nature a visible symphony whose wonderful harmonies reveal themselves to the charmed eye that can perceive them?...and the artist

feels his soul exalted in a sort of delightful intoxication…" (Breton,1890, p247).

I believe what he is describing is the interconnected relationship that is nurtured within the art making process when one is connected to the natural world as a child.

In a study of pre-kindergarten children's artful behavior, Carolina Blatt-Gross found that children "draw, sing, paint, dance, drum, dramatize and decorate their faces and bodies with little to no encouragement from adults (Blatt-Gross, 2011, p1). Observations revealed that modest and spontaneous displays of artful behavior are a frequent, but often unnoticed, part of the pre-kindergarten classroom," (Blatt-Gross, 2011, p8) suggesting that "artful behaviors represent an inherent part of human nature" (Blatt-Gross, 2011, preface) and should be encouraged instead of discouraged or ignored in early learning situations. Confirming this innate behavior of art making in young children, parents and educators could readily build upon this behavior, in conjunction with a holistically based education, to form the basis for environmental education that encourages the propagation of a caring and nurturing human / more than human relationship essential to the sustainability of this world. Art making naturally teaches us to work in a cooperative way as we move through the process, in addition to cultivating this energy to build a stronger connection with the natural world.

Art making, according to Tim Ingold, "is a process of… drawing out or bringing forth of potentials immanent in a world of becoming… In the act of [art] making the artisan couples his own movements and gestures… with the

becoming of his materials, joining with and following the forces and flows that bring his work to fruition" (Ingold, 2013, p31). Art making relies on partnering with the materials needed to make art, physically mastering the mechanics of the craft while integrating with the creative energy in which the form emerges through the "very unfolding of this force field" (Ingold, 2013, p44). "To join in the processes of formation… is to participate in a dynamic world of energies, forces and flows…, to *inhabit* the world" (Ingold, 2013, p89). I would add that this process is tempered by the art maker's cultural background which provides the context for how the art maker understands their skill, materials and creative energy. In the case of a holistic perspective which already acknowledges the interconnectedness of our universe, this process would already provide an awareness of this intention.

The poet, Gary Snyder, speaks of his work in a similar way, "Each poem grows from an energy-mind-field-dance, and has its own inner grain. To let it grow, to let it speak for itself, is a large part of the work of the poet… as "it" enters the world through the poet's breath, "it" enters the realm of words and things" (Murray, 2000, p98). Carla de Sola, a pioneer in the development of liturgical dance, talks about "breathing prayer into her dance performances" and the need to "allow room for the spirit [energy] to fill it" (Wuthnow, 2001, p192). Otherwise, the dancer may be too inside their head and the dance may be too cerebral. And poet, Greg Glazner, explains that all life has a spiritual energy. As he nurtures his work to form, he remembers to leave "space for the universe to say things" (Wuthnow, 2001, p228).

These artists are speaking of a dialog between their artistic skill, energy and the emergent art form that depicts the art making process as a flow of resources between the physical and invisible dimensions as the form takes shape. The familiarity of this dialog forms the backbone of the art making practice that awakens the individual to an interconnected worldview while providing a framework for understanding the interconnected world and our reciprocal need to nurture nature's well-being as our own. This dialog is similar to the nurturing process that takes place when a local stream is restored to health or the diversity of a woodland or other habitat is returned to its natural state or even a master gardener realizes her garden in full bloom. Boundaries are blurred and all become connected in a lasting, beneficial, reciprocal relationship, as if we could "imagine a deep practice of universal consideration for all living things, a consideration that is not instituted as a moral principle or rule governing behavior, but rather, a dimension of one's very perception of the world" (Buker, 2011, p14).

But, because of our failure to understand this relationship in the West, the art making process becomes relegated to an unnecessary, almost frivolous indulgence instead of the framework and preparation for the perception of an interconnected, nurturing worldview that engages this work.

In her dissertation on "Art as Ecological Practice," Valerie Triggs indicates that "art practice may foster greater recognition towards the world's dense web of the vitality of all things [and] may generate the sustenance for making more of this vital reality…" (Triggs, 2012, p1). Art educator, Ayako Nozawa emphasizes that "art is a way of knowing and art making is a form of meditation." The process

of art making helps us to “let go of self-control, and dive into the free realm of interconnectedness… (Nozawa, 2005, p224) [allowing us] to trust that the creative intelligence will find its way” (Nozawa, 2005, p225). These art makers acknowledge that the universe is a welcome part of their process and their voices add to the dialogue that connects art making with the energy of life. The essence of this connection between art making, the energetic level and the natural world is wonderfully described in Mark Helprin’s new novel, as he explains what the music professor at the heart of his story imparts to his students.

> First, he made sure that they played flawlessly, and when he was assured that they did, he bid them disengage. That is, analogously, to close their eyes and take their hands from the wheel or let go of the reins. Music, is not made by man. If you know this and surrender to it you’ll allow its deeper powers to run through you. It’s all a question of opening the gates. Of risking your disappearance and accepting it. If you arrive at that state you’ll be effortlessly propelled, seized, and possessed by the music. Paradoxically, your timing will be perfect as time ceases to exist. All matter, and even we, are a construction of energy, and all energy is pulse and proportion. (Helprin, 2017, p86-87)

Helprin’s analysis requires art makers to consider their practice in this interconnected way. Seeing the world in this way can transform one’s relationship with the natural world, strengthening the energy field and creating relationships that are healthier for the art maker and the larger natural world. *Art making is part of our responsibility as a member of the ecosystem.*

Chapter 6.

The Role of Tradition

One of many Indigenous and Eastern cultural beliefs is the process of acquiring knowledge through practical experience, rather than just intellectual reasoning (Wu, 2005, p27). “The *Dao*, thus, aims to transform the perspective of the practitioner through practice,” (Wu, 2005, p29) in contrast to our Western culture which “uses verbally formulated language as a foundation” (Wu, 2005, p44) for intellectual knowledge. This lived experience of self-cultivation or practice may help holistic cultures stay connected to the larger world, whereas the Western based system of learning compels us to lose our inner connections with qi which “makes the internal qi or psychophysical energy dissipate,” (Wu, 2005, p44) thus separating us further from nature. The process of art making has the ability to move us toward an experiential state of practice that can reconnect us to the larger world, expanding this concept of verbally formulated language as the only foundation of knowledge in the West. For the Native American, according to Peat, “knowledge… is an ongoing process better represented by the activity of coming-to-knowing” (Peat, 2002, p55). Grounded in practical experience, this type of knowledge “involves the relationship of the various powers, energies and beings of the cosmos…(Peat, 2002, p286) [and] is not so much stored as data in the brain but is absorbed into the whole person” (Peat, 2002, p66).

Understanding the world in this way, where knowledge is gained by

integrating body and mind through lived experience, can help to support the premise that the natural world is a single interconnected ecological system that requires the collective pursuit of balance and harmony, which “is present when everyone, human, animal, plant and planet, fulfills their obligations and goes about their proper business” (Peat, 2002, p286). A primary goal of holistically based cultures seems to be to maintain this state of balance and harmony, which centers on “recognizing the legitimacy of the interests of the other and balancing those interests with one’s own” (Detwiler, 2013, p169). Ceremonies and rituals that exemplify “being in right relation with the cosmos” (Hogan, 2013, p22) and those which convey practices for how to be attentive to the living earth can provide the cultural knowledge to maintain this balance.

Author Heesoon Bai considers the notion of preventive ethics “aimed at creating a condition of viability and well-being for all members of the earth community” (Bai, 2004, p51) as one way to move us toward an interconnected worldview. As she explains, “the primary objective of medicine should be the promotion of good health… [Likewise], ethics should primarily be about preventive moral care, (Bai, 2004, p52-53) preventive medicine in the moral dimension.” The idea behind making “ethics an everyday practice” is to “re-vision the way we see and relate to the world so that the end result is that we live without harming each other, and, moreover, contribute to each other’s viability and well-being” (Bai, 2004, p53-54).

This pursuit of balance and harmony is also the intention behind the traditional Eastern way of knowing. “Qi must be experienced functionally to be

understood. [It] is based on the cosmological notion that human beings are meant by nature to harmonize with the universe" (Wu, 2005, p117). Engaging with this life energy through the dialogue of practice is the work of art making and strengthening the energy flow by making it available for all our encounters with the larger world propels us toward balance and harmony.

The Gaia Theory,

> "pictures the Earth as a living, self-regulating organism that seeks its own patterns of homeostasis, equilibrium and sustainability by coordinating the interaction between inorganic and organic matter, from neutrinos to rainforests, in a fashion that sustains those forms that promote life and attempts to eliminate those that do not" (Dunbar, 2000, p7).

According to author Dirk Dunbar, this theory suggests that the "stability of life formed and nurtured on the planet…is so phenomenal that the planetary environment must be regarded as mindful" (Dunbar, 2000, p7). He attributes this larger mind to Native American's "immersion in nature" (Dunbar, 2000, p8) and their belief in nature's intrinsic value and refers to the Gaia theory as a "participatory universe" (Dunbar, 2000, p7) in which we have the ability to connect the vital energy of the life force and/or the concept of qi energy to work toward a world of balance and harmony.

"Scholars believe that shamanistic dances, such as the Great Dances, were among the earliest dance forms in China and through those dances, the people resolved the congestion of their bodies or the inertness of qi-bioenergy caused by the stagnant rivers that resulted from frequent floods. As a result, the

dances helped the flow of the rivers on the earth. In other words, the shamanistic Great Dances helped ensure the circulation of qi-bioenergy within human beings as well as the qi (vital force) in the surrounding environments" (Wu, 2005, pp 119-120). In fact, most Indigenous cultures participate in rituals and ceremonies that include art making as a means of reinforcing and carrying on their practice of sustainably inhabiting their place.

These collective practices that include art making are known as traditions, passed down from generation to generation. According to Edward Shils, author of a book on the subject, a "tradition is anything transmitted or handed down from the past to the present… In the case of practices and institutions made up of human actions… it is the patterns or images of actions which they imply or present and the beliefs requiring, recommending, regulating, permitting or prohibiting the reenactment of those patterns" (Shils, 1981, p12). For many, there is a "sense of being connected with an unbroken chain of generations," (Shils, 1981, p14) a sense of continuity among those that share in the tradition.

Tradition, in many oral cultures, was the instrument for transmitting information and instructions and for the most part, these traditions reflected the sustainable patterns of their local communities' holistic understanding. David Abram explains that Indigenous cultures do not experience the world "as a set of fixed and finished facts, but as a story in which we…are all participant… In other words,…the earthly world is felt as a vast, ever-unfolding Story in which we – along with the other animals, plants and landforms – are all characters" (Abram, 2010, p270). According to him, "the oral languages spoken by such peoples held

them close to the speaking earth" (Abram, 2010, p266). Thus, for many holistic oriented cultures, tradition provided a way to participate in this "story" and acted as a guide to the care and responsibility of those inhabiting their particular place.

There are many examples of Indigenous ritual celebrations that utilize the arts but I mention here the all-night healing dance of the !Kung because it combines healing for both the human and more than human community through the art making process. This ritual of dancing, singing and drumming creates a healing energy known as "num." During these dances, everyone in the community works together to activate the num. As the healers in the group dance, "...the num in them heats up and becomes a vapor, [rising] up the spine to a point approximately at the base of the skull..." (Katz, 1982, p41). It then takes on its healing powers, known as kia. There is fear associated with this ritual as the num must be activated to the boiling point to be useful for healing. The boiling num leads to an "altered state of the consciousness" (Katz, 1982, p8) in order for the participants to release the "healing energy to the entire community" (Katz, 1982, p3). As these participants dutifully enter this unknown realm that will benefit their human / more than human community, the closeness of this community is reaffirmed. Their ritual process of dancing, singing and drumming connects them to this num energy that they believe provides healing for their entire community and "seeks to re-establish the balance in the individual-cultural-environmental gestalt" (Katz, 1982, p53). Their example underscores the link between the arts and tradition, helping to connect the different dimensions of their universe to strengthen its survival.

Another example of an art-based ritual celebration is the Eastern European women's circle dance, which is seen "as an embodied affirmation of the life cycle which both sustains, and is sustained by, the dancing women" (Shannon, 2011, p141). According to teacher Laura Shannon, "the archaeological record confirms the significance of the dance in a wide area of Eastern Europe and the Near East. At the heart of this region is the area known as Old Europe, birthplace of agriculture, whose Indigenous inhabitants lived in peaceful agrarian settlements for thousands of years" (Shannon, 2011, p139). Seen as "a primary means of women's worship in ancient Europe" (Shannon, 2011, p139), the circle dance evokes the circle of life, affirming women's work as "the key to the ongoing survival of the human community" (Shannon, 2011, p146). The three measure dances use repetitive steps "like the repetition of a mantra" (Shannon, 2011, p142) in various patterns to elicit a slow, simple movement that evokes a meditative sensation of energy that connects the circle of women "with an ancient lineage of dancing women going back through time. The dances are not a performance, everyone present participates" and according to Shannon, "we dance for ourselves and not for an audience" (Shannon, 2011, p142). This allows dancers to focus inward and helps to connect with "a sense of oneness with all of life" (Shannon, 2011, p143). Through their circle dance tradition, interviewed participants have stated their connection to the earth's energy and the women who have preceded them and those still to come (Shannon, 2011). The dance circle "invokes the circle of the cosmos, universal symbol of unity and totality, and serves as a kind of mandala, which allows each

dancer to center herself while bringing the different energies of the individual dancers into a balanced whole" (Shannon, 2011, p154).

"Like acupuncture, [dance] releases the blocked energy so that it is available to be drawn upon. Because modern, urban people have such minimal energy exchange with the natural environment and with other people, we have become "dysrhythmic," out of sync, the rhythmic flow is blocked, the sense of order and harmony is missing" (Stewart, 2011, p198). This is similar to the role of the shamanic Great Dances of China in resolving congestion in both the people and their rivers. A form of folk dancing, circle dances emphasize "connectedness and continuity" (Shannon, 2011, p139) and like dance ceremonies in other holistic communities, provide a forum for healing through a process that connects these women to the flow of earth's energy.

Traditions can develop from any manner of action or belief as long as the inherent longevity endures but longevity shouldn't be the only reason to continue with tradition. Shils' focus on the definition and purpose of tradition does not distinguish between good and bad, but Bowers distinguishes those traditions that have contributed to the quality of life as "good" and those that "fail to take account of how humans are dependent upon the viability of the Earth's ecosystems" as ones that "need to be abandoned or radically altered" (Bowers, 1997, p74). Keeping Bowers' definition of good and bad traditions in mind, those traditions that seek to maintain the balance and harmony of our ecosystem would be considered good and those lacking in this intention would not. Although not all rituals and ceremonies in traditional cultures are good, many are a reflection of

the understanding that the survival of the human community is linked to the survival of the larger world. Their traditional events appear to be connected to nature so as not to be superfluous to the pattern or flow of the energetic life force within the universe.

> "Every community that lives in close and intimate contact with undomesticated nature – whether hunters and gatherers, or subsistence horticulturists – acknowledges the myriad energies that move in the invisible depths of the sensuous, honoring these powers with regular gestures of offering in return for the steady provisions of earthly sustenance. The spirits or invisibles spoken of by oral, Indigenous peoples [provide] a way of acknowledging the myriad dimensions of the sensuous that we cannot see at any moment – a way of honoring the manifold invisibilities moving within the visible landscape – and of keeping oneself and one's culture awake to such unseen and ungraspable aspects of the real…a simple and parsimonious way of remembering our ongoing dependence upon powers we did not create, whose activities we cannot control" (Abram, 2013, p128).

A more holistic perspective that recognizes our existence is tied to the life force and the interconnectedness of all life on the planet could provide the basis for traditions that perpetuate a connected universe.

According to LaChappelle, "if we're going to rediscover a viable relationship with nature, it will not be through more ideas but through experiences where you know you are part of nature, with no questions asked" (White, 1994,

p168). She talks of seasonal festivals that include “the total community – the plants, animals and soil of the place. It also includes more than just the present living community. These festivals make use of myths, art, dance and games, all of which serve to connect the conscious with the unconscious, the right and left hemispheres of the brain, and the humans with the non-human“ (White, 1994, p169). They encourage mutual participation and community cohesion and provide “the experience of finding ourselves within nature, and that is the key to sustainable culture” (White, 1994, p174). Doctoral student Laura Buker, concurs that the health of a community (both human and more than human) is tied to the health of the local ecosystem, as exemplified in the stories and festivities about the local river at the heart of her First Nations community. “If the bonds to the river are disrupted, the connections of unity broken, then a disharmony emerges, and a chasm of chaos widens depleting the knowledge of biodiversity” (Buker, 2011, p2).

Many religious holidays that recognize the seasons to some extent already exist and could provide an introduction to local celebrations that highlight the awakening of new life in honor of the spring equinox or the light filled celebration of the winter solstice. Locally here in Portland, there are currently countless outdoor festivals that include food, plants, music and other arts once the dry summer months arrive as people eagerly enjoy our rain-free season, but most of these are not tied to any seasonal events except the nice weather and tend to use nature as a backdrop, not the main event. Although my focus in this chapter has been on examples of cultures that utilize art making in those traditions that

reinforce their ties to the natural world and seek harmony and well being in their communities, I believe that art making in the West might also access this energy and through ongoing practice, develop closer ties to their communities. I also believe, from first hand experience that art making from this perspective broadens our awareness of the natural world, making us more receptive to the inclusion of the larger world in the decisions we make and how we see the world we live in.

The secular nature of our culture will determine the secular tone of our community rituals, but as people experience their own spiritual moments in nature and art making, the strengthening of the energy field will bring others along. The practice of Buddhist mindfulness is an example of a ritual aimed at connecting the human / more than human world and mending the planet's health. According to Bai and Scutt, "mindfulness practice [is] an effective way to cultivate a sense of interbeing… between ourselves as human beings and all other beings that make up the ecological community that we call earth" (Bai & Scutt, 2009, p100). From the subject-object integration and bonding that comes from the cultivation of mindfulness practice, "flows love of life (biophilia) and deep appreciation of the other beings' sacred existence. (Bai & Scutt, 2009, p100).

This ability to "experience interbeing and resonance with all beings…" (Bai & Scutt, 2009, p101) can provide a foundation for utilizing the art making process as a way to understand the natural world and affords an opportunity to explore a more integrated approach to the arts and our relationship with the more than human world so we can appreciate the intrinsic value of the macrocosm of

which we are a part. From there, we have the opportunity to participate in the unfolding of a process that allows us to linger in a space where a new relationship between this energy dimension, the arts and nature can take place.

In her book, “The Healing Flow”, artist and therapist Martina Schnetz, describes the arts as a “container for creative energies and behaviors that help to provide order, create rituals that are transformational and give voice to aspects of being that are beyond reason and logic” (Schnetz, 2004, p22). As a therapist who utilizes art making as a way to heal, she recognizes that “the languages of the arts resonate deep within our being. They are primal in nature and they have the potential for making us aware that we are a part of a greater whole of being while allowing us to celebrate our uniqueness” (Schnetz, 2004, p36). Included in this healing process, which she refers to as the “Healing-Flow Model,” is a need to bring “intuitive knowledge and ways of being in the world…to connect with, express and understand creative energy and its flow…” (Schnetz, 2004, p43). In essence, it sounds very similar to the developing relationship I discuss between the arts, the energy dimension and nature. It is this energy flow that is essential to the healing process, “the dialogical process between self and the world” (Schnetz, 2004, p46).

The art making process works with the energy in the system. The more one practices one’s art making, the more comfortable one becomes with the art making relationship. The more comfortable one is with the relationship, the easier it is to work. Art making teaches us to trust the process and comfortably work with both the visible and invisible dimensions of our universe. It nurtures

connection and provides a vehicle for acknowledging our dependence and giving thanks. As we explore collaboration within the art making process, our intention to commit to our community, both human and the more than human, grows stronger. This commitment provides a foundation for understanding our interconnectedness and our responsibilities as members of the world community.

In my mind, the recovery of our planet may very well depend on a combination of physical restoration with an ongoing infusion of qi in a gentle courtship of people and place respectfully getting to know each other over time. This type of recovery would transform a site from a benign set of scientific instructions delineating a particular landscape to an environmental experience interlaced with the dialog of the art making process. As a means to collectively involve the local community in this restorative process, community arts might provide an experiential format. Deborah Barndt, who writes about community arts, explains that the process “refers to the engagement of people in representing their collective identities, histories and aspirations in multiple forms of expression” (Barndt, 2008, p351). It represents a modern form of the type of art making “used within rituals and ceremonies” of Indigenous community life and can be seen as a way to counter the Western view that “frames learning as a personal and primarily mental undertaking rather than a social relation and holistic experience” (Barndt, 2008, p351). According to Barndt, in Latin America community arts were seen as a way to “engage people more fully, move their spirits and inspire collective action” (Barndt, 2008, p351) but in North America, it was seen as a way to “disseminate elite or classical arts to rural communities

that had been marginalized by the large (more heavily funded) urban cultural centers" (Barndt, 2008, p351). As a vehicle for engaging people in their local community, community arts may offer a format to engage in developing a relationship over time through restoration and art making in a particular place.

More recently, community arts have been used to "nurture and heal people and/or communities" (Barndt, 2008, p352) which would seem to fit the purposes of this research. Barndt details key elements of community arts that reflect the holistic views I have focused on that would provide an appropriate forum in which art makers could explore these insights. She notes that community arts are "infused with a spirit of collaboration at many different levels…similar to the reciprocity at play in an ecosystem…[they] tap sense-based, intuitive and relational ways of knowing…[and are] powerful catalysts for unearthing different kinds of knowledge and moving people to participate more fully in the knowledge production process." They also see as their goal, helping "groups move from collective analysis to collective action" (Barndt, 2008, p352-353).

It remains to be seen if this is the right forum for this undertaking but it would provide a place for locally based residents to meet and collaborate and based on Barndt's knowledge, the nature of community arts would seem to lend itself to connecting these people with the ecological work of art making. In addition to community arts, I would love to see an exploratory parent/child class offered at the schools for both parents with young children and those with middle school kids to introduce the art making process and the ecosystem.

Suzi Gablik, the well-known author, artist and professor, claims to have

already noticed changes “in which the individual artist becomes an integral component of a larger social network”(Gablik, 2004, p64). This idea of a network acts as “a new pattern of organization and as a generative creative force” (Gablik, 2004, p64). In her article “Beyond the Disciplines: Art without Boundaries,” she cites Ken Wilber’s work that “weaves together the many pluralistic contexts of science, morals, aesthetics, Eastern as well as Western philosophy and the world’s great wisdom traditions, to suggest that the world is one undivided whole, and related to itself in every way.” She talks about a new artistic culture, “founded in dynamic models of integralism, intersubjectivity and transdisciplinarity…art is not viewed as spectacle, but as a social practice rooted in the whole being” (Gablik, 2004, p62). Although her focus is the physical world, this whole being that she refers to is further rooted in both the human community and the larger natural world. Despite her claims of this new emerging artistic culture, we know that this integration and interconnectedness has been mainstream in both Indigenous and traditional Eastern cultures for generations.

In this chapter, I have described several examples of Indigenous cultures whose traditions support the sustainable patterns of their communities and art making is often a component of them. Bowers defines good traditions as those that contribute to the quality of all life and Dolores LaChapelle talks of seasonal festivals that include the whole community as a way to “rediscover a viable relationship with nature (White, 1994, p168). Many religious communities, to some extent, recognize the seasons through some of their holidays and these celebrations could provide an introduction to the development of a more

meaningful relationship with the natural world by incorporating a holistic perspective and local nuances. This, in conjunction with the possibility of ongoing involvement through community arts might provide the impetus to mobilize the community to add their voices to the care and healing of the natural world.

In the following section, I describe three art makers, a sculptor, a dancer and a musician, who access this animated life energy through their art making and utilize it to provide a foundation for their relationship with the larger natural world. They each practice in a different facet of the arts and they have distinct ways of understanding their art form, materials and practice in relation to the larger world, but they all acknowledge the energy of the universe as a welcome participant in their work and that which connects them to the life force of the universe.

Chapter 7.

The Dialog between Art Making and the Earth

Lithopuncture

The sculptor, Marko Pogaknic, has been an art maker professionally since the 1960s when he had his first exhibit in the former Yugoslavia. During a time of great unrest in that part of the world, Pogaknic became aware of art's capacity "to change, to transform and to transmute the conditions in life that do not pulsate in resonance with the universal patterns of love and truth" (www.markopogaknic.com, 2016). In 1960, he and poet, Iztok Gerster, founded a Slovenia artistic collective known as the OHO Group that became an artistic commune in 1971. Dedicated to integrating daily life into the art work, the goal of the group was to create a balance and harmony between the people in the commune and nature. Through his work and daily lifestyle, he developed a strong connection to the natural world and its energy. In 1979, his art evolved into the specific form of ecological art he called "lithopuncture," (www.markopogaknic.com, 2018) described as a method of earth acupuncture whereby Pogaknic created stone pillars carved with cosmograms, an "imaginative message translated into graphic form," (Pogaknic, 2007, p221) and positioned them at key places throughout the landscape.

Through the ancient practice of geomancy, which looks at the invisible dimensions of the earth's geography, Pogacnik studies the vital energetic dimension of the earth. Similar to the acupuncture meridians in the human body,

the earth has an energy level that runs throughout the landscape. Pogaknik uses the term “ley lines,” which originally referred to the alignments between historical sites or the cultural layer of the landscape to denote the channels of life force or energy paths (Pogacnik, 2007, p89) that run through the earth. To create his lithopuncture stones, he engages in a dialogue with all the subjects involved in the place where he is working. He must get to know the different dimensions of a place and develop an inner communion with the place so he can effectively mediate between consciousnesses to determine which points need to be treated to free up the energy and help it to flow. Based on the results of his exploration, he determines where to position his lithopuncture stones “so it presses properly at a sensitive point on the landscape, which allows a constant impulse to be transmitted to the organism of the place” (Pogacnik, 2007, p228). He describes the earth landscape as being “composed of vital-energy streams, consciousness networks and a multitude of pieces of solid matter – a permeable, multi-layer membrane” (Pogacnik, 2007, p35).

Steeped in the traditional aspects of Eastern European history and folklore (he makes his home in Slovenia), his holistic perspective is rooted in the pagan folklore culture of old Europe during the Middle Ages and aspects of the Bible’s Book of Revelations. He is guided by the story of the Seven Seals which is all about the transformation of the earth but instead of following the book in a linear fashion from the beginning, his cosmic interpretation of the book begins in the 12th chapter, where a “spherical composition” emerges and expands the story of the Apocalypse (Pogacnik, 2000).

Echoing Pogacnik's interpretation of Christianity during the Middle Ages, the priest and "spiritual theologian" Matthew Fox, (www.matthewfox.org, 2018) talks about the tradition of "creation spirituality" that was prevalent in Eastern Europe at this time. Creation Spirituality included all beings – "the galaxies and the stars, trees, wolves, microorganisms, rocks, mountains and children" (White, 1994, p183-184). It was the story of the whole cosmic universe, that conveyed the understanding that "we are in God and God is in us… the interdependence of all things" (White, 1994, p185). Today, Fox describes creation spirituality as the "reawakening of mysticism, protecting mother earth" (www.matthewfox.org, 2018) and continues his work in this area with the Fox Institute for Creation Spirituality.

His interpretation aligns with Pogacnik's understanding that we are all part of the earth's transformation as portrayed in the Book of Revelations. Pogacnik's most recent work focuses on communicating with all the dimensions of the universe to support this transformation. In addition to his lithopuncture stones he also creates geopuncture circles, which are communication centers around the world to encourage communication between humans and the different dimensions of the universe. Through his interconnected art making practice, he has learned "the unstructured flow of nature's language" (Pogacnik, 2000, p31) to understand the level of "etheric masses and fields which offer the opportunity for the life processes to manifest, connect with each other and be properly balanced. Without this etheric counterpart, life on the material level would be deprived of life itself" (Pogacnik, 2000, p82).

According to Pogacnik, "we have become more and more dependent on

the mechanisms of our rational mind. We need to find ways to discipline our rational mind to obey the rules of a holistic world view… (Pogacnik, 2007, p183). We are accustomed to perceiving life, nature and landscapes as objects outside of ourselves… (Pogacnik, 2007, p186). Holistic perception is based upon oneness" (Pogacnik, 2007, p187).

He believes that humans must cooperate and be part of earth's transformation process and he says "people should regularly work on sensing the presence of the earth's power field and emotional field within their own beings and on anchoring them deep within their body…" (Pogacnik, 2000, p84). To this end, his books provide exercises to lay the groundwork for getting in touch with the energetic field and he also teaches workshops regarding his practice and creates art installations. Like any skill, this transformation requires regular practice and the ability to incorporate the practice into the everyday patterns of one's life to become effective. Humans need to temper our rational mind with our intuition or "voice of the soul" to balance our thinking so as not to lose oneself in a "superficial rationality" (Pogacnik, 1997, p196). "If before uttering their thoughts and releasing them in action, one lets them run through the heart so that they are enriched by the intuition and experienced as they broaden out into the several dimensions of being, then the danger which accompanies logical thinking is overcome" (Pogacnik, 1997, p197).

Describing the process of developing a "conscious cooperation" between the different levels of the universe, he explains, the "first step into deeper perception happens when we enter the invisible worlds through special

meditative states, visualizations or trance while living in our day-to-day consciousness. Eventually [we are] able to perceive the invisible world as an existence parallel to normal reality. At the same time as remaining in normal consciousness, the experiences of the second reality are fully registered, examined by the mind and immediately integrated into our own world of experience. The third level of perception takes on a revelatory quality. If we perceive a being in this way, we become inwardly one with the being and experience its reality as if it were our own" (Pogacnik,1995, p214).

After honing his art making skills and his ability to connect with the invisible dimensions of our universe for all these years, he explains that "what exists at the subtle levels manifests in one way or another within the material sphere of reality" (Pogacnik, 2000, p200). We need to collaborate with the intelligence of the world. In reading about Marko's work, it certainly seems to support the idea that art making may be part of our human responsibility to care for the natural world and, at present, to help in its healing. In fact, Marko refers to his art making as "Earth Healing" because it combines his art making with alternative healing methods. I believe his efforts focus on helping humans be part of a healthy solution for both the natural world and the individual.

To see his work up close and get an understanding for how he integrates his earth healing work into the real world, I had the opportunity to see Marko's lithopuncture installation at Fox Hollow Farm, a 1300-acre farm owned by Brian and Jane Newton in Crestview, KY. In 2006, the Newtons decided to raise cattle biodynamically on the farm. In addition to raising cattle, they lease parcels of the

land to other farmers who live on the land and grow vegetables and flowers. Brian is a chemist by trade, which helps him create the nutrient sprays at the core of biodynamic farming. The biodynamic mission of creating conscious relationships that nurture and harmonize the elements of the farm to keep the whole in balance is consistent with Marko's work of earth healing and optimum energy flow and creates a cohesive intention for the farm's work.

As Brian explained to me, in 2008, Marko visited the farm and after exploring the land, determined that two ley lines ran through it. He then selected the spots where the lithopuncture stones should be placed. There are two stones at the entrance.

Figure 1: This stone represents the tree of life.

Figure 2: This stone represents the farm.

A line of seven stones placed along a drive that runs through the farm and they are there to honor the farm.

Figure 3: The stone in the foreground represents the triple source of transformation and healing. The stone behind represents the place of memory of civilizations past and present.

Figure 4: This stone represents the master teacher of spiritual masters and teachers.

Figure 5: The seven stones that honor the farm.

Farther down this road there is an open meadow area that contains 28 stones that are there to honor the world.

Figure 6: Some of the 28 stones that honor the world.

Figure 7: This stone represents the presence of love permeating the inner core of each living being.

Figure 8: This stone represents the veiled one, unseen and not heard, yet is present as love.

Marko works with a group that join him at his different installation sites to help produce, place and sculpt the cosmograms that are carved on the stones. To my surprise, most of these volunteers are not artists, but are drawn to Marko's

work as a means to help the environment. Brian has now become one of these volunteers and travels to the different sites where Marko does his installations.

Since the installation, the farm has become a community resource. There are trails open to the public for hiking, monthly concerts in the summer and a fall festival in October. Their beef is sold to the local school district, hospital and others in the local community and they network with other farms in the area who are interested in their methods. As a community resource, the farm helps to educate the community about sustainable choices and Brian has become an advocate for Marko's work and the need to nurture and heal the earth by working with its energy to keep it flowing.

I was there at the end of September, coming off of a pretty hot summer. Everything was green and lush so there were lots of birds and butterflies still out and about and frogs in the pond. There is a really nice "vibe" to the place. In many ways it is a typical farm but there seems to be a sense of connectedness to it. Other farms I've been to have also been peaceful places but there is a sense of urgency when it comes to getting the work done. There was none of that urgency here. As I walked through the trees and around the different lithopuncture stones and observed the cows grazing, there was a sense of contentment, a lack of stress here on the farm. It would have been a wonderful place to practice yoga, tai chi or any type of meditative or art making practice and I hope that as part of their community work, they will accommodate these types of activities in the future.

Along one of the ley lines that traverses the farm is a small town that also

has a Pogaknik installation. Brian took me to see this planned development of roughly 10,000 homes approximately 20 minutes from Louisville, a major employment hub in the area. The homes are built in a southern architectural style with a park, promenade, amphitheater, commercial/retail sector and an elementary school in the development. The installation is located in the park in a lovely area near a group of mature trees but I think that the large amount of concrete in a town of this size seems to restrict or mute the energy flow emanating from the installation. It would have been nice if there had been more greenspace throughout the development and a way to connect the greenspaces in the community to have a more harmonizing effect.

Figure 9: This stone represents the world of ancestors and descendants as stars upon the night sky.

Figure 10: The elemental consciousness of the mineral world is depicted in the form of a labyrinth symbolizing the memory of minerals known to us.

Marko's work spans the world, both indoors and out and his website lists 20 completed lithopuncture projects from the 1980's until the most recent one in 2008. He has also been named a UNESCO Artist for Peace and considers his earth healing work to be a "synergetic combination of ecology, art and a spiritual approach to life" (www.markopogaknic.com , 2018). His notion of "earth healing" corresponds to my own thinking that perhaps we are compelled to make art because of its ability to cultivate this vital life energy.

Marko has spent his life practicing his art making and communicating with both the visible and invisible dimensions of the universe in an effort to cultivate this vital life energy so necessary for the health and well-being of our universe and to share this experience and knowledge with his fellow humans.

Spirit Dancing through Qi-Body

Wen-chi Wu is a dancer who wrote her dissertation on "Spirit Dancing through Qi-body" in which she talks about her experiences as a dancer before and after she began practicing qigong. According to her, she had experienced many injuries during her years as a modern dancer but after beginning her qigong practice, she found her "severe chronic dance injuries had disappeared… and her artistic development reached a completely new level" (Wu, 2005, p2). She credits Yan Xin Qigong training with her ability to receive and attain qi at a considerably higher level that changed her from the inside out and significantly revitalized her dancing achievement (Wu, 2005, p5). This "deepening process of

qi-transformation is the means of unifying the mind and body and of subsequently attaining the state of spirits (shen)" (Wu, 2005, p8), which, according to her, is a higher level of the qi energy state. Working toward this higher level transforms an individual's art making from the "level of the technical into that of the spiritual" (Wu, 2005, p9). "In the state of the union of human and heaven one cannot be separated from one's life energy, breath-energy or psycho-physical energy in mind-body terms, which manifests the power of one's invigorating life force" (Wu, 2005, p20).

"Qi exists as the energy of matter and the unconscious mind" (Wu, 2005, p24). As Wu explains, "the perfecting of a skill goes together with the training of one's mind/spirit. The entire path is a process of dissolving the self (ego) into the true self. Such a level of *inner* immersion cannot be attained merely by technical practice of any art, but ought to be achieved in relation to qigong meditative training" (Wu, 2005, p184). Whereas Pogacnik accesses the energetic field through his ability to communicate with the different levels of consciousness that are reflected in his lithopuncture, Wu's example highlights her practice of chi gong to access the energetic field through her dance. Both artists have their own process of accessing the energy field and utilizing their art making to strengthen it.

Wu explains that at the first stage of this training, "the relation between mental intention and bodily movement is quite undeveloped; mentally he/she knows what to do, but he/she is physically unable to do it. As he/she practices it repeatedly, the connection between intention and movement becomes closer and

closer. After a time the feeling of difference between them disappears entirely, and the dancer [in this case] gets into a condition in which the mind does not consciously control the body" (Wu, 2005, p185-186). The movement is not felt "in a purely mental nor purely physical manner, but instead an ambiguous mind-body correlation" (Wu, 2005, P186). This mind-body correlation Wu describes is what philosopher Yuasa Yasuo considers to be the microcosm to the human/nature correlation that is the macrocosm. According to Yasuo, the two are connected through a reciprocal relationship (Yasuo, 1993, p109) that could be similar to the flow that Dolores LaChapelle talks of as the connection to the larger mind.

Wu refers to artists at this level as "skilled artisans [but] true artistry requires the spirit to dance" (Wu, 2005, p187). This level of technical competency provides the gateway or foundation for entering this "tunnel through which the artists can deepen into the unconscious," (Wu, 2005, p187-188) through a process of internalization transforming the qi. For dancers, this qigong training allows for the proper use of breath energy so it doesn't remain stuck in a physically conscious state but allows the dancer to "maintain and enfold qi-bioenergy" (Wu, 2005, p206) at a higher level where the dance and the dancer are one.

"The ultimate attainment of the dancing qi-body is the lived body… the agent of the cosmos or the mediator between microcosm and macrocosm" (Wu, 2005, p217). Through its interaction with spiritual-physical energy, the process of art making becomes a means of healing for both the participants and the

surrounding environment. As the qi circulates from the performer, in this example, to the audience and surrounding environment, healing becomes a collective experience within the realm of this high level of training. “Even the audience enters a state of spirit, because the performer goes beyond a personal level” (Wu, 2005, p223). Wen’s experience describes a deep connection to the more than human world through the energy flow of qi and her practice of art making with the goal of achieving the union of human and heaven.

Both Pogacnik and Wu connect to their art making through their access to the energetic level of the universe. Although they have different backgrounds and beliefs, they are both actively cultivating a stronger connection to the natural world through their access to this energetic field and their art making. Both see their work as a form of nurture and healing for themselves and the larger world.

Matsunobu’s Shakuhachi Study

Musician and educator, Koji Matsunobu’s study investigates “how the shakuhachi [a type of bamboo flute] is used to strengthen ecological and spiritual aspects of musical practice” (Matsunobu, 2009, piii). As he explains in his dissertation, the playing of the shakuhachi makes it possible for “practitioners to embody the flow of the earth energy (ki) through sound… [enabling] human-nature integration” (Matsunobu, 2009, pvii).

His two-year study looks at what values current students are learning through their practice as they actively reinvigorate the connections with nature,

the past and themselves. He selected participants that actively played the shakuhachi flute and were also involved in the bamboo harvesting and instrument making of the flute as part of their practice. Because the shakuhachi was originally utilized as a Zen instrument for meditative practices, Matsunobu chose players that were more involved with the spiritual aspects of shakuhachi instead of those solely focused on its musicality. He chose participants in both Tokyo and Vancouver, BC to better observe the distinct “difference of spirituality [that] is identified in their individualistic and relational approaches to music…” (Matsunobu, 2009, p16). He was also interested in those who sought to minimally process the bamboo they selected to maximize the individual character of the bamboo flute, providing an additional way to incorporate nature into their musical experience.

A shakuhachi player himself, Matsunobu’s research includes actively participating in “shakuhachi practices and activities” (Matsunobu, 2009, p45) with the participants to "be able to understand other people’s experience (of music) better…” (Matsunobu, 2009, p45).

As mentioned earlier, the oneness with nature that the East has traditionally experienced through the concept of ki is at the foundation of the Eastern holistic perspective. The role of ki (qi or chi) energy, as the East refers to the flow of life energy, was an important aspect of both the study and the participants’ various practices, whether from Tokyo or Canada.

“In music, ki was traditionally considered as a source of energy from which practitioners gained inspirations and within which basic conditions for

artistic expression aimed at the demonstration of the yin-yang relationship were created" (Matsunobu, 2009, p19). Matsunobu explains, "One's playing of flute music is an act of inhaling the energy through controlled and refined breathing exercises, transforming it into an individual expression, which manifests the state of total mind-body, human-nature oneness represented in his playing" (Matsunobu, 2009, p19).

Comments from several of the participants echo this understanding of the flow of ki and the deeper connection to the natural world as evidenced in their experience during their shakuhachi practice. One flute player described playing the shakuhachi as "a wind-like tone that embraces sounds in the environment. It resonates well with the songs of the birds, water sounds and wind. As I continue playing, the earth energy circulates inside and outside of my body. A moment of oneness with nature is achieved…" (Matsunobu, 2009, p1). Another student in the group stated that "playing such instruments, we are reminded of the primitive, organic dimension of life…" (Matsunobu, 2009, p155-156). According to him, this dimension of life harks back to our "more primitive self… this primitive self that feels the energy and the vibe of creatures… that appreciates the "animal-like" state in which human existence is felt continuous and being part of nature…[which] allows human beings to be in harmony with the environment and fully engaged in the here-and-now" (Matsunobu, 2009, p156).

Another practitioner in the study was described as living a life "aligned with the ecological cycle of bamboo that he cultivates on his own property in Japan" (Matsunobu, 2009, p114). By doing this, he maintains a sustainable relationship

with the local ecological patterns in his community which he expresses through his music. He works to keep his bamboo forest healthy year-round for the various drums and flutes he makes and to keep his “connection with nature” (Matsunobu, 2009, p115).

During Matsunobu’s study, some of the participants attended “the Bamboo Roots Pilgrimage,” (Matsunobu, 2009, p121) a month-long trip to harvest bamboo and train with shakuhachi teachers.

> “Going to a remote bamboo grove with fellow shakuhachi students and masters, inhaling the fresh air of nature on a mountainside, digging out the roots of bamboo, and smelling the soil and fresh flavor of bamboo in the beautiful sunlight, are the most effective ways to feel and understand the primitive impulse of ancestors who have created, experienced and inherited the organic engagement with nature, music and spirits through the shakuhachi” (Matsunobu, 2009, p121).

According to one member of the group, the communal act of this pilgrimage created such wonderful energy that the “beauty in that energy got me to a different level of mind and body connection” (Matsunobu, 2009, p123).

“Because the process of harvesting bamboo is such a profound experience, the acquired bamboo pieces tend to become very special to those who harvest them” (Matsunobu, 2009, p125). The Japanese players described the nature of co-evolving with their flute and “being nurtured by bamboo” (Matsunobu, 2009, p110). This “co-evolution is observed when practitioners yield to the distinctive characteristics of their individual pieces of bamboo as they are,

assimilating themselves to them, instead of altering them in favor of functionality" (Matsunobu, 2009, pvii). Matsunobu explains the relationship with bamboo in this way, "when the air goes through the lips and hits the mouthpiece, the sense of union with the instrument is created" (Matsunobu, 2009, p108). Several participants mentioned that the "sound already resides in a piece of bamboo… [and that] musical instruments are believed to be a medium for human beings to solicit an array of sounds contained in the earth" (Matsunobu, 2009, p98). This coincides with the Native American belief that stories reside in the earth waiting for humans to uncover them (or give them life) and is part of the concept of reciprocity, a key aspect of the Native American relationship with the natural world.

For Pamela, another student in the group who already does work in "sound therapy, chi gong, reiki & healing," - all activities that tap into ki energy - shakuhachi playing forms "a connection to the earth and activates the flow of energy" (Matsunobu, 2009, p243). She sees the shakuhachi as a "pipe through which the energy flows, in a similar way that she balances and clears the earth energy in her healing work." As she plays, she feels "the earth energy is being drawn up through the bamboo and sent out through the vibrations of the sound" (Matsunobu, 2009, p243). The flute "becomes a part of nature, a conveyer of the earth's energy, as if it is linking her and the ground" (Matsunobu, 2009, p244). And yet, another participant describes a similar sensation, "the energy is felt as though it were coming up from the earth through the flute, a realization of the ki energy… [a way] to connect themselves to nature" (Matsunobu, 2009, p245).

Shakuhachi players who played outdoors found their experiences were "characterized by the heightened awareness of the environment, the feeling at one with nature, the sense of an integration of human-made and environmental sounds, and the self-experienced as part of the world" (Matsunobu, 2009, p191). The practice of shakuhachi allows them to connect with the ki energy they bring to the existing flow. According to Matsunobu, "the experience of tuning into nature is often realized by the awareness of the ki energy (Matsunobu, 2009, p194). Playing the shakuhachi is a series of breathing exercises and the circulation of ki energy. …Breathing in and out, taking the ki energy of the earth into the body, your body-mind-spirit will achieve oneness" (Matsunobu, 2009, p 194).

Describing an occasion where he and another participant, Andrew, went to a nearby lake to play outdoors, "We just blow quietly into our flutes that we both made by ourselves out of the bamboo… as we play, we notice that groups of ducks come closer to us… As we rest, they also fly away. As we blow, they come back to us. Some eventually remain in the same place and don't seem to be moving away. They give us a rhythm and sense of repetition in nature. Then we find a beaver floating and slowly passing in front of us as if he is listening to us... Time flows into our consciousness… It feels like animals can sense the harmony and peace in our tones" (Matsunobu, 2009, p156-157). He goes on to say, "it was not only the external environment, but also our inner state of mind that brought the moment of feeling at one with, and being integrated into, nature" (Matsunobu, 2009, p158).

Andrew explains that these experiences of the integrated self, help him to "learn how to live with less and less," (Matsunobu, 2009, p161) evidence that this deeper connection to our more than human partners gives us an ability to incorporate this holistic perspective into one's daily life. My own experience acknowledges this – the art making process fills me with such satisfaction and gratefulness that the need to indulge in excessive material gratification and over-consumption dissipates. This mindset helps me to live a healthy and satisfying life while trying to balance the technological world of the 21st century. A materially simple life as a member of the larger ecosystem is a life that can be savored in a way that recognizes the rich, but slower pace of nature's flow where one is mindful of the experience but doesn't feel one's choices are limited.

The awareness of ki energy helps in this sense of integration with one's surroundings and Matsunobu speaks of an emerging ecological worldview that suggests that "human mind activities are connected to the ecological patterns of a large system and thus situated in, interrelated to, and dependent on the environment" (Matsunobu, 2009, p18). One of the shakuhachi teachers put it this way, "As I play for an extended amount of time, I often feel as if I am an extension of the flute, as if I myself am a **pipe**, through which the air naturally goes in and out of my body with no obstacle" (Matsunobu, 2009, p195). Accordingly, this larger realization of ki energy helps "to balance the flow of the ki, such that environs and body are productively continuous one with the other" (Matsunobu, 2009, p305). This is the same state of oneness and sense of ki connection and extension of self that "is experienced through the *taiko* Japanese

drum” (Matsunobu, 2009, p306).

In studying his participants’ relationship with the environment, Matsunobu found that those who “took the integrated roles of bamboo harvester, flute maker and player became sensitive and alert about the ecology of bamboo and the relationship between human activities and environmental changes” but although he came across “many ecologically minded shakuhachi practitioners… none of them was involved in environmental activities to protect the environment or the local community beyond” (Matsunobu, 2009, p308) in the way they lived their individual lives. The key here is Matsunobu’s use of the word “many.” Just like there are many different types of holistic cultures, and many different ways to identify the energy in our ecosystem, there are many different factors that determine one’s perspective, including the awareness to integrate a compartmentalized viewpoint across the cultural spectrum.

This was very similar to what I found in talking with several local artists about their lack of environmental activism and I believe this is because they don’t see their work as activism and don’t equate their relationship with the natural world through the cultivation and connection of ki energy from art making as a valuable environmental practice recognized and understood by the larger community.

With regard to Matsunobu, his role in this study is more of an observer than a teacher. But I do think that relying on people to find their own way in all of this is somewhat shortsighted in light of all the information being presented. It took me 40 years to connect all the parts of my experience and make sense of

the interconnectedness of my world. Having been educated in the mainstream of Western intellectual thought, I found myself unable to name or describe the exhilaration my body experienced during the dance. Even taking notice of the same exhilaration on a long hike didn't provide me with a name for it. Although art making, energy work and a love for the environment were all actively present in my day-to-day life, I don't think I ever would have put them all together until I came across an inconspicuous phrase during my studies. The phrase comes from Yuaso Yasuo's 1993 book on "The body, self-activation and ki-energy."

> "It is a state of bodymind oneness where the movement of mind and body become indistinguishable…of self-forgetfulness, in which consciousness of oneself as the subject of bodily movement disappears and becomes the movement itself that is dancing" (Yasuo, 1993, p27).

The book that contains this passage explains the act of self-cultivation that Yasuo describes as one that presupposes the Eastern concept of the body-mind oneness. But having been raised with the Western concept of body-mind dualism, which sees the mind as separate from the body and the training process as one of conscious calculation proceeding from mind to body, this way of knowing had not been articulated to me in this way until I read that passage.

Artist Lisa Lipsett describes her introduction to this art making process as a new way of knowing. One day, twenty years ago, she was painting a vase of tulips. According to her, "the painting was technically fine and the colors were beautiful, but somehow both the act of painting and the resulting image didn't express the life I could sense in those flowers." To address this issue, she began

to paint with intention the “resonant feeling connection within another living being. [In this case], the way the tulips felt instead of the way they looked. Paint gave color and form to my felt experience…I learned how to attune to nature using art as a bridge.” She goes on to say that “drawing and painting for the last 15 years has strengthened my sense of belonging, deepened my understanding of nature, sparked my curiosity and wonder about how nature works, and heightened my sensitivity to patterns, textures, and cycles of the living world. I have been awakened to the potency of creativity to attune ourselves to the world around us. I now have immense respect for art as a way to know” (Lipsett, 2013, p3). It takes a long time to put these pieces together within the Western mindset and my concern is that this way of knowing has become unavailable to many art makers and educators.

Introducing art makers to the concept of art making as environmental work could provide a basic understanding of the need for intention to utilize art making in this way and how a transformation can take place over time when one is aware of the ability to connect with this universal energy. The more art makers work with this intention and awareness, it seems to me the more central to their thinking and behavior the planet becomes, further strengthening their connection over time. I believe this is then further reflected in the choices they make in their daily living as they acknowledge their connection to the natural world. This needs to be a long-term mindset where one embraces the need to nurture a practice of intention and awareness that, hopefully, provides a new way of doing things that eventually enriches the patterns of one’s daily life, including their art making, and

becomes grounded in a holistic perspective where body, mind and nature is all interconnected.

In her article on Art & Ecology, Carole Becker states that,

> "art sends the viewer into relationship with him or herself and into the recesses of the unconscious from which the art has emerged. It is from there – from these deepest layers – that we can then reach out and find the relationship between dreams and reality, the child and the adult, the individual and the collective, inner and outer, human and nature. If we deny ourselves access to these deeper psychic states, we will never understand the interrelatedness of the universe, or grasp the magnitude of our place within it" (Becker, 2006, p200).

Indigenous and East Asian worldviews appear to comprehend this deeper relationship as reflected in the understanding of the interconnected life force or qi energy.

Even though art makers have the ability to linger in this unknown space and work with the imaginative, intuitive and creative aspects of the mind/body and the holistic perspective the art making process unknowingly instills, for most art makers raised within the Western worldview, the process of art making tends to be seen through an economic lens rather than as a community-based practice. When children are young, art making is somewhat encouraged if they have an inclination in a certain area but at some point, "children are no longer encouraged to be *artists* but rather to become the *audience* for art – the passive repositories of art's history. But why does this occur? In part because in American society, it is

believed that art is somewhat frivolous, that one must get serious as one becomes an adult and learn the skills necessary to function in a world of quantifiable exchanges" (Becker, 2006, p201).

The focus in the Western world tends to be equated with generating a successful livelihood, not the benefits of art making itself and certainly not art making for the purpose of connecting to and cultivating qi for the health and well-being of the natural world. Although many are aware of the therapeutic effects of art making and the satisfaction and enjoyment one finds in delving into this work, the lack of commercial value of these pursuits relegates them to the area of extracurricular activities.

June Boyce-Tillman also looks at the arts and its economic value in her article about how musicology "concentrates only on certain aspects of the musical experience," and talks about the characteristics of Type A and Type B, "the two systems of thought embodied in various cultures in the world" (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p102). She quotes Stan Gooch's definition of the characteristics of Type A as

> "activity leading to products; objectivity; impersonal logic; thinking and thought; detachment; and discrete categories of knowledge that are based on proof and scientific evidence." Type B "favors being; subjectivity; personal feeling; emotion; magic; involvement; associative ways of knowing; and belief and non-causal knowledge. Gooch suggests that the Western world has chosen to value the first of these systems and neglect the other" (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p102).

Boyce-Tillman explains that “people who wish to embrace the values of Type B can easily be pathologized or criminalized as the dominant culture seeks to reinforce the validity of its Type A values,” resulting in the values of Type B becoming “hidden or repressed by Western culture” (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p102).

According to her, the full musical experience involves the interaction of both Type A & B in a dynamic relationship where both can be valued equally. To this end, she created a piece, *The Healing of the Earth,* “built on a notion of community in which through participatory performance professional musicians and children work together with integrity” (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p112). She explains,

> “the value systems of the Western classical concert with its separation of the composer, performer, and audience are balanced in this work by a more democratic process of creation and performance… The players and singers are placed around the audience who also have to sing. The notion of a musical performance as packaged by a conductor at one end of a space and propelled to the other where it is received by an audience is now replaced by one in which each member of the audience has to construct his or her own listening experience; this will depend on which group of musicians are nearest them. So, we all collaborate – performers, composers, and audience – to make things happen musically and also ecologically” (Boyce-Tillman, 2004, p112).

She goes on to say that “the spirituality of the piece lies in the notion that through such music-making we effect the ecology of the planet” (Boyce-Tillman,

2004, p113). Like an ecosystem where every member is integral to the effective workings of the system as a whole, every member of this performance piece is instrumental to the experience of the performance as each component works to blend the musical pieces together into this particular event.

As these examples show, the integration of the art making process with the energetic level of the natural world appears to connect humans with the more than human in a larger effort to nurture survival and the healing process. Through their art making, these artists have experienced profound connections with the natural world that have transformed, not only their way of life and their relationship with the natural world, but their own art making, as well. Their examples are recognition of what I believe is the real work of art making, which connects them to the ecological patterns of the larger ecosystem and nourishes their need to make art and, ultimately, survive.

Even though art making naturally provides an antidote to the unrestrained dominance of logical thinking that pervades Western thought, these art makers illustrate how their connections with the more than human world are bound up in their art making to form sustainable and ongoing relationships that nurture all aspects of our ecosystem and mitigate what Pogacnik refers to as the “danger which accompanies logical thinking” (1997, p197). This awareness and the intention to utilize their art making in this way seems to be missing from mainstream art making in the West. What Pogacnik, Wu and Matsunobu have in common is that their process includes a meditative practice that connects them to the energetic level of the universe and, in turn, pervades their art making.

Although I don’t know much about Wen-chi Wu, a review of recent articles by Matsunobu shows he continues to look at the integration of music and nature in his work and Pogacnik is an active environmental advocate for humans to connect to the energetic level that should suffuse everyday life.

Chapter 8.

Conclusion

It seems clear to me that the direction in which the Western world is taking us with its largely unilateral focus on the physical dimensions of the planet, our over-dependence on rational thought and “verbally formulated language as a foundation” (Wu, 2005, p44) for intellectual knowledge, and the over-consumption of material objects is detrimental to the planet’s health. Our disruption of the planet’s systems that has brought about climate change puts at risk not only the planet’s habitability for a wide variety of species that currently populate our ecosystems, but the health and well-being of the planet itself.

Environmental organizations have been fundamental in calling our attention to the environmental suffering in our midst and the need to take responsibility for the destructive actions that are curtailing the life of our planet, but within the existing framework of the western cultural model, our disconnected worldview seems to lack a sense of urgency when dealing with non-economic matters like climate change, species and habitat destruction and extinction, human overpopulation, and the overwhelming belief that Western science can fix everything. Environmental education occurs within this same context and judging by the current health of the planet, a wider perspective would be a welcome consideration.

In his 2004 article, environmental educator, Anthony Weston quotes one of his students: “Our current system does not emphasize our connection to the

natural world" (Weston, 2004, p34). Weston goes on to voice his own concerns, explaining that "importing the usual modes of teaching into environmental education risks reproducing the very disconnection from the larger world that was the problem in the first place" (Weston, 2004, p35). Presenting environmental education from a science-based perspective only places the student outside their own communal ecosystem looking in, further separating and disengaging humans from our interconnected world. According to Weston, "the task of environmental education, then, very broadly speaking is to address our disconnection" (Weston, 2004, p33). I believe this research shows that the art making process could provide an important connection.

Art making has been tied to the health and well-being of many Indigenous and Eastern communities since these cultures developed their various holistic worldviews and as I said before, I believe the West has overlooked this connection. Dissanayake's findings on the mother-infant bond from which emerges a sense of belonging, a search for meaning, the acquisition of competence through handling and making and the expression of meaning through elaboration (Dissanayake, 2000, p8) leads me to believe that the need for elaboration compels us to make art **because** of its ability to cultivate this universal life energy that culminates in the survival of our species.

Up to now, many in the art making community have been a peripheral voice in environmental activism, but they must play a larger role in the care and healing of the natural world if we hope to change our trajectory. "Art offers access points…" (Triggs, 2012, p1) to the aliveness of the world, which, in turn,

may lead to a deeper connection to the natural world and its well-being. An approach that builds on art making as a behavioral trait of survival and a holistic perspective that purports an interconnected understanding of relationship acknowledges that body and mind are connected to the ecological patterns of the larger ecosystem. As an artist, herself, Jeannette Armstrong talks about the arts helping us to connect to “the source or the big stream…, something all humans seek.” This connection allows humans “to operate from a place of health, well-being and happiness and when we lose this connection, or spirit [as she refers to it] we damage all of humanity” (Jensen, 2004, p297).

Art makers are already skilled in the back-and-forth dialogue that nurtures the relationship between the artist, the energy and the emergent work. Many art makers already credit their creative ability to forces beyond their control and see themselves as a conduit for the work they ultimately bring to form. They are “recipients of or benevolent hosts to the visions, images, words, or songs that move through them,” (Olsen, 2002, p209) an acknowledgement of the different dimensions involved in the process and the need to cultivate this energy that connects the world and makes life flow. “The myth that claimed that science and technology, with their endless data and facts, would meet all our needs…” fails to acknowledge that “technology and data did not nourish [the] soul” (Schnetz, 2004, p21).

Previous cultures once understood these connections between art making and the larger universe and the limits within which the natural world could flourish. What would it take to honor these limits and respect the needs of our

ecosystem? Providing a strong foundation in arts-based learning early on so children can develop the dialogical patterns that emerge from such a model would provide the framework for engaging with the energy dimension. Couple that with local based experience in the natural world to connect the child to the human / more than human community and convey a sense for how to be attentive to the living earth provides the basis for a holistic perspective and the cultural knowledge to maintain this balance.

If the art making process can be presented from an environmental perspective as a way to understand a holistic worldview and access, cultivate and strengthen this vital energy field that connects us to the web of life, then we have a foundation for an expanded context of positive environmental behavior that can include Western based science and what Bowers' refers to as an ecological intelligence, which requires the awareness of "how local actions introduce changes in the life forming processes that move through the micro ecologies of genes and chemical changes to macro ecologies of changes taking place in the world's oceans and weather systems" (Bowers, 2013, p238).

To me, the evidence here indicates that the art making process has been essential to the sustainability of Indigenous and traditional East Asian cultures and Dissanayake's research confirms its role in the survival of our species. Because of its ability to cultivate this universal life energy that appears to be so necessary for the earth's well-being, I believe art making is crucial to integrating a holistic perspective in the West. By utilizing the art making process as the foundation for environmental education, the science and sustainability of

environmental education becomes embedded in a holistic context, that allows the old to be embraced in a new way, strengthening our connections to the larger universe and “joining the inner and outer worlds” (Ching & Ching, 2007, p2) through a new relationship between the arts, the life sustaining energy flow, and the rest of the natural world. This, I believe, is the real work of art making.

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